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PROTECTION AND PRECARIOUSNESS: WORKPLACE MOBBING, GENDER  
AND NEOLIBERALISM IN NORTHERN ITALY

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School-New Brunswick

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Anthropology

written under the direction of

Laura Ahearn

and approved by

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New Brunswick, New Jersey

May, 2007

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Protection and Precariousness:

Workplace Mobbing, Gender and Neoliberalism in Northern Italy

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This dissertation, based on fourteen months of fieldwork from 2003-2004, reveals the cultural co-production of gender, work and capitalist practices in one of Italy's economic strongholds, the northern city of Padua. The study traces and conceptualizes the emergence, institutionalization and charged circulation of "mobbing" across varied field sites: corporations, mobbing clinics and state public health institutions. On one level, mobbing refers to a set of vexing practices that isolate, degrade and humiliate a worker to the point of his or her resignation. However, I consider mobbing a deeply gendered cultural discourse about the intensified precariousness of labor that shapes and reflects the desires and subjectivities of Italians during neoliberal reform. I argue that programs to expand Italy's neoliberal economy and promote market flexibility collide with welfare state laws that safeguard employment in ways that make mobbing a particularly salient issue in Italy. That mobbing emerges between a precarious labor market and state protections, in turn, produces

complex and opposing effects and paradoxes for workers. Far from envisioning protection and precariousness as two impenetrable categories, I aim to unveil how certain labor and state protections actually intensify the precariousness of workers. I also show how within social and economic precariousness worker-citizens find new pathways for protection. The “cultural biography” of mobbing pertains to a critical historical moment beginning in the late twentieth century when labor rights, good health and job protections come most vividly into direct opposition with a set of social, economic and political risks and uncertainties. I reveal how it is precisely the volatile simultaneity between protection and precariousness—fueled by apprehension and risk in the workplace—that produces mobbing as a culturally urgent issue and source of embodied identity in Italy. My study, delving into the charged life of mobbing, lends insight into how social actors produce meaning in a period of neoliberal reform, as well as how the intimacies of affect, health and gendered relations are inextricably articulated with the state and global economic processes.

## Preface

For Russian linguist and literary philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, the word itself “lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s” (Bakhtin 1981: 293). This is an idea I found deeply compelling from the moment I first read his work. He asks us to imagine a single word connected on a great invisible chain to every time it has been spoken before, exact moment with its precise inflection and saturated with its historical context: “[Any utterance] is but one link in a continuous chain of speech performances” (Vološinov 1973: 72). Words, then, belong in part to everyone along the chain. Though we may use that word because we believe to know its meaning, we can only approximate its past usage. Judith Butler (1997) examines this same idea as “the responsibility of the speaker of negotiating the *legacies of usage* that constrain and enable that speaker’s speech” (Butler 1997: 27, my emphasis). Butler, like Bakhtin, reminds us that words ‘are not our own,’ and necessarily carry with them their past usages.

This is a dissertation about a word: mobbing. Though I attend to it as set of practices, images, discourses, forms of governmentality and self-disciplinary techniques—it is also a long narrative about a little word. Certainly Bakhtin himself viewed language usage as something representing “ideological systems and approaches to the world” and never “just” words (Bakhtin 1981: 296). Broadly conceived, my task is to uncover why certain subjects use and/or identify with this particular word “mobbing.” It is also about how, given certain historical situations, this word has become a crucial way for them to make sense of what it means to be human. It’s about finding links along the chain.

## Acknowledgments

Mirroring its topic, this dissertation is the product of multiple kinds of labor, far greater than that of any single person. My advisor and committee chair, Laura Ahearn, has *tirelessly* listened, read, suggested, clarified, motivated, encouraged and cheered for me for the past six years. I am endlessly grateful for her constant guidance and profound insights on my graduate study and project. I also thank Angelique Haugerud, for her energy, enthusiasm and clever suggestions in our many discussions and chats; and Louisa Schein, for helping me push the envelope on ethnography and theory and for encouraging my thinking to be “supple.” I am also indebted to Don Kulick, who has made many concepts amazingly lucid, especially in theorizing performativity and desire.

I have also benefited greatly from conversations and classes with Jane Schneider, John Borneman, Ethel Brooks, Uli Linke, Ana Ramos-Zayas, Dorothy Hodgson and David Hughes. Frances Mascia-Lees has also provided me with much support, encouragement and fresh suggestions. My graduate experience at Rutgers University leans on the minds of my fellow graduate students, Andy Bickford, Kathryn Kluegel, Nia Parson, Rebecca Etz, Dillon Mahoney, Chelsea Booth, Debarati Sen and Sarasij Majumder. And I owe a very special thanks for the many hours dedicated to sharing ideas and laughs to Tracey Dye, Mona Bhan and Arpita Chakrabarti.

I have gained very valuable feedback by presenting my work at the American Anthropological Association meetings and the Society for Cultural Anthropology (Milwaukee, May 2006). For Chapter 5, in particular, I am indebted to the participants at the Institute for Research on Women seminar on Health and Bodies, especially Ann Jurecic and Ed Cohen. For Chapter 8, I especially thank participants of the University of Chicago’s

Anthropology of Europe Workshop. For her exceptional observations and engagement with my work, I thank fellow Italianist Andrea Muehlebach.

I am enormously appreciative of the support I have been given by numerous funding institutions and agencies, including: Council of European Studies/Society for Anthropology of Europe Pre-Dissertation Fieldwork Fellowship, Fulbright Program, German Marshall Fund Program, Bevier Dissertation Fellowship, Special Research Awards and Travel Awards from Rutgers Graduate School New Brunswick, the Rutgers Institute for Research on Women and the Rutgers Department of Anthropology.

Without the trust and care of a great many friends, colleagues and participants in Italy, I could not have carried out this project—thanks especially to Grazia, Diego, Barbara, Francesca, Riccardo, Chiara, Sadi and William. Thanks, too, to everyone who entrusted me with their stories, ideas and reflections.

The people who surround me everyday have personally and emotionally sustained me in so many ways. I am especially grateful to dear friends Neha and Tanya, and to Darine, a wonderful friend, housemate and vibrant interlocutor. I have been truly fortunate to have had the encouragement and immense support of the Morello family: Rosetta, Luciano, Diana and Elena. To me, any accomplishment is inseparable from the love of my mom, Maureen, my sisters, Marissa and Dana, and my grandparents, Carmel and Vincent. And for his extraordinary and kind involvement in all things big and small, I thank my wonderful partner Paride.

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“Mobbing attacks ‘sick’ workplaces, where people are considered tools and not precious resources.”<sup>1</sup>

“In a world of turmoil, who doesn’t fear precariousness?”<sup>2</sup>-*La Stampa*, Italian newspaper

Mobbing (*il mobbing*), an English term used in Italian, refers to a phenomenon that emerged in the 1990s across Europe and in Italy, one that is highly familiar to most Italians and Europeans. The most common definition of mobbing in Italian texts is work harassment: the marginalization, isolation and hostile treatment by superiors and/or colleagues, often with the intention of coercing the targeted worker to resign (Di Martino and De Santis 2003). With mobbing, workers are said to be excluded by groups of actors, conglomerates of upper-level, same-level or even lower-level co-workers. It is also something that most Italians consider “new” and related specifically to the growing instability of the labor market.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Flavia Fiorii, “Mobbing: Vittima un lavoratore su 10,” *Corriere della Sera* (July 10, 2006). Available online at [http://www.corriere.it/Rubriche/Salute/Diritto\\_alla\\_salute/2006/07\\_Luglio/02/ART\\_mobbing\\_020706.shtm](http://www.corriere.it/Rubriche/Salute/Diritto_alla_salute/2006/07_Luglio/02/ART_mobbing_020706.shtm). All translations from Italian to English are author’s.

<sup>2</sup> 12 February 2004. “Donna Vessate. Una Precarietà che Fa Paura.” *La Stampa*, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> “Il mobbing prospera nella new economy.” *La Repubblica*. (26 March 2001).



**Figure 1 Film “Mi Piacce Lavorare” (Bim Production, 2003)**

The 2003 film, “I Like to Work: Mobbing” (*Mi Piacce Lavorare: Mobbing*) packed Italian theaters. In the film, managers and co-workers mob middle-aged, single mother Anna, played by acclaimed Italian actress Nicoletta Braschi. For Anna, a seemingly content worker in the accounting department, things begin to change rapidly following her company’s corporate merger and the arrival of new managers. One day, her ledger is missing; a few days later, her computer crashes; soon after, her desk is taken over by a colleague. In the meantime, her colleagues begin to ignore her and treat her nastily, while the managers demand that she completes impossible tasks, such as locating a single misplaced file in an archival labyrinth. To her boss, she pleads: “I like to work,” adding, “*Not* working tires me much more than working.” She continuously strives to accomplish every new task set before her, whether it is counting photocopies or timing the tasks of factory workers. At

times Anna is left without anything to do at all and wanders the halls looking increasingly pale and weak. The mounting stress results in a sharp decline in Anna's health, and ultimately she suffers a physical and mental collapse. Upon her return, her boss criticizes her for not "adapting" to the new "rhythm" of the company and urges her to resign. Anna, refusing to quit, successfully sues the company for mobbing her.

The practice of mobbing may seem bewildering to some viewers. American viewers may wonder why Anna wasn't simply fired or why her colleagues turned on her. From the perspective of the company's executives, we see that mobbing Anna takes a great deal of time, planning and energy. Mobbing seems to defy the supposed economic logics of capitalism—values of temporal and financial efficiency. It is circuitous, indirect, paradoxical. All at once, Anna's work experience was governed by fear, suspicion and doubt. Indeed these affective and quotidian dis-orderings emerged as the most salient aspects that I heard in narratives from Italians I met who believed that they were being mobbed. I met a professional chef asked to prepare elaborate meals, who would find the cafeteria fridge empty. A man told me that he was viciously faulted by managers and colleagues for a company-wide computer virus because he forgot to re-install anti-virus software. A woman who herself worked to counsel victims of mobbing believed her files were being photocopied at night by managers plotting her removal. An elderly police officer reported to me that he was left alone in a room with just the penal code to read. A hotel worker's visits to the restroom were timed by her supervisors. There were also people, often men, who described what seemed to me to fit the definition of mobbing, but would describe it as either an instance of the "precariousness" (*precarietà*) of labor or avoid any label whatsoever.

I remember when a friend first mentioned mobbing to me in the summer of 2002. She had assumed I had heard of it, adding that the use of an English term suggested to her it

was probably “an American thing.” Though I had never heard of it before, I soon found mobbing everywhere. I quickly discovered that there was a massive interdisciplinary literature on mobbing, an entire industry of mobbing specialists, special mobbing centers, and European and Italian legislative proposals to ban mobbing. In a very brief span of time, mobbing had become a deeply resonant cultural concept and the basis for new subjectivities in Italy, including mobbers (*mobbiizzatori*) and mobbees (*mobbiizzati*), targets of mobbing. I was immediately compelled by the phenomenon. Why the pervasive suspicion and doubt about the workplace? Was mobbing a perverse strategy to bypass Italy’s famously “rigid” labor protections? Why did mobbing become critical just as Italy and other industrialized nations were reforming their labor markets leading scholars to announce “the end of work” (Rifkin 1995)? How did Italian ideas about social difference, particularly around gender and class, re-emerge or become obscured within the discourse of mobbing?

*Protection and Precariousness* is about the complex array of practices, feelings, discourses and bodily states, together with the cultural assumptions and discourses about gender, sexuality, class and labor that cohabit and accrue behind a single name: mobbing. This ethnography of mobbing makes visible broad economic, social and historical structures in the day-to-day injustices, frustrations, and suffering of workers. It is about how economic and social alienation and uncertainty can make us, quite literally, ill; how workers fashion and are fashioned by the state; and how certain cultural narratives allow social actors to grapple with immense transformation.

This dissertation is also about protection (*tutela*) and precariousness (*precarietà*), what I see as a millennial dialectic between safeguards and uncertainty. Security versus insecurity. Keeping safe versus being subject to risk. These dynamics apply directly to Italy’s changing labor market. Italy is famous for its elaborate apparatus of labor protections, which allow

for Italians to keep long-term job positions. Consider that 45.8% of Italians held the same jobs for over ten years in 2005, compared with the 8.2% European average.<sup>4</sup> Certain standard employment contracts such as the “lifelong” or “undetermined time contract” (*contratto a tempo indeterminato*) have been likened to being enclosed in a “barrel of steel” (*botta di ferro*)—nothing can get through it.<sup>5</sup> In other words, it is both legally challenging and costly for companies to dismiss workers with such contracts. Since the 1990s, the Italian welfare state has upheld most labor contract protections, while at the same time promoting new policies that legalized non-standard (e.g., short-term, temporary) job contracts to create greater market flexibility (Matteo and Piacentini 2003). For the first time, employers in the 1990s-2000s had a wide assortment of *legal* ways to hire short-term workers as a viable alternative to “lifelong” contracts. As such, many Italian workers have suddenly found that their “barrel of steel” contracts may be less than mighty and, for those hoping to find work, reduced to an unlikely aspiration.

Italians use the term “precarious” (*precario*) for this new assortment of “flexible” short-term or self-employed job contracts and “precarious-ization” (*precarizzazione*) as the process of rendering economic, political and social arenas precarious—unstable, uncertain, high-risk. Precariousness, thus, entails both economic and existential risk and uncertainty (Massumi 1993, Beck 1992, Gill 2000: 4, Castel 2003, Butler 2004). Take, for example, a news article that discussed the state of “pseudo-mobbing.” It warns workers: “Be careful, however, not to mix up the true and real persecution with a subjective state of mind. In mobbing, these two components are connected, but they shouldn’t be confused.”<sup>6</sup> The idea of “pseudo-mobbing” is an example of what I define as existential precariousness, a

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<sup>4</sup> 2 December 2005. “Censis: Decelera Mercato Lavoro, Italiani Pigri d’Europa. *ANSA Notiziario Generale in Italiano*.

<sup>5</sup> Megan K. Williams. “Mobbing: Italian Style.” CBS Radio. <http://www.megankwilliams.com/radio.html>

<sup>6</sup> “Il mobbing prospera nella new economy.” *La Repubblica*. (26 March 2001).

particular kind of subjectivity and affective state in which persecution of various kinds seems imminent. My focus on precariousness in Italy also relates to the idea of “risk society,” the notion that social, political and economic fields are undergirded and governed by the management of uncertainty and risk (Simon 1987, Gordon 1991, Beck 1999, Clark 2003). German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992, 1998) conceptualizes the global “risk regime” in which the prevention and forestalling of risks gain primacy over the elimination of existing social problems and ills. Social and governmental apparatuses aim to forestall and minimize pending environmental and health dangers, thus becoming the new plane upon which citizens encounter social protections, welfare and collective belonging (Beck 1992). This new regime also suggests a shift in governance on multiple levels as “governments, corporations and professions also govern through risk rather than aiming to eliminate it altogether” (Isin 2004: 220). Indeed risk regimes suggest a new mode of governmentality, a “hybrid array of devices for the management of insecurity” (Rose 1996: 37) and, thus, not necessarily a retreat or weakening of the state (Sassen 1996, Slaughter 2003). Risk regimes have an important affective dimension, “a culture of fear [that] becomes vulnerable to the emergence of panics” (Isin 2004: 219, see also Davis 1999).

The cultural time and space of mobbing unfolds as a series of practices, ethics and ideologies that fluctuate and shift between of protection and precariousness. The “cultural biography” (Kopytoff 1987) of mobbing pertains to a critical historical moment in Italy when labor rights, good health and job protections come most vividly direct opposition with a set of social, economic and political risks (Beck 1992, 2000). Mobbing, I will show, uncovers an Italian state of multiple social, political and economic orders, including: a welfare state able to maintain and renew legal protections that safeguard job stability and occupational health; a socialist state keen on upholding the rights of labor; a post-Fascist

state that tips protection into paternalism; and, a neoliberal state that privileges the expansion of corporate power and risk control. As such, this dissertation will provide a lens to re-examine debates about the state, globalization and the regulation of capital (e.g., Jessop 1999, Mitchell 1999, Friedman 2005). It will also highlight how the configuration of labor under neoliberal conditions creates and shapes particular kinds of gendered and classed subjectivities, somatic effects and affective registers (e.g., Dunn 2000, Freeman 2001, Ong 2006). Far from envisioning protection and precariousness as two impenetrable categories, I aim to unveil how certain labor and state protections actually intensify the precariousness of workers, as well as how within social and economic precariousness worker-citizens find new pathways for protection. I reveal how it is precisely the volatile simultaneity between protection and precariousness—fueled by apprehension and risk in the workplace—that produces mobbing as a culturally urgent issue in Italy. This dissertation will reveal mobbing to be a deeply gendered cultural discourse and set of social practices resulting from and about the intensified precariousness of labor that shape and reflect the desires and subjectivities of Italians during neoliberal reform.



“For some people, everything is mobbing. It’s not objective, it’s just what they’ve lived (*il loro vissuto*).”-Camilla, mobbing clinic volunteer

## 1.1 The Birth of Mobbing

Mobbing is an English word, yet an unfamiliar term to most English speakers, due to its particular social history. Alternative terms for mobbing in English include workplace bullying, emotional abuse, generalized workplace harassment or status-blind harassment. Still, there have been publications in English, though rare, that adopt the term mobbing (e.g., Davenport, Schwartz and Elliot 1999). In Europe, the Germans and Scandinavians use the term mobbing, the French use the term moral harassment (*harcèlement moral*), and in Holland the term “pesting” (*pesten*) is used (Martino and De Stantis 2003). The word comes from the Latin *mobile vulgaris*, referring to a “moving crowd.” The idea of mobbing as unpredictable and sometimes unprovoked collective harassment was borrowed from literature on animal behavior, specifically avian mobbing:

The behavior known as ‘mobbing’ has been defined as a demonstration made by a bird against a potential or supposed enemy belonging to another and more powerful species; it is initiated by the member of the weaker species, and it is not a reaction to an attack upon the person, mate, nest, eggs or young (Hartley 1950: 315 in Altmann 1956: 241).

The historical narrative of mobbing reveals that its origins are not specific to a single European country. In the 1980s, Swedish psychologist Heinz Leymann redeployed the term from the animal to the human realm, using it to describe group harassment in the workplace (Di Martino and De Santis 2003). It seemed that what was salient for Leymann was the notion of “ganging up” on one person, even though mobbing primarily refers to the elimination of the “weaker” person, not the boss or supervisor. However, the idea of mobbing did not really begin to spread throughout Europe until in the 1990s. In Italy

common glosses include: “psychological pressures, mistreatment, verbal aggression;”<sup>7</sup> “moral harassment;” (*molestie morale*)<sup>8</sup> and “psychological terrorism” (*terrorismo psicologico*).<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 2** “The Office,” from Italian website on mobbing.<sup>10</sup>

In Italian, there have been several terms associated with mobbing including: “vertical mobbing,” suggesting harassment between workers of two different corporate levels, “horizontal mobbing,” between same-level colleagues, and double mobbing (*doppio mobbing*) referring to the impact on family members. It is important to note that the term may be affixed to a very wide array of practices, attitudes and understandings. For some, it is appropriate to discuss mobbing as what English speakers may term bullying, often between children. Occasionally, I have found mobbing used to describe, in a more generalized

<sup>7</sup> “Persecuzione in ufficio Torino, corso anti-mobbing,” *La Repubblica*. (25 October 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Nistico, Fausto. In *Corso di Pubblicazione su 'Informazione Prevedinziale: Mob, Mobber, Mobbing*. [www.unicz.it/lavoro/NISTICOMOBING](http://www.unicz.it/lavoro/NISTICOMOBING). (p. 2) Accessed 4/16/2003.

<sup>9</sup> Filippone, Bruno. “Mobbing: Cos’è?” *Fogli* 4: 16/31 March 2002.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.giallopesca.it/interno.php?id\\_disciplina=19#02](http://www.giallopesca.it/interno.php?id_disciplina=19#02)

fashion, practices in which groups of actors exclude or harass a single individual of the same group, something that occurs among soccer players on the same team or within families.<sup>11</sup>

In my experience, however, while there remains an idea of mobbing applicable beyond the workplace, its predominant usage in Italy refers to severe work harassment.

What consolidated this meaning in Italy was the work of occupational psychologists. Expanding his research in Italy in the mid-1990s, German psychologist Harald Ege (1996, 1997, 1998) focused on the destructive psychological and social effects of mobbing, as well as “the physical integrity of the victim.” He also codified mobbing into six discrete phases, progressing from isolation to harassment to illness. Ege is now one of the leading “mobbing specialists” in Italy, as well as the president of Prima, the Italian Association against Mobbing and Psycho-Social Stress (*Associazione Italiana Contro Mobbing e Stress Psicosociale*).<sup>12</sup> Mobbing, in fact, is very often considered a threat to workers’ health, a dangerous and spreading pathology.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in the year 2000, Italy’s Minister of Health Umberto Diesi listed two issues, “cigarette smoking and mobbing,” as Italy’s top two national health problems.<sup>14</sup> In 2003, mobbing also became recognized as the primary cause for a work-related illness (INAIL Circular n. 71 December 17, 2003), a medical pathology that I analyze at length in Chapter 6.

How many people are mobbed? Statistics about mobbing reflect the process of “normalization” in the Foucauldian (1972, 1978) sense. In measuring the distribution of a practice across populations, these measures authoritatively establish mobbing as natural and common. By plotting the “deviance” of mobbing across Italy, it also suggests the

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<sup>11</sup> Bignotti, Gigi. *Mobbing, Incubo per Centomila*. Il Gazzettino 9 January 2005, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.mobbing-prima.it/princ\\_it.htm](http://www.mobbing-prima.it/princ_it.htm). Accessed November 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Flavia Fiorii, “Mobbing: Vittima un lavoratore su 10,” *Corriere della Sera* (July 10, 2006). Available online at [http://www.corriere.it/Rubriche/Salute/Diritto\\_alla\\_salute/2006/07\\_Luglio/02/ART\\_mobbing\\_020706.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/Rubriche/Salute/Diritto_alla_salute/2006/07_Luglio/02/ART_mobbing_020706.shtml).

<sup>14</sup> “Il mio decalogo per vivere bene.” *La Repubblica*. (13 December 2000).

“correction of the individual” (O’Malley 1996: 189). The statistics, while variable and partial, nonetheless confirm mobbing’s existence and prevalence. According to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Condition, four percent of Italian employees have been victims of mobbing since March 2002.<sup>15</sup> However, other reports suggest from four to *eighteen* percent of workers in Italy are mobbed.<sup>16</sup> In 2002, surveys estimated as many as 40 million Europeans were victims of mobbing.<sup>17</sup> Mobbing is also situated territorially within Italy, with newspaper reporting of 65% of cases occurring in the North.<sup>18</sup> While mobbing is often purported to be “gender-neutral,” most mobbing studies indicate that the average mobbee is a woman in her forties who works in the private sector.<sup>19</sup> The problem of gender, sexuality and mobbing is one I take up most directly in Chapter 4 and Chapter 7.

Various professional and public health organizations have been founded to address the problem of mobbing, from the Bologna group “Mobby” to psychiatrist Dr. Renato Gilioli’s Work Clinic in Milan for study, therapy and rehabilitation related to mobbing.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Filippone, Bruno. “Mobbing: Cos’è?” *Fogli* 4: 16/31 March 2002.

<sup>16</sup> 23 February 2005. “Psichiatria: Fino a 18% Lavoratori Vittime del Mobbing.” *ANSA Notiziaro Generale in Italiano*.

<sup>17</sup> “Mobbing: Malattia da 20 miliardi di Euro.” *Corriere della Sera*. (1 September 2002).

<sup>18</sup> “Un milione di lavoratori maltrattato dai capi.” *Corriere della Sera*. (18 January 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Associazione contro Mobbing: [www.helpmobbing.it/il\\_mobbing.html](http://www.helpmobbing.it/il_mobbing.html)

<sup>20</sup> “Mobbing: i Comportamenti di vittime e aggressori.” *La Repubblica*. (24 July 1999).



**Figure 3 Website “Italian Movement of Associated Mobbees”**

In 2000, The Italian Movement of Associated Mobbees (Figure 3) was created. Its founder recounts:

I have been an executive of the State Railway and for three years. I was a classic victim of mobbing: isolated, disqualified, professionally devalorized. . .I began to connect myself to other workers in my situation, and we decided not to be passively subjected, but to create an association, a movement that represented all mobbees.<sup>21</sup>

A movement, in fact, is an appropriate term for the hundreds, if not thousands, of mobbing hotlines, clinics, research groups and counseling centers in Italy and Europe. The study of mobbing has become a continually expanding area of specialized knowledge production, both in terms of a specific public discourse, literature and new educational tracks. The “first anti-mobbing” course, for example, took place in the northwestern Italian urban center of Torino in 1999.<sup>22</sup> In 2006, the University of Verona began to offer a masters degree in mobbing:

The master, therefore, aims to train professionals who are expert at recognizing stressful situations which may deteriorate into episodes of mobbing. This expert individual will acquire specific methods, techniques and tools for monitoring different situations in which mobbing may occur as well as a thorough understanding

<sup>21</sup> “Dopo 3 anni di ingiustizie ho fondato l’associazione.” *La Repubblica* (8 February 2000).

<sup>22</sup> “Persecuzione in ufficio Torino, corso anti-mobbing.” *La Repubblica*. (25 October 1999).

of the factors that are directly linked to the phenomenon (stress, overcompetition, management styles, etc).<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, psychologists, lawyers and union workers participate in specialized mobbing conferences to learn from other mobbing specialists and programs. And there are numerous opportunities to do so: for instance, a December 2001 conference in Vicenza entitled, “Mobbing: Damage to the Person”, a 2003 conference, “Mobbing: Knowing it to Defend Yourself,” held in Padua and another in Cagliari called, “Mobbing: How to Recognize It, Confront it and Prevent it.” Conference titles from 2006 included, “Mobbing: Special Observations” (Basilicata, Italy)<sup>24</sup> and “Mobbing: Limits and Possibilities of Protection” (Messina, Italy). In order to give a sense of the growing web-based discourse of mobbing, an internet search in August 2006 with the search word “mobbing” yielded 1,040,000 hits in Italian language pages only (5,700,000 for the whole web). A further search in March 2007 yielded 144,000 in French language pages and 1,230,000 in German.

Beyond Italy, mobbing is also a salient category throughout Western Europe, spanning Germany, Sweden, France, Austria and the United Kingdom (Di Martino and De Santis 2003). The European Union has recognized it as a critical issue and encouraged states to pass legislation to prohibit mobbing (Mobbing in the Workplace A5-0283/2001). While Italy has yet to pass an official anti-mobbing law, there have been labor contracts that include a code of conduct against mobbing, one recently impacting three million workers.<sup>25</sup> In addition, there have been numerous legal rulings recognizing mobbing as a violation of labor contracts, as an act of unjustified demotion and a violation of the workers’ right to bodily integrity (Cantistani 2000; see also Chapter 6 of this dissertation).

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<sup>23</sup> Available online: <http://www.formazione.univr.it/fol/main?ent=cs&id=169&lang=en>. Accessed March 8, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Available online: <http://www.overlex.com/evento.asp?id=90>. Accessed January 2006.

<sup>25</sup> “Pubblico impiego: accordo per i ministeri.” *La Repubblica*. (28 February 2003).

Of the many tropes within the discourse of mobbing in Italy, one of the most consistent and powerful situates mobbing as one of the most brutal and dehumanizing aspects of work:

Stressed by computers and as if that weren't enough, oppressed by bosses. Hard life, that of the workers of a technologically advanced society, of the corporations that have adopted the new canon of the "new economy" to the letter. And it is between the desks of the offices most technologized, in fact, that *mobbing* finds its most fertile terrain: here, the hierarchy is ruthless, exploiting the frustrations of employees.<sup>26</sup>

This is just one example of how a series of changes in Italy's labor market, produced the "new" economy which, in the view of many Italians, created precisely the conditions that nourished mobbing. "Mobbing prospers in the new economy," cried the headline of another Italian newspaper in 2001.<sup>27</sup> The "new economy," in public rhetoric, is used to describe the state campaign to advance economic reform of the labor market (Carboni 2005), together with the idea of fast, flexible and technologically innovative business organization (Thrift 2000). In this context, as in the above examples, the "new economy" signifies a new social, political and economic order of "scientific institutions with techno-elite, consumer society, professional communities with social capital and intangible resources," in addition to a growing "culture of risk" (Carboni 2005: 45-47). Though mobbees, mobbing specialists and workers may have defined office injustices and disturbances in different ways, mobbing has consistently been discussed in the context of growing economic instability and risk. This dissertation will very closely examine how the discourse of mobbing is one in which actors examine, re-shape and critique the vexing conditions of the global economic office and the demise of stable employment.

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<sup>26</sup> "Il mobbing prospera nella new economy." *La Repubblica*. (26 March 2001).

<sup>27</sup> "Il mobbing prospera nella new economy." *La Repubblica*. (26 March 2001).

## 1.2 Ethnography of Circulation

*Protection and Precariousness* conceptualizes the social life of mobbing in the mouths, pens, papers and electronic wires of Italians, mostly in the northeastern region of Veneto. I also bring to bear information from media, courts and institutions beyond the regional parameters. The idea of the “social life of things,” as Arjun Appadurai (1986) conceived the term, was initially a way of theorizing the movement and circulation of commodities, from production to distribution to consumption. Attention to “cultural biographies” (Kopytoff 1988) engendered questions about the changing histories of certain objects and things as they were traded, given, received and consumed for different people and places (Urton 1997, Mullin 2001, Comaroff and Comaroff 2006). Scholars in linguistic anthropology have also teased out a similar notion circulating discourses, often described as “intertextuality,” as a way to trace the appropriation and recontextualization of texts from one site or historical moment to another (Bauman and Briggs 1990, Spitulnik 1998). Here, the “social life of things” becomes the “socially charged life of language” (Bakhtin 1981; see also Spitulnik 2001: 114). As Susan Gal (2003) argues: “The circulation of texts can contribute to establishing the authority of novel arguments and to legitimating the political subjectivities associated with them” (94). Importantly, Gal’s understanding of text here is “segments of discourse that are potentially detachable from their co-occurring social and cultural surround” and “need not be written” (96). In tracing the charged life of mobbing I aim to combine these understandings of circulation. In adopting this approach to study the traffic in mobbing—specifically, under the generalized and changing rubric of “mobbing”—I highlight how actors are actually exchanging and trading in ideas, desires and practices that reflect moral understandings of labor, citizenship, economic markets and the role of the state. Therefore, this study was undergirded by the premise that no single site alone would



give an adequate and deep picture of mobbing—the mapping and plotting of who, where and what accumulated around this word mobbing would be my methodological guide.

Moreover, I aimed to get away from the notion of circulation as an even and uniform “flow” of “ideas” in an effort not to “gloss over the changes that such ‘ideas’ often undergo as a result of travel” (Gal 2003: 96). And I emphasize that this “travel,” the circulation of the word mobbing, is anything but even. The discourse of mobbing, in fact, tends to stick to certain kinds of people, places and institutions, and thus, suggests a kind of knotted circuitry of multiple dimensions—varying in intensity, speed and volume. First and foremost, this study focuses on how and when particular *actors* identify with an available cultural idiom (mobbing), and also when they do not do so. What other kinds of subjectivities and structures of power move between those for whom the term mobbing resonates? How do these actors employ, and perhaps revise, existing moral orders to think about or frame the problem of mobbing? My work in mobbing clinics, putting me in direct contact with people who believed that they were mobbed, served as my entryway into this node. Attending also to another more widely circulating circuit, I examined how various *media* (newspaper, television, film, books) proliferated, complicated and regenerated the salience of this discourse to, perhaps, new zones or sites. To some extent, mobbing has also been commodified and consumed on an *institutional* level, insofar as it (when properly defined and mobilized) can attract resources and monies to open a clinic, run a social program or expand public health services. Here, I was particularly interested in what kinds of governing projects are promoted—or perhaps decentralized—when capital accumulates under the banner title of mobbing. Finally, I was interested in the movement of this term among the growing community of experts (lawyers and judges, trade union workers, psychologists, medical doctors and public health professionals) and their many projects

(codifying work-related illnesses, planning mobbing prevention programs, issuing or interpreting court rulings, organizing labor movements). I have also drawn on historical work in reviewing mobbing legal and medical history, and the specific funding structures of public mobbing projects. The “experts” here (a topic I expand on below) were also critical not only as they were key and authoritative actors who codified and standardized what mobbing means, but also because they were in *direct* contact with mobbees, and thus, as part of a co-constitutive project with worker-citizens, were part of creating cultural meaning around mobbing narratives. For this particular track, I have drawn on my close day-to-day contact with mobbing counselors, lawyers, trade union workers, public health officials and medical professionals.

A circulation approach is also a move away from the notion of “circulation and exchange as processes that *transmit* meanings, rather than as constitutive acts in themselves” (Lee and LiPuma 2002: 192). In other words, to whom and from whom knowledge about mobbing is conveyed produces and generates its cultural meanings in the very process of information exchange, media consumption and the very routings of who tells and who hears workers’ narratives.

The metaphor of circulation may also be helpful because the discourse of mobbing, and, therefore, the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, are anchored in diverse populations and diverse localities, clinics, offices and hospitals. Many ethnographies, by contrast, focus on the lives of a particular group, be they Brazilian transsexuals (Kulick 1999), Malay peasants (Scott 1985), Thai women factory workers (Mills 1999) or Sri Lankan priestesses (Obeyesekere 1983). Many ethnographies, such as these, skillfully render the lives a group of people meaningful, complex, interconnected and accessible to unacquainted others—the readers—who despite their lack of expertise in the region can grasp human

complexity in extraordinary ways. Yet, in this ethnography, though almost entirely grounded in Northern Italy, there is no single group or institutional site behind this story. Rather there are multiple groups of very diverse actors and institutions linked only by the highly enigmatic concept of mobbing. This does not mean, of course, that ethnographic methods no longer apply. Judith Farquhar (2002) eloquently describes what ethnography can accomplish:

Much ethnography proceeds by identifying a cultural oddity that needs explaining and then placing it in historical, ideological, and practical context until it no longer seems odd. In fact, more often than not ethnography succeeds in making unfamiliar cultural practices seem not only understandable but necessary (19).

By the end of this thesis, I hope the reader no longer sees mobbing as a cultural peculiarity, but recognizes how its salience depends precisely on its circulation between particular people and places; and that this circulation is always undergirded by cultural knowledges and practices that condition and shift its movement.

### **1.3 Methods of Movement**

The theoretical notion of circulation played a role in a greater disciplinary shift towards new methodologies, such as “multi-sited ethnography” (Marcus and Fischer 1986, Marcus 1995). I designed and carried out multi-sited fieldwork for this project from July 2004 to September 2005 in Padua, Italy.



**Figure 4** A map highlighting the city of Padua (*Padova*) in Italy.

### *1.3.1 The City, the Language*

I selected Padua, a highly industrialized center of the northeastern Veneto region, because the Veneto region was known to have an advanced capitalist economy (see Chapter 2). Interested in tracing mobbing's link to Italy's changing economy, I situated myself in an urban space that was home to a thriving transnational labor economy. I had already lived in Padua teaching English (1999-2000) and had carried out a total of eight months of pre-dissertation fieldwork (2001, 2002, 2003). Thus, I also had the advantage of having studied and acquired proficiency in the Veneto dialect. I was already fluent in Italian having studied the language since 1996, including prior study in Italy (Florence, 1998). The city of Padua was also another essential site of this study as I moved among its markets, cafés and locales and took part in its day-to-day rhythms.

### *1.3.2 Corporate Sites: Contax and Datagisco*

I conducted research at two corporate sites in Padua in my study of mobbing, aiming to follow the trail of mobbing to the corporate private sector. I selected two corporations, one a multinational company, Contax, and the second a smaller firm, Datagisco, both of which are in the information and communications sector.<sup>28</sup> Datagisco is a mid-sized firm of 500 employees in the information systems sector that had originally been a small family firm. Contax is a large multinational corporation that has over 1000 employees in various office sites in Padua. Both have fairly young working populations, mostly between ages twenty-five and fifty, and nearly equal percentages of male and female workers.

I selected these worksites to achieve a greater understanding of workplace norms, social relations, and corporate structures and employer-employee relations. I also hoped I might possibly observe mobbing in action. Yet whether or not I would “see” mobbing, I believe it was crucial to have situated myself in workplaces in order to get a sense of social relations in such environments. Mobbing is only one social category in relation to a constellation of other ways of describing relationships and/or conflicts in workplaces. In staying close to workers in diverse institutions, I sought to make sense of how mobbing fits with other ways of describing relationships and conflicts. I also interviewed employees from the two corporate sites about their workplace experiences, interpersonal relationships and social practices at work. I recorded my interviews in addition to some naturally occurring conversations.

One great challenge in studying these institutions was where to place myself along the quite rigid hierarchies and what exactly to occupy myself with when most workers were behind computers. I realized that time with executives made me suspect to employees, yet

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<sup>28</sup> I have used pseudonyms for all company names and the names of all collaborators.

time with employees made it more difficult to re-enter relations with upper level employees. In order to get around these difficulties, I often “shadowed” different people, reading a particular set of documents the particular employee would give to me at their desk right beside them and often asking questions about their projects and products. For example, at DataGisco I read a proposal written for a public contract to convert archived bank files into an interactive, digital software. At Contax, I perused available promotional materials and new service packages the agents would be selling to their clients. This strategy worked well because I was able to converse better about company structure vis-à-vis my growing knowledge of corporate protocol, projects, products, and history. During meetings, breaks and mealtimes, I was able to hang out socially with workers, becoming familiar with other aspects of their daily routines.

### *1.3.3 Mobbing Clinics*

I also included in my study places to which victims of mobbing might turn: mobbing clinics (*sportelli*). Mobbing “clinics,” almost always publicly funded, publicize and offer services to assist the victims of mobbing. They also promote education and awareness about mobbing in the Veneto regions. I selected three clinics in greater Padua. The first was run by the Equal Opportunity Office, a European-Union-supported institution promoting women’s employment. The second was associated with female university affiliates and local volunteers, mostly college graduates with degrees in psychology. Here, I followed the group from their training to the grand opening of the clinic and early casework. The third clinic, funded by the Veneto regional government, was headed by two women who had been mobbed. This clinic was visited by various mobbees in the entire Veneto region. In most cases I was only allowed to pursue interviews with mobbees within the clinic context. Thus,

the information I share here comes from my engagement with mobbees through these three clinics.

#### *1.3.4 Public Health Institutions*

Upon recognizing the increasing medicalization of mobbing, I also involved myself in public health institutions beginning in January 2005. I was involved in the planning stages of a mobbing ‘prevention program’ involving various Veneto public health institutions, and also completed a series of interviews with health officials at various institutions dealing with the problem of mobbing from the medical perspective.

#### *1.3.5 Classwork and Interviews*

The University of Padua offered a course for students, “Mobbing and Gender Discrimination: A Course for Her,” which I audited in Fall 2004. I had the privilege not only of meeting academic researchers and professionals who worked on the issue, but also of chatting with students about their understandings. I also interviewed professionals specializing in mobbing, including lawyers, counselors, doctors and public health officials in Padua and a few nearby cities. Overall, considering all sites, I interviewed over seventy individuals. I also attended conferences and lectures related to mobbing, and visited newly opened mobbing clinics and educational programs in the city.

#### *1.3.6 Fieldnotes and Material Documentation*

My daily practice in Padua was to take fieldnotes in smaller notebooks then extend these notes into full-length descriptions on my personal computer. In the end, I have over five hundred pages of single-spaced Word files as a record of my fieldwork.

I also gathered a variety of written documents throughout the months of fieldwork: 1) corporate documents (newsletters, conduct codes, etc.) from human resources or personnel workers that deal with interpersonal relationships in the workplace in general and

(if available) on mobbing in particular; 2) published legal bulletins of the European Union and local institutions; 3) news articles primarily from two main newspapers, including: *Corriere della Sera*, a national newspaper based in Milan, *Il Gazzettino di Padova*, Padua's main daily newspaper; 4) union pamphlets, brochures, conference materials and books on mobbing; 5) and legal history and archival materials related to mobbing, labor law and Italy's economic development. I also collaborated in designing and implementing a survey about workplace relationships and mobbing with members of one of the mobbing clinics and a mobbee, Cinzia.



“You want to be like an American/but you were born in Italy/so there ain’t nothing to do about that” (*Tu vuoi fa l' Americano/ma si nato in Italy!/ non ce sta' niente affa*)—  
Lyrics to popular 1956 Neopolitan song by Renato Carosone

#### 1.4 Studying as the “Americana”

The idea of American identity in Italy connects with a broad and paradoxical set of meanings. For many managers and executives, being American seemed to suggest automatically that I shared and understood a special knowledge about business and capitalism. CEOs would remark on their last deal with an American company or comment nostalgically on their last trip to New York. Being American seems familiar, as Italians consume an immense amount of American media and share a collective awareness about daily life in the United States. On the other hand, I was eyed suspiciously, often by politically left-leaning Italians, particularly when I said I was studying labor. “In your country, they just ‘send you home!’ (*mandarti a casa*),” they would say to me, using an expression meaning to fire or lay-off a worker. One friend joked that Americans able to work in the same company for their lifetime set “some kind of record.” A trade union activist told me plainly, “The American approach [to labor] is *totally* different.” From their perspective, my interest in “work and social relations” seemed anomalous, yet this was never a permanent obstacle to establishing rapport. Of course, between these two poles was a range of emotions, curiosity, admiration, indifference, hostility.

Even though Americans visit Italians by the millions, it was still unusual to find an American anthropologist in the workplace. Once when I was introduced, a man remarked, “Just think! A New Yorker who wants to study the Veneto!” At the same time, Italians can often be wary about that Americans have a sense of greater privilege, stemming from notions of American imperialism. After Italy had a large scale blackout shortly after the

United States' blackout in 2005, a common joke was to say that Italy “got *everything* after it was in America first.” In terms of my personal experience, I recall an incident in Padua when a blizzard hit during the winter months of 2005. I had spent hours the day before trying to getting home. The day after, I remarked to a friend at Datagisco that the city seemed to have “shut down.” He laughed and rolled his eyes, chiding: “Don’t be so American!” (*Non fare l'americana*). I certainly did not want to suggest that Italy’s snow apparatus was substandard. But the discourse of an idealized “America,” full of riches, power and a sense of superiority waxes so strong that Italians often resent what they view as expressions of such privilege.



**Figure 5** Author (on right) at dinner with friends, including Diego Vertieri (on left), in 2005.

My position was also shaped by the fact that I am an American of Italian descent, mostly from Southern Italy. While my ethnicity narrows one gap of difference between other Italians and me, it is not seamless because northern Italians highly resent Southern Italians and view them as subaltern (Schneider 1998). However, most Italians saw me as simply “American.” In fact, I was often referred to simply as “the girl” (*la ragazza*) or “the American” (*l'americana*).<sup>29</sup>

Most Italians who participated in this study were senior to me in age and status and many in economic wealth. Anthropologists call the study of the professional class or elites as “studying up” (Nader 1972, Marcus 1993, Shore and Nugent 2002). Yet for me it was a necessity to study corporate elites if I wanted to develop a better understanding of the disenfranchised mobbees whose stories I hoped to convey, in addition to shedding light on how elites develop cultural ideologies and practices that sustain their positions (Shore and Nugent 2002). For a study on neoliberalism, I find it useful to emphasize a point made in another study of capitalisms in Italy: “Capitalists are always constituted as particular kinds of persons through historically specific cultural processes” (Yanagisako 2000: 5). Studying elite capitalists is just one of many epistemological fields that contribute to my understanding of mobbing.

In teasing out the dynamics between protection and precariousness, I theorize the discourse of mobbing as shaped by diverse kinds of regimes—neoliberal, gendered, political, labor, affective, medical and political. In the next section, I begin to introduce some of the most salient of these themes.

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<sup>29</sup> Notably, Veneto Italians seem to use “girl” (*ragazza*) for women under the age of fifty.

### 1.5 Neoliberalism, States and Worker-Citizens

The emergence of mobbing in Italy is deeply shaped by various social, economic and political changes that have been characterized as economic globalization or neoliberalism (Sassen 1998, Edelman and Haugerud 2005, Harvey 2005, Robinson 2007). Neoliberalism, understood as a global historical process shaped by specific market-oriented economic policies, has become increasingly dominant since the 1970s (Barry et al 1996, Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Sandbrook et. al. 2007). Beginning in the 1970s, “free market fundamentalists” Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek helped to disseminate notions of radical neoliberalism in Europe and the United States (Sandbrook et. al. 2007: 213, Berend 2006: 275). The ideology of neoliberalism was sustained by the fiction of a neutral economic “market” serving as “a mask worn by particular interests which are not coincident with those of ‘nation’ or ‘the community,’ but which are interested, above all, in being mistaken to be so” (Thompson 1993: 305 in Gill 2000: 3, see also Polanyi 1957). Indeed neoliberalism ideologies, against most forms of state intervention, regulation and ownership (Berend 2006: 275), sustain a view that “self-regulating” markets will “resolve problems of destitution, joblessness and insecurity” (Sandbrook et. al. 2007: 15).

An economic, social and political process, neoliberalism “proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, free markets and free trade” (Harvey 2006: 145). In addition to political and economic strategies to commodify labor, privatize welfare provisions and ownership and deregulate global markets (Harvey 2006: 153, Barry et al 1996, Collins 2005), neoliberalism is marked by “social polarization and pervasive insecurity” (Gledhill 2006: 323; Goldstein 2004, 2005), the

acute expansion of inequality (Held and McGrew 2003, Graeber 2005, Sassen 2005), and social injustice and the commodification of bodies, cultural forms and lifestyles (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Scheper-Hughes 2001, Ong 2006).

### 1.5.1 *Downsizing the State*

What actors (employers, workers, citizens) and institutions (state, courts, unions) are held ethically responsible for the effects of precariousness and the costs of mobbing? How are the emergence and resolution of mobbing shaped by state policies, juridical practices and modes of governance? To best situate these questions, I have turned to an ongoing dialogue about the question of the state in relation to the dominance of global markets and neoliberalism (Castells 1996, Holmes 1999, Burawoy 2000, Gledhill 2004). The question of how states resolve national labor problems in terms of global capitalism looms large (Sassen 1988, Collins 2003, Bourdieu 1990, Robinson 2007a), though this study does not limit itself to how the Italian state regulates employment policy. The current debate about the “free market” and the state recalls concerns that social theorists shared about *laissez-faire* economics in the early part of the twentieth century. Antonio Gramsci (1971), for instance, argued that state authority produced the economic mechanisms of the market economy:

It must be made clear that *laissez-faire* too is a form of State ‘regulation’, introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means. It is a deliberate policy, conscious of its own ends, and not the spontaneous, automatic expression of economic facts. Consequently, *laissez-faire* liberalism is a political programme designed to change—in so far as it is victorious—a State’s leading personnel, and to change the economic programme of the State itself (160).

Importantly, as Thompson (1967) and Polanyi (1957) also articulated, Gramsci shows that his notion of a “free market economy” was one that *masked* the role of the state in its regulation (Jessop 1977: 370, Buci-Glucksmann 1980). Similarly, neoliberal ideologies of an “unregulated” and “free” market suggest a hands-off approach by the state thereby

obscuring the state's involvement in this process (Sassen 1988, Held and McGrew 2003, Trouillot 2003, Edelman and Haugerud 2005). Indeed, they extend to the relationship between state and civil society. David Held (2003) suggests: "The changes under way represent the extension of the classic liberal concern to define the proper form, scope and limits of the state in the face of the processes, opportunities, and flux of civil life" (170). This dissertation will expose new configurations and techniques of governance that echo the long-standing problem of simultaneously managing national subjects and global economic markets (e.g., Jessop 1977, Hardt and Negri 2000, Mitchell 1999, Steinmetz 1999).<sup>30</sup>

Current debates about the role of the state in relation to neoliberalism (Habermas 2003, Slaughter 2003, Clark 2003, Friedman 2005) often divide between "globalists" pointing to waning state sovereignty and "skeptics" maintaining the state's enduring vitality in international affairs (Held and McGrew 2002, Held 2003, Sassen 2005). Theories of the state rest on particular understandings of the global economy and, specifically, capitalism (Held and McGrew 2002, Hardt and Negri 2000, Mann 2003, Robinson 2007)—the state, for instance, appears beset by *internal* contradictions with respect to implementing neoliberal policies precisely because national economies cannot be conceived of as "discernable and discrete economic system[s]" (Robinson 2007a: 8). Those suggesting a shift in national sovereignty point to a number of new international orders: 1) the ineffectiveness of state policies in resolving national economic issues (Jessop 1999); 2) the growth of supranational

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<sup>30</sup> Neoliberal theories of the state are a departure from Marxist understandings in which the state is mechanism of class rule (Steinmetz 1999). Such frameworks tend to see the state as "neutral," an entity that "can be used with equal facility and equal effectiveness by any class or social force" (Jessop 1977: 356; Steinmetz 1999). Furthermore, Marx was writing at a time in which the economy was not conceived of as separate from the state (Foucault 1991 in Mitchell 1999: 92). Hardt and Negri (2000) pair a Marxist understanding of the state and the economy with Foucauldian notions of biopower (Robinson 2007). But they do retain a strong Marxist notion of the state as "constructed to oppose every tendency on the part of the proletariat" (110) and critique Foucault for having "failed to grasp finally the real dynamics of production in biopolitical society" (28). Various scholars have examined labor (Burawoy 1979), the state (Buci-Glucksmann 1980) and globalization from neo-Gramscian, and neo-Marxist frameworks of ideological and state hegemony and "consensual domination" (Robinson 2005: 12; see, for example, Cox 1987, Arrighi 1994).

regimes (European Union) and an increase in “translocal linkages” (Jessop 1999: 389, Keohane 2003, Held and McGrew 2003); 3) the rise of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and “supra-national governance institutions” (e.g., World Bank, WTO) (Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 27; Strange 2003, Held 2003); 4) the disarticulation between physical territory and national government (Held and McGrew 2003: 11; Harvey 1989, Giddens 1990); 5) and, the exponential rise in world exports, foreign direct investment, foreign exchange transactions, and international bank loans (Berend 2006, Rondinelli and Cheema 2003).<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the state retains exclusive legitimating power, for example, for “the use of force, judicial regulations, permanent military forces...[and] the means of ensuring national security” (Held and McGrew 2003: 10; see also Mann 2003, Clark 2003).

For some, these transnational processes have enabled a more Foucauldian thinking about state power as scattered and net-like—“from the centrality of government to more decentralized forms of governance” (Jessop 1999: 389), “a growing diffusion of authority” (Strange 2003: 128) and the state’s “disaggregating” (Slaughter 2003: 189; see also Hardt and Negri 2000, Hedetoft 2003, Robinson 2007, Rose 2007). Others suggest that the premise—the view of the state as between “national” and “global”—is itself faulty and suggest that studies should instead attend to how “the state itself has been a key agent in the implementation of global processes, and it has emerged quite altered by its participation” (Sassen 1996: 29; see also Jessop 1999, Gilpin 2003, Robinson 2007).

The notion of the “retreat” (Strange 1996) and “downsizing” of the state (Morgen 2001, MacLeod 2004) is premised on the notion that a government apparatus may privilege “the laws of the market over the laws of the state as guardians of public good” (Giroux 2004: 65, Sassen 1996, Gill 2000). Thus, a central scholarly focus relevant for Italy relates to

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<sup>31</sup> Strange (2003:129) argues the “hollowness of the state” may, in fact, only be applicable to western or even Euro-American nation-states and less applicable to Asian states.

growing concerns about the decline in state welfare programs (Castells 1996, Friedman 2005). The debates surround a basic paradox in that despite the state's need to make policy in relation to the globalized economy, "the level of welfare is still a national phenomenon, that is, the degree to which capital investment tends to concentrate in one place or another" (Friedman 2005: 161). Moreover, the Western European model of social democracy has historically rested upon the notion of a "comprehensive and universal welfare state" (Sandbrook et. al. 2007: 14).

These concerns speak to a wide-spread tendency for states to privatize public services, reduce welfare benefits and defer or shift various modalities of the state to other actors or entities: citizens, non-governmental organizations, private corporations or international financial institutions (Castells 1996, Rose 1996, Held 2003, Grewal 2005). When ascribing to neoliberal orders, the state, rather than being a primary source of welfare, centers on national security (Weldes et. al 1999, Hardt and Negri 2000, Clark 2003, Giroux 2006) and the "dilution of risk" (MacEachen 2000: 316, see also Beck 1999). This process, leading to what has been called "the decline of social citizenship" (Isin 2004:217) is supported by a related notion of "individualization" (Beck 1992), construing citizens as "subjects of choices and aspirations to self-actualization" (Rose 1996: 41) and "autonomized" (Burchell 1996: 27). These terms point to the ways in which under neoliberal conditions citizens are re-fashioned as more responsible for and capable of providing their *own* welfare, a concept bolstered by ideologies that view political subjects as rational and calculating (Perramond 2005, Ong 2001). Thus, neoliberal ideologies promote the ideals of freedom and autonomy, in tandem with the idea that 'autonomous' individuals have a moral responsibility to "take responsibility to protect themselves from risk" (MacEachen 2000: 323). Neoliberal conditions sustain a basic paradox—of individual



autonomy idealized as free of state interference, even as the state structures particular enactments of this “autonomy”:

Paradoxically, neoliberalism, alongside its critique of the deadening consequences of the ‘intrusion of the state’ into the life of the individual, has nonetheless provoked the intention and/or deployment of a whole array of organizational forms and technical methods in order to extend the field within which a certain kind of individual freedom might be practiced (Barry et. al: 10).

Neoliberal governance, then, is animated by an ideology of decline even though it corresponds to “the promotion of correspondingly appropriate techniques of the self” (Burchell 1996: 29). Practices of citizenship, then, cannot be easily deciphered between forms of collective governance and the Foucauldian notion of self-discipline or “techniques of the self.”

It is also, therefore, critically important to recognize that “degovernmentalization of the state” not be confused with “de-governmentalization per se” (Barry et. al 1996: 11). In other words, a neoliberal governmental apparatus may be intense and potent, though masked by alternative or new modalities, techniques and strategies of self-discipline and consensus (Slaughter 2003, Trouillot 2003, Held and McGrew 2002, 2004; Brenner 2004). Rosenau (2003) invokes the term “framegration” to describe this process as paradoxically split between “centralization and integration” and “decentralization and fragmentation” (223). The effects of globalization on the state may indeed be complex and unexpected: “the very nationalism perceived to be threatened in fact reimagines and reforges itself” (Hedetoft 2003: 21). The nation-state, thus, might be seen not as declining, but rather as “reconfigured” (Held and McGrew 2003: 14, Rosenau 2003) and able to produce “complex new relations between national states and supra or transnational institutions, on the one hand, and diverse class and social forces, on the other” (Robinson 2007a: 17, Trouillot 2003). This study aims to magnify, on the one hand, “the extent to which states are

implementing and presiding over painful social dislocations and the cultural conflicts that attend them” (Gill 2000: 16); and, on the other hand, creating conditions for citizens to garner welfare, to fortify labor protections and even, paradoxically, to critique neoliberal orders (Petryna 1999, Dunn 2000). The state, only appearing to be a distant and distinctive entity, is shaped by and part of daily practices and the production of meaning (e.g., Scott 1985, Steinmetz 1999, Mitchell 1999, Edelman 1999, Gledhill 2000, Gill 2000).

### *1.5.2 The Role of Experts*

Much of this study is grounded not only in the narratives of mobbees, but also very much around the critical role of a specialized group of professionals, the *experts* on mobbing—counselors, doctors, public health professionals, trade union activists, political figures and lawyers. This wide array of trained professionals has become absolutely critical in producing, disseminating and codifying knowledges about mobbing—and, in turn, the conditions of labor. These epistemic practices have been viewed in previous studies as a form of governing “at a distance:” “Public authorities seek to employ forms of expertise in order to govern society at a distance without recourse to any direct forms of repression or intervention” (Barry et al 1996: 14). Mobilized through expert knowledge production, thus, is the scrutinizing of citizens’ day-to-day practices and the creation of a new form of governance:

The authority of expertise becomes inextricably linked to the formal political apparatus of rule, as rulers are urged to accept the obligation to tame and govern the undesirable consequences of industrial life, wage labour and urban existence (Rose 1996: 39-40).

Thus, it is critical to unveil how neoliberal political projects are tangled up with expert management and knowledge production –the origins, therefore, of “techno-politics” (Mitchell 2002). I have taken this insight as critical in thinking through the relationship

between forms of governance and the authoritative role of mobbing “professionals.” At the same time, the process also implies a new role for worker-citizens: “Individuals are to become experts of themselves to adopt an educated and knowledgeable relation to self-care in respect to their bodies, their minds, their forms of conduct and those of members of their own families” (Rose 1996: 59). In particular, as mobbing circulates in health and medical fields, experts might be characterized as “somatic experts” (Rose 2007: 28) or “pastors of the soma” (29)—playing central roles in the neoliberal technologies of biopower. In learning from the experts on mobbing, worker-citizens are encouraged to engage in practices of self-modulation and care, becoming responsible for their own personalized welfare.

### *1.5.3 Neoliberalism in Italy*

Italy’s neoliberal reform relates to Europe’s “market-radical variant of neoliberalism” (Bohle 2005: 58), structured largely by its role as member state of the European Union (Kierzkowski 2002, van Apeldoorn 2002, Cafruny and Ryner 2003, Bosia 2005). Critical to this process in Europe has been transnational migration, monetary policy and exchange and transnational political governance (Keough 2006: 433, Borneman and Fowler 1997, Berend 2006). Much of neoliberal refiguring of European welfare creates “a narrower criteria for the allocation of social provisions, more involvement of the private sector in the delivery of the benefits, and a great emphasis on work-related benefits” (Gilbert and Van Voorhis 2003: 2). In Italy, welfare policies in the 1990s have focused, in particular, on pension reform rather than on unemployment and family assistance (Fargion 2003: 313).

Neoliberal economic policies, progressively in the 1980s and 1990s, have led to broad change in Italy, such as high unemployment rates, threats to long-term job security, and a larger informalized economy (Blim 2002, Yanagisako 2002, Fargion 2003, Ginsborg 2003). Still, despite the implementation of various neoliberal policies (Cafruny 2003, Ferrera

and Gualmini 2004), Italy is still often considered “behind” other European economies (Agnew 2002, Gallo and Birgit 2003). Many public debates in Italy reflect a great concern about the effects of neoliberal policies, principally the 2003 Biagi Laws that dramatically restructured Italy’s labor market (see Chapter 2 of this dissertation).<sup>32</sup> The notion of job “precariousness,” mobilized by Italy’s pro-labor political parties, directly critiques the privatization and destabilization of labor (see Chapter 3). The discourse of mobbing in Italy, I show, allows actors to name the injustices and human costs of neoliberal orders.

Italy, and the northeastern Veneto region in particular, is a distinctive site to study neoliberal governance and labor for multiple reasons. Italy has a rich labor movement history and strict labor safeguards (Ginsborg 2003), yet has also been called “the darling of neoliberal development” (Blim 1990) in part because of the early regional development of flexible labor strategies (Piore and Sabel 1984). Moreover, the nation’s economic development has been conceptualized as punctuated and incomplete: “the Italian economy did not complete one stage (industrialization) before moving onto to another (informatization)” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 289). Here, Hardt and Negri refer to “informatization” as a process including the use of new technologies, the robust growth of the service sector and the expansion of immaterial labor (see Castells 1996). This dissertation explores and conceptualizes how the Italian state precariously combines its support for free market dominance with national labor protection and welfare (Agnew 2002). It takes the case of mobbing as a way to examine states as “often in an ambiguous role vis-à-vis global capital, on the one hand representing itself as a defender of national interests, but on the other hand being complicit with the forces of economic globalization” (Bergeron 2001: 994). Here, Bergeron points to what the state *appears* to be stand for and

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<sup>32</sup> November 7, 2006. “Cambieremo la Legge 30.” *Corriere della Sera*. Online: [http://www.corriere.it/Primo\\_Piano/Politica/2006/11\\_Novembre/06/ministro.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Politica/2006/11_Novembre/06/ministro.shtml).

ideologically align with. Importantly, however, the case of mobbing in Italy speaks to the ambivalent role of actors and institutions within a single globalizing state that cannot be teased wholly into categories of “national” and “global” (Robinson 2007a; see also Sassen 1996, Held 1996). Rather, as Robinson suggests, such complicity is constituted in actual dialogues and networks between a transnational capitalist class and “the accelerated pace of transnational practices of actors worldwide” (137). In other words, as much as the state’s policies affect daily lives and subjectivity, this study will also emphasize how “people...do this displacing” (Robinson 2007a: 14; see also Rosenau 2003: 225).

While certain aspects of Italy’s labor policies and economic development reflect global neoliberal trends, the overarching concept of neoliberalism *alone* is not sufficient to grasp the politics and complexities of Italy’s current transformation. Rather than view neoliberalism as an incoming force, “a vast *tidal wave* of institutional reform and discursive adjustment” (Harvey 2006: 145, emphasis mine), I position this project with others who attend to “what ‘ordinary people’ do” and how “everyday life has become ‘neoliberalized’” (Gledhill 2006:323, see also Sharma and Gupta 2006). Likewise, while I emphasize labor and changes in modes of production, I refrain from imputing capital its own intentionality: “Capital’s thirst must be quenched with new blood, and it must continually seek new frontiers” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 227). Taking an anthropological and historical approach to questions of neoliberalism, citizenship and the state (e.g., Heyman and Smart 1999, Gledhill 2000, Gill 2000, Ferguson and Gupta 2002, Goldstein 2005), I am compelled by Italy’s existing political, economic and social structures, discourses and ideologies that shape the expansion of neoliberal policies and ideologies in unexpected ways. I hold here that states have divergent political and ethical orders, shaped by diverse histories, such that the effects of neoliberalism cannot be totalizing or predictable (Heyman and Smart 1999, Gill

2000, Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 18; Gledhill 2005). Emphasizing the historical conditions that “allow [neoliberalism] to enter into novel relationships with diverse value orientations and political positions” (Collier and Ong 2005: 17), this study challenges assumptions that economic and cultural processes in Italy can be lumped into a homogenized category of “Neoliberalism.”

#### *1.5.4 Italy's Worker-Citizens*

The transformation of the labor market is a primary feature of neoliberalism, including the expansion of nonstandard forms of labor, decentralization and deterritorialization of production processes, outsourcing, self-employment and the normalization of unemployment (Harvey 1989, Sennett 1998, Castel 1997, Collins 2003). One aspect of this process has been called the “casualization of labor,” referring to the “expansion of what are typically considered casual or unsheltered jobs” and “the weakening role of the firm in structuring the employment relation” (Sassen 1998: 146). As I elaborated upon above, Italians refer to this process as the ‘precarious-ization’ of the labor market, emphasizing the dramatic increase in atypical and short-term contracts as opposed to long-term, secure job contracts with benefits (Blim 2002, Ferrera and Gualmini 2004). Indeed this study will also examine state sovereignty in terms of the ongoing reconfiguration and casualization of labor (Sassen 2000, Collins 2003, Harvey 2005, Ong 2007), a focus which is rarely central to debates about state sovereignty and economic globalization (Fairbrother and Rainnie 2006: 4), with few exceptions (e.g., Hardt and Negri 2000, Dunn 2000, Blim 2002, Sassen 2003).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hardt and Negri, adopting a neo-Marxist and Foucauldian approach to Empire, situate labor relations as central to the production of Empire: “It is always the initiatives of organized labor power that determines the figure of capitalist development...[l]abor power is the most internal element, the very source of capital” (208).

Work in the sense of employment and *cultural* work in the sense of “the reproduction of asymmetrical relations or structures” figure centrally in stories of mobbing (Schein 2000: 20). Importantly, work is also one of the central modalities through which citizens become political subjects of the state, a process resting on a particular configuration of power, the production of difference, regulation and moral orders (Burawoy 1979, Aretxaga 1997, Schein 2000). In the following chapters, I highlight how the discourse of mobbing reflects ongoing negotiations about citizenship, labor and governance, and the ways in which worker-citizens find new ways to garner welfare state protections vis-à-vis the biological damage of mobbing (Rose and Novas 2005, Petryna 2005, Collier and Lakoff 2005).

Just as Italy’s governmental apparatus is full of opposing, fragmented and paradoxical ideologies (Berezin 1999, Hardt and Negri 2000), so too is citizenship. On the one hand, neoliberalism is a central component: “formal citizenship [...] was to be waged to establish consent and conformity at its heart...[with] neoliberalism as its ideological warhorse, the freedom of the individual the basic tenet for society” (Ginsborg 2003: 296). But, on the other hand, Italian citizenship may be distinguished from other Western democracies by its famously weak sense of national belonging, the collective mistrust of the state, and its diverse components of “individualism, collectivism, libertarianism, communitarianism, market capitalism, welfare statism, majoritarianism, consociativism, secularism and clericalism” (Koenig-Archibugi 2003: 87, 98).<sup>34</sup> Italy’s late unification in 1861 is often cited as, in part, reason for its fragmented nationhood, as well as the historical simultaneity of “nation-building, economic modernization and democratization” (Koenig-Archibugi

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<sup>34</sup> Consociativism, sometimes called neocorporatism, refers to a political or economic system in which “a high level of inclusiveness can be attained...only within the framework of predefined actors or interests with the capacity to organize and gain some sort of ‘licence’ (Adam 1994: 40). It is also worth noting that Italian citizenship is based on the predominance of *ius sanguinis* or blood citizenship traced through parent’s citizenship, allow foreign nationals to retain Italian citizenship, and grant citizenship to foreigners born in Italy if they remain there until the age of majority (Koenig-Archibugi 2003:104)

2003:90, Hardt and Negri 2000). After a period of ambivalent nation-building, the Fascist state built Italian citizenship on an allegiance to the patriarchal state, emphasizing laborers as central and important figures (Koenig-Archibugi 2003: 93). Consider, for instance, Article 3 of the 1948 Constitution of Italy: “It is the task of the Republic to remove all economic and social obstacles that...hinder the full development of the human person and the actual participation of all *workers* in the political, economic, and social organization of the country” (Koenig-Archibugi 2003: 96, emphasis mine). In the Italian case, the worker-citizen is profoundly central—foundational—to the state structure and social protections (Horn 1994). In fact, Italy has been called an “occupational welfare system” where membership in particular occupational groups is the essential component of garnering welfare protections (Koenig-Archibugi 2003: 102).<sup>35</sup> It was the development of protections to safeguard the worker-citizen, established primarily around protecting the male worker that propelled the expansion of social rights in Italy first under fascism and in the growth of the welfare state (Horn 1994; see Chapter 6 and 7). But, importantly, the figure of worker-citizen is premised upon a gendered political subject and body—to which I now turn.

## 1.6 Subjectivity, Gender and Bodies

*Protection and Precariousness* examines capitalism and labor as processes that deeply affect subjectivity, even as capital is itself shaped by laboring subjects (Thompson 1967, Gramsci 1971, Jamieson 1991, Verdery 2000, Castells 1997). It is, then, part of a much larger historical project to “discover the means and forces of the production of social reality along with the subjectivities that animate it” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 22). With mobbing, of course, the question often becomes how *not* working or exclusion *from* work affects

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<sup>35</sup> The Italian system of citizenship cannot be adequately explained by a Marshallian paradigm of citizenship, based on a tripartite of citizen rights: worker-citizens, warrior-citizens and parent-citizens (Turner 2001: 189). The degree to which work is fundamental to citizenship varies, but in the Italian case, work, warrior and parenthood are not necessarily given equal social and political value.



subjectivity. The production of subjectivity under neoliberal conditions, then, entails a close examination of how such subjectivities are formed “*outside* the institutions, but even more intensely ruled by their disciplinary logics” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 331-2, Agamben 1993).<sup>36</sup> My analysis of the subjects of mobbing, (primarily those mobbed and/or managing mobbing) ethnographically charts a process of how “new forms of management shape not only performance of work, but also the kinds of persons that workers become” (Dunn 2004: 20).

While *both* men and women are implicated as ‘mobbers’ (*mobbi~~zz~~atore*) and ‘mobbees’ (*mobbi~~zz~~atore*), the idea of mobbing as gender-neutral unravels upon further investigation. I theorize the gendered aspect of mobbing on multiple levels: who gets mobbed and why, the way in which the discourse of mobbing draws from and reiterates gendered ideologies, the gendered structure of the mobbing industry and the historical genderings of work, citizenship and the body in Italy. There are also gendered practices: many social actors, both women and men, now classify events once deemed ‘sexual harassment’ as mobbing. My analysis is premised on a feminist understanding of gender as a process, a form of subordination, an axis of social difference and a set of cultural ideologies (Abu-Lughod 1990, di Leonardo 1991, Grewal 1999, Aretxaga 2001, Taylor 2004); and as “historically contingent and constructed, simultaneously embedded in material relations, social institutions, and cultural meanings” (Lamphere et. al: 1997: 4). Though work harassment in Italy acts upon and emerges in tandem with many forms of social difference, I found that one of the most salient inscriptions of difference was through gender. Moreover, I use mobbing as a multi-dimensional lens to magnify how “neoliberal policies reorder men’s and women’s relations

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<sup>36</sup> Hardt and Negri are clearly pushing towards a more “hybrid” understanding of Foucauldian understandings of the subject: “hybrid subjectivities produced in a society of control may not carry the identity of a prison inmate or a mental patient or a factory worker, but may still be constituted simultaneously by all of their logics” (331).

to each other and the kind of alliances, opportunities and collusions that become possible and impossible” (Gill 2000:4).

I also view gender as central to the constitution of subjectivity, involving both “subjectivation” and “subjection”: “the paradoxical effect of a regime of power in which the very ‘conditions of existence,’ the possibility of continuing as a recognizable social being, requires the formation and maintenance of the subject in subordination” (Butler 1997b: 27-29, see also Foucault 1983). For Butler, then, the constitution of the subject is a double process, one of recognition and culturally legibility—subjectivation or subject-making—but also one that necessarily requires being subject *to* regimes of power (Foucault 1972, 1977). Sherry Ortner (2005) also theorizes the notion of subjectivity as an opposing process, calling it “the basis of ‘agency,’ a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon” (34, in Luhrmann 2006: 346; see also Ahearn 2001b). In my analyses of mobbing, I aim to keep hold of this tension, analyzing the ways in which mobbing allows new identifications to surface through which actors “act on the world,” negotiate problems and injustices, while also examining how these practices are nonetheless constituted by regimes of gender, labor and class (Moore 2006). Here I understand identification as an unconscious process “through which individuals assimilate an aspect or property of an other, and are, in that process, transformed” (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 139). In addition, I hone in on how gender is continually reworked as an effect of discursive practices, political economy and affective regimes (Gal 1995, Ahearn 2001, McElhinny 2002).

### *1.6.1 Bodies of Mobbing*

The historically specific emergence of mobbing is also an entry point for rethinking the connections among gender, bodies, capitalism and meaning-making. By bodies, I refer

to bodily practices, suffering and physical susceptibility, notions of health and wellness, the emotional inscription within/through the body and processes of embodiment (Csordas 1994, Boddy 1997, Lock 2002). The idea of laboring bodies is an especially fruitful area for studying the body, as “the body comes to substantiate the abstract economic realm as a site where the multiple processes that engender and otherwise differentiate categories of embodied labor converge” (Anagnost 2005: 200). And by bodies I also mean “sites,” where “discourses and practices intersect...ordering and disordering, generating, articulating and occluding many levels of experience” (Farquhar 2002:244, see also Lock and Kaufert 1998, Price 1999). Bodies become central to the story of mobbing in many ways, but most importantly because mobbing is considered by many Italians to be a health problem, a threat deeply affecting the mental and physical wellbeing of workers (see Chapter 6). Mobbing entails that bodies endure various kinds of risk as “risk thinking has been central to biopolitics” (Rose 2007: 71). Moreover, my understanding of worker-citizen is not of a neutral body, but as a necessarily *gendered* and sexualized body (Butler 1993, Martin 1987, Conboy et. al 1997, Schiebinger 2000) and one that forms a basis for gendered citizenship (Orloff 1993, Anagnost 1994, Aretxaga 2001, Alonso 2005). How, I ask, do the multiple political ideologies within Italy’s history shape the worker’s body as “a biopolitical site for the disjuncture between rationalities of welfarism and neoliberalism” (MacEachen 2000: 318)?

Gender ideologies in Italy carry with them a history of sharply drawn dichotomies: lusty men and alluring women, masculinity as dominating and bold and femininity as demure and caring (Baranski and Vinall 1991, Baranski and West 2001, Horn 1995, Spackman 1996, Holmes 1999, Krause 2001). Gender ideologies and orders are especially important within the workplace and the organization of the labor market (Caldwell 1991, Bassi 1993, Jeanne

2000, Krause 2001, Yanagisako 2002). *Protection and Precariousness* will examine participation and alienation from the labor markets from a feminist perspective (e.g. Kondo 1990, Freeman 2000, Mills 2003, Collins 2002, 2003), highlighting the ways in which sexual and labor regimes are intertwined (Salzinger 2000, 2003, Yelvington 1996, Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003), and uncovering the gendered dynamics of neoliberalism (Sassen 1996, Ong 1999, Chase 2002, Sharma 2006).

### **1.7 Geopolitics and Biopolitics**

Although I discussed “neoliberalism, states and worker-citizens” and then “gender, subjectivity and bodies” separately above, I will spend the rest of this dissertation insisting that understanding mobbing means conceptualizing these ideas as inextricably articulated with each other. This study will, therefore, also speak to the intersections between geopolitics and bio-politics (Foucault 1978, Rose 1996, Hardt and Negri 2000: 22-27; Grewal 2005, Orr 2005). A convergence between “geo” and “bio” maps the meeting points between political economy and health (Scheper-Hughes 2000), between neoliberalism and psychosomatic bodies (Orr 2005), between welfare states and biological wellbeing (Health et. al 2003, Rose and Novas 2005, Petryna 2005, Rajan 2006), between the organization of labor and gendered subjectivity (Ong 1987), between state policy and desire (Aretxaga 2002) and between affect and rule (Berezin 1999).

The management of health, welfare and bodies under neoliberal conditions reflects the continuing resonance of Foucault’s (1978) biopolitics, the biopolitical management of populations through disciplinary knowledge and practice in which “such entities as economy, population and society were irreducible to bodies that constituted them, but were shaped by them” (Isin 2004: 221, Horn 1994: 7, Hardt and Negri 2000). For Foucault (1978), the body was the critical node of biopolitics, where its “affirmation” served as “a primordial form of

class consciousness” (126) and an “indispensable element in the development of capitalism” (152). A resurgent interest and redefinition of modern biopolitics has been forged in light of new forms of capitalism and modalities of governance. Biopolitics remains a salient undercurrent in various theoretical insights in the present age, including new forms of self-governance deployed to modulate bodily wellbeing and health (Collier and Ong 2005, Ong 2006, Rose 2007), the biological need to control risk (Beck 1992) and “ontological security” (Turner 2001), and the biological basis of citizenship (Health et. al 2003, Rose and Novas 2005, Petryna 2005). It bears reiterating that that new understandings of a neoliberalizing bio-power emerge in conversation with other studies that have theorized the links between cultural production, economic change and bodily transformation. Here I am referring to ideas about how bodily discipline is a product of industrial time regimentation (Thompson 1967), how capitalist understandings of waste and efficiency shape knowledges about and the experience of menstruation (Martin 1987), how the transnational organ trade steers over the imprinted tracks of global poverty and wealth (Scheper-Hughes 2001), and how illness seems “sent” because it is an effect of global economic structures (Farmer 1990).

These also resonate with a Gramscian (1971) understanding of the habits and desires of men formed in tandem with the rise of the Fordist economy. Here I am referring to Gramsci’s compelling theorization of the 19<sup>th</sup> century development of “new sexual ethic suited to the new methods of production” (204). In the following excerpt, he elaborates on this discussion:

It seems clear that the new industrialism wants monogamy: it wants the man as worker not to squander his nervous energies in the disorderly and stimulating pursuit of occasional sexual satisfaction. The employee who goes to work after a night of ‘excess’ is no good for his work... This complex of direct and indirect repression and coercion exercised on the masses will undoubtedly produce results and a new form of sexual union will emerge whose fundamental characteristic would apparently have to be monogamy and relative stability (304-305).

What is so extraordinary about Gramsci's analysis is how he connects and theorizes intimacy in relation to wide-scale economic transformation. Alone this formulation might compel a more top-down materialist analysis of sexuality and the disappearance of how sexualized subjects (with multiple kinds of desires) shape capitalism (Schein 2000, Curtis 2004).

However, when paired with Foucauldian and neo-Foucauldian understandings of bio-power and neoliberalism (Larner 2000, Ong 2006), Gramsci's insight demands that we refrain from assuming that sex, gender relations and health are cut-off from large-scale political and economic processes and structures. My return to Gramsci also allows me to reflect upon the necessity of combining analysis of the political and economic conditions of neoliberalism in tandem with a Foucauldian understanding of the subject (Hardt and Negri 2000, Ong 2007). Robinson (2007), for instance, notes that the appeal of Hardt and Negri's (2000) work has been "a theory of globalization that combines Marx with Foucault" theorizing instead a "new universal order that accepts no boundaries and limits, not only in the geographic, economic and political sense, but in terms of its penetration into the most remote recesses of social and cultural life, and indeed, even into the psyche and biology of the individual" (131).<sup>37</sup> Daily practices, identifications and bodily experiences cohabit in intimate proximity with emergent neoliberal labor structures, modes of governance and ideological orders.

Biopolitics is critical to mobbing because of how worker-subjects grapple with risks shaped by global changes in labor organization. That is, these economic risks radiate to encompass multiple aspects of daily biological life and how it should be managed. In examining biomedical risks, Nikolas Rose (2007) suggests:

The political vocation of life sciences today is tied to the belief that in most, maybe in all cases, if not now then in the future, the biologically risky or at risk individual

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<sup>37</sup> I am not suggesting I adhere to Hardt and Negri's (2000) formulation of empire, as often an agent-less process. I do, however, find it useful to understand neoliberal biopower as combination of materialist attention to class and state structures with postmodern theories of the subject and power.

once identified and assessed may be treated or transformed by medical intervention (40).

Now while Rose refers to multiple biomedical practices such as genetic counseling, psychopharmaceuticals and stem cell research, I believe we should not limit the notion of risk becoming “vital” risk in other fields, such as in employment. Being a worker “at risk” in Italy, similarly, seems to invite intervention and gaze, whether it is in the form of insurance, compensation or prevention. These pathways must be attended to as workers enter new regimes of labor where economic risk (and the loss of *labor* protection) slips into health risk. In other words, labor control often promises to forestall the loss of *health* protection. The “casualization of labor” (Sassen 1998) is, therefore, not only a change in the relations of production, but also a change in the kinds of biological subjects that workers become.

*Protection and Precariousness* is invested in magnifying how neoliberal configurations of labor and capital produce prohibitions, desires and social values, even as I contest that any of these can be reduced to the material conditions of neoliberal labor, or, in the case of mobbing, exclusion *from* labor. In the histories of mobbing I present, I aim to rethink the dismantling of labor protections, new modalities of managing populations and the experience and management of bodily integrity as deeply co-constitutive of subjectivities and cultural practices. This work contributes to a larger scholarly endeavor of charting how subjects constitute and are shaped by neoliberalism and the global re-structuring of employment—from the contracts they hold to the futures they intimately desire to the illnesses they develop.

## 1.8 Chapter Overview

The chapters of *Protection and Precariousness* relate to one another and can be grouped into what I see as three themes that extend over and into the chapters that follow. The next two chapters give an historical background and an ethnographic overview of Italy’s current

labor market. The second chapter, “From Protection to Precariousness,” continues with historical background and contextualization of mobbing in the Veneto region and Italy. Through a critical examination of Italy’s expanding neoliberal economy and historically protectionist regimes, I show how mobbing emerges as cultural discourse about this economic transition. I also contest, however, a strictly materialist analysis of mobbing as simply a strategy of downsizing and cost reduction.

Chapter 3, “Your Death, My Life: Economic and Existential Precariousness,” takes on the political origins of mobbing in an effort to return more centrally to the notions of protection and precarious. How is mobbing inextricably tied to the precarious-ization of labor and life? The question of what propels workers to turn on one another reveals sharply diverse political orientations and multiple understandings of the human present in Italy. I show the political and cultural significance of the “precariousness,” both as a way to talk about employment and also as a way to discuss existential angst and a state of constant apprehension. I reveal how the related notion of precariousness is fundamental in understanding why mobbing became salient in Italy.

The second theme of the dissertation, taken up in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, elucidates how specific affective, linguistic and gendered regimes inform how workers navigate interpersonal conflicts, exclusion and difficulty at work. I highlight how unspoken regulations shape how actors respond to trouble at work and how they are able to perform and be recognized as flexible and productive workers. Chapter 4, “Feminizing the Inflexible,” further illustrates the gendered dichotomies within the discourse of mobbing, revealing how women are increasingly excluded from the notion of flexible worker. To supplement the case studies I present of women who have been mobbed, I examine the film “Mi Piace Lavorare: Mobbing” as a critical gendered representation of mobbing. In Chapter



5, “Emotional Regimes, Worker Discipline,” I argue that the experience of alienation and conflict within the worksite is refracted through underlying norms of gender behavior, affective style, communicative practice and managerial position. I attend also to the gendered implications in a situation when mobbing is *not* explicitly named.

In the last three chapters, I turn to the ways in which health and bodies—bodies classed, gendered and habituated-by-certain-labor-practices—are redefined in relation to shifting global economic demands and how social and economic devaluation are experienced somatically. At the same time, I continuously weave the corporeal within the fold of broader state and institutional projects. I accomplish this in Chapter 6, “Living It on the Skin,” through a close examination of a newly codified work-related illness, “Organizational Coercion Pathology” (OCP) that purportedly results from mobbing. I pursue an historical question of how the right to ‘bodily integrity,’ first established under Fascism, gave way to forms of both worker compensation and surveillance under neoliberal conditions. I show that what has been pathologized is not a specific figure of a mobber, but rather the organization of labor itself. Chapter 7, “The Sex of Mobbing,” takes up the question of why sexual harassment, unlike mobbing and “organizational coercion,” is *not* considered a health problem or a threat to bodily integrity. I also illustrate how there is an implicit moral hierarchy between mobbing, glossed as moral harassment, and sexual harassment. That sexual harassment may be grouped under mobbing masks the sexualized and gendered inequalities that sustain global capitalism. I attend to the ways in which welfare citizenship is premised on understandings of a gendered and sexualized body.

In Chapter 8, “Project Wellbeing: Mobbing Prevention as Health Risk Regime,” I turn to the new wave of programs aimed at preventing mobbing. I re-examine how new pathways are created and broken between worker-citizens and the state through projects,

governed by cohorts of mobbing experts, promising to eliminate mobbing and improve worker “wellbeing.” Such projects reveal a specific Italian imaginary of how workplaces should be, of what may happen in the future, of potentials and estimates—a mapping, in other words, of *risk*. I mine the discourse of preventing mobbing and related projects in order to examine how actors, specifically through medical modalities, imagine and construct a corrected and moral relationship between worker-citizens and the state.

In the concluding chapter, I discuss my findings mobbing as integrally related to the multiple paradoxes of precariousness and protection that have emerged during a period of social, economic and political change in Italy. The cultural biography of mobbing sheds light on the state of the state in relation to processes of economic globalization and the kinds of subjectivities that emerge within neoliberal configurations of labor and power.

## Chapter 2 From Protection to Precariousness

“The journey of mobbing is on the information superhighway in the new economy, [an economy] continuously populated less by people and more by... “human capital”...in a threatening sea and vast market.”<sup>1</sup>

In this passage, mobbing is a like single thread intertwined with particular historical and cultural fabrics: threats, dehumanization of labor and vast markets. Why do some Italians view the workplace as a “threatening sea”? How does mobbing come to be an important cultural discourse of this economic transition, marked by people becoming “human capital”? Even though mobbing, as I discussed in the introductory chapter, is a term recognized throughout the European Union, it has come to have a particular urgency and salience in Italy. By mapping the historical field of Italy’s dynamic political, social and economic order, I uncover the historical conditions and tensions from which mobbing emerges. The discourse about mobbing reflects cultural apprehensions about the worst of global capitalism, reiterating its risks, effects and human costs. The rapid replacement of Italy’s protectionist labor regime, once one of the world’s strongest, with neoliberal economic and social policies played, I argue, a very significant role (Boeri and Garibaldi 2005). But we first must recover Italy’s specific cultural and political genealogies in order to understand why high risk neoliberal labor regimes would seem, to many Italians, something economically, politically and ethically *deviant*. My point is that the *devaluation* of labor can only be pathologized in a context in which labor is, or once was, *valued*.<sup>2</sup> Policies that would

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<sup>1</sup> Nistico, Fausto. *In Corso di Pubblicazione su 'Informazione Prevedinziale: Mob, Mobber, Mobbing*. [www.unicz.it/lavoro/NISTICOMOBING](http://www.unicz.it/lavoro/NISTICOMOBING). (p. 2) Accessed 4/16/2003.

<sup>2</sup> Though my study is not a comparative one, I believe that the relative *weakness* of pro-labor ideologies and politics within the United States that plays a significant role in why mobbing is *not* an urgent national issue (see Aronowitz et. al 1997).

fashion the Italian labor force into a pliable population of interchangeable human work units opposes existing ethical orders for many Italians, an ethics that animated the creation of state law and policy in the past. Mobbing, thus, emerges at a historical moment dominated by a sharp decline in labor safeguards, *but also* the coexistence of a deep cultural *value* for safeguards in an increasingly market-oriented labor force. The tension between pro-labor and pro-market political movements and ideologies creates the moral orders from which Italians may understand what is at stake, and, in turn, what mobbing disrupts, during neoliberal reform. The case of mobbing gives us a lens to examine how moral economies “constituted a political obstacle to the imposition and implementation of pro-corporate free-market policies” (Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 21, Collins 2005). To more deeply understand the social, economic and political dynamics of the workplace at the time of mobbing’s birth, I recover and rethink a deeper history of industrial and neoliberal development in Italy. This chapter will begin by introducing the Veneto region and tracing Italy’s unique industrial development. After discussing neoliberal labor reform in detail and contextualizing political reactions to these policies of “precariousness,” I turn once again to mobbing.

## **2.1 Geography and Demographics of Veneto**

The Central and Northeastern regions of Italy have long played an important role in Italy’s overall economy. The area has been called the “Third Italy,” constituted by small-industries, sharecroppers and artisan producers, distinct from the more industrially-based northwest, and the more agriculturally dependent south (Colatrella 2001: 16; OECD 2001: 14). It has also been widely noted as one of the wealthiest region in Italy. Indeed, the per capita export income of Veneto’s residents was twice the national average in 1995 (Colatrella

2001: 263). The Veneto region is 18,000 square kilometers of mostly vast plains and resident to 4.5 million inhabitants (Ferguson 2003: 450).<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 1 Map of the Veneto region.**

The region has a number of strengths, from available land for potential industrial sites, to “Catholic-run” banks offering flexible loans, and the sharing of capital, information and specialized skills among Veneto’s merchants (Colatrella 2001: 262). The Veneto has historically been a Catholic-centered region, a stronghold for the Christian Democratic Party (*Democratici Cristiani*) and for political organizations like Catholic Action, and the CISL labor union (Colatrella 2001: 313). While there are a significant number of large corporations, small firms catering to the world’s niche markets dominate in the Veneto region (Jewkes

<sup>3</sup> It is located in the northeastern corner of Italy’s famously boot-shaped peninsula, with one edge towards the Adriatic sea and south of the Alps. This region includes Lake Garda and the Livenza-Tagliamento river-system, and bordered by Austria to the near north and Slovenia to the near east. Veneto is surrounded by four regions: Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Lombardy, and Emilia-Romagna.

1997).<sup>4</sup> In the Triveneto region (Veneto, Friuli and Trentino), one person in every ten is an entrepreneur (Jewkes 1997).

The Veneto region is subdivided into administrative provinces and grouped around cities; Veneto's provinces include: Padua, Venice, Vicenza, Verona, Treviso, Belluno and Rovigo.<sup>5</sup> The city of Padua, located thirty kilometers west of Venice, is known for its thriving economy, including over 750 different industries (Bramezza 1996: 54). Considered an essential part of Italy's economic stronghold, together with the Lombardy region, the northeast of Italy contained over 30 percent of the country's primary industrial regions in 1997 (Jewkes 1997), and the total volume of export from Veneto made up 14% of national exports in 1996 (Bramezza 1996: 54).<sup>6</sup> In 2003, however, the Veneto economy suffered a downturn, registering an over eight percent decline in exports (Veneto Lavoro 2004: 9).

Regional identity is shaped by the practice of speaking Veneto dialect, in both private and public arenas (Ferguson 2003, Molé 2002). It is also crafted through specific language ideologies about the Veneto dialect itself: "The fact that a Veneto [person] never uses a double consonant, allowing vowels to be pre-eminent, demonstrates the antiquity of the language" (Bernardi 2005: 27). To further contextualize the unique social and economic

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<sup>4</sup> Some examples of Veneto subcontracting include Luxottica's (eyeglass production) acquisition of a plant in Hong Kong for lens production and Safilo (also eyeglass) with manufacturers in Turkey (Nassimbeni 2003: 161). Eyeglass companies like Optimissimi and Luxottica comprise a great deal of Padua's significant optical industry. In 1996, Padua's optical instrument market made up over 10 percent of Italy's total exports (ISTAT 1999), and 90 percent of the world's eyeglasses (Colatrella 2001: 264).

Eyewear producers like Luxottica and Safilo have also purchased United-States-based companies such as "Lens Crafters," "Sunglass Hut," and "Smith Sport Optics" (Nassimbeni 2003: 162). Benetton, located in Treviso, is another of Veneto's high profile family firms and the first of Italy's firms to be listed on the New York Stock Exchange (Harrison 1994). Benetton is divided among eight family-owned factories and warehouses and subcontractors numbering over 500, only 10 percent of which are outside the region (Harrison 1994). Benetton's model is characterized by the flexible organization of multiple interlinking firms in the area, and thus characteristic of flexible accumulation (Harvey 1989). Larger companies like Benetton may pressure the pyramid of small industries to keep labor costs low, and thus, put long-term job security in jeopardy.

<sup>5</sup> The city of Padua became part of the Venetian city-state in 1405 (Bramezza 1996: 52) and apart from brief occupations from France and Austria, was part of Italy since 1866.

<sup>6</sup> The bulk of Veneto exports are shipped off to Western Europe (comprising 27 percent to Germany and 10 percent to France), 10 percent to Eastern Europe, and 8.5 percent to the United States (Colatrella 2001: 272).

landscape of the Veneto region, it is also necessary to connect Veneto's development to national and global economic histories.

## **2.2 The “Miracle” of Industrialization**

What makes Italy's economic history unusual has been its extremely rapid shift to industrialization. At the time of Italy's unification in 1860, 62 percent of the labor force in Italy was dependent on agricultural production (Boltho et. al 2001: 2). Towards the end of the 19th century, despite ongoing problems of disparate markets and capital, Italy began industrializing (Barca et. al. 2001: 29). In the 1880s, and with the help of protectionist tariffs, southern agricultural landowners and northern industrialists constituted the core of the market (Piore and Sabel 1984: 153). Economist Fabrizio Barca (2001: 30) argues that the most important factors of Italy's industrialization included a combination of “heavy industry, public procurements protected by high tariffs, and financed by so-called ‘mixed banks’ that combined credit opportunities with equity programs. Increased education and importation of technological devices helped Italy to produce its first major industrial firms, FIAT in 1899 and Olivetti in 1907 (Piore and Sabel 1984: 153). Industrialization in the early 20th century began in northwestern Italy, where the famous “industrial triangle” among Milan, Turin and Genoa flourished (OECD 2001: 14). While simultaneously expanding protections for laborers (accident prevention and insurance, for example) (Horn 1994: 40-41), Italy's Fascist government weakened worker's labor rights in the 1920s, especially in repeated wage cutting programs, failed to expand mass production, increased importation and did not implement anti-inflation programs (Piore and Sabel 1984: 153). After the demise of Mussolini's Fascist government, Italy's 1948 constitution shifted from its long-term centralized governance, particularly evident during the Fascist regime, to allow for more robust regional government control (OECD 2001: 141). In the geopolitical context of post-Fascism governance, plans

were made to strengthen Italy's economy and to prevent the spread of communism in Europe (Barca et. al 2001: 32). The ruling Christian Democrat party did not destabilize family run firms, and sustained economic growth into the 1950s, particularly in Central and Northern Italy (Barca et. al 2001: 35). Additionally, the rise in domestic investment increased rapidly during this period (Di Matteo and Yoshikawa 2001: 53).

According to most economists, Italy's economic growth between 1950 and 1970 was quite remarkable (Di Matteo and Yoshikawa 2001: 45). This period (1952-1971), in fact, has become known as the "Economic Miracle," a manufacturing and industrial boom coinciding with the first reduction of protectionist regimes that swiftly reduced labor costs (Ginsborg 1990: 214). Part of what sustained this extraordinary economic growth in the period was the rapid movement of workers from the south of Italy to its industrial North; in fact, figures suggest in the early 1960s up to five million people (14% of the population) from the South moved to the Central and Northern regions of Italy (Di Matteo and Yoshikawa 2001: 52). The North, in essence, became an industrial frontier for unemployed and economically disadvantaged southerners.

The southern migration to the North also produced particular kinds of labor relations between employers and employees that led to industrial decentralization and flexibility (Piore and Sabel 1984). The Southern workers, largely trained in agricultural sectors and not being accustomed to factory labor, contributed to a great deal of strife between laborers and employers (Piore and Sabel 1984). Many workers resisted the use of mass-production equipment, and this fact, unifying craftsmen and unskilled workers against employers, often resulted in multiple strikes in the early 1960s (Piore and Sabel 1984:155). Thus, workers effectively limited their work pace and productivity, but also the quality of their contracts and their promotions (Piore and Sabel 1984: 155). In turn, new flexible



strategies of management emerged to better control of the labor force, and employers swiftly began to decentralize production (Piore and Sabel 1984: 156). Workers, divided up into smaller firms as a disciplinary measure, meant the creation of new jobs, especially for artisans and craftsman who left the large industrial sites (Piore and Sabel 1984: 156). Furthermore, large firms encouraged workers to set up collaborations between smaller firms to become more competitive (Pagano and Trento 2003: 199). What is significant and unusual is that these small firms found ways to collaborate, exploiting the fact that workers quickly developed skills to become self-sufficient owners and managers themselves (Pagano and Trento 2003: 199). This particular type of rapid development of skilled artisans in small firms, together with the structure of decentralized production, became one of the unique strengths of the Italian economy. Indeed this mode of production, dubbed “flexible specialization,” was a model that thrived in the Veneto region (Piore and Sabel 1984). The idea of “flexible specialization” stems from Piore and Sabel’s (1984) description of Italian economic conditions, but is also a generalized term for production driven by “networks of technologically sophisticated, highly flexible manufacturing firms; [it’s] a strategy of permanent innovation: *accommodation to ceaseless change*” (Piore and Sabel 1984: 17, emphasis mine). Thus, and ironically, Italy’s Veneto region is, in many ways, one of birthplaces of flexible labor regimes—producing a kind of precursor to what David Harvey (1989) would later describe as “flexible accumulation,” that “rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption” (Harvey 1989: 147). For Harvey, flexible accumulation is more of a global model of production. It is also characterized by “time-space compression,” the notion that time and space intervals are shortened, shouldered by technological innovation, by the speed and intensity of transnational exchange. Although the two forms are not identical, both rest on the notion of

“accommodation” and “flexibility,” as well as the idea of orienting production towards rapid market change. And, importantly, for both modes of production, “the general outcome is lower wages, increasing job insecurity and in many instances loss of benefits and of job protections” (Harvey 2005: 76).

### **2.3 Stagflation to European Community (1971-1993)**

Despite the “Economic Miracle,” a significant portions of Italy’s population, 19 percent of the workforce, were employed in the agricultural sector in 1970 (Di Matteo and Yoshikawa 2001: 43). Wages increased in the 1960s and the need for capital remained high, both of which contributed to a relatively stable level of growth of the Italian economy into the 1980s (Barca et. al 2001: 33). State labor policy in the 1970s stunted the growth of large-scale firms and limited their potential growth by requiring excessive bureaucratic work for the opening new firms and very high taxation (Carnazza et al. 2001: 161). The 1970s has become known as the “stagflation” period (Vercelli and Fiordoni 2003: 14). Like many industrialized nations at this time, Italy faced a difficult economic period dominated by “oil shocks” that destabilized the economy, leading to high inflation and deficit (Di Matteo and Yoshikawa 2001: 58). The Fordist model of production entered into a period of crisis, as the growing strength of small and mid-scale firms and increased market deregulation overtook the power of large industrial plants and large-scale firms (Vercelli and Fiordoni 2003: 16). Italy’s government apparatus was also decentralized in this period, allowing greater autonomy to five “special regions” (Sicily, Sardinia, Valle d’Aosta, Trentino-Alto-Adige and Friuli) (OECD 2001: 141). Italy’s economic deceleration, high inflation, currency depreciation of its monetary unit (lira), and high unemployment rates lasted throughout the 1980s (Di Matteo and Yoshikawa 2001: 59, OECD 1997).

## 2.4 Worker's Statute and Article 18

A number of new labor protections for workers in the 1970s dramatically changed the cultural and social ways in which job positions and work would be understood. First, there was a system of “social shock absorbers” (*ammortizzatori sociali*) which would improve unemployment protection and insurance and minimize the risk of job loss (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 36). The Workers’ Statute (*Statuto dei Lavoratori*) of 1970 was instrumental in improving safeguards for workers and it followed the intense surge of the trade union movement in 1969, a moment dubbed Italy’s “Hot Autumn” (*Autunno Caldo*) (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004). A number of the statutes of this important legislation specify how workers’ health should be safeguarded: one reaffirms workers’ right to health and safety (Article 9) and another requires employers to verify sick leave only through public institutions for public safety (Article 5). Other measures limit the employers’ use of surveillance via audiovisual measures (Article 4), protect the work assignments negotiated at the time of hiring (Article 13) and institutionalize and expand unions’ role in organizations and the importance of collective bargaining (Articles 14-17, 19-27).

Perhaps the most famous and contentious of these articles was Article 18. This statute promotes the protections for workers in firms with more than fifteen employees who hold the “undetermined time” (*tempo indeterminato*) contract, which gives them a “full time, life long contract,” full social security benefits, health insurance, retirement plans, and accident insurance (Schiattarella and Piacentini 2003: 90).<sup>7</sup> In terms of dismissing workers, Article 18 changed older legislation by requiring the *automatic* reintegration of dismissed workers when the dismissal was deemed “unjustified,” rather than allowing the employer to pay a penalty (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 38). What this accomplished was to make

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<sup>7</sup> I will use either the term “undetermined time contract” or “lifelong contract” to refer to these contracts.

dismissing workers with the undetermined time or lifelong contract an extremely costly and time-consuming process for employers. In Italian imaginaries, it was Article 18 that created the legal conditions in which workers would come to call this contract a “steel barrel” (*botta di ferro*), highly protected and stable. Though “undetermined time” contracts can be used for a part-time position, they are distinct from “determined time” (*tempo determinato*) contracts, which are designated for preset periods of time.

In 2001, when Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi proposed a revision of Article 18, trade union CGIL organized a general strike of three million workers, and the measure was not approved. In 2003, CGIL led the nation in a national referendum to extend the benefits of Article 18 to companies with less than fifteen employees, but the attempt was not successful. Before new labor policies were passed in the 1990s, employers had few legal ways to hire cheap workers and relied on part-time labor, informal or ‘under the table’ contracts, or simply remained just under the 15 employee mark. The Veneto region, for example, has the most *fourteen* person firms in all of Italy (Colatrella 2001: 274).

#### *2.4.1 Cultures of Safeguards*

Thus, by the end of the 1970s, Italy had established a labor market organized around great obstacles for worker dismissal, insurance protections for the unemployed, extensive pension benefits, health care benefits and a strong union role (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 36-30). Notably, labor policies were especially rigid in terms of occupational illness and disability, providing for “full wage continuation of sick workers” (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 39). By the end of the 1970s, other laws were passed to improve wage indexation, regulate youth employment, expand industrial mobility and provide for vocational training (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 39). At the same time, it is important to recognize that labor policy in Italy was generally aimed to protect the “insiders,” those already employed, to a

greater extent than the “outsiders,” those seeking employment (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 43). For the “insiders,” however, full employment meant a great deal of stability and security.

## **2.5 The Emergent Global Economy (1993-2001)**

By the mid-1990s, neoliberal policies began to be seen as the appropriate model in Europe to achieve high levels of productivity in the global economy and transform industry “from bodies operating in the general public interest to market-oriented companies” (Vercelli and Fiordoni 2003: 25; Spiller 2003: 88). Transforming the labor market and a series of labor protections to a neoliberal ‘flexible’ economy would take a great deal of policy change in Italy. Many state powers were transferred to regional and local governments, agencies and the office of the Prime Minister in order to make Italy more capable of European policy implementation (OECD 2001: 142-6). In addition, the state began to privatize and restructure Italy’s banking system to be more conducive to neoliberal economic policies (Bianchi et. al 2001: 164, Pagano and Trento 2003: 200). Adjustments were made according to various features of Italy’s demographics, such as the problem of pension spending given the high ratio of elderly to working people (Vercelli and Fiordoni 2003: 24). Italy was also one of the few European countries to minimize spending in the health care sector (Vercelli and Fiordoni 2003: 25). In addition, various public sectors such as utilities and telecommunications were rapidly privatized (Pagano and Trento 2003: 199). Privatization alone generated nearly 8 percent of the average GDP between 1993 and 2001 (Pagano and Trento 2003: 200). State ownership in companies went from 30 percent in 1996 to less than 10 percent in 1998 (Bianchi et. al 2001: 183). Entrance into the European Community in 1989 also allowed the state to dramatically decrease spending in Southern Italy (from 21 billion Euro to 15 billion Euro in 1997), thereby limiting distribution of

wealth around the country. The delayed privatization and restructuring of large firms in the Italy's *Mezzogiorno* (Southern Italy) during the mid-1990s produced even higher rates of employment, averaging over 20 percent in 1995 (OECD 2001: 20).

Various measures were taken throughout the 1990s that rendered the labor market less stable and secure. The *scala mobile*, the practice of adjusting wages to the cost of living, was abolished in 1992 (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 143). In 1997 (Decree 469/1997), regional and local governments were granted more authority over employment placement services and many of which were privatized (e.g., temporary work placement centers) (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 98).<sup>8</sup> Implementing European recommendations, employment placement centers were to take on a “preventive” approach to the labor market, providing highly trained consultants and electronic data banks in order to “get the unemployed into the labour market as soon as possible” (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 99). Here, “preventive” strategies meant policies and institutional strategies that staved off long-term unemployment.

The Treu Law, passed in 1997, was another important measure to expand the use of flexible labor contracts and promote privatized job placement services, gaining particular success in urban Northern Italy (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 102). Additional measures included: 1) Law no. 196/1997 that no longer required that fixed-term contracts (determined time contracts) would automatically become life-long contracts but allowed employers to give “wage compensations” instead; 2) the expansion and promotion of part-time contracts; and, 3) Legislative Decree 386/2001 which no longer required employers to justify fixed term (determined time) contracts (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 102-3). For instance, an employee could be given a three-month contract without justification. Various measures were also implemented to reduce welfare benefits in the 1990s, including reducing

pension benefits, further decentralizing health care, empowering local administrations, restructuring unemployment benefits and reforming measures of social assistance (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004:115-6).

Still, in September of 1999, the European Union Labour Commission criticized Italy's employment policy and high unemployment rate; and subsequently urged Italy to further reform (Spiller 2003: 108). Thus, despite Italy's ability to rapidly privatize and implement market-oriented economic policies, it was nonetheless considered an economic liability for Europe as a whole. Promising to correct Italy's economic pitfalls, Silvio Berlusconi, representing the House of Freedom (*Casa delle Libertà*) political coalition, was elected Prime Minister in 2001, becoming the first long-standing, post-communist political government in Italy (Borselli 2001). Bolstered by his entrepreneurial image, Berlusconi had started a new political party, Forza Italia, dubbed a "neo-conservative movement" in Italy which promised to improve and expand Italy's economy and political position in Europe.<sup>9</sup> His political coalition consisted of the neo-fascist party National Alliance, (*Alleanza Nazionale*), the deeply conservative Northern League (*Lega Nord*) and the CCD or former Christian Democrats. A right-wing media tycoon, Berlusconi has been criticized not only for his ownership of most Italian media stations, but also for the degree to which he increased the power of the executive branch (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 154, Foner 2001).<sup>10</sup> A proponent of "a neoliberal economic programme, with strong Thatcherist tones: fewer taxes, greater choices for citizens, competition and efficiency in public life, a residual welfare state" (Ginsborg 2003: 291), Berlusconi's election was extremely significant for political, economic

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<sup>8</sup> Italy allowed temporary employment for the first time after two European Court of Justice rulings that obligated the country to do so (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 100).

<sup>9</sup> Forza Italia translates as "Go Italy" and is also is a phrase often shouted at soccer matches. Most authors leave the party name in Italian.

<sup>10</sup> He has also been criticized because of his property and control of television networks, a major soccer team, and shopping malls.<sup>10</sup>

and social change in Italy. In the six years of this leadership, Berlusconi tightened ties with the United States, overhauled the labor market by passing additional labor reform packages and continued privatizing national industries.

## 2.6 Neoliberal Labor Policy Reform (2001-2003)

In the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the process of neoliberalization in Italy quickened its pace. In 2001, Berlusconi passed the White Book (*Libro Bianco*), a recommendation for policies to regulate Italy's labor market, encouraging corporatist agreements and further flexibilization of the labor market (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 157). Next, the Biagi Law (no. 30/2003), named after professor and consultant Marco Biagi, extended and expanded the primary changes of the 1997 Treu Law. The Biagi Law allowed for a number of important provisions, summarized in Figure 2 (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004:160):

1) Fully liberalize placement services for employment, “not only public agencies but private agencies, private consultants and universities.”
2) Legalize an assortment of new flexible job contracts, from internship to free-lance to consulting positions.
3) Legalize the practice of “leasing” employees from private agencies, such as “Manpower.”
4) Expand of utilization of part-time job contracts.
5) Standardize and make more efficient outsourcing.
6) Expand training, internship and apprenticeship job contracts.

**Figure 2 Summary of Biagi Laws**

From its very inception, the Biagi Law has lived a complex, highly politicized and violent history. The law was met with great public outrage, particularly from Italy's Leftist political parties (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 159). The “new” Red Brigades, a militant communist group, killed Marco Biagi, a professor and consultant for the Biagi Laws, outside



his home on March 19, 2002.<sup>11</sup> In October 2006, the appeal case for the five Red Brigade members charged in his murder began and was still ongoing at the time of this writing.<sup>12</sup> The Biagi Laws, indeed, represent a profound clash between three political genealogies of the Italian state: the Center-right former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi whose government passed the Biagi Laws; the Center-Left Prime Minister Romani Prodi promising to radically modify the Biagi Laws; and the Communist Party (*Rifondazione Comunista*) who called for an immediate repeal of the Biagi Laws.

### 2.6.2 *The Idea of Precariousness*

For many Italians, the 2003 Biagi Laws are what animated a more urgent public discourse about “precariousness.” But as early as 1992, the notion of precariousness was already a local idiom to describe the “new economy” in Italy, as described by the secretary of the Left party (*Democratici di Sinistra*) member: “For many months there has been a great boom in determined time contracts and a *precariousization* of the productive process” (emphasis mine).<sup>13</sup> Precariousness (*precarietà*) became a strong national and even European slogan for economic changes, emphasizing compromised job security and the risks that workers faced in a market of declining and limited labor protections (Procoli 2004: 1). Posing full employment as a social value, new forms of contracts and the loss of stable employment raised the question in Europe of whether “a *core value* in Western society is about to fade from the scene” (Procoli 2004: 1, emphasis mine). The idea of

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<sup>11</sup> The Red Brigades are militant communists who wanted to incite class revolution as an armed struggle. For the Red Brigades, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) under leader Enrico Berlinguer could no longer be depended upon to incite the proletariat revolution, rather they viewed the PCI as “above all at the service of the imperialist state” (Drake 1989: 72). Furthermore, they saw the PCI as a tragic end for Gramscian thought and ultimately, a bourgeois movement (Drake 1989: 10). In the end, the peak of Red Brigade terror brought 13,000 acts of political violence and 1200 deaths in a fifteen year period (Drake 1989: 159). What is often most remembered from the terror in the 1970s was the capture and murder of Aldo Moro in 1978, leader of the Christian Democrats.

<sup>12</sup> 4 September 2006. “Terrorismo: Biagi.” *Ansa Notiziario Generale*.

<sup>13</sup> 18 December 1992. “Problemi del Lavoro.” *Il Sole 24 Ore*.

“precariousness” of labor, thus, suggests not only the dismantling of jobs, but also the disassembly of one of the fundamental supporting structures of European society. The term precariousness also emphasizes that market *flexibility* entails risk and uncertainty for the worker: “The diffusion of flexibility seemed to be an incontrovertible trend of the Italian labor market even though the risk of precariousness and jobs’ bad quality were emphasized in the national debate” (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 104).<sup>14</sup> Ex-Communist and member of Leftist party PDS (*Partito Democratici di Sinistra*) Antonio Bassolino explained his position against the Biagi Laws: “If flexibility becomes synonymous with precariousness, then flexibility risks becoming an infinite thing and provoking a precarious-ization of people’s lives and of Italian society.”<sup>15</sup> Echoing this notion of economic and social precariousness, Italian sociologist Roberto Rizza (2005) argues that atypical or nonstandard employment leaves “individuals ... trapped in unstable jobs and they can’t manage to get out of a vicious cycle of *precariousness* and social exclusion” (57). What Italians call precarious-ization is also similar to what Ulrich Beck calls a “risk regime:”

Whereas the Fordist regime brought about the standardization of work, the risk regime involves an individualization of work. [...] People are expected to make their own life plans, to be mobile and to provide for themselves in various ways. The new centre is becoming the *precarious* centre (2000: 70).

For Beck, neoliberalism entails risk and, therefore, precariousness. In fact, Italians often use the term to refer to a wider variety of social risks beyond the workplace, risks that extend to high immigration rates, political instability, and even terrorism. The discourse reveals that what is at stake in losing a stable job is far greater than the job itself, and includes family planning, investment and the core of social stability. Before I delve into how political parties

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<sup>14</sup> My use of “precariousness” here is taken from the original English text.

<sup>15</sup> 16 December 2005. “Lavoro: Bassolino, Flessibilit  non sia sinonimo precariet .” *ANSA Notiziario Generale in Italiano*.

have mobilized around the notion of precariousness, I turn to two groups who are precarious insofar as they have been excluded from full participation in Italy's labor market—women and immigrant populations.

## **2.7 Gender: Problems of Employment and Birthrate**

Employment in Italy has historically been marked by gendered hierarchies and sharp differences between women's and men's employment rates (Baranski and Vinall 1991, Caldwell 1991, Bassi 1993, Jeanne 2000). In 1961, the employment rate for women was 22 percent and 36 percent in 1993 (Ginsborg 2003: 35). Italy's feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s contributed to changing gender regimes, expanding women's social roles from the realms of domestic caretaking and motherhood (Ginsborg 1990, Spackman 1996). The feminist movement also played a significant role in hard-won legal battles for the legalization of divorce in 1974 (Ginsborg 1990: 351) and the legalization of abortion in 1978 (Ginsborg 1990: 394). As for employment, women's participation in the labor force remains low with respect to other European member states (Bernardi 2000, Ginsborg 1990, 2003). Regional disparities are the rule—women's involvement in the workforce is also three times higher in the North (Bernardi 2000: 137). Most of the women in Italy's workforce, 63.5%, are between 25 and 29; and, studies show that women's participation in the workforce tends to follow the life (and reproductive) cycle of women (Martineli et. al 1990: 151). As for Padua, its work force is also characterized by a gendered division: employment rates are 60.1 percent for men and 33.5 percent for women.<sup>16</sup>

One might assume that Italy's relatively low occupation rate for women would suggest women necessarily take on the role as mothers and caretakers. Yet the particularly Fascist cultural ethos and state program that promoted the numerous Italian family has

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<sup>16</sup> Source: ISTAT: "Il Mercato del Lavoro in Provincia di Padova nel 2002: 05 Marzo 2003."

become, for the most part, an historical artifact (Spackman 1996, Horn 1994). In recent years Italy's low birthrate, averaging around 1.2 since 1993, has been the cause of a national debate about the "diminishing" population (Ginsborg 2003: 69, Krause 2001). Elizabeth Krause (2001) has aptly pointed out how the national discourse on reproduction portrays women as "irresponsible" caretakers who neglect the nation, often framing the debate in terms of the incoming immigrant populations. Working women without children, in this environment, risk being indexed as deviating from their more "appropriate" social role in domestic realms (Krause 2001, Ginsborg 2003).

But what can explain Italy's low birthrate? On one level, Italian women tend to continue to adopt all caretaking and household responsibilities, even after they enter the workforce—a double task more conducive to having only one child (Ginsborg 2003: 71). Other important demographic factors may play a role, such as Italians marrying later and limited labor opportunities (Ginsborg 2003: 71). In 2001, women, on average, married at age 27.8 and had their first child at 28.5 (Toma 2003: 314). Moreover, social taboos against having children out of wedlock remain strong so single-headed households have not become mainstream (Ginsborg 2003: 71). While these factors may play an important role, it is also important to recognize that "contemporary family-making practices result from historical adjustments, deeply linked to economic shifts that involved the unraveling of the patriarchal family and household" (Krause 2006: 594). For Italian men, careers tend to replace fatherhood as a dominant symbol of masculinity, also complicating Fascist ideologies that constructed fatherhood as quintessentially masculine (Ginsborg 2003: 71). At the same time, a great majority of Italians in their twenties and thirties live at home, delaying having families of their own. As such, as historian Paul Ginsborg (2003) suggests, the family is a paradox insofar as "the very strength of the Italian family...contributed to its numerical diminution"

(Ginsborg 2003: 72). With the low birthrate and low full-time occupation rate, Italian notions of femininity have shifted away, in part, from solely the realms of marriage and motherhood, but have not shifted largely into the realms of full participation in the labor market or public sphere.

## 2.8 Immigrants and Labor in Veneto

In this section, I briefly highlight the history of immigration in Veneto both because neoliberalism in the region depends heavily on immigrant labor and because racist xenophobic sentiment in Veneto raises anxieties about the “precariousness” in everyday lives and workplaces (Cole 1997, Krause 2001). Italy has had significant rates of immigration since the 1950s, though sharp rises began in the 1980s, in part driven by demands for industrial and working class labor (Ambrosini 2001: 62, Grillo 2002).<sup>17</sup> The immigrant population in the Veneto is rather substantial, numbering upwards of 70,000 (Colatrella 2001: 256). To this region, in particular, immigrants have come from Morocco, Albania, the former Yugoslavia, Ghana, Senegal, Philippines, Romania, China and Tunisia (Colatrella 2001: 98; Tossutti 2001: 378).<sup>18</sup> Estimates as of 1994 suggest that immigrant labor account for nearly 43 percent of industrial jobs in the Veneto region, even though immigrants constitute only 2 percent of the region’s population (Colatrella 2001: 268).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Estimates of the number of immigrants residing in Italy are about 2,400,000 (Tossutti 2001: 378). The patterns of immigrant’s origins has also changed significantly, 53.2 percent were Western European immigrants in 1975; in 1997, 28 percent were from Africa and 23.4 percent were from Eastern Europe, and 15.5 from Western Europe (King and Andall 1999: 140; Caritas di Roma 1998). In this context, the northeastern region of Italy enables swifter job entry for immigrants (Ambrosini 2001: 63). Italian citizenship law in 1992 orders a four-year residence period for EU residents before gaining Italian citizenship, and a ten-year residency period for non-EU applicants (King and Andall 1999: 153).

<sup>18</sup> In 1999, immigrants residing in the Veneto region were said to represent 19.4 percent of the total population, the second highest of all regions, after Lombardy (Ambrosini 2001: 79). “Labor entries” for the Veneto region were 29,094 workers in 1998, the second highest after Lombardy (Ambrosini 2001: 81).

<sup>19</sup> Other estimates by ISTAT, the official state statistics office, are less dramatic for Italy as a whole. In 1996, they estimated that foreign workers without documents made up 14 percent of employment, and were 3.1 percent of the total workforce (Ambrosini 2001: 65).

Social anxieties about immigrant presence in Italy pervade news media and day-to-day conversations in the city (Krause 2001). Reports in 2000 suggest that Italians feared the negative effects of higher immigration rates, with 42.8% fearing it would lead to higher crime rates and 32.3% seeing it as a threat to employment (Diamanti 2001 in Ardizzoni 2005: 512). In Padua, local parts of the city are designated as “the Casbah,” “the Bronx” and “Africa” indexing where many immigrants sell goods or live (Colatrella 2001: 326). Indeed many Paduan youth who attend the university and commute to the city talk openly about their disgust or fear of the train station, a visible contact point for ethnic Italians and immigrant communities. The immigrant “crisis” is often explicitly linked to Italy’s low birthrate; many news media portray a shrinking Italian population in contrast to the “infiltrating” *extracomunitari* (non-EU immigrants) (Krause 2001).<sup>20</sup> The notion of precarious-ization encompasses many levels of insecurity and fear, including the still undetermined role of new immigrants in Italian society.

## 2.9 Political Pushes and Pulls

### 2.9.1 Right Wing Politics: The Northern League

The right wing politics that have emerged in the region reflect and further shape anxieties about labor, social issues and immigration policies. The rise of the right-wing separatist party in the 1990s, known as the Northern League (*Lega Nord*), became the fourth largest party in Italy in 1996 and Veneto’s second largest party (Colatrella 2001: 316). The Northern League, tied to the conservative Veneto League (*Lega Veneta*), was also part of former Prime Minister Berlusconi’s coalition government and, thus, promoted various

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<sup>20</sup> Some scholars have attempted to put the racist attitudes regarding immigrants into Europe into a cultural and historical context. Dario Melossi (2003) argues that the joint crises of state sovereignty brought on by European integration and processes of economic neoliberalism have led to economic and social restructuring, and fear, insecurity and hate towards immigrants (375).

neoliberal market reforms and ideologies. But importantly Lega Nord animates neoliberalism by asserting specific Veneto identity and values.



**Figure 3 Signpost in Padua: the symbol of Lega Nord next to socialist revolutionary, Che Guevara, and the phrase “Workers’ Movement” (*Movimenti dei lavoratori*).**

Championing the ideology of family and hard work, and positioned against the “indolence” and “criminality” in the South, the League’s party initially began as a movement for the independence for the north of Italy as “The Republic of Padania” (Colatrella 2001:316). Refashioned as Italy’s pro-federalist party rather than a separatist party, the Northern League opposes heavy taxation, support for Southern Italy and immigration (Colatrella 2001:316; Tambini 1996, Ardizzoni 2005: 515).<sup>21</sup> Though animated by diverse political and economic allegiances, the League supports two central pillars of neoliberal

<sup>21</sup> Bossi’s speeches often construct the north as more “European” than “backwards” and “bureaucratic” Rome (Tossutti 2001: 69).

reform: the decentralization of the state and reduction of national welfare programs. The League draws strongly on Catholic notions of diligence and piety to reassert divisions between Veneto citizens and their many ‘others’—e.g., Southern Italians and immigrants (Colatrella 2001: 323). Within Veneto’s moral economy, work is viewed as a symbol of one’s *deserving* and individualized efforts. Consider what Veneto scholar Ulderico Balderico (2005) suggests:

[There is] a certain Veneto way of appreciating *work done as God commands*. Such as the generations of artisans, of farmers, but also of great entrepreneurs, of populists and patricians. One of the principals shared in the deep identity of Venetos (14; emphasis in original).

Here the neoliberal valorization of “autonomous” labor is reinforced as an act of divine duty. At the same time, middle- and upper-class Veneto worker-citizens see themselves as *exploited* labor, because they often feel that it is their hard labor that the state strips from them in the form of taxes for the “unworthy” South (Colatrella 2001). Therefore their labor is also holy insofar as it is a sacrifice for others. Though the Northern League is not the majority party, their political rhetoric nonetheless represents the unique condensation of regional and neoliberal values prevalent in the Veneto region.

### 2.9.2 Communist Party and Rhetoric from the Left

In distinct contrast to the Northern League, the political standpoint of both Italy’s Communist Party (*Rifondazione Comunista*) and ex-Communist trade union CGIL are profoundly and fiercely anti-neoliberal labor market reform. Though above I described their anti-Biagi law position, a very brief genealogy of Italian Communism will reveal how the party was positioned to stage their present rejection of “flexibility.” Italy’s first major communist party, PCI (*Partito Comunista Italiano*) was founded after World War II in Italy and grew quickly in the post-war age. During the 1950s and 1960s, the PCI aimed to take power



using electoral votes and government bodies in order to diverge from Soviet communism and simultaneously forge an alternate Italian version. At the height of the PCI, they were the West's largest Communist Party with 1.4 million members.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the 1970s, scholars argue the PCI alienated a new generation of young supporters, failed to develop effective media tools and estranged the feminist movement (Gundle 2000).<sup>23</sup> The party continued to struggle in the 1980s, seeking to find a compromise between Marxism and growing American bourgeoisie values in Italy.<sup>24</sup> Not only did the PCI fail to create a space between United States hegemony and Soviet communism, but also they did not adequately reinvent themselves to appeal to a new generation of supporters. The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 represented the final period of decline for the PCI (Blim 2000). Two years later, the PCI was split into two parties: one that would preserve the Soviet heritage and Marxist ideology, the *Rifondazione Comunista* (RC); and the other social democratic, the PDS (*Partito Democratico della Sinistra*) (Philips and Bull 1996). The split of the PCI represented an ideological obstacle for Italian Communism to reconcile its two strains: social democracy and Soviet communism (Blim 2000). Yet members of both of these parties continue to shape Italian politics. In April 2006, Romano Prodi and the Union party won Italy's

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<sup>22</sup> "Better Left Than Red" *Time*, 10 October 1990. Vol. 136. Issue 17, p. 47.

<sup>23</sup> In turn, young people increasingly associated the PCI with elitism and outdated social values. In the meantime, the PCI inched away from its Soviet origins under the leadership of Enrico Berlinguer in the 1970s and 80s (Borselli 2001). To the surprise of many supporters, the PCI accepted and endorsed Italy's alliance with the United States in NATO (Hassner 1980: 222). PCI member Giorgio Napolitano's, currently serving as the Italian President, declaration that he supported NATO also came as an abrupt shock to more traditional Marxists in the party. The rightward direction of the PCI coincided with the rise of the militant Red Brigades, who violently reinstalled traditional communist ideology in a regime of terror (Drake 1989: 157). Despite the problematic and contradictory ideology, the electoral success in the 1970s suggested that the PCI had tenuously created a niche for Western Communism. A new slogan for the party was dubbed at the Berlin Conference for European Communist Parties in 1976: "A Europe which is neither anti-American nor Anti-Soviet" (Hassner 1980).

<sup>24</sup> The 1980s saw much growth, prosperity and stability for Italy and the swift maturation of Italian capitalism. The rise of consumerism had long-lasting social, political and economic outcomes for Italy. Consumption of American archetypes vis-à-vis American products and media served to widen the gulf between youth and the PCI (Osgood 1980). American hegemony within Italy abetted the dissolution of the PCI by binding youth to American cultural ideals that demonized communism.

executive office, against Silvio Berlusconi with the PDS and RC *both* as part of Prodi's political coalition. Moreover, Giorgio Napolitano, ex-PCI member, became President of the Republic, and Fausto Bertinotti, National Secretary of RC, became President of the House.

Unlike Berlusconi's center-right Forza Italia and the conservative Northern League political parties, Prodi's Union Party publicly opposes neoliberal labor policy reform. In May 2006, Prime Minister Romano Prodi announced that the Biagi Laws would be revised and suggested policy reform such that undetermined time contracts would cost *less* for employers, while "atypical contracts" would cost *more*, as an economic incentive to dissuade employers from relying on the latter.<sup>25</sup> Prodi's bill proposed to abolish certain forms of labor, including "on call" positions and staff leasing, and to establish pension contribution for certain flexible contracts.<sup>26</sup> The public message of anti-Biagi Laws and anti-precarioussness have become, especially for the Left, a growing social movement. In campaigning prior to the 2006 election, Communist leader Fausto Bertinotti accused Berlusconi's government of nourishing "a cancer in our society, a dramatic illness: precariousness. [...] Precariousness is a disease that kills social cohesion."<sup>27</sup> In 2003, ex-Communist trade union CGIL began to use precariousness as a key term for mobilizing demonstrations against the Biagi Laws, staging protests such as "A Day Against the Precariousization of Work" and; in 2005, "Struggle against Precariousness, Rights and Welfare for Atypical Work."<sup>28</sup> Beginning in 2003, the Communist Party (RC) began their campaign called the "Struggle of Precarious Ones" (*Lotta Precariato*) with demonstrations

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<sup>25</sup> Atypical is both part-time and determined time contracts. Pogliotti, Giorgio. 19 May 2006. "La Legge Biagi Sara Rivista." *Il Sole 24 Ore*, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Pogliotti, Giorgio. 19 May 2006. "La Legge Biagi Sara Rivista." *Il Sole 24 Ore*, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> 6 April 2006. "Bertinotti: E' la precarieta' il vero cancro." [http://www.caniscolti.info/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=7160]

<sup>28</sup> 3 July 2003. "CGIL In Piazza a Settembre." *La Stampa*, p. 44. Second reference: 28 June 2005. "Lavoro: Allarme CGIL, Troppi Precari e Poche Garanzie." *ANSA Notiziario Generale*.

against the Moratti reform, an extension of the Biagi Laws for Italian university employment.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 4 Communist Party Poster: “Precarious Government.” May 1, 2005, Workers Holiday

Taken together, the passing of the Biagi Laws and the response of the precariousness movement represent, in micro-encapsulated form, the success and failure of Italy’s partial neoliberalization. They also uncover an alluring belief that the Italian state can effectively reassert control over global capitalism. What I believe is most critical to take away from Italy’s geopolitical topography is the multitude of available, though conflicting and paradoxical, political ideologies. The push-pull of pro-labor and pro-market discourses have multiple effects. While, in part, the state seems to uphold the value of labor as inherently

<sup>29</sup> 11 May 2004. “Ricerca: Bertinotti 15 Maggio in Piazza per Lotta Precariato.” *ANSA Notiziario Generale*.

important to citizens. But, so too do state policies and legislation support the urgency and vitality of *independent* labor, regional autonomy and the value of flexibility.

## 2.10 Neoliberalism as the “Anglo Saxon” Model

While, on the one hand, neoliberal economic policies are often considered an extension of certain northern Italian values, such as individualism and bootstrapping, for the most part, precariousness is viewed as a foreign intruder. When the notion of firing a worker with ease came up in Italy, someone would almost always refer to this as either the “Anglo-Saxon model” (*modello anglo-sassone*) or simply the American model (*modello americano*). Firing, glossed as “sending someone home” (*mandare a casa*), was widely thought to be the dominant managerial strategy in the United States. That is, Italians often defined a social and economic system characterized by a weakened labor force with few protections not only as the “precarious” new economy, but also something explicitly *not* Italian. The idea of the “Anglo-Saxon model” is a persistent discourse that stands in as the neoliberal economy in Italian public debates. It also suggests a public awareness that neoliberalism is very much attributed to economic policies established in the 1980s by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and United States President Ronald Reagan (Harvey 2005: 88), and currently driven by superpowers such as the United States and Britain (Ong 2005:3). Perhaps, too, the notion of “Anglo-Saxon” capitalism implies a Weberian sense of capitalism as a particularly Protestant, as opposed to Catholic, endeavor (Weber 2001). Critics, however, point to Europe’s use of “Anglo-Saxon” model as faulty, as it not only masks the true forefathers of capitalism—including Scottish Adam Smith and Spanish David Ricardo—but also the great diversity of European capitalisms.<sup>30</sup> The notion of Anglo-Saxon neoliberalism furthermore diminishes and obscures the ways in which the Veneto’s flexible specialization (Piore and

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<sup>30</sup> 28 June 2005. “L’Europa non tema il modello anglosassone.” *La Repubblica*, p. 1.

Sabel 1984) was itself a strong tradition in the Italian context. However, the notion of neoliberal economics as part of an “Anglo-Saxon” tradition remains very strong (Reyneri 2005: 40). For example, when the European Employment Strategy of 1997 issued four main pillars of economic growth for Europe (employability, adaptability, entrepreneurship and equal opportunity), the Italian debate centered on the degree to which such reforms were “Anglo-Saxon and northern European policy paradigms” (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 105). Italy’s labor market as deviant from an Anglo-Saxon economy reinforces the discourse of Italy’s economy as “backwards” characterized by bureaucracy and fragmentation (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 106).<sup>31</sup> Yet the debate about precariousness, in light of the Anglo-Saxon model, also shows the Italian capacity to render other modes of production as immoral. That neoliberalism is indexed as “Anglo-Saxon” persistently reminds Italians that this new form of economic and social policy, generating precariousness, is something unnatural or alien to a certain Italian way of being in the world.

### **2.11 Precariousness as Memory of Protection**

Neoliberal reform was intended to dismantle a labor market defined by its safeguards or protections (*tutela*), “an extended and articulated system of social guarantees” (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 57). The upheaval of contract change also followed a period in which the trade union movement, representing Italy’s strong labor movement, had been heavily deflated (Ginsborg 2003: 57). It is vital, I believe, to see the tensions and clash as between a sense of precariousness and a value for maintaining safeguards for worker-citizens. With the passing of the Biagi Laws in 2003, employers were able to cut costs by using a new crop of short-term contracts, even though the undetermined time contract (Article 18) was not altered. In effect, the state expanded the possibility for corporations, public and private, to

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<sup>31</sup> Though it is telling of the state bureaucracy that Italy has over 90,000 laws on record as opposed to France’s

utilize alternative sources of labor. Thus, the entire economy shifted, showing a progressive decrease in lifelong contracts granted to workers. For instance, between 1977-1983, the average number of these contracts was 51.9%, between 1991-1997 it had fallen to 36.3% (Ballarino 2005). In the Veneto region, the average number had fallen to 24.5% in 2002 (Veneto Lavoro 2004: 145). At the same time, it was far more difficult for new workers to be given these contracts. The rate of new issue decreased 4 percent between 1993 and 2000 in Italy as a whole and dropped 33.7 percent in the northeast (Schiattarella and Piacentini 2003: 90). Holders of lifelong contracts were quite likely, then, to feel particularly threatened considering how employers were likely to favor flexible contracts. At the same time, workers in determined time or new flexible contracts were also apprehensive about gaining any sort of job security. I believe that this is a key dynamic of precariousness, leading to a rising sense of apprehension and fear for a majority of Italian workers.

Robert Castel (1997) points to how instability is lived by those who have experienced stability. Thus precariousness only becomes “sedimented” progressively in future generations who view such dynamics as natural (Castel 1997 in Migliavacca 2005: 109). That is, precariousness only becomes a social problem because job protections have been a routine social and economic expectation. In Italy stable work was normalized only for a relatively small period of time from 1945 to 1975 when the process of industrialization allowed for most citizens to garner a lifelong position (*lavoro per la vita*) (Reyneri 2005a: 21). The Italian protectionist labor market has been measured with an extremely high RPI (regime of labor protection or *regime di protezione dell'impiego*), a quantitative measure of state labor protections that considers safeguards for regular occupation, temporary occupation and collective dismissals (Boeri and Garibaldi 2005: 46). Transnational measures for “RPI”

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7,325 and Germany's 5,587 (Ginsborg 2003: 217).

showed that Italy had an RPI rate of 3.5 for the late 1990s, compared with a 0.7 for the United States, 2.9 for France and 2.6 for Japan (OECD Employment Outlook 1999 in Boeri and Garibaldi 2005:46). Italy thus is unique in that its precariousization is taking place in the context of one of most intense regimes of labor protections in Europe, and the world (Boeri and Garibaldi 2005). This combination is of utmost importance, I contend, for the way in which this dramatic economic transition is lived by worker-citizens in Italy. It is the intensified vulnerability of those who feel they have something at stake with the upheaval of the labor market that also propels mobbing into national debates and arenas. The social and economic history of stable work in Italy has played a critical role in generating a set of moral orders in which workers fear and are unsettled by the hasty removal of secure labor. Only in the context of Italy's moral economy, in which stable work was seen as an ethical right of citizenship, could precarious work be recognized as unethical and even life-threatening.

## **2.12 Sword of Damocles: The Normalization of Fear**

The commentary of Elenora Pagnan, one of DataGisco's partners and Director of Human Resources, condenses a common "structure of feeling" about the Italian workplace at this particular historical moment. For example, in describing the "crisis" in the labor market, she explained: "People who are not productive in this moment of crisis when you have to cut costs, these people have to leave the company." The "crisis" she refers to here is the process of neoliberal reform, the market-oriented policies passed in order to build a cheap, flexible, often outsourced labor market, despite Italy's strong legal measures to safeguard labor. Elenora also told me that she herself had been accused of mobbing by one of her assistants, but had denied the charges.<sup>32</sup> A later segment of the interview follows:

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<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, since the worker had already left the company, I was not in contact with the woman who accused Elenora of mobbing her. Moreover, I felt that it may compromise the position of trust I had

It's not so simple with our Article Eighteen. It's not so simple to fire people. But uh there should be the chance, in the meantime, I think even of greater work stimulus. [...] Because if you know that your job isn't a given, it brings [...] more productivity. And, then, definitely a "turnover," and so also the chance even ... for an employee to change jobs. Because certainly if it's ok with the person you fire him, but then you need another. ... There's this rotation. So it's not a given if you lose your job because you've been fired: Oh God I won't find anything. Right now there's this, here in Italy, there's this motionlessness, like someone keeps his job and meanwhile no one can fire him and no one ever changes. I mean I think it would be much more dynamic even for the kids to grow more by changing ... work more often basically. [...] Sometimes, someone gets hired at twenty years old when he's a boy and stays in the same job until he finishes and up until he retires. In my opinion, that's an absurd thing. [...] You don't grow, you get old earlier, like there's no stimulation. You don't grow professionally, don't grow as a person, you don't put- don't put yourself in competition with anyone. In the end it gets very monotonous, very sad even. [...] And therefore I think without a doubt employees always have this, we say this sword of Damocles, this constant fear of ...not having your own job. But for me anyway it could be a good step ahead for the vitality of the company.

Elenora here spoke about a basic obstacle to easily firing workers, Article Eighteen of the Statute of Workers of 1970. In her discussion, she used multiple concepts associated with neoliberal discourse that simultaneously reframe stable labor as greatly deficient and inferior—aged, “motionless,” without stimulus and even sad. By contrast, the flexible labor market, was characterized by “vitality,” “dynamism” “productivity,” “turnover,” “change” and “competition.” She also deploys a specific metaphor to describe the current labor market: the sword of Damocles. A reference to Greek mythology, the sword of Damocles is a symbol for an ever-present threat or the sense of impending doom.

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established at DataGisco. Later, I found out that Lidia and Dora (Chapter 6) had actually handled the case against Elenora which was still pending.





**Figure 5 Sword of Damocles by Richard Westhall. Painting from 1812.**

In the story, tyrant king Dionysius invited jealous admirer and peasant Damocles to dinner. By the end of the evening, Damocles realized he was sitting directly underneath a sword, precariously hung from the ceiling by a piece of hair. Dionysius did this to show him that his life as a king was under a constant threat, so Damocles should not desire the lives of the wealthy and powerful. Damocles begged to return to his life as a poor man. The myth is premised on a moral lesson that if wealth comes with risk, then poverty is the only path to security. Welfare ideologies, on the contrary, aim to resolve economic gain and job security. Elenora's allusion to the myth becomes highly instructive of two basic elements of neoliberal ideology: 1) fear is a *normal* part of economic gain; 2) and, security and wealth cannot coexist for workers. The notion of the sword of Damocles illuminates the tensions of neoliberalism; it has been likened to the retreat of capital: "Capital flight is the sword of

Damocles that hangs over the heads not only of those who organize workers, the marginalized poor or women, but over governments who attempt to regulate the conditions under which capital can operate with a national economy” (Sen 1997: 23 in Bergeron 2001: 995). For Italians in Padua, finding a new job in Italy is not often easy—low turnover, high rates of unemployment and a social value on living close to one’s family make finding a new job difficult and undesirable, particularly within the service sector where I situated my study. In addition, having a stable job is considered fundamental to achieving true adult status in making life plans and investments. These social factors translate into a heightened sense of fear for workers who recognize just how precarious their positions have become.<sup>33</sup>

### **2.13 Mobbing: A Neoliberal Problem**

The discourse of mobbing is fraught with inconsistencies that become more complex as I delve into the real-life cases of mobbees. But my starting point in many subsequent discussions is the degree to which mobbing and neoliberalism emerge as an entangled pair. I call attention not only to the historical simultaneity of the expansion of Italy’s precariousization and historical safeguards, but also to the changing consciousness of many Italian workers. Though the idea of mobbing begins with the notion that it preys on stable “lifelong” workers coerced to resign, it develops into something that brings to the radar screen a wide array of unjust corporate practices related to neoliberalism. For example, this is evident in the 2006 news article on mobbing, linking it to notion of dehumanization: “Mobbing attacks ‘sick’ workplaces, where people are considered tools and not precious resources.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Howard F. Stein (2005) also contributes to understandings of fear and anxiety in the workplace in his exploration of downsizing in the United States.

<sup>34</sup> Flavia Fiorii, “Mobbing: Vittima un lavoratore su 10,” *Corriere della Sera* (July 10, 2006). Available online at [http://www.corriere.it/Rubriche/Salute/Diritto\\_alla\\_salute/2006/07\\_Luglio/02/ART\\_mobbing\\_020706.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/Rubriche/Salute/Diritto_alla_salute/2006/07_Luglio/02/ART_mobbing_020706.shtml).

At the same time, Italians often describe mobbing as a specific corporate strategy to dismiss lifelong workers. Lawyer Francesco Gallo who specializes in mobbing told me:

In the public and private sector, employers sought illegitimate means to induce the worker to resign in order to avoid a penalty for the firing of a worker that could easily have been considered illegitimate or unjustified. Such means were often extremely negative for the worker's health. They were to attack and deny the fundamental human rights for the dignity of mankind.

Francesco's narrative follows a series of events premised on a logical economic sequence: high labor costs, capitalist desire to reduce labor and costs, need to avoid legal penalties by coercing resignation, and then mobbing. At the same time, Francesco also views mobbing as a vital issue, putting "human rights" and "dignity" at stake. The idea of mobbing workers as a coercive means of avoiding the "undetermined time" contract is not a robust hypothesis. First, as the above figures suggest, only a small fraction of workers enjoy these contracts. Second, Italians talk about mobbing both as something put in action by managers, but also by same-level or lower-level co-workers. Finally, Italians who do *not* have this contract report being mobbed. Recently, using mobbing as a technique for corporate downsizing has been criticized as being a costly and ineffective project for companies, in addition to a morally objectionable practice: "A worker subjected to psychological violence has an output down 70 percent in terms of productivity. His cost, for a manager, is 180% more."<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, the capitalist "rational" value of cost-effectiveness is used to critique mobbing, even as mobbing is purportedly discussed as a cost-saving strategy.

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<sup>35</sup> "Mobbing: Malattia da 20 miliardi di Euro." *Corriere della Sera*. (1 September 2002).

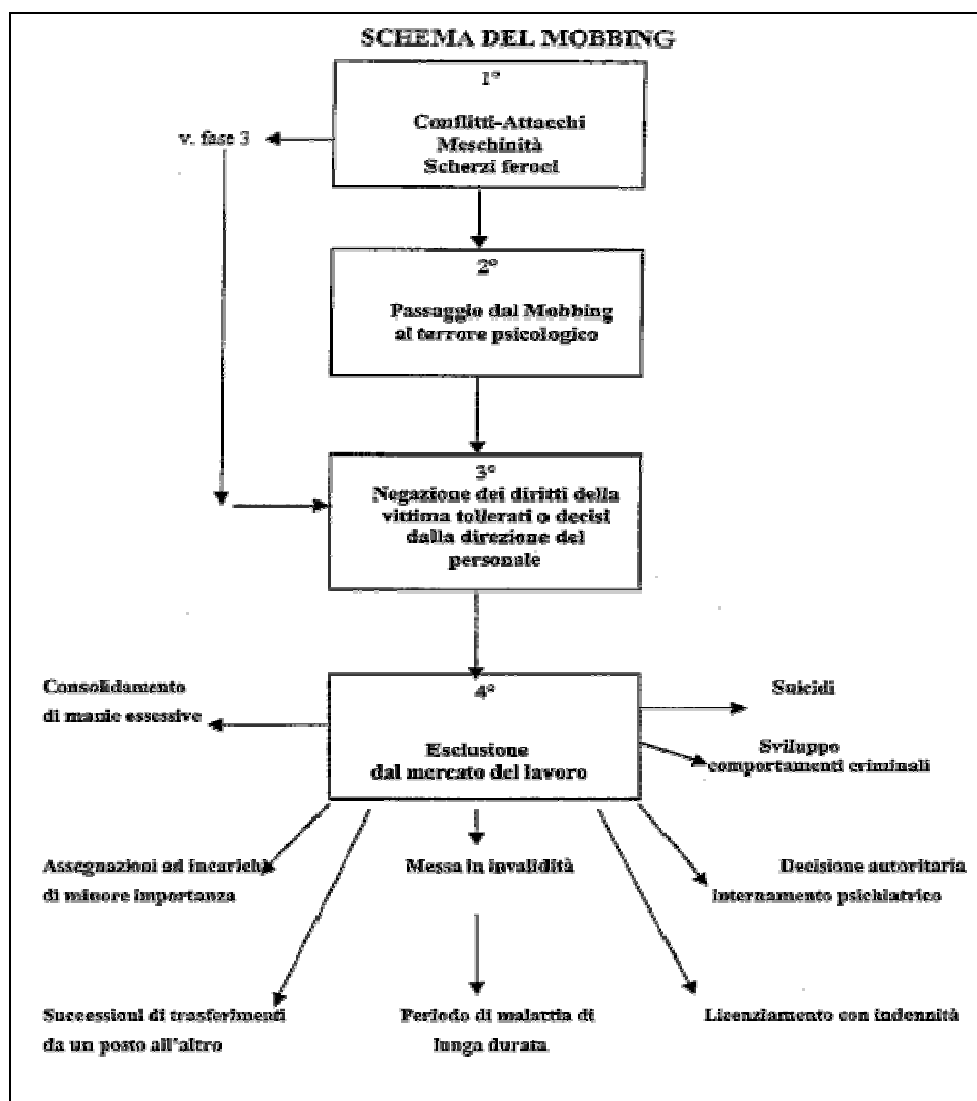


Figure 6 Schematic of Mobbing<sup>36</sup>

In the discourse of mobbing, in fact, mobbing is something that may result in exclusion from the workforce in addition to various other effects. In the trade union CGIL's mobbing schematic (Figure 5), the steps of mobbing include: 1) "Conflicts, Attacks, Meanness, Hostile Jokes;" 2) "Passage from Mobbing to Psychological Terrorism;" 3) "Denial of the victim's rights tolerated or decided by the personnel director;" 4) "Exclusion from the labor market." The direct effects (center arrows) include "disability leave" and

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.cgiltoscana.it/dip/dps/mobbing/default.htm>

“long-term sick leave.” Other effects include (beginning left arrows) “excessive (psychological) mania, being assigned inferior work tasks, work transfer;” as well as (right arrows): “suicide, the development of criminal behaviors, authoritative decision by the in-house psychiatrist and dismissal with compensation.” The schematic visibly shows how exclusion is only one possible outcome of mobbing. It is also evident that the effects are devastating to the psycho-physical state of workers and society at large.

Though the schematic sustains a notion of mobbing as gender-neutral, it is a deeply gendered discourse. Within these gendered discourses, men asked to execute inferior tasks are described as being mobbed. Below I quote from a news article:

Over the years Francesco was trusted with delicate tasks that earned him the esteem of company managers. But then came a management change. Francesco was asked to open and direct a new branch in the province, where all the workers that the new management considered low profile were sent to. And that made Francesco understand, in a nearly explicit way, that they wanted him out.<sup>37</sup>

While mobbing is not only a middle or professional class crime, it is often portrayed as such. Here, Francesco, as a result of a management change, believes himself to be mobbed because of the “low profile” workers assigned to his cohort. Flexible management often entails the juggling of workers among managers. In Italy, however, this practice got included within the scope of mobbing, and thus considered a deviant and abusive practice.

In the next passage, the 1999 article describes a 45-year old male engineer, who describes his experience of being mobbed:

I was transferred to an underground office with the walls covered with humidity, where I could bring only my personal objects, and where there wasn't a computer. When I asked my superior why, he responded that paper and pen would have been enough because from now on my only task would be to take note of his orders and follow them.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ardu, Barbara. “Ecco il Mobbing Veleni in Ufficio.” *La Repubblica* (24 July 1999.)

<sup>38</sup> “Io, dirigente urbanistico finito nello scantinato.” *La Repubblica*. (8 February 2000).

The crime of mobbing here is the crime of deprivation of work and information, and the subordination of (men's) labor. Within the historical specificity of Italy's neoliberalizing policies that I outlined above, the idea of little or no work can become deeply threatening and risky. It is the historically specific organization of labor in Italy that works as the backdrop that animates certain practices as endangering. The worker who is subject to "forced inactivity" remains vulnerable not only to further mistreatment and alienation, but also to greater pressure to resign. Without the broader context of labor policy change and diminishing social protections, fewer tasks would not seem as threatening to the worker's economic livelihood. For instance, a 2003 article describes what happens to mobbees

(*mobbi~~zz~~ati*):

[They are] accused of low productivity and loaded up on marginal tasks more so than other colleagues or even inferiors, given impossible objectives and useless tasks, drawn up on exaggerated disciplinary actions, stripped of responsibilities, excessively checked up on by fiscal agents, excluded from meetings, threatened with possible office transfer, obsessive control of work hours, urgent requests for jobs even on holidays and after work.<sup>39</sup>

Victims of mobbing, "mobbees," list a series of offenses that are exactly those practices that are becoming normalized corporate practices in Italy, where workers are subject to disciplinary regimes of control, high demands and increased surveillance (Reyneri 2005). Within this narrative, mobbing means both inconsistency and uselessness for workers, as well as hyper-surveillance and high demand. This is precisely the kind of "interruptions" of work that scholars have described as *most characteristic* of global capitalism, market slows and spurs that change the governing strategies of market-directed corporate objectives (Reyneri 2005, Sennett 1998, Beck 1999). Note also that this, as in many accounts of mobbing, the mobber does not necessarily feature as the central agent of the narrative. Rather, the series of persecutory practices and the organization of labor itself often becomes construed as

agents of mobbing. It is a point that is counterintuitive as workers don't necessarily talk about a single social actor "doing" the mobbing per se. Rather, what often happens is that the *effects* of ambivalent, confusing or disjointed work relationships become construed as mobbing, particularly when mobbing is medicalized in "Organizational Coercion Pathology" (see Chapter 6 of this dissertation).

The local Paduan newspaper published an article in 2005 on mobbing, describing it as an "illness," and a "psychological terrorism" in the workplace lasting at least six months and affecting as many as 100,000 in northeastern Italy.<sup>40</sup> Again situating mobbing as an effect of neoliberalism, the article named the origins of mobbing: "The diffusion of this phenomenon is tied to the great transformation of labor: the tendency for exasperated flexibility, globalization, precarious-ization, intensified optimization of corporate costs."<sup>41</sup>

The article, then, offered the following advice for potential mobbees:

It's not healthy to be passive and continue to tolerate abuse and unfair harassment. The best solution is to continue to carry out one's job, reacting to the provocations and pre-acquiring evidence for eventual legal action."<sup>42</sup>

This account condenses various elements of mobbing that I will further elaborate on in this dissertation. First, worker-citizens are hailed as individualized agents of justice, called upon to assemble proof of mobbing. Naming mobbing is considered the task of the worker-citizen, rather than a collective class or group of workers. What will become legitimate forms of proof for this form of psychological terrorism so difficult to record? Finally, there is the notion of health—mobbing as a destructive force against the psychophysical integrity of workers is something essential to how mobbing is understood, negotiated and acted upon.

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<sup>39</sup> "Un milione di lavoratori maltrattato dai capi." *Corriere della Sera*. (18 January 2003).

<sup>40</sup> Bignoti, Gigi. 9 January 2005. "Mobbing: incubo per centomila. A Tutte le età." *Il Gazzettino*, p. III.

<sup>41</sup> Bignoti, Gigi. 9 January 2005. "Mobbing: incubo per centomila. A Tutte le età." *Il Gazzettino*, p. III.

<sup>42</sup> Bignoti, Gigi. 9 January 2005. "Mobbing: incubo per centomila. A Tutte le età." *Il Gazzettino*, p. III.

The discourse of mobbing makes visible the embodied apprehension, fear, mistrust and persecution in the Italian workforce. For Veneto workers, the near-hegemony of neoliberalism in the region requires workers to be geographically mobile, lose job security, face greater competition with other workers and work longer hours (Colatrella 2001: 302). Lack of job security, risk of job transfer, little or no engagement between employer and employee characterize both neoliberalism *and* what is known as mobbing. This dissertation takes this uncanny overlapping and disjuncture as a starting point and mobbing's salience as an entryway to understand how human consciousness and corporeality intersect with economic change and historical conditions, revealing the intimacy of neoliberalism. Yet they are also distinguished from one another in that neoliberalism is often understood as an abstract process, while mobbing has become a frame for new subjectivities and real bodily effects.

Worker-subjects will also reflect Italy's highly fragmented political ideologies that house the neoliberal Berlusconions and the Communist dissenters—with much space in between. Together they form a vibrant and urgent backdrop for the ongoing dialogue about mobbing. Mobbing's legibility is contingent upon changing corporate hierarchies and economic reconfigurations. It also attests to the ways in which capitalism is fragmented (Yanagisako 2001, Tsing 2000), only making sense by amplifying the existing cultural and historical conditions that make it possible.



### Chapter 3      *Your Death, My Life: Economic and Existential Precariousness*

“The face of the other in its precariousness and defenselessness is for me at once the temptation to kill and the call to peace.” — Emmanuel Levinas<sup>1</sup>

“Endemic uncertainty is what will mark the lifeworld and the basic existence of most people.” – Ulrich Beck<sup>2</sup>

“We have noted a definite incapacity on the part of companies to evaluate the human and economic damage caused by mobbing.”<sup>3</sup>—Maria Grazia Cassitto, psychologist from Milan’s Work Clinic

#### 3.1 Existential Precariousness

How do people respond to their own precariousness and that of others?

Precariousness, a salient social, political and economic concept in Italy, rests on certain basic assumptions about human behavior and human consciousness. The philosophy of precariousness illuminates the deeper understandings of the human upon which the discourse of precariousness rests. From philosophical debates, I have extracted a set of dialogues posed around the notion of how humans grapple with one’s own and others’ precariousness. In his essay, “Peace and Proximity,” philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1996) reflects upon whether peace can be achieved by bridging the distance to the other. He wonders whether recognizing one’s own dependence and interconnectedness with the Other, while inspiring the desire to eliminate the Other, could also activate another process. Perhaps, he argues, the Other’s precariousness in reflecting one’s own precariousness, may incline one to move towards peace: “The face of the other in its precariousness and

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<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Flavia Fiorii, “Mobbing: Vittima un lavoratore su 10,” *Corriere della Sera* (July 10, 2006). .

defenselessness is for me at once the temptation to kill and the call to peace” (Levinas 1996: 167). Levinas’ usage of precariousness (*précaire*):

...fully implicates its etymology in the Latin word *precari*, an interestingly intransitive verb meaning to pray. The suggestion in Lévinas is that the Other is finally the divinity to whom we must pray and *upon whom our existence depends* in a supplicatory way (Smith 2004: 259, emphasis mine).

The problem, then, is that the Other is someone “upon whom our existence depends” and yet humans repeatedly fail to recognize this “dependence.” For Levinas, a basic paradox of human life is the inability to identify the articulations between human lives. The human response to this profound interdependence wavers between solidarity (peace) and destruction (death).

Judith Butler (2004) poses an alternative to the way in which Levinas views the response to the Other: “It is unclear why Levinas would assume that one of the first or primary responses to another’s precariousness is the desire to kill [...] We should consider the dilemma they pose as constitutive of the ethical anxiety” (Butler 2004: 136). In *Precarious Life*, Butler examines the precariousness of a post-9/11 world of interconnected bodies at risk, only some of whose lives ‘count’ as mournable. The “ethical anxiety” returns to a basic paradox of the subject, in being subject to and subject of particular kinds of regimes:

The subject is compelled to repeat the norms by which it is produced, but that repetition establishes a domain of risk, for if one fails to reinstate that norm 'in the right way,' one becomes subject to further sanction, one feels the prevailing conditions of existence threatened (Butler 1997b: 28).

Subjectivity, in other words, is at risk precisely because of the riskiness or precariousness of the very “conditions of existence” upon which subjectivity is based.

The dialogue between Levinas and Butler can be very fruitful in understanding the relationship of mobbing to precariousness. In public discourses that I explore below, there are two ways in which mobbing is understood as *caused* by precariousness. On a basic level,

the model rests on the idea (or at least hope) that another worker's precariousness would be met with peace, through class consciousness and solidarity. Instead, however, it is met with the drive to kill (vis-à-vis mobbing), to eliminate the other in an act of merciless (and often ineffective) self-preservation. These ideas parallel what Levinas poses as the human response to precariousness: opposition between "making peace" and "killing." Butler, however, points to the way in which the precarious conditions *themselves* drive the idea of precariousness as a desire to eliminate someone else. We should not assume then, that what drives a worker to mob another worker is this human drive to eliminate the Other. Rather, for Butler, precarious conditions create the precariousness of all subjects – precariousness is not even and fluid, it subjects certain bodies more so than others. Thus, her formulation points more towards the ethics of subjects constituted through conditions overwhelmed by risk and uncertainty.

### **3.2 Dual Precariousness in Italy**

The question of what propels subjects to turn on one another reveals sharply diverse political orientations and multiple understandings of human life. In Italy these dialogues are carried out in an explicit public discourse about what happens when *workers* are precarious. Emerging against neoliberal labor reform, the discourse of precariousness in Italy is a publicly debated set of ideas and the centerpiece of a new political platform and social movement. And it has become a powerful site of negotiation about the meaning of work, the rights of workers and the role of the welfare state in protecting worker-citizens. The idea of precariousness underscores the perspective of the worker and valorizes long-term secure labor—it turns the neoliberal value of flexibility on its head. Deploying "precarious" as a way to reinscribe flexibility bears distinct moral overtones that strongly criticize a neoliberal labor market. Refiguring the political role of Italy's Left, this discourse is very much

constituted from within Italy's Communist and Socialist traditions as an explicit critique of neoliberalism.

Precariousness is not only a central theme for a political movement, but also reflective of gendered dynamics of labor. Mostly male political actors publicly describe the "precarious worker," a figure that has *not* been explicitly feminized. Italian women, however, are more often assigned precarious contracts by employers. Additionally, the figure of the "precarious worker" emerges in contrast with classed and masculinized identifications such as "freelance worker" (*libera professionista*). Identifying contracts, labor practices and people as "precarious" is at once a political act, a gendered identification and an ethical claim positioned as antithetical to neoliberal ideologies. Teasing out these diverse gendered and classed identifications, I recover the subtle ways in which precariousness—explicitly acknowledged by subjects or not—runs deeply through the experiences of very diversely positioned worker-citizens.

It is useful to theorize precariousness in Italy as constituted by two central components. On the one hand, precariousness is *economic*, referring to a particular configuration of Italy's labor market; on the other hand, it is *existential*, understood as a pervasive instability and apprehension that haunts all aspects of contemporary life. These dual and contingent forms of precariousness shape and reflect the precarious-ization of workers' subjectivities and their sense of deepening alienation and exclusion from social life. Precariousness, in my view, is one of the most profound effects of the construction of what I call a 'two-tier' workforce, split between lifelong workers and short-term workers. What happens to the consciousness of laborers when there are precarious contract holders work or search for work in the same context as workers with undetermined time contracts? I argue that the two-tier structure creates the conditions for the precarious-ization of relations

between workers, inciting and reflecting suspicion and the practices of persecution. Italian worker-subjects have, in some ways, all become precarious, shaped and shaping a work environment beset by unknowing, anxiety, doubt, fear. There is, thus, another dimension to the economic and existential of precariousness. I examine the relationship between mobbing and precariousness as something that matters because of the economic and existential *closeness* of protected (*tutelato*) and precarious (*precariato*) workers. This closeness, I show, fuels conflicts and, importantly, renders the discourse of mobbing a salient medium through which to describe certain subjects' fears and perceptions of their own persecution. Mobbing, in my view, is generated by the *closeness* and by the duality of precariousness.

### 3.3 Two Tiers: The Closeness of the Protected and the Precarious

The passing of Law 30, also known as the Biagi Laws, legalized over forty different kinds of contracts from “on call” jobs to internships to staff leasing positions via a secondary temporary labor organization (see Chapter 2).<sup>4</sup> Most broadly, the Biagi Laws allowed more “determined time” contracts of various typologies—these were in fact more “flexible” or precarious contracts, allowing for a more pliable workforce. The Biagi Laws, thus, engendered a dramatic change in the subjectivities not only of the newly and precariously employed, but also of *all* workers by structuring the legal creation of a two-tiered workforce in Italy. In a relatively short period of time, then, Italian workers with undetermined time contracts were becoming scarce and determined time workers were becoming more abundant. Before the Biagi Laws the distinctions between the undetermined time workers and determined time workers were not as salient or contentious as they became

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<sup>4</sup> Employers, however, cannot simply convert to short-term contracts, as Italian and European law proscribes that a single employee will default to an undetermined time contract after two or more progressive short-term contracts with the same employer (EU Directive 1999/70/Ce) (Cirioli 2006). In fact, 40% of full-time workers with short-term become long-term employees after one year, but this still leaves 60% whose next contract is short-term.

after the onset of neoliberal restructuring. The decline in long-term work (with undetermined time contracts) and replacement with short-term (determined time) workers is a well-documented trend in Italy, and in particular, the Veneto region.

	<b>Undetermined Time Contracts</b>	<b>Determined Time Contracts</b>	<b>Temporary Work Contracts</b>
1991	55%	22%	0%
2003	31%	43%	12%

Figure 1 Adapted from Veneto Lavoro (p. 53) Source: Veneto Lavoro su Dati Amministrativi Provinciali Archivi Netlabor<sup>5</sup>

I have presented statistics in the above table in order to illustrate how the undetermined time contracts within the Veneto region have been nearly halved, while the number of determined time contracts has almost doubled. And I also show that a new contract category now holds a portion of the labor market. The difference between temporary work contracts (*interinale*) and determined time contracts is that the former is through a secondary provider of labor, while the latter is initiated through the actual company. In order to fully highlight the shift between these two kinds of contracts, I have excluded three other forms of contracts: training contracts (*contratto di formazione*) used for workers ages sixteen to thirty-two (which decreased from roughly 10% to 2%) and internship contracts (*contratto di lavoro apprendistato*) used for advanced professional training (which has remained relatively stable in this period at approximately 13%). The constitution of Veneto's labor force has been refigured with a majority of determined time workers, and a greatly reduced group of undetermined time workers. Notably, work in the Veneto region is

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<sup>5</sup> I have adapted this table from a distribution graph in Veneto Lavoro (2004), referring to the total percentage number of recorded contracts in the Veneto region for each year between 1991 and 2003. No raw numbers were available for this particular graph.

also particularly precarious for women. In 2002, women held 55% of the determined time contracts in the Veneto (Veneto Lavoro: 145).

This particular structure of the two-tier workforce, split between two different kinds of workers, is fundamental in creating the structural conditions of precariousness, and for generating and reflecting Italian understandings of precariousness as a discourse about labor. To examine this more fully, I turn now to a series of narratives and practices that reflect this two-tier workforce and play a role in constituting the cultural meaning of precarious.

### 3.3.1 *Reflections on Two Tiers*

The narrative of Davide, a project manager at DataGisco, a mid-sized service industry firm, reveals some of the social dynamics of this two-tiered workforce. In our interview, I asked him about his relationship with precarious workers. Davide explained his views:

It's obvious that the relationships are different. It's not like I treat a precarious one (*un precario*) differently. [...] In a very dynamic job, I don't concentrate much on relationships. I don't have very human relationships (*rapporti tanti umani*), [...] Sometimes maybe we exaggerate in expecting the new generation to have experience for themselves. It's not out of spite: 'I've worked and you have to work, too.' But I mean, damn, you've never worked before or you're trying to [work]. I say this to guys during the interview, this [job] is for two or three months now, but you may have a new opportunity, the company is big. And so if you're smart, then you work. Can't change that! [...] You have to plant yourself in there, be available (*disponibile*). It's not as if I'm asking you to come to work for free, but if I ask you, 'Tuesday I'm starting a job, can you stay an hour?' And you respond to me, 'Well, are you paying me?' I'm not saying that's not a worker's right, but it makes me fume (*mi vengono i fumi*).

Davide's narrative relies on the figure of the "available" (*disponibile*) worker to propel a moral reconfiguration of labor. Precarious-contract holders were not only defined in terms of their job position, but as a new and distinct subjectivity, as "precarious ones" (*precari*). Propelled by neoliberal ethics, workers' individual "smarts" could be rewarded by corporations with long-term contracts or more work. This type of logic fortifies the

difference between new workers and undetermined time workers because the latter group, according to these logics, has successfully merited their positions. It instills within new hires a sense of obligatory competition that they can acquire such positions as well—it is *not* their right to have a job position; rather, it is something they must earn and deserve. Precarious workers must respond to the elusive promise of job security, an alluring and unspoken pledge that the specter of job scarcity keeps in place. In spite of potentially insufficient pay, workers were expected to demonstrate this willingness and desire to work because of the possibility of job extension. This structure creates a disciplinary regime for workers in which they must self-manage and produce because of the alluring promise of possibly securing a long-term labor contract. Workers subject to the demands of a manager like Davide must convincingly perform their “availability” and “willingness” (*disponibilità*) on multiple levels: 1) a perceived humility of the worker to accept orders; 2) the refusal to make economic demands; and 3) the willingness to take on risk. Inquiring about payment transgresses implicit rules of a neoliberal workspace both by avowing their identity as workers with rights and also by refusing to occupy a subject position that is economically pliable. Davide also admits, ultimately, the lack of “human relationships” (*rapporti umani*) with *either* precarious or permanent workers. The workplace, a site of economic precariousness, is devoid of what constitutes the “human” aspect of relationships.

### **3.4 Gendered Precariousness**

#### *3.4.1 Precarious Ones (i precari)*

In February 2005, Nora Daretin, a middle-aged woman of somber demeanor, arrived at Fiore’s Montiglio’s Office of Equal Opportunity (*Pari Opportunità*) with a problem about work. Fiore’s office was a state-elected political institution present in every province



of Italy and one that caters to mostly women's employment issues.<sup>6</sup> Employed as a check-in operator at an airport, Nora had come to Fiore after her three-month, part-time contract was not renewed: "They told me that I wasn't good. I wasn't fast." The letter Nora received from her boss said explicitly she was not offered another contract because she was "slow." Nora told us angrily: "We're in an airport. We're not on a production line (*catena di montaggio*)!" Fiore asked her how she was able to support herself with this job, averaging less than four hundred euro (four hundred eighty US dollars) per month. Nora explained that she had returned to her parent's home after she had lost her partner to cancer months prior and been unemployed. In March, Fiore had finally been able to speak to the supervising manager at the airport regarding Nora's case and requested the possibility that she be reinstated. Later that day, Nora returned to the office to discuss what had transpired. Fiore reported: "He said you were unable to adapt to the environment. He said, 'I don't want to hire her precariously. I won't do it. She's very capable for other types of environments, but not the airport.'" Here, hiring her "precariously" meant offering Nora another short-term job contract, with no long-term security. Nora was visibly annoyed and reminded us that her training had been inadequate and her employers corrupt. For example, she noted, they had hired the boss's sister with an undetermined time contract, and she was less than attentive to travelers: "She left a line of people just because she has undetermined time contract. I said, 'Look if you need ten minute break I'll come in for you.' Basically, this company is pitting the poor against the poor!" Fiore put this into perspective: "Most people with precarious jobs try to hide their errors; meanwhile she was beginning to announce hers. [...] In a precarious environment, everyone hides everything. They deny the evidence. But, then, so do the non-precarious ones." The logic here was that Nora's co-worker failed to be

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<sup>6</sup> Equal Opportunity are understood as promoting women more so than ethnic or racial minority populations.

an attentive and vigilant worker precisely because she had the job security offered her by the undetermined time contract.

Fiore looked at Nora directly and spoke slowly and evenly, sharing a view informed by her perspective as a Communist activist and ex-trade unionist:

You have to understand that in some ways the world is terrible. In this world, if a job is done well or poorly not everyone gives a damn. They only care about a favorable economic profit, not how much money is spent on polluting. What is important is getting money. This is objective, not subjective. It is the opposite of slowness. And if justice is important then we have to busy ourselves with obtaining it. We have to realize that we are not what they want. They need to earn, but why should we adjust ourselves according to their mentality?

Fiore had picked up on Nora's comment that she was too "slow" for the job and reframed this "slowness" as a way in which she was distinguished from the fast, unethical and polluting capitalists. Later that month, Fiore sent one last letter to Nora's boss to support giving her another chance. She received a faxed reply and refusal. Nora, in the end, did not return to work at the airport.

Nora's story and her engagement with Fiore expose a set of labor practices and cultural understandings that I think of as two interconnected knots: neoliberal market reform and specific Italian cultural understandings of precariousness. In the dialogues between Fiore, Nora and Nora's boss the term "precarious" was used in the following ways: to hire precariously, a precarious job, a precarious environment and precarious ones. It is clear that the term slipped between a sense of risky employment to a sense of greater uncertainty, risk, and "being subject to unknown conditions."<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, the term has a distinctly moral overtone, even when it is used by employers. For example, Nora's boss's refusal to re-hire Nora "precariously" allowed him to strategically position his decision in a historically specific moral field of refusing

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<sup>7</sup> *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/precarious> (accessed: February 14, 2007).

precariousness. Saying “I don’t want to hire her precariously” became, at once, an ethical negation of neoliberal values, while at the same time allowing him to refuse her a position.

Nora’s reflection, “the poor against the poor” is highly astute. The tension among all workers, both long-term and short-term, was heightened and intensified upon the establishment of a regime of decentralized and temporary labor that devalued both long-term and short-term laborers, often igniting hostilities between groups of workers. As is evident in Nora’s narrative and Fiore’s use of “precarious” and “non-precarious,” it has become routine to identify co-workers not by name or rank, but rather by the kind of contract they hold. This seemingly mundane linguistic practice reflects the importance of the emergent two-tier workforce in Italy.

#### *3.4.2 Performing Willingness*

That workers in Italy must contend with risks in the labor market reflects a process of extending risk society (Beck 1999): “Risk is to become a daily necessity shouldered by the masses” (Sennett 1998: 80). Showing one’s “availability” and “willingness” (*disponibilità*), despite the economic risk it may entail, seems to be something that many workers, particularly among women I encountered, have already adopted as a work practice. I found that almost all of the precariously employed, particularly middle class women with college degrees, reported beginning a job with neither dialogue about, nor written agreement of, their pay. Precariously employed women had created new kinds of labor practices, including *not* asking about payment before accepting a position. In Padua, people talked about jobs as if it were already entirely self-evident that one must portray oneself to employers as patently disinterested in pay. Diana, a twenty-five-year-old graduate in the Economics of Tourism, had a job working in a hotel on a six-month determined time contract. She did not, however, ask her employer how much she would be paid, but rather discovered her salary

based on her first few paychecks. She admitted to me that she thought it would have been “impolite” to have asked. Alessandra, a twenty-four-year-old graduate in communications, waited over two months working a forty-hour week at a firm in Padua without asking whether or not she was being paid. Since this was her first job after graduation, she was still eligible for internship contracts that would be without salary. I had met Alessandra through a friend, and whenever I saw her I would ask her, “So did you ask yet?” She would smile and shake her head. Once she explained that asking sooner would make her “look bad” (*brutta figura*).

Her use of “brutta figura” is particularly noteworthy as it is a phrase used to describe practices or events that were damaging or embarrassing to one’s public and classed persona, such as bringing a “cheap” gift, wearing an inappropriate outfit for an occasion or hosting a party at an inexpensive locale. Its opposite, “bella figura” is also distinctly classed—wearing brand name clothes, having excellent professional credentials and traveling frequently; “it centers upon public appearance” (Silverman 1975: 40 in Nardini 1999: 11). Avoiding “brutta figura” means abiding by a set of regulations that codify class-based appearance, style and etiquette. But the notion of “figura” in Italy is not only a public façade but “the very subtle, all-encompassing and public ways in which the expression of Italian identity is imbricated in creating ‘bella figura’” (Nardini 1999: 20). That workers who ask about pay make a “brutta figura” suggests a new kind of class consciousness. Inquiries about financial remuneration would disrupt the tenuous availability (*disponibilità*) that workers, particularly female laborers, must enact to secure a long-term work contract. The two-tiered workplace results in the separation of “bella figura,” an upper-class consciousness (where one can’t ask about money), from “brutta figura” (where economic demands portray one as a working class laborer). Fashioning oneself as an economically indifferent and upper-class woman with

little concern about payment is thought by many to increase one's chances of obtaining a precarious job contract.

In Fiore Montiglio's Office of Equal Opportunity, I met a woman struggling with the consequences of a precarious contract that had been discontinued at an inopportune time. Sandra, a woman in her early thirties who worked in a clothing shop, entered the office visibly pregnant, her third-trimester belly rounding her jean overalls outwards. Sandra described how her boss at the store had promised her she would work "as if she had an undetermined time contract," yet remained on six-month renewable contracts. While Sandra's employment remained relatively stable given the renewable six-month contracts, she had no access to the various benefits that come with the latter contract: "After six months I wasn't changed (onto an undetermined time contract), and the boss says, 'Don't worry, you're protected,' but then he gave me only determined-time contracts." Italian employers are only allowed to renew a single worker's determined time contract two times before it defaults to an undetermined time contract (Cirioli 2006). She had told the shop owner that she was pregnant in December 2004 and when her last contract expired in March 2005, she was told via written letter that it would not be renewed. Her boss suggested that Sandra try to ask for INPS or the National Institute for Welfare (*Istituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale*) to finance her maternity leave. She continued:

He mentioned that the contract was expiring. I call him and he says, 'Well, you're pregnant and you can't come back to work. Are you sure you want to come back right away? I said, "When I've finished everything. I have two months leave prior to the birth and three months after. But maybe part-time. But I can't come back full-time."

During maternity leave, women are paid eighty percent of their wage by INPS, and most national contracts require that the employer pay the 20% difference in wages.

Sandra said her boss had promised not to “leave her uncovered” and “did so in good faith.” One of the lawyers who collaborated with Fiore’s office told her she would not qualify for INPS monies because she had only three months of INPS contributions in the eighteen consecutive months prior to the birth of the child which, would hardly cover a five-month maternity leave. Furthermore, and unfortunately, there was little legal recourse because his decision was within the legal limits of an employer to use two consecutive determined time contracts. Sandra said she would not be willing to take any legal action against the store owner because she felt that he had acted in her best interest, but only later had been deceived about INPS resources. Rather, she suggested, he had made a mistake regarding the kind of worker protection she would be entitled to from INPS.

Sandra’s case exemplifies the consequences of precarious labor and the split workforce, particularly for women. Women are asked to trust their employers and be constantly willing and flexible, in order to secure a determined time contract. Sandra had, in fact, become precarious—she had no guaranteed job, financial support, or maternity benefits. Fiore talked to Sandra about the risks that such “precarious” contracts often entailed for women in particular. Women in Veneto are well aware of how quickly workers are dismissed once they are pregnant. Childbirth represents a key shift for women in the Veneto region as over 25% of Italian women leave work after childbirth.<sup>8</sup> Many women reported lying about their marital status such that employers are convinced they will remain childless for a number of years. In fact, women often told me that their employers had openly, though illegally, inquired about their marital status and intentions about starting a family. Access to work in the Veneto for women, in other words, means guaranteeing employers that they will remain economically underpaid and childless.

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<sup>8</sup> “Lavoro: Bonanni (CISL) Da Fisco Risorsa Per Occupazione Donne.” *Ansa Notizario Generale*. July 12, 2006.

### 3.4.3 *The Blank Contract*

Like the new employees who did not ask about their retribution, there are new ways that employers seek to develop new strategies in the labor market. Employers, it seems, have also begun using what is called a blank contract (*il contratto in bianco*). I first heard about this at Fiore's clinic and as something that often occurred when women were hired. The "blank contract" is an official letter of resignation that workers are asked to sign at the moment they are *hired*. This way, the employer can, at any time, fill in the date, thereby terminating the contract. Workers may sign this in exchange for a kind of contract that offers more benefits—for example, the undetermined time contract. Workers may also sign this contract as the only means by which they can *enter* the workplace. At the same time, the employer retains the right to hold the worker coercively in a position of imminent dismissal. In effect, then, the blank contract strips the protections offered by the undetermined time contract. It bypasses state legal protections and renders workers, with undetermined time contracts, as precarious as short-term workers. It is a new form of labor exploitation that preys on the desire of Italian workers to regain stable positions of work. Because its usage is obscured and illegal, it was very difficult for me to gauge its actual prevalence. I consider the blank contract to be significant as an index of a rise in corporate exploitation. The employer emerges in a more ideal position as laborers battle one another to either retain long-term positions or garner a renewable short-term contract—making more effective and pernicious the regime of discipline around all workers.

### 3.5 Precariousness as Critique

The discourse of precariousness, for Italy's political Left-wing, has become a way to criticize the notion of flexibility as a pernicious manifestation of neoliberal economic strategies and values. The economic restructuring carried out under Italy's Right-wing

government emphasized the expanding flexibility of the economy. Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi defended the Biagi Laws in March 2005: “One owes it to the intervention of the Italian government. Thanks to the laws and the sacrifice of Professor Biagi, the labor market has been given the most advanced and the most dynamic flexibility in Europe.”<sup>9</sup> Within this publicly staged debate, flexibility becomes immersed in a constellation that draws together Right-wing politics, a transnational imaginary of Italy’s role in the European Union and a neoliberalized market understood as necessarily progress-oriented and advanced. But like Berlusconi’s strong public image as an entrepreneur, flexibility also becomes inherently mixed up with masculinity and the subject position of employer. Consider the following story.

At a dinner at a restaurant in October 2006 during a return trip to Padua, the first course seemed later than usual, even for Italy’s temporal rhythms. The owner, a woman in her mid-forties, knew my friends as regular clients and came to the table to apologize. “The cook,” she sighed, shaking her head, “cancelled [his shift] at the last minute. On a Saturday night! And thanks to the *Communists*, I *have* to keep this worker. Just think – it was easier for me to get divorced! But getting separated from this worker, now *that* will never happen!” The Left-wing-led fight to return undetermined time contracts to citizens renders them a visible agent to blame for undesirable workers. The owner’s remarks directly mirror the rhetoric that Berlusconi used in 2005:

Today entrepreneurs have to hire young people without needing to marry them. Today entrepreneurs are wary of new hires because of the undetermined time contract, which obliges them. Now it’s easier to separate from your wife than from your co-worker.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 25 March 2005. Website: <http://www.uonna.it/biagi-legge-precariato-flessibilita.htm>

<sup>10</sup> 26 March 2005. Website: <http://www.uonna.it/biagi-legge-precariato-flessibilita.htm>



Berlusconi's metaphor is actually quite an apt synopsis of Italy's current historical conditions. The new figure of the neoliberal economy, then, is not the monogamous and faithful husband married to his workers, but rather the sexualized male bachelor able to change partners with ease. Berlusconi, representing state authority, grafts the intimacy of marital relations onto the market-determined workings of capital and labor. Echoing this notion, an occupational medical doctor told me: "The company is not your family. There shouldn't be a love relationship with your worker." Here, he referred to the ideal of familial love and connection as one that workers expected in the workplace. Italian workers have historically relied upon close, familial relationships between worker and employer, even when not tied by kin relationships (Yanagisako 2001). He had been explaining that he thought most workers had inappropriate expectations about work, and it was this that made them more likely to feel estranged and mobbed. But once again, we find the gendered metaphor of a "love relationship" between employers and employees invoked as the *wrong* way to approach the workplace.

Berlusconi's vision of flexibility emerges as contingent with separation between familial and care relationships and work ties, the political Right-wing and a classed style of Italian masculinity. And Berlusconi's public persona of masculine, capitalist and billionaire become important cultural tropes among the discursive layers of "flexibility" in this complex landscape. An elastic labor market enhances the transnational value of Italy with respect to Europe and the global economy. Flexibility is derived from the perspective of the employer in that short-term, subcontracted (or as Italians call them, "atypical") labor, allows for an elastic labor supply, fluidly adjusted to meet various market demands. But from the perspective of the worker, being at the mercy of an endless series of short-term labor contracts is indeed precarious—uncertain, risky, dependent on circumstances beyond one's

control. Emily Martin (1994) points to the doubleness of flexibility in the context of the labor market, how “workers who gain flexibility in their jobs may end up having to give up security” (146). Without a previous cultural value and political apparatus of labor safeguards in Italy, the loss of security would not have been as urgent. I believe this is precisely the reason why the Italian political Left, critical of neoliberal labor policy and supportive of enhanced labor safeguards, refused to use the term “flexibility,” because in Italian the term flexibility, unlike precariousness, is not always recognized as entailing danger and risk.



**Figure 2** Graffiti in Padua: “Stop Precariousness.” Taken by author July 2005.<sup>11</sup>

Precariousness, unlike flexibility, is solidified as Left-wing and sustains a notion of neoliberalism as risky, promoting of inequality and identified with the subject position of the

<sup>11</sup> The writing in red underneath says “No patents!” Though not directly related to precariousness, the idea relates to a mostly Communist and politically Left-wing discourse mobilized against all forms of private property, including patents.

worker: “flexibility means the redistribution of risks away from the state and the economy towards the individual” (Beck 2000: 3). In producing a discourse against flexibility Italy’s Left solidifies the semiotic tie between Berlusconi, Center-right, and neoliberalism, while precariousness connects Italy’s Left and Center Left with the history of Italian Communism. The trope of precariousness as highly dangerous and all-consuming iterates within this discourse, revealing a more fluid boundary between “work” and “society.” The moral orders that animate the value of flexibility and the imaginary of the transnational tend to be naturalized as economic and not ethical views. Claims about the precariousization of Italian society expose the fictions of flexibility; they reflect deeply ethical concerns about the relationship between a stable labor market and the collective national body. Neoliberalism, on the contrary, deterritorializes both land and populace in the making of an elastic labor market and creates new moral orders under the guise of “flexibility.” The discourse of precariousization reterritorializes the worker as fundamental to the nation.

Anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff (2001) theorize the makings of “millennial capitalism,” or “capitalism in its neoliberal, global manifestation” (4):

It appears to include and to marginalize in unanticipated ways; to produce desire and expectation on a global scale, yet to decrease the certainty of work or the security of persons; to magnify class differences but to undercut class consciousness, and above all, to offer up vast, almost instantaneous riches to those who master its spectral technologies—and, simultaneously, to threaten the very existence of those who do not (8).

Precariousness is one culturally and historically specific formulation of millennial capitalism, underscoring the inherent and near-totalizing risk that motors its expansion, which interrogates the “legacy of irregular piecework, of menial ‘workfare,’ of relatively insecure, transient, gainless occupation” as its starting point (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 5). But in the discourse of precariousness class remains elusive, disarticulated from an explicit narrative about class relations (Jameson 1999:47 in Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 15). At the same

time, precariousness afflicts and impacts more than one class, and, thus, structures a kind of identification that may resonate with multiply positioned and multiply skilled laborers.

In addition to RC's promotion of an anti-precariousness campaign, Communist Party (RC) secretary Bertinotti has also spoken out in the House against the current reform of the labor market. In May 2006, he told the House that: "Italy is a country marked by grave social inequalities and an alarming precariousness. It is this that constitutes an impediment to the growth of the Country, not the question of the cost of labor."<sup>12</sup> For Bertinotti, Italy's current economic crisis must be explained according to the logics of precariousness. Upsetting the logics of neoliberalism, Bertinotti re-imagines slow growth *not* as resulting from a lack of flexibility, but rather as fueled by inequality and precariousness. How the Left articulates the motivations for economic instability will be fundamental in my later discussion of how mobbing relates to precariousness.

### 3.6 Generation Precarious

Precariousness characterizes the lifestyle of a generation of young Italians, aged 25-40, and many young workers are invited to identify themselves as precarious workers. Reports from Italy's largest union, CGIL, exposed the following statistics on precariousness. In 2004, 70% of new positions were precarious positions, constituting 45% of the jobs of workers between the ages of thirty and forty-four (more dramatically in northern Italy). Precarious positions comprised 63% of skilled and technical labor, while only 6.5% of workers held short-term contracts for unskilled labor.<sup>13</sup> This last statistic harkens back to my discussion of Italy's reliance on undocumented immigrant labor for "unskilled labor," and also the trend in outsourcing unskilled labor—which would result in a low percentage of short-term contracts in Italy. In the Veneto region, this is also a generation that remembers

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<sup>12</sup> 26 May 2006. "Bertinotti: Competitività non dipende da costo del lavoro." AGI.

<sup>13</sup> 28 June 2005. "Lavoro: Allarme Cgil." *Ansa Notiziario Generale*.

parents and grandparents in an agriculturally driven economy, poor families with dirt floors in rural homes until the 1970s and the dramatic period of “modernization” in the 1980s that made the Veneto region one of the richest in Italy. Even for the urban elite of Padua, the rise to middle and upper class status is a critical collective memory, often viewed triumphantly, that deeply shapes their understandings of work, class status and economic opportunity. Unlike their parents, often in economic ventures in small and mid-sized firms, Veneto’s young, skilled and educated workers are the most likely to be precariously employed. Rather than the poster children of 1980s flexible specialization, they have become the new iconic figures of the anti-precariousness movement, part of a new political consciousness.<sup>14</sup>

Before a national meeting of RC in March 2005, Bertinotti address focused on precariousness and focused, in particular, on the lifestyles of Italy’s youth:

The “nth” firing, the “nth” promise of being hired, dissolved at the last minute. This is the life of the precarious worker. And frankly it is an unsustainable life. We need to make a memory of this story because it is the story of a generation, of our children, of young people in a time of globalization and neoliberalism, of the capitalism of our time. It is the story of waiting for a future that never comes, of little money, of interruptions, of getting fired, of being called to work, of being left at home, of uncertainty about today and tomorrow, about mobbing and about temporary work.<sup>15</sup>

Of the many websites and blogs that chronicle precarious unemployment, one, ([www.generazione1000.com](http://www.generazione1000.com)) has been most widely discussed and publicized. “Generation 1000” refers to the average pay of 1000 Euro for Italy’s youth. On another website, one writer describes how the process of precariousization interrupts all aspects of life:

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<sup>14</sup> Jean and John Comaroff (2001) suggest, “Generation as a principle of distinction, consciousness, and struggle has long been neglected, or taken for granted, by theorists of political economy. This will no longer do” (16).

<sup>15</sup> 4 March 2005. “La Relazione di Fausto Bertinotti.” Website: [http://ww2.carta.org/articoli/articles/art\\_2590.html](http://ww2.carta.org/articoli/articles/art_2590.html). Accessed 15 October 2006.

For the young proletariat of today and for the next generation of workers, economic precariousness is not just an insecure, temporary or poorly paid job, but it is a synonym of social precariousness, the difficulty in creating an autonomous life, of daily frustration.<sup>16</sup>

Notably, the author embeds the notion of “proletariat” within a broader critique of precariousness, locating and linking a new social and political consciousness. In addition, a new crop of books speaks about precariousness, including: *Twelve Stories of Determined Time Contracts* (Platania 2006), *Precarious Life and Eternal Love* (Ferracuti 2006), *The Insomnia of Successful Precarious People*, (Roggla 2005), *I Crack Up but I’m Not Hired: Travel Guide for Flexible Workers* (Bajani 2006) and *My Name’s Robert. I’m Forty and I Make 250 Euro a Month* (Nove 2006). At the same time, authors maintain a solid boundary between precariousness and flexibility. In *A Future of Precarious Ones*, author Michele Tiraboschi (Sacconi and Tiraboschi 2006) explains:

Unlike what has happened in other countries, in Italy the expressions “precarious work” and “flexible work” have an uncontrolled usage, and consequently, a distorted usage. [...] Flexibility and precariousness are two quite distinct concepts, but they get used like synonyms. This is an outright simplification....one that feeds a slow economy and the rupture between “typical” workers and “atypical” workers.<sup>17</sup>

Maintaining flexibility and precariousness as distinct upholds two subject positions, the notion of the global flexible worker and the global precarious worker. The former is founded on the notion of a classed vision of a worker able to rapidly suit the changing needs of a market, the latter of a worker deeply unsettled and alienated by economic risk and social uncertainty.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://italy.indymedia.org/news/2006/10/1167391.php> Accessed 30 October 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Santonocito, Rosanna. 31 May 2006. “Il ritratto dell’uomo flessibile.” *Il Sole 24 Ore*.



**Figure 3** “Stop Precariousness Now!” National Demonstration. From website of Rifondazione Comunista (RC).

In July 2006, workers, students and union leaders protested in Rome holding signs, “Stop Precariousness Now” (*Stop Precarietà Ora!*). Demonstrators demanded the abrogation of two laws in addition to the Biagi Laws: the Moratti Laws extending short-term contracts in schools and universities, and the Bossi-Fini Laws, a set of anti-immigration laws.<sup>18</sup> The figure representing this campaign is a headless white body, amorphously gendered, teetering perilously on a fragile and narrow stand. By not explicitly gendering precariousness, the potential for workers to identify with an ambiguously gendered social problem remains possible.

As part of an “anti-precariousness” platform, the Communist Party also demanded the extension of Article 18 to protect all workers.<sup>19</sup> A referendum to extend Article 18 to undetermined time workers at workplaces with fewer than fifteen workers had already failed in June 2003. But the protection of secure jobs remains a key imperative of the anti-precariousness movement in addition to eliminating precarious contracts. CGIL, the Communist Party and Democratic Socialist (DS) members specifically, and Left-oriented citizens more broadly, fashion Article 18 protection of the undetermined time contract as a paramount safeguard that should be extended to all workers. DS member and ex-CGIL trade unionist Cesare Damiano proclaimed to union leaders in July 2006 as the new Minister

<sup>18</sup> 8 July 2006. “Lavoro: Movimenti e Sindacati a Governo.” *Ansa Notiziario Generale*.

<sup>19</sup> 8 July 2006. “Lavoro: Movimenti e Sindacati a Governo.” *Ansa Notiziario Generale*.

of Labor under Romano Prodi: “This government is seriously intentioned to give a message to the country that the kind of work that should become normal is undetermined time labor. [...] We want to encourage pathways of stabilization and discourage and reduce the precariousization of labor.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in an interview RC leader Fausto Bertinotti suggested:

Going beyond Law 30, one must proceed towards re-conquering the *absolute centrality* of the undetermined time contract. In order to do so, one must proceed by eliminating the job figures most exposed to the risk of precariousness, and raising the cost of atypical contracts so they are not more convenient than the undetermined time contract.<sup>21</sup>

The Leftist political solution to rectify the weakened labor market is, therefore, not only to eliminate the precarious contract, but also to fortify the existing strengths and protections of the undetermined time contract.

Recently, the Communist Party (RC) has launched a new campaign within the anti-precariousness protests called “When do you expire? (*Quando Scadi?*)” The campaign promotes:

The committee united themselves in the struggle for the *right* to a secure job. [...] We support the subjectivity of people against the expiration of their jobs, in sharing the struggle against the neoliberal politics and the abolition of laws that sustain flexibility. (*emphasis mine*)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> 16 July 2006. “Lavoro: Damiano, Per Noi Forma Normale é Tempo Indeterminato.” *Ansa Notiziario Generale*.

<sup>21</sup> 29 March 2006. “Bertinotti: I Veri Laici Siamo Noi.” <http://www.avvenimentonline.it/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://home.rifondazione.it/>





**Figure 4** “When Do You Expire?” Campaign from Rifondazione Comunista website.

The “When do you expire?” campaign deploys the images of young Italians holding up signs that say, “I expire on” a particular date. Here, they refer to the idea of “expiration” (*scadere*) which is used to describe something whose quality or value has diminished, (e.g., milk expires, a contract expires). Expiring, meaning “to sink in someone’s estimation,” also evokes ends and limits in its derivative “expiration” (*scadenza*) (Harrap’s Dictionary 1990: 420). Reasserting the contingency of economic and existential precariousness, the campaign captures the dehumanization of neoliberal work where work entails the objectification of the laborer to a temporal regime. The campaign draws on public imaginaries that apprehend the end of work as a metonym for one’s life and one’s intensified devaluation. Utilizing similar imagery, Andrea Bajani (2006), author of *I Break Down: but I Can’t Get Hired: Travel Guide for Flexible Workers* (*Mi spezzo ma non m’impiego: Guida di viaggio per lavoratori flessibili*) writes about a generation of Italians living with discontinuous work. The result, Bajani argues, is the

sensation of living “with an expiration, without a way out from a state of permanent precariousness.”<sup>23</sup>

Like the Communist Party (RC), CGIL, the ex-Communist Italian General Confederation of Labor, has its origins in Italy’s strong Communist traditions and has mobilized the notion of precariousness on a national scale.<sup>24</sup> CGIL’s anti-precariousness political campaign, called “Don’t forget me” (*Non ti scordardime*), has five guiding mandates for the “rights of the precarious workers”: 1) Cancellation of Law 30, the Biagi Laws; 2) Equal Compensation; 3) Full Rights to Maternity Leave and Sick Leave; 4) Inclusion in National Welfare (unemployment); 5) Inclusion in Local Welfare (professional training, nursery schools, cafeterias, transportation programs).<sup>25</sup>

The second very critical aspect of the campaign is one in which the notion of a *stable* job is a *right* of the worker. While the notion of the right to work or the right for pay have been mobilized with Socialist and Communist movements, what is different is the emphasis on long-term, which prior to the growing hegemony of short-term contracts could not have been imagined. Precariousness thus engenders a new discourse about the *rights* of workers.

### 3.7 Precariousness as Deprivation of Rights

A critical aspect of precariousness is how a precarious labor market infringes upon the rights of workers. Transforming the discourse of precarious-ization into one of rights reframes the accountability of the Italian state. By positioning precariousization as an assault against the rights of workers, critics of neoliberal labor reform actively mobilize a call for

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<sup>23</sup> 31 May 2006. “Il Ritratto dell’Uomo Flessibile.” *Il Sole 24 Ore*.

<sup>24</sup> CGIL was founded in 1906 and grew slowly to over two million members by 1920 (Vallauri 1995). Under Fascist rule, union organizations were abolished and CGIL was reconstituted at the end of World War II in 1944 (Vallauri 1995). In the late 1940s a series of schisms within the union created Italy’s two other major trade unions, CISL (Confederazione Italiana Sindacato Lavoratori) and UIL (Unione Italiana del Lavoro) (Vallauri 1995).

<sup>25</sup> CGIL Website:

<http://www.cgil.it/nuovoportale/PrimoPiano/documenti/2006/060310NontiscPrecariato.pdf>

*corrective* state intervention. It is the legacy of Italy's Communist and Socialist traditions picked up in contemporary political parties and unions that reanimates a Marxist approach to rights.<sup>26</sup>

Evident in both RC and CGIL anti-precariousness political campaigns, rights discourse can be traced to Left-wing political party candidates and trade union representatives. In 2003, secretary of trade union CGIL, Vincenzo Scudiere explained his position on precariousness: "The laws that the state wants are aimed at destroying the *right* to work. [...] We cannot believe that companies would want to lose the heritage of stable and capable people...in the name of flexibility that is only precariousness."<sup>27</sup> In a similar vein, in October 2005, Gloria Buffo, speaking for the Democrats of the Left (DS), said: "Making precarious work stable – this must be our objective; it means giving people who work back their *rights*."<sup>28</sup> Political actors, then, situate short-term and non-standard work contracts as an assault on the rights of workers, as both a legal and moral infringement. The discourse of precariousness animates an ethical imperative to safeguard not only the opportunity to work, but the mandate that work be certain and long-lasting. Within this set of cultural understandings, secure work is not a privilege of the laborer, but rather it is a worker-citizen's right. If, alternatively, as neoliberal ideologies propose, stable work is merely a reward for those who merit it and not a right, then the state may cater to the fluidity of a transnational market control.

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<sup>26</sup> International Studies professor, Micheline Ishay (2005) describes how the historical Marxist legacy in promoting economic rights may have been overshadowed by attention to communist atrocities.

<sup>27</sup> 3 July 2003. "CGIL In Piazza a Settembre." *La Stampa*, p. 44.

<sup>28</sup> 28 October 2005. "Lavoro: Buffo, Bene Prodi, Precariato Problema Numero Uno." *Ansa Notiziario Generale in Italiano*.

The language of rights, since Romano Prodi became Prime Minister in April 2006, can also be traced to Italy's executive office. Discussing the labor market with Bishop Vittorio Veneto in September 2006, Prodi stated:

Flexibility has been confused with the precariousness of life. The application of Law 30 has, in fact, allowed the condition of precariousness, but above all, it has sustained an affirmation of an economic culture in which flexibility is good in and of itself. And it has become normal to save company competitiveness with the precariousness of *rights*.<sup>29</sup>

Affirming the moral corruptness of flexibility, Prodi refuses to adopt an assumption that flexibility is a self-evidently positive value. The moral order of corporate interest and the market as necessarily hierarchically superior to the worker, he continues, corrupts *all* rights, not only those of the worker. Here we find that the boundaries between workers' rights and citizens' rights are blurred such that the zone of life corrupted by flexible labor is maximally expanded. Prodi's position allows an anti-Biagi-Law stance to represent not just the protection of labor rights, but also as a core concern of modern citizenship.

Once neoliberal restructuring is reframed as an attack on rights, then, state interventions seems not only plausible but urgent. The state must intervene in order to protect workers' rights for stable, long-term work as the national guarantor of society. In other words, the political and moral orders of the Italian welfare state must be re-established. Aris Accornero (2006), author of *Saint Precariousness Works For Us* (*San Precario lavora per noi*), articulates this understanding of the State: "The State must guarantee the continuity of citizenship for the people who pass from one temporary job to another and who feel alone and without an identity. If this is not done, the social ill-will and the worrying will continue."<sup>30</sup> Accornero shows that those actors who are anti-precariousness often view the

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<sup>29</sup> 15 September 2006. "Lavoro: Prodi a Vescovo Zenti." *Ansa Notiziario Generale*.

<sup>30</sup> Santonocito, Rosanna. 31 May 2006. "Il ritratto dell'uomo flessibile." *Il Sole 24 Ore*.

state as absolutely critical to maintaining justice in labor practices, the security of work and even the identity of a generation.

Behind the understanding of precariousness are not only political imperatives demanding that the state abolish the Biagi Laws, but a social view that economic and existential precariousness feed upon one another. I routinely came upon this very diffuse and powerful notion of precariousness as the breakdown of work and life.

### **3.8 Mobbing as Precariousness**

Mobbing has become emblematic of precarious conditions. For example, in 2000, mobbing was described as “a strategy of company terrorism, in which the fearful ‘Unabomber’ excels.”<sup>31</sup> Here, the idea of the United States terrorist bomber known as the “Unabomber” is conflated with the figure of the mobber. Mobbing as terrorism works as a metaphor precisely because it produces unpredictable violence, fear and anxiety for workers. The Italian mobber is hung upon discourses of terrorism that further discipline workers’ bodies and produce the workplace, like the nation-state, as a site of fear of unpredictable violence.

The language of war saturates mobbing discourses, with increasing intensity and frequency. An Italian sociology of work handbook for the “prevention of mobbing” defines mobbing in these terms: “The mobbee is also a mobber in terms of his colleagues, in a sort of fratricidal conflict (almost among gladiators) that ends up eliding every solidarity and every bit of belonging: a war in which the weakest is destined to succumb. . . like a soldier that kills the mobber and immediately after kills himself.”<sup>32</sup> Here, the idea is that mobbing incites a deadly “fratricidal conflict” with death the outcome for mobbers and mobbees

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<sup>31</sup> Bartezzaghi, Stefano. “Parole d’attualità.” (9 November 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Nistico, Fausto. *In Corso di Pubblicazione su ‘Informazione Prevedinziale:’ Mob, Mobber, Mobbing.* [www.unicz.it/lavoro/NISTICOMOBING](http://www.unicz.it/lavoro/NISTICOMOBING). Accessed 4/16/2003.

alike. What this also suggests is that mobbing divides workers as a function of its ability to “elide” solidarity ties between workers.

Finally, in the context of a discussion about how mobbing makes victims depressed and suicidal, Lidia, mobbee and co-founder of mobbing clinic, told me:

When you are mobbed the only thing that you are left with is: I'll kill you one day. It's something that you shouldn't do. [...] It's like postpartum depression—you don't have your head in the right place.

The rage against one's mobber instills the desire to kill that person. Interestingly, Lidia situates desire in a medicalized discourse of postpartum depression. Notably, in 2004-5 there were various highly visible cases of mothers in Italy who had killed their children. These events were explicitly linked to the medical category of post-partum depression and a sharp change in hormonal levels for the mother. Therefore, Lidia's comments suggest both that mobbing is a life-death crisis and that murderous rage is an uncontrollable biological outgrowth of suffering.

What these examples show us is that mobbing is bound up with the notion of precarious life, a delicate life that can be, at any possible moment, endangered. The idea of precariousness, then, as being subject to unknown perilous conditions, is a discourse that sustains the idea of workers being subject to the uncontrollable situations that govern work and life. The existential urgency of mobbing provides a necessary frame for another related idea: precariousness as fueling the breakdown of work and society.

### **3.9 Your Death, My Life**

In September 2004, I interviewed prominent CGIL trade union activist and Communist Party (RC) leader Carlo Grattini. Carlo had previously served in various significant roles in the party and was, in 2004, serving as a Minister of Labor for a province of the Veneto region. I met him through Equal Opportunity Officer Fiore Montiglio as they

were both serving in the same provincial government. When I entered his office, Carlo moved from his desk to sit at a round meeting table with me. There Carlo sat, balancing a heavy mid-section over his outstretched legs and leaning forward on the chair. His thick black ringlets framed his bearded face and fell in coils around his dark eyes. I asked him about his view on the origins of mobbing and he spoke reflectively about matters that he had often, it seemed apparent to me, spoken about publicly. He began:

Mobbing's a phenomenon in expansion: why is it in expansion? The precariousness of labor, above all bossing, or mobbing by your boss, has always existed. What is particularly evident now is mobbing between colleagues, horizontal mobbing – this aspect is the realization of precariousness. I can think about saving myself if I isolate you—*mors tua vita mea* (*your death my life*). If the pack isolates you then we've found the first subject that will have to go.

Mobbing as “the realization of precariousness” suggests that coercive office ousting is the fruition, the penultimate production, of the labor market's uncertainty and risk—mobbing materializes from precariousness. Market competition, in Carlo's view, might be characterized by violent and deadly competition. He also refers to what is sometimes called “bossing” or “vertical mobbing” which occurs when a manager isolates and expels an employee. Informed by a Marxist understanding of labor dynamics, the routine exploitation of the worker at the hands of producer cannot adequately explain why mobbing has become so prevalent and deeply felt by Italians, according to Carlo. What is “new” is the disruption of “horizontal” relationships or same-level colleagues or co-workers. The Latin phrase “*mors tua vita mea*,” meaning “your death is my life,” underscores a new kind of subjectivity for the worker that is hyper-individualistic, isolating and destructive. Mobbing, in this sense, is a pre-emptive strike that is both self-saving and deeply alienating in practice. If mobbing is the effect of precariousness then it derives not from corporate cost-saving. Rather, it is an effect of the devaluation of workers who try to safeguard their own positions by striking out

at others. Put simply, Carlo's formulation points to how this coercive harassment comes from the precipitous loss of class consciousness and worker solidarity.

Carlo continued, leaning his chin to the ceiling and tilting his chair backwards, "The fact is that they are no longer citizens; people are goods—they are objects." It was clear that he considered work relations within a capitalist market regime as inherently dehumanizing—at stake, then, was the objectification of what it meant to be human. Carlo then reflected on the state of modern citizenship:

Modern democracy has formed around citizenship. Today citizenship is being modified. [...] We live in a working society (*società lavorativa*); if you lose work, or when work becomes precarious, then we enter into a precarious society of uncertainty and insecurity. There is no longer global citizenship. You are alone, you are autonomous. It is unpleasant and you don't have any defense at work or in society.

Later, he emphasized the point again: "Above all for a working society, [work] is not an accessory [to citizenship]; it is a facet of citizenship. Depriving me of work means depriving me of citizenship." While workers seem increasingly encouraged to find alternative means to create their identities outside of the work environment (Sennett 1998), Carlo maintains that work is the essential foreground for subject making, the site of producing Italian citizenship. He thus resutures labor relations with the process of late modern subject-making. Reiterating widely circulating Left-wing discourse, the welfare and well-being of the collective is at stake in negotiating the protections of the worker. In his mobilization of the concept "working society" (*società lavorativa*), he fuses "work" and "society." Doing so, he troubles the fault lines of neoliberal hegemony in which the realm of the personal and lifestyle, instead of one's work, have emerged as primary sites to mold subjectivity (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001, Ong 2006).

Before leaving, I asked Carlo if he thought that decreasing labor protections (*tutela*) might result in less mobbing, referring indirectly to Article 18 and undetermined time



contracts. He responded immediately and said it would *not* improve the situation, only make the workplace a more precarious site and, thereby *increase* cases of mobbing. Before I discuss the full significance of Carlo's analysis, allow me first to present a very similar exchange I had with another CGIL and Communist activist.

### 3.9.1 *The "Real" Cause of Mobbing*

In May 2005, I came upon a flyer for a new mobbing clinic in another city recently opened and operated by one of Italy's Left-wing unions, CGIL, and by Toni, the local organizer. The new clinic, open four hours per week, would focus on Tourism and Tertiary Service sectors. I made an appointment with Toni with only a brief introduction by phone. For Toni, I sensed some suspicion on his part when I began with an introduction of my project, "I'm doing research on mobbing and precarious labor." Toni's eyes narrowed, "But they are two *completely separate* things!" I offered an over-simplified explanation, clarifying that they were intertwined in that mobbing eliminated a pool of long-term workers, while precarious contracts prevented workers from ever *becoming* permanent workers. "Well," he shrugged, "this is *one* relationship. And anyway that's what we say."

Toni then went on to explain that the clinic would focus primarily on union-mediated resolutions, followed by juridical intervention and, lastly, "psychological support." "Work culture," Toni reminisced, "was once more solidaristic (*solidale*), aimed at the group; now it's more individualistic." Mobbing, he explained, was an outgrowth of "excessive individualism" in the workplace. He echoed Carlo's assertion that mobbing was "realization of precariousness."

What is *at stake* in the way in which precariousness and mobbing relate to one another? Why did Carlo and Toni work so hard to situate mobbing as a terrible outcome of or the perverse manifestation of precariousness? The political and increasingly popular

movement of anti-precariousness is premised on exposing the diminished quality of life of “atypical” workers, situating precarious contracts as morally reprehensible for workers.

Within this framework, flexibility for the employer entails precariousness of contract, and life itself, for the worker. What if mobbing was the “realization” – the result of – protection, not precariousness? In this interpretation, Article 18 protections for undetermined time labor put workers at risk of being mobbed. This line of reasoning, however, derives from an almost strictly materialist position on labor relations—a notion that mobbing was used as a strategy to subvert laws (Article 18) that make firing workers difficult. The very contract upholding state labor protections could be framed as unnecessarily risky and, at worst, ineffective. If protections produce precariousness then lifting Article 18 would eliminate obstacles to firing workers and thus, end, mobbing.

Carlo and Toni both forged an alternative narrative, that *precariousness*, not protections, caused mobbing. Doing so, they mobilized the notion of precariousness as the primary and unifying ill for *all* workers, on both tiers of the workplace, and cast mobbing as the failure of state labor protections to adequately protect workers. The unifying pulse of the anti-precariousness movement is to *extend*, not eliminate, state labor protections like Article 18. For Carlo and Toni, horizontal mobbing between workers resulted from precarious labor regimes that pit workers against one another. This critical narrative positioned labor protections, in particular the security of long-term jobs with an undetermined time contract, as *fundamental* and necessary for improving work relations because it would allow workers to re-establish class solidarity.

## Part II.

### 3.10 The Precariousness of Contracts

Identifying oneself as a “precarious worker” in the Veneto region signifies a particular political positioning, one that is deeply critical of labor market restructuring. But that does not mean that all precarious workers will identify as “precarious.” Despite the predominance of women as precarious workers, identifying oneself or one’s contract as precarious is not a feminized subject position in the meta-linguistic discourse on precariousness. Leftist political discourse crafts precariousness as a destructive force for both men and women. And it is a salient and available idiom to describe one’s work and oneself in Italy. But I found that many men in general, and specifically those whom I met at the multinational company Contax, nearly all of whom were employed with precarious contracts, did not identify as precarious. In this company, a good portion of executives as well as customer service workers held determined time contracts. Why didn’t Contax workers with determined time contracts identify as “mobbed” or “precarious”? In this first example, I want to show how the workers faced a kind of collective ousting, but no one defined it as mobbing. Much of what transpired may have, in another context, been called “precarious” by workers. This conspicuous absence is indicative of their classed and gendered subject positions.

Contax is a multi-national company in the communications and information technology industry, employer of over 1200 in their headquarters and satellite offices in Padua. It is divided into three divisions, (1) Corporate, including product development, marketing, human resources; (2) Sales, handling both private and corporate accounts; (3) Customer Service, limited almost entirely to call centers. I situated myself within one Sales division under the manager, Gianni Mastinini. Gianni, like many of the employees in Contax

Sales, used primarily freelance contracts and employed individuals almost entirely between the ages of 20 and 50. The education level of the mostly male group of agents varied, from technical high school to college graduate level. The workers in the Sales division also worked in a separate space from the massive tower headquarters in Padua, though they frequently participated in meetings and trainings with other Sales workers. This was one way in which Contax, a multinational, was nonetheless divided into smaller, more manageable corporate organs, one of which Gianni directed.

Though I spent time with Contax workers as they ventured outside of the office, much of my time was in the Sales division office. The look of the office is sleek, technological and clean. Contax' signature color is yellow, and its logo, its font, and its color are everywhere in the office – in posters framed on the wall, on pens, cups, notepads, folders, mouse pads, calendars. In the Sales division, only Gianni and the accountant have separate offices. The agents share seven tables and five computers where they spend most of their time in the office setting up appointments with clients to either sell more Contax services and products, or maintain their client base. The head manager Gianni is a multi-millionaire. As both director and head agent, he profits from sales to his set of clients and also earns a percentage of the sales from all of his agents, who total around fifty in number. In fact, Gianni, having worked with Contax when it was an Italian-owned company in the late 1990s, had generated a small empire of satellite Sales divisions and has even set up specialized call centers that focused exclusively on his clients. Gianni's elitist class position was an evident feature of his dress, his everyday talk and the material things that surround him, from his finely crafted hand-tailored suits to his Porsche. The disjuncture between Contax agents' and Gianni's wealth was a source of strain among agents. Picking up a car

magazine on the office table, one employee had remarked dryly: “*This* is the real problem in this office.”

In February 2005, I entered the office and the “Base” agents were preparing for an important meeting with Gianni regarding a contract change. Agents were divided into groups according to the focus of their client relationship. Sales Agents were focused primarily on sales of new products and services, mainly to customers who had not already established a relationship with Contax. Base Agents, by contrast, concentrated on maintaining a set group of clients, resolving everyday problems and preventing client loss. Gianni had already called and postponed the meeting from ten to eleven o’clock. Wearing his signature grey suit, he arrived at 11:30 and the meeting began soon after. I sat with five Base Agents around the glass meeting table, while Gianni set up the digital projector and his PowerPoint presentation. “Today,” he announced, “we’re going to talk about money.” He opened his laptop and began with the first slide, “Remuneration Base Agents 2005.” The arrangement of sales and earnings for all Contax Base Agents was suddenly, and quite radically, changed at this meeting.

Prior to this meeting, Base Agents had been paid a fixed monthly salary (200 Euro/240 US Dollars), then paid per scheduled meeting with a client, earning additional commissions for sales and when clients upgraded their service. As Gianni unveiled the new pay schedule, it was evident that they would be paid only if a fixed percentage of their client base did *not* switch service providers. For example, if fewer than 15% of their clients terminated their contracts with Contax they would earn a predetermined amount based on this “retention rate.” If fewer than 9% of their clients ended their contracts, they had a higher earning potential. Clients who changed to a corporate account were also considered against their total, as well as those who failed to make payments on time. Ultimately, this

system of payment was highly difficult to control and gauge for Base Agents, as each agent had approximately one thousand clients. “All you have to do is stay under 12% [rate of client loss], and your monthly salary will stay at 100%,” explained Gianni. What Gianni had done was to translate how Contax calculated *his* earnings, as a function of all his sales agents’ earnings, into a more stringent rule for the agents. Gianni, for example, would receive a cut from Contax if he lost more than 8% of his total client base, so he, in turn, urged his agents to aim for a loss no less than 12%.

All the agents seemed quite shocked and upset. Cris, a man in his early forties, exclaimed in dialect: “I don’t understand a damn thing!” Clara, a woman in her late thirties, looked at the screen, and seemed confused: “Am I missing something or are they not paying for visits [to clients] anymore?” Gianni tried to explain a bit more, emphasizing that instead of being paid per visit, they would be paid based on the total percentage of their clients who left Contax: “Is that clear?” Clara responded sourly: “Only for a twisted mind like yours.” Gianni did not respond with hostility. Rather, he reminded them that he could provide weekly updates about their client base: “This company wants numbers.” After asserting his willingness to distribute information about the products that Contax wanted them to sell, he became slightly exasperated: “Can you all just partially reason? This means less client loss and you put more money in the bank. [...] The market is expanding like this.” As a member of a global capitalist elite class, Gianni’s “entrepreneurial activities are conceived in terms of markets, monetary transactions and modes of manufacture that transcend national borders” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 13). Gianni framed the issue in terms of the desires of the company and the mandate to attune labor practices to the ever-changing and moving market. To Gianni, Cris retorted angrily:

I find it *incorrect* that Contax is making me pay for their client loss. Frankly, it’s outside of the parameters of my job and unprofessional of Contax. They really have

big heads! [...] This is the kind of information that I'm not able to monitor. Give me other tools to do it! You've earned well up until now and you weigh down the Base Agents. Now *I'm* paying for it.

Gianni's composure remained even as he added aloofly: "I agree with you. Today you are here to maintain the client base. If the job is unpleasing, then there are other jobs." Clara intervened at this point: "But there's also a limit. You work really hard and then you don't earn anything!" To emphasize "really hard" work, she pointed hands as the shape of pistols to either hip.<sup>33</sup> Clara added: "You live decorously and I'm 'going hungry (*go fame*)," the latter she said smiling and in dialect. Ignoring her comment about his wealth, Gianni outlined a set of strategies for them: "You must be active, strongly attentive. [...] What can we do? One, you get pissed off and you leave. Two, the better thing to do is realize that it's this or this (*é così o così*)." While Gianni did pose a "this or that" situation, this last phrase "this or this" implies, in Italian, that there the contract change was inevitable. By saying this, Gianni was suggesting that the situation itself was stable and resistant to change.

Clara tried again to convince him that the visits with clients should be considered paid work as they had been in the past: "The fact that we go to clients has no value?" He advised: "Work on *retaining* clients." She scoffed: "Then our work is invisible!" Gianni, however, was unmoved: "To me, the numbers speak for themselves. [...] Enter into the logic of the company! [...] What are you going to do? Leave or adapt."

Clara and Gianni had another exchange about their drastically different economic needs. Clara told him, "You have an earning potential that is much higher [than ours]." To which, Gianni came back, seeming perturbed for the first time: "Do you know how much it costs to maintain everything?" Clara declared: "For us, even one hundred euro changes something. For you maybe ten million. But for us it's even little things that are taken away."

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<sup>33</sup> The gesture actually refers to "breaking one's balls" so the fingers point towards the genitals. It is used commonly by both men and women.

With the differences between the agents and Contax defined but not resolved, Gianni tried to end the meeting on a positive note: “I’m convinced this will all go well.” As everyone dispersed for lunch, the murmurings of frustration and outrage were evident.

In this meeting, Gianni enlisted moral ideologies based on market competition and buttressed by the rational and cogent “logics” of economic forces described as unstoppable—the inevitability of market capitalism. The workers were called upon to “enter the logics of the company”—to situate themselves with him in a market-oriented framework. The result was entirely bifurcated in this Contax manager’s view: one, accept a risky income plan; or, two, be unemployed, made evident in his “adapt or leave” suggestion. Even though the first option might have been construed as coercing the workers to resign, no one at Contax, either that day or afterwards, named Gianni’s actions as “mobbing.” Part of this, however, was shaped by the fact that workers at Contax identified with, and perhaps desired, a classed and political subject position that was aligned with a sense of individual work ethic and a totalizing view of the market.

If workers didn’t quit, then they had to become more willing (*disponibilità*) to adapt to escalated corporate expectations with “active, strongly attentive” labor practices, not pay demands—they had to become precarious. The stakes for *how* they are paid had just been turned inside out, yet there was no one clear mobber. Gianni admitted no direct accountability for this change because, according to this rationale, the company and market logics constrained and forced the change. Rather, he imposed a “neoliberal ethical regime,” one that “requires citizens to be self-responsible, self-enterprising subjects” (Ong 2006: 9). Such “technologies of neoliberalism” (Ong 2006: 9) fuse ethical, economic and political regimes in the production of subjects increasingly disarticulated from employers, other workers and the state. Instead of asserting rights as worker-citizens as Carlo may have



proposed, they were called upon to take on the individual responsibility to self-manage their economic viability. Gianni, embodying a classed subject position of capitalism's wealthy elite, issued threats to his staff even as he coolly justified that they were unavoidable.

### *3.10.1 Hu-man Capitalism*

How Gianni related to his employees in this context was deeply shaped not only by how he identified as an elite capitalist, but also how he viewed Contax. I first met Gianni in August of 2003 when he and I were sitting in the same conference room that two years later became the site of this meeting. I had requested a preliminary interview with him about the company and his own career. My single opening question elicited a response from Gianni that lasted almost an hour. On that day, he also spoke to me about earning potentials:

In our world two plus two doesn't equal four. Two plus two can equal three; it can equal zero; it can equal ten. So, what does that mean, Noelle? You can invest a lot, but that doesn't mean your result will be immediate. You may have an immediate result. You may not have a result. You may have a big result. I don't count results; your result comes with time. Ta ta ta. Every day. Selling is like shaving your beard, every day. [...] Today you do "business," tomorrow no, the day after tomorrow no, the day after next, yes again. So you have to be constant.

Capital, Gianni argued, could be slippery and elusive and *defy* logic. There was no set or guaranteed economic return for given labor or investments. Even if capital was wavering and unpredictable, its precariousness could be conquered by self-determination and dedication—epitomized here by the masculinized daily ritual of shaving. Gianni, thus, was a capitalist who fashioned himself as able to control and chase transient and risky capital by his own tenacity and endurance. Shaving is an important metaphor here because there is something deeply gendered about the masculinized figure of the entrepreneur and his relation to capitalism.

He also spoke proudly about Contax transnational economic success that, he explained, derived largely from its speed: "[Contax] is much faster than other companies in

how they can react in a second. A small and svelte company is always fast.” To illustrate his point, he curved his hands and ran them across the table: “So, if the market is going like this then we adapt like this.” His hands swerved and he slid them in the opposite direction: “If the market goes that way, then we adapt that way. It’s velocity.” He paused: “The faster you are the faster you get a profit.” Multinational Contax, divided into multiple smaller divisions like Gianni’s, fits the flexible specialization structure (Piore and Sabel 1984) and what, on a global level, is considered flexible accumulation (Harvey 1989) – both frameworks that rely on multiple smaller parts within one conglomerate that allow and enhance market flexibility through swift and coordinated corporate action.

With us being a company of a certain kind, as I say, ‘We were, we are and we will be.’ (*Ci siamo, c’eravamo, ci saremo.*) [...] It’s a company that says, ‘Go! How can we do this? Let’s do “business” together!’ [...] We exploit this thing of feeling and it transmits security. [...] Contax has always given their clients freedom: ‘You are free to choose; if you want to stay with me, I’m happy, but you can leave tomorrow morning.’ [...] In the end, you’ll come back. The client who feels they can leave comes back more easily. Why do I say ‘try the competition’? Because I’m convinced it won’t do anything. In English you say ‘taste,’ right?<sup>34</sup>

The relationship between producer and consumer is like that between two (sexualized) adults. A global producer, like a confident lover, is confident enough in the ‘services’ it/he provides that partners are offered freedom of choice, knowing that the promise of consumer/sexual freedom ensures long-term allegiance. Freedom and feeling intertwine to cement the producer-consumer relationship; they shape the kinds of ideologies with which Gianni identifies. The intimacy fabricated between the company—its brand symbolism—and the consumer is harnessed to fashion faithful consumer practices (Klein 2002).

Gianni returned again to an explicitly sexualized understanding of capital: “We rape our clients, (*i nostri clienti li violentiamo*)” by constantly “changing their contract agreements

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<sup>34</sup> Doing business (*fare ‘business’*) is an Italian expression using the English term. He mentions “taste,” but he is most likely referring to the “feeling” a company gives people. *Sentire* in Italian means both taste and feel.

from under them” (*cambiare le carte in ballo*). He shrugged, “The world will be like this.” Again he utilized a violent, sexualized metaphor to describe the movement of capital between production and consumption. The producer, however, “rapes” clients by subtle manipulation, a labor practice that secures the “free” relationship. *Why does freedom require violent subjection?* Embedded within neoliberal imaginaries, the producer activates a client-consumer relationship with a deceptive illusion of ultimate freedom and closeness. From an ethical standpoint, this form of capitalism relies on and demands total submission—not just deregulation. Richard Sennett (1998) has pointed out such paradoxes within neoliberal regimes as “flexibility begets disorder, but not freedom from restraint” (59). It resembles and reflects, in many ways, the issue of contract manipulation that was at hand for Cris, Clara and the other Base Agents—they were subjected to a sudden and important contract change and yet reminded they were “free” to stay or go.

### 3.10.2 Precarious Distances

The day after the contentious meeting with Base Agents, without Gianni in the office, I spent the morning chatting with Cris. It took me a while to earn Cris’s trust, but in the preceding six months I had spent at Contax we had established a closeness I didn’t share with other workers. Cris told me, emphatically:

When you lose human contact, you become a number. They’re all lovely, all darling. But in the end this doesn’t guarantee numbers for the big company in the end. I’m talking about how Gianni is with us. And how Contax is with Gianni. It’s not just Contax; the world is just like this. It’s good to do this job, earn some good money, earn by making the branch manager earn a lot. That’s what Gianni does. He exploits people. Things change and now Contax is giving a cut to Gianni. Any company will eventually cut corners, it’s always been like this. [...] If I hurt myself tomorrow? Or if I’m sixty or seventy years old and you earn twenty to thirty thousand dollars a year, what’s left in your pockets? [...] The agent should be motivated. In reality, we aren’t agents, we’re sub-agents, the agent is Gianni.

Picking up his business card and holding it towards me, he pointed at the logo, “I have this on my card, but really I don’t work *for* them, I represent them, but I have no

connection to them.” The powerful and ever-present company logo represents to Cris not a group of directors, but rather a distant, reified and detached entity—one for whom Cris’s contacts are truncated. Cris’s exasperation is an everyday example of a kind of capitalism in which “capital and its workforce become more and more remote from one another” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 13). In addition to representing a global company, the Contax logo has itself become a reified manifestation of Cris’s alienation from the corporate structure (Klein 2002). But Cris also views Gianni as the victim of the eternalized market and himself along a sub-hierarchical command of corporate trickle-down exploitation. It is evident that these kinds of practices emerge as already normalized -- producers “always” manipulate workers then and now. For Cris this represents the precarious-ization of an already risky contract that allows neither sick leave nor retirement benefits.

Alessia, one of the three administrative assistants who was present while we chatted, nodded and added solemnly: “Yeah, he’s always watching you, too. He’s curious; he comes up behind you to see what you’re doing.” Cris explained that his high-yield clients were automatically shadowed by an official from the upper level Contax corporate headquarters. By contrast, he exclaimed: “You can’t even go into Contax headquarters. None of us can, not even the girls.” (“The girls” referred to the three administrative assistants in the office.) I asked if he thought if Gianni would mob new agents. Cris sighed and said: “We don’t need to, they’ll never stay in the company. They’ll all leave shortly after being hired.” In his view, precariousness eliminates mobbing as it creates work conditions that replace individual mobbers—the new articulation of labor preemptively reduces the number of workers.

Another aspect of precariousness is not knowing, unpredictability—at Contax knowledge about clients is highly guarded and tightly controlled. Despite Gianni’s promises to keep the Base agents updated on client information, I found that pathways of information

between upper-echelon managers at Contax and workers were highly guarded. A few weeks later, Cris and another agent, Franco, were discussing how some companies allowed their sales agents to check orders and track the arrival of goods with real time precision. Cris said to Franco: “They’ll never let us [do this.]” I asked why. “Because,” Cris explained, “We would know too much. They leave you hanging. They change everything all the time on you. Once you know something they change it on you again.” (*Perche sapremmo troppo. Ti lasciano in ballo. Ti cambiano tutte le cose sempre, ora che conosci qualcosa ti cambiano ancora.*) Franco nodded in agreement. Corporations like Contax regulate flow of information in order to manipulate and, as Gianni had told me, “rape” clients. Likewise workers can be also regulated and disciplined by masking certain kinds of information. From Cris’s perspective, “they”—a collection of various and separate actors at Contax—seem to work in coordinated and intentional fashion to make things purposefully difficult for workers. The spatial distance between Cris and other workers and Contax headquarters exacerbates the felt existential gap between laborers and those who control capital. The recent contract change, forcing him to choose between precarious remuneration or unemployment in a precarious labor force, heightened his suspicions and feelings of persecution regarding Contax. In a labor market where lack of information, silence and misinformation are rife with social and economic consequences, day-to-day events are transformed into practices that may be essential to one’s social and economic viability. Bits of information seem saturated with willful purpose, causality and intention. But, importantly, despite viewing Gianni’s actions as intentionally coercive and hostile and designed specifically to make their jobs more difficult, neither Cris nor Franco ever framed this as Gianni’s mobbing of them. I want to consider a few more aspects of the relationship between Gianni and Cris before I explain why I believe this may have been so.

On another day in late February, I accompanied Gianni to another one of his offices where he would be hiring some new agents. On this morning, like so many other mornings, Gianni pontificated on the value of money: “Money, Noelle, is just paper. When we had the lira we used to say, there was lira for me, it circulated for everyone. If I buy, then you work and he works. I invest a lot, Noelle, I invest.” I found his repetition of my name tedious and patronizing. It was a consistent verbal habit he had with many of his interlocutors. He also admitted to me that he was annoyed at how much he would lose because of the new contract remuneration, telling me that the issue had surfaced because of the way in which Contax paid him. Just as Cris had guessed, Gianni’s contract agreement with Contax had been changed from being based on how many clients he had to how many clients he had lost. Precariousness persists like a repeating fractal—it multiplies along a trajectory of interconnected, yet deeply alienated, workers. Even though Gianni disavowed his position as “precarious,” it was clear he, too, could be manipulated by corporate decisions. But he, unlike Cris or Clara, could restructure his own employees to accommodate this loss.

He was frustrated with the upper echelons at Contax, and spoke as if he were addressing them directly: “I’m an entrepreneur. And so I don’t work for you; I’m not *your employee (tuo dipendente)*”—emphasizing the latter words as if they were necessarily distasteful things. Proclaiming himself in the subject position of entrepreneur, Gianni fashions himself at the apex of this chain of command, an enterprise in and of himself. Employees (*dipendente*), on the other hand, are rendered passive and somehow *other* to entrepreneurship—not in command of capital. The term itself, *dipendente*, derives from the dependence, workers who are dependent on (hired by) single employers for their salary and benefits. It is precisely this kind of labor that is being cast as low-status here. The figure of the entrepreneur emerges as antithetical to “dependent” work—the independent upper class

enterpriser who manages capital and crafts the classed and gendered position *dipendente* as that which he is not.

Like the economic relations Gianni had described to me in previous conversations, this classed and gendered position as capitalist carried a hetero-erotic charge. He added, proudly, that he had been receiving a constant stream of offers for new collaboration and investment: “I’m tired sometimes. I feel like a woman whom everyone desires.” Desires, economic and sexual, often merged in Gianni’s worldview. Here, he identified *being* desired with the gendered subject position of women. About Alessandro, the assistant manager we were visiting that day, whose tanned features indexed his recent trip to Australia, Gianni laughed: “Tall, tan, beautiful and rich -- if he were a woman, I’d marry him!” Alessandro’s desirability was couched in terms of his wealth and beauty allowing Gianni to humorously remark that their business partnership could be a marriage.

### **3.11 Italian Masculinity and the Freelance Worker**

#### *3.11.1 “Dipendente” as Other*

In mid-March, the problems at Contax remained unresolved and palpable, even in the day-to-day. I went with Cris on one of his client meetings, which allowed me time to talk with him privately. He was frustrated by what he called the “bad mood” (*malumore*) atmosphere and said several workers had tried to meet with corporate directors to discuss the new contract and resulting problems: “We made our ‘bad mood’ known. If we leave, then they’ll know why.” Gianni, Cris reported, remained on his phone during the meeting and paid little attention to the dialogue: “Gianni looks at numbers, not at ethics and morality. He makes a mountain of money and makes his agents go hungry. I think he’s supported from up above. Pampered by the CEO.” The workers had a meeting with Contax executives but had not managed to change the contract back to what it was. Cris wondered

whether the outcome of the meeting, as well as Gianni's "unethical complacency," were both influenced by high-level corruption.

And what will you do? I asked. "The only thing to do is leave and sell other things. [...] I want to be taken seriously, not look for a job as an employee (*dipendente*) but rather as a freelance professional (*libera professionista*)." The contract change, in addition to Gianni's threats to "adapt or leave," resulted in Cris's search for alternative jobs. But, defining himself as a freelancer, he did not see himself as a victim of precariousness. Like Gianni, Cris defined himself against *dipendente* and fashioned himself as a freelancer, a new style of late modern worker, "a new type of 'high tech' nomadic worker" (Beck 2000: 75). Identifying as a *dipendente*, it seemed, was not just unappealing but a moral invocation of its opposite value—independence but also a particularly gendered identity as an 'independent,' masculine worker (Schein 2000: 134, Ho 2005).

The proliferation of contracts made legal by the Biagi Laws included freelance contracts. I am using the term "free lance" for the Italian '*libera professionista*' for two reasons: one, because it more closely approximates the Italian and the term 'free' is also important in evoking the value of autonomy and independence; and two, I use the notion of freelance labor to refer to "a person who sells services to employers without a long-term commitment to any of them."<sup>35</sup> Freelance contracts that proliferated in Italy after the Biagi Laws were passed offered job holders no additional benefits -- no coverage for sick days, vacations, or pension. The freelance contract was used more and more by corporations for "regular" full-time employment, in addition to short-term contracts in various subsets including apprenticeship, internship, temporary, subcontracted. Employers could use freelance

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<sup>35</sup> *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/free lance](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/free+lance) (accessed: February 14, 2007).



contracts formally and saved 40% with respect to other kinds of determined time contracts—in fact, 89% of workers with “free lance” contracts work for just one company.<sup>36</sup> Freelance contracts must be accompanied by an individual tax code, which can be acquired with the help of a professional accountant, thus requiring legal status and capital to acquire. The utilization of freelance contracts increased 60% from 1995 to 2002 (Carboni 2005: 50). And the usage is very gendered: only 5% of free lance professionals are women in Italy.<sup>37</sup>

Even women able to adopt the identity as freelance professional seemed to do so with greater complications. Twenty-eight year old Angelina had graduated with a degree in liberal arts, and had, for the moment, found work as a research assistant at a chemical research laboratory and plant. Her boss assured her that her freelance contract would be renewed each year and added she would “freely” be able to take on other jobs at the same time. She discussed the benefits of the job to me and her cousin, Giacomo: “With the freelance contract, it’s nice because I can always leave.” Giacomo looked at her, laughing: “That’s one thing that *all* workers have the right to do—leave.” The flexibility of a worker’s *departure* was in Angelina’s view a unique value to freelance work. It was humorous to Giacomo precisely in that she rendered her semi-permanence a positive attribute, while her precarious contract was something that most were trying to avoid. Freelance contracts, for Cris, articulated him with the independent and classed position of *owning* his own labor.

Cris was not alone in this kind of identification. In early May, on another trip to clients with Sales Agent Luca, also employed with a freelance contract, I had an opportunity to ask about Luca’s understanding of Contax. Luca, in his late twenties, had been earning very well and was considered extremely valuable by Gianni. Considered a sleek dresser and

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<sup>36</sup> 28 June 2005. “Lavoro: Allarme CGIL, Troppi Precari e Poche Garanzie.” *ANSA Notiziario Generale*.

<sup>37</sup> 2 December 2005. “Censis: Decelera Mercato Lavoro, Italiani Pigri d’Europa.” *ANSA Notiziario Generale in Italiano*.

handsome by most employees, he played a special role in that he was often sent out when clients terminated their contract agreements with Contax. On call, he would rush out with corporate gifts, discounts and problem-solving capabilities to try to retain the client. Sitting on the passenger side of his BMW, I noticed his perfectly shiny waved hair, long eyelashes and meticulously ironed white shirt. I asked him generally about Contax management and he replied:

Contax is huge. I have to deal with things on my own and that's it. When you work for a corporation, you're a number and that's it. [...] It would be nice to say that you're part of a Contax group. But that would be hard to say. But I can say when Contax is wrong. I'm not a company man. I try to be objective in front of certain things that Contax does wrong. Our call center sucks – it's the truth. It sucks, but Nico [his District Manager] says it doesn't. I don't feel like a Contax man. [...] I'm under Gianni, fine, but I'm motivated to work. I'll always do something on my own, not be hired by someone else (*alla dipendenza di qualcuno*)—I'll do something that's mine.

His gendered and classed position enabled him to disavow the identity of a “precarious worker,” and *dipendente*. Rather, Luca forged an identity based on his ability to critique the company that, in his view, his freelance status granted him. Being a *dipendente* was somehow morally inferior to his role because it compelled one to be a “company man”—to adopt a less critical view of Contax. A freelancer, unlike a precarious worker, fashioned his labor as “his own.” His view also bore a resemblance to Gianni's discussion about selling and shaving—and his “constancy.” Through Luca's disciplined “motivation,” he activates a neoliberal ethics based on shaping and controlling capital relations.

While we were driving Luca received a call from his mom. “That was my mom,” he grinned. “She calls me so I know everything will be ready when I get home. This way, I waste less time and then I go out again.” That Luca lived at home was not surprising to me; it is quite normal for both his colleagues at Contax, as well for many Italians. In 2003, 60% of unmarried Italians aged twenty-five to twenty-nine and almost 30% of thirty- to thirty-

four-year-olds lived at home with either a single or married parents. And this occurred disproportionately for men between 30 and 34 years old (37% M vs 21% F) (ISTAT 2006: 65).<sup>38</sup> The culturally specific norm is a critical demographic factor that sustains precariousness in Italy—middle class men and women under 34 also have very high unemployment rates in Italy. But, especially for middle class citizens like Luca, living at home sustains their consumption practices. Luca's freelance professionalism was accompanied by adornment with high-fashion brands, weekly trips to salons and café sojourns in Padua's chic center. Living at home expands workers' disposable income. A freelance contract, though just as precarious as any other short term contract, does not necessarily alter the lifestyles of Padua's youth demographic.

My chat with Luca reminded me of another afternoon I had spent with his colleague, twenty-five-year-old Marco, a Sales Agent, on his rounds to clients. Marco had only been working for Contax for a year and also lived at home. I asked him about his freelance contract status, and he responded:

We all have our own tax code, yeah, but this means you don't have anything. You don't have vacation, sick days, and they can still fire you (*lasciarti a casa*).<sup>39</sup> We pay the contribution for retirement, and *you* have to do it, not your boss. For now it's ok, but when you have a family it's not ok. You earn four thousand euro, but in the end it's only two thousand if you have a family and you have fixed costs. But for now it's a good way to learn how to sell. [...] You can get yourself stuff -- I got a car, a boat -- your nice little vices.

Describing his salary in terms of a monthly net pay, Marco recognized the economic and social limitations of this kind of contract, particularly for those with families. But freelancing, he asserted, fit his current lifestyle. Precariousness does not limit one's access to a middle class subjectivity in that it does not forestall classed consumption practices.

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<sup>38</sup> ISTAT "Giovani da 18 a 34 anni celibi e nubile che vivono con almeno un genitore per sesso." For individuals between 25-29, men also lived home more than (71%) women (52.7%).

<sup>39</sup> "Leave someone at home" (*lasciare a casa*) is a common gloss for firing workers. Davide (quoted in Chapter 3) also used the term to fire a worker, saying: "Va a casa" (She's going home.)

Why did Gianni, Luca and Cris assert themselves against the figure of the hired employee (*dipendente*)? How could they be simultaneously at opposite sides of the labor relations, yet all produce a subjectivity that othered stable work? For the workers I met at the multi-national company Contax, identifying as “freelance” aligned them with neoliberal values, even as their own positions were undermined by the state’s reduction of labor protections. The two figures, precarious and freelancer, however, reveal more about classed positioning and the way in which actors view their labor than about an ability to tame capital. It also implicitly aligned them with the political Right-wing, Berlusconi’s government that promoted the restructuring of the labor market. The freelance worker emerges as both precarious and yet more deeply articulated with neoliberal values, masculine identity and Italy’s political Right-wing. It is one manifestation of how actors identify as citizens “obliged to become free of state supports and to develop skills as free agents of their own lives” (Ong 2006: 9).

### 3.11.2 *Changing Corporate Skin*

Months later, in July 2005, Base Agents continued to work under the conditions of the new contract. On a Friday afternoon, after hanging around at Contax, I stopped in to talk to Gianni in his Porsche-model-adorned office, particularly about how a new agent he had hired was faring and about the news that Marco had quit. He caught me up:

Marco makes 2000 Euro a month max. And you won’t go anywhere with that. The guys are afraid of saying so. But these guys are not employees (*dipendenti*). Yes, you can be more secure, but you can still be fired. I fired the new agent after a week. He didn’t feel like doing anything; in this job, we don’t need deflated people.

It is from an upper class position can Gianni examine Marco’s net pay as insufficient. His employees are not *dipendenti*; in Gianni’s view, they do not desire the security. But he also reveals the ironic aspect of this position, in that they, like any other *dipendente*, can be fired. Then he shared his plans for the next few months with me:

I'm going to open a new window in September. I have to *change the air*. I won't eliminate anyone. I'll just put someone by their side who is better. Either you start running or you leave. Noelle, it's a shitty life, but that's what it is. If you stop, you lose. [...] We have to *change our skin*. It's very important for business--making money. [...] There are lots of people that don't change their skin. But you can never say, 'I've made it.' Every day you start from zero. [...] No one gives you anything. You have to do it yourself. [...] The market is a market that works this way. You can't do anything else (emphasis mine).

Gianni had to intensify the pressure on workers in order to compel the workers to conform to new shifting standards or quit. Here, he was talking about intentionally making a more competitive, difficult work environment. In other words, Gianni admitted to me his plans to mob his workers in the coming months. But Gianni, in this classed and gendered context, was *not* considered a mobber by the workers or by himself. Why not? It is also interesting to note that he is employing a metaphor of office change as a changing of the "skin." In Chapter 5, I describe how the notion of the skin in the Italian context resonates with deeper bodily experiences. In this case, the skin stands in for the whole *corporate* body. Interestingly, we will also see that it is Gianni who, in Chapter 4, describes a growing company as a growing woman—whose body and skin must be renewed.

Hiring newer, additional precarious workers would ensure, he thought, that everyone "runs" faster. When I met Gianni in 2003 he had explained that "If you stop, you lose" (*Chi si ferma é perduto*), making use of a Southern Italian idiom valorizing the benefits of velocity, and the consequences of immobility. But coupled with a neoliberal ethic, there is no unpunishable stillness. These logics position citizens who are not able to secure work as deficient in speed and capability. They are, therefore, not eligible for protections because they have proven themselves to be less dynamic, and subsequently less worthy as individuals. On the other hand, he emphasizes his own ethics of individualism, fashioned as disconnected from other social aids or protections—in that "no one give you anything."

This resembles what Douglas Holmes (2000) has called “fast capitalism” in which “the abstract principles of market exchange are rendered as ethical imperatives” (92).

I left Padua in late August 2005 and learned via email correspondence that by December 2005 a number of Sales and Base Agents had left Contax. The skin, it seems, was changed. In October 2006, I saw Cris again and he told me that in March 2006, Gianni had come into the office and fired both him and Clara. Cris explained that he had to obtain legal support to obtain the salary and severance pay that were due him according to his contract. Cris had long struggled with his precarious position at Contax, and it had now been unexpectedly terminated after a series of changes that might have eventually compelled his resignation. Following his termination at Contax, Cris changed jobs and has begun selling eye contact fluid to optometrists in the Veneto region, in addition to promoting a new company he founded with a friend. The new company offers consulting services on security and safety measures required by recent Italian laws and corporate guidelines. Cris affirmed once again that he would never return to being a *dipendente* but would instead pursue his employment goals as a *libera professionista*.

The relationship between Cris and Gianni reveals the extent to which employees, working in precarious conditions, may *not* identify with the political discourses of Leftist Italian political parties and trade unions. Even though Cris and Gianni struggle with one another as employee and employer, there are joined by a broader kind of classed and gendered subject position. Precisely because the freelance workers and entrepreneurs are believed to manage their own labor, these cultural figures reflect forms of neoliberal self-governance as “governing becomes ... concerned more with instilling behavior of self-management” (Ong 2006: 9). Cris and Gianni are examples of neoliberal political subjects who define themselves by how they view their economic and social self-management even as

the precarious labor market conditions fuel and shape the way in which they relate to one another. The events at Contax also reveal how coerced resignation, even if was not explicitly defined as mobbing, was produced in the context of the precariousization of labor. This deeply felt risk and uncertainty of work extends to professionals who work as mobbing counselors, as they too are dependent upon precarious contracts.

### **3.12 Precariousness in the Mobbing Industry**

Men and women in the ‘field’ of mobbing work in a destabilized labor market along with other precarious workers, struggling in search of secure, long-term employment. What is required for mobbing professionals, then, is that they pursue their terms and definitions of mobbing in order to stay employed and obtain research funding. *Fixing* the meaning of mobbing staves off precarious employment because mobbing knowledge has accrued social and economic value in Italy and Europe. But the social actors involved in work with mobbing feel the same sense of apprehension about their labor as do the mobbees they try to help.

#### *3.12.1 Heightened Distrust for the Mobbing Counselor*

Beginning in September 2004, Fiore Montiglio was employed as one of Veneto’s Ministers of Equal Opportunity (*Consigliera della Pari Opportunità*), an office that promotes women’s employment and works towards education and public awareness related to gender discrimination in the workplace. It was with Fiore that I met women like Nora and Sandra who were struggling with their contract disputes. Fiore was in her early fifties. Her hair, a layering of bright whites, silvers and grays, rested lightly on her shoulders and her thick bangs fell to the top edge of her clear plastic-framed glasses. She was originally from Lombardy, moving to Veneto later in life to do archival work, and she often commented

that she had taken years to master Veneto dialect—and to understand Veneto people, whom she often described as “right-wing” and “racist.”

Fiore’s public service work entailed one to two days of work per week, away from her regular employment. The provincial government would pay her salary as the Equal Opportunity Minister, in addition to refunding her expenses. I joined her for one of her two days each week during my stay in Padua and was fortunate that Fiore often scheduled important meetings on the day that I would be there. She had a strong social following of women friends of all ages who often remarked that she was “mythical”—Italian slang for outstanding or extraordinary people or things. Fiore already had two young women working in her office, Francesca and Lara. Both assistants were nearing their college graduation and were employed part-time in Fiore’s office in order to fulfill an internship requirement. While they both hoped this would lead to long-term employment, they were content to have short-term positions. They often told me that they were tired “of being precarious,” but that the high profile and prestige of this office would be useful to them.

Despite the crowded office, Fiore was consistently able to include each assistant and me in her daily activities of meetings, letter writing, program organization and meetings with women, carefully explaining each step and relevant histories, and making spontaneous and thoughtful commentaries on day-to-day political and social events. Fiore had a gentle and thoughtful manner to her but was entirely assertive and frank in her comments. Once, over lunch, she jokingly asked our waiter if he minded the company of feminists. He laughed and said he’d always believed women were “the better sex.” That, replied Fiore without a moment’s pause, is precisely what men say who are most convinced of women’s inferior status.



In early October, Fiore received an anonymous letter from within the provincial government describing poor working relationships among the employees, nearing about 150, of the ministries and public officials as well as vast financial mismanagement and corruption. As Equal Opportunity Minister, Fiore's office was housed in the public ministry but she was officially employed by the state. Thus, she knew and had to collaborate with various public officials and ministers, but she should not be considered a public employee. The letter asked Fiore to help employees because of rigid schedules and constant surveillance related to coffee and lunch breaks. Fiore's first response was in the form of a letter to the accounting department asking for recent activity for her office. She said that the previous equal opportunity official had not initiated any new programs. In her view this meant that the officials had corruptly siphoned her office's funds into other activities and programs. She also had a meeting with human resources personnel about the schedule, asking for greater flexibility on entry times for public office workers. Fiore then wrote a brief paragraph related to this these negotiations and asked the website manager to post it on the main site of the province. When this task was not completed, Fiore told me, she concluded it was most likely done on purpose, under explicit instruction from the office administrators. The technician told Fiore that his delays were simply technical difficulties. Yet Fiore explained that "they," the province-level officials, were keeping "a close eye" on her, and most likely wanted her ousted. "Noelle," she said, "I think I'm being mobbed." To my surprise, the very woman whose responsibility it was to resolve mobbing problems for women, felt that she herself was a target.

At a nearby café that had become our habitual lunch place, Fiore explained that she had become a target because she had taken up the in-house complaint despite the fact that "normal" office operations usually meant no questions related to office finances. In

addition, she had supported a candidate for the national Equal Opportunity Minister while other officials in the Ministry of Labor had backed someone who had no prior work experience in women's affairs: "They should be ashamed of themselves!" (*Ma si vergona!*) Finally, she explained that she had preferred not to employ the administration's lawyer, instead selecting her own, preferring a woman lawyer for her case work, someone independent of government relations. You see, Fiore explained, this is why they are working against me.

Fiore and her assistants all believed that someone was stealing materials out of their office closet. Between sips of jasmine tea, Fiore explained that photocopies were probably being made of all her correspondences and cases. For example, an estimate on the publishing cost for Fiore's manual on national and local equal opportunity programs had disappeared and then "miraculously reappeared" a week later. "But, there was nothing out of the ordinary in the estimate, right?" I asked, trying to understand why this might have been stolen. "They're just watching us," said Fiore. In Fiore's view, the administration was able to conduct extensive and elaborate practices to alienate her and keep her on guard. Small events in the office were seen through the frame of highly skilled intentionality—from moving her office to the third floor to problems with the heating. Even when I passed someone and they did not greet me, Fiore was convinced they were "instructed" to do so.

That afternoon, Fiore called one of the office managers, a man whom I had always noticed because he would whistle while patrolling the office and had an atypical fashion signature of bright orange or purple jeans. Standing before Fiore in his office, he stood with one hand holding an unlit cigar, the other fingering his wispy beard. Fiore demanded that the locks on her office cabinet locks needed to be replaced immediately—her materials, she argued, related to sensitive matters, and the private cases of women needed greater security.

He walked towards the cabinet and peered curiously at the lock. Make only one copy of the new key, ordered Fiore. She hoped that this one copy would be shared between herself and her assistants. In the months that followed, many things were still reported missing, and Fiore often wondered just how many copies had been made.

In late November, I came into the office to find Fiore, Francesca and Lara scrutinizing some documents that had arrived from the accounting department with the details of the expense account for the office. Fiore had not yet been paid, a delay she insisted was orchestrated to push her towards an early departure. “I can’t just tell him that the numbers are wrong because he (the accounting department manager) will just say he made a mistake. He’s a clever one.”<sup>40</sup> Fiore explained to me that there were nearly two thousand euro of expenditures that could not be accounted for. And, she exclaimed angrily, “I’m not making a cent!” (*Non prendo una lira!*).

Fiore was actually only the Acting Equal Opportunity minister, since the real minister, Carolina Zitona, had been on maternity leave since January 2003. In January 2004, Carolina decided to come to the office intermittently to check on Fiore’s progress. In Fiore’s view, Carolina was coordinating her actions and decisions with the provincial government and monitoring Fiore. While Fiore continued to manage the incoming case load, Carolina began to demand a greater role in the cases that Fiore had established. In the next several months and until August 2005, Fiore remained in the office and handled the cases. In September 2005, after my departure, Fiore told me how Carolina had returned to work full-time, and subsequently no longer wanted Fiore to handle any cases. For Fiore, this

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<sup>40</sup> Being clever (*furbo*) is description used often in Italian—it may also be represented non-verbally by using the thumb to draw a line from the outward corner of eye diagonally towards the corner of the mouth. “Cleverness” is only one possible gloss, as being “*furbo*” entails both sneakiness and savvy. What it almost always implies is some sort of premeditation or intentionality of the action. Derivates include “*fare furbo*” to do something that is clever or sneaky; and “*furbastro/a*” to be a clever person, though the ending implies in a negative sense.

confirmed her suspicions about the corruption of the public office. She explained that the state and other ministers in the regional government preferred Carolina because “she did nothing.” The various missing files or delays in payments were read as active sabotage and implicit support for Carolina by the regional government. Carolina was a former CGIL labor activist, a trade union that in Fiore’s opinion (though she herself was a Communist labor activist) was corrupt and ineffective: “The unions bought her long ago! She doesn’t want to do anything. She’s with the employers!” Carolina told the assistants who had come to work for Fiore that their contracts would not be renewed. Though Francesca found employment elsewhere, Lara and Fiore struggled for the next months as they felt increasingly hostile relations with Carolina. Lara told me that one day she had gone to get the mail and had been yelled at for doing so—suddenly this routine practice was taken away from her. Lara was certain that Carolina had convinced other colleagues to humiliate her. By December 2005, Fiore began cutting back on her time in the office but continued to send letters to the managers requesting pay for her work. She handled the cases on which she had been working by dealing directly with the women involved instead of going through the office.

Fiore, like other mobbing specialists and workers, had a livelihood that was deeply intertwined with an ongoing, though precarious, interest on the part of the public in mobbing, as evidenced by monies that came from the Italian state and the European Union. The mobbing clinics, projects and programs are not, of course, outside the dynamics of labor that mobbing professionals analyze on a daily basis. Nearly all of the mobbing clinical workers, psychologists, consultants, public health professionals were working on short-term job contracts, or unwaged labor, monies that were largely tied to a constellation of regional, state or European Union programs to prevent mobbing. The course I took at the University

of Padua on mobbing and gender discrimination, for example, was funded through special funds tied to the regional Office of Equal Opportunity. The instructors, some of whom had received freelance contracts to teach the course, had managed to obtain employment through this transient anti-mobbing paradigm. Mobbing counselors Lidia and Dora were also paid out of temporary regional and state funds, in addition to money from NGOs who supported their mobbing clinic. Daniele's position (see Chapter 4) at the mobbing clinic was unpaid, as he served as an intern to complete his degree in clinical psychology. His colleagues, some of whom were university- or hospital-affiliated (see Chapter 4), were volunteers. Mobbing-specialized psychologists were almost all employed with determined time contracts at INAIL and other various public health agencies and research groups. The psychologists who had visited the mobbing clinic (Chapter 7) had also secured only part-time, temporary contracts for their services. The majority of mobbing specialists were themselves precarious workers.

### *3.12.2 A Precarious Anthropologist?*

Ironically, I found that my participation as a researcher in the mobbing industry made me appear to others to be a precarious worker. When I began collaborating with public health officials in the region to investigate Organizational Coercion Pathology, I met director of SPISAL (Prevention, Hygiene and Security in Workplaces Services) Dr. Franco Galetto. I had initially asked to interview Dr. Galetto as I did not know whether there were any mobbing programs yet underway. Coincidentally, a few weeks prior to my call, he had hired an organization psychologist, Dr. Dalia Ostaro, who would be in charge of coordinating an anti-mobbing program with other regional public health offices. In order to show my gratitude for my participation at the office, I often tried to help Dalia with small office tasks, writing meeting minutes or organizing her collection of mobbing materials.

When, in the late Spring of 2005, Dr. Galetto asked me about my plans for next year, I explained that I was waiting to hear about what kind of support I would receive from my department. “So, you’re precarious, then?” he replied, concerned: “Do you want to stay here and work with us?” Dr. Galetto became interested in “finding a contract” for me for the next year. I recognized that “finding contracts” was a new practice emerging as part of Italy’s new labor market which had a sudden growth in the types of contracts one could be employed by. Importantly, he did not use the phrase of finding me “a job.” Managers like Dr. Galetto would be likely to try to reward unpaid interns with contracts.

The mobbing-specialized field was a highly competitive field, given Italy’s labor market and the small (but growing) pool of designated funds for mobbing research and prevention. Just as my presence could be seen as benevolent and helpful, it was sometimes seen as a threatening or intrusive part of the mobbing-specialized community. My position as researcher was thus viewed as a sort of competing production of knowledge with its potential to garner limited state and transnational resources. In Fall 2004, I came upon an advertisement for a “Mobbing Archive.” I immediately sought to call the archive director, Dr. Ruspini, but for many weeks he would not answer my calls. Eventually, Dr. Ruspini, who held an academic position, asked if I would come to his office hours, and I gratefully accepted. I was surprised when I arrived and was asked to sit opposite him *and* five of his assistants who stared at me coldly. A project on mobbing? *For whom?* Dr. Ruspini explained he would *not* be interested in any sort of collaboration and sidestepped my questions about the archive. Months later, Dr. Galetto, who was organizing various mobbing prevention programs, planned a meeting about a new mobbing project for public health officials. I unexpectedly came upon Dr. Ruspini, who was also in attendance. Afterwards, he accused Dr. Galetto of sending me as a “spy” to his office to ask about the archive, even though I

had gone to research the archive before meeting Dr. Galetto. Dr. Galetto told me afterwards that he had tried to convince him that he had, in no way, sent me as a “spy,” but had not managed to entirely quell Dr. Ruspini’s suspicions. He figured that Dr. Ruspini’s “archive” was a mere front to hoard local and state mobbing funds. He added, laughing, that he had always found Dr. Ruspini’s “unsavory” talk about women quite distasteful and that I was rather fortunate to have avoided any dealings with him. The possibility that workers may rapidly lose their job positions creates an environment in which others’ are wary of one another’s access to resources. In this case, my study posed a risk to Dr. Ruspini. One can then draw a parallel between my experience of being accused of “spying,” Fiore’s conviction of being spied upon and Cris’s belief that Contax executives intentionally shifted his contract and access to information. Precarious and mobbed workers, and the experts whose job it is to help them, were united in this climate of fear, suspicion and accusation.

### **3.13 Precarious Subjectivities**

How does neoliberalism redefine human existence in the world (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001)? How do Italians respond to their own precariousness and other’s precariousness? The experiences of Fiore and Cris, despite the divergent ways in which they identify themselves and their labor, reveal a shared and connected historical context. Class, gender and political consciousness shape whether or not one may find mobbing a salient way to describe one’s experiences. But mobbing as a cultural category emerges as part of, not as tangential or antithetical to, the broader context of suspicion, mistrust and apprehension. In other words, mobbing was produced through *both* economic and existential precariousness. Cris and Fiore also shared a belief that managers had potentially supernatural powers in their ability to infiltrate purposefully the mundane practices and events of the workplace. The

belief that corporate executives or provincial-level ministers can willfully structure alienation stems from a sense that neoliberalism seems an inevitable and highly coordinated process. Though some coordinated levels of managerial deceit and maliciousness seemed to me undeniable, I pose that these beliefs are nonetheless strengthened in an inverse relationship to the depth of workers' alienation. In other words, the extreme and rapid devaluation of workers, structured by the neoliberal labor policies, contributed and reflected the process of workers localizing this persecution to particular superiors or labor practices at work. In the Veneto region, workers' subjectivities were precariously dependent on very transient and economically volatile conditions—Cris's as freelancer and Fiore as mobbing counselor. They also both share the memory of pre-Biagi Laws, labor protections and political movements to install long-term contracts—Italy's Left tradition that was, and still remains, vibrant. Because neoliberalism isn't totalizing or overdetermined in their memories, Fiore and Cris feel more alienated than Fiore's assistants, Lara and Francesca, than Cris's younger colleagues or than expectant mother Sandra who, as the younger generation, enter the workplace when neoliberal ideologies have already been normalized to a greater degree.

Working in a recursive loop, mobbing and precariousness seem to me to be formidable twins—born from similar dynamics and radically contingent. The state's decision to diversify labor contracts restructured the workforce such that more than ever before, precarious workers were side by side an increasingly diminished group of long-term workers. Stripping protections and amplifying precariousness at the same time changed the consciousness for both newly entering and long-established workers. Before 2003, employers had few other means to establish short-term employment. The position of long-term workers with undetermined time contracts could not, therefore, be easily supplemented by short-term workers. In 2003, however, this changed. The Biagi Laws thus exacerbated



mobbing in two important ways: first, by allowing employers to hire short-term laborers, and, second, through the creation of a precarious workforce split between two-tiers. For the former, short-term contracts could be used to replace eliminated lifelong workers. And, for the latter, the ethos of precariousness sparked a sense of apprehension and suspicion among all workers such that practices became and/or were interpreted as persecutory.

That globalization creates a deterritorialized and individualized workforce has been well documented (Appadurai 1990, Collins 2003, 2006). I am calling attention to the effects of what happens when the workplace is only *partially* so. Italy's historically specific labor protections and simultaneous neoliberal legal reform have resulted in a two-tiered workforce. The notion of a 'two-tiered' workforce has been used to describe conditions whereby a small majority of workers earn a high income, while the majority of workers are low-paid. But I deploy this term in the Italian case to compare one tier of undetermined time workers with a second tier of short-term workers with determined time contracts. The effect of this structural reorganization and creation of a two-tiered workforce facilitated and produced a change in subjectivity, rendering both permanent and semi-permanent workers precarious. The permanent workers, feeling a heightened mistrust of colleagues and supervisors, must deflected conflict in order to maintain their positions. New workers had to prove the value of their labor and become disciplined, hardworking and most of all, risk-taking (Beck 2000). These workers were disciplined by their desire to obtain a new position. For both groups of workers, the alternative 'other' moved within the shared visual and bodily space of the workplace and in public discourse. Undetermined time workers and short-term "non-regular" workers were both transformed by a precarious regime. The former was a discipline based on prevention, the other of hope. That is, the diminished group of long-term workers had to apprehend everyday situations in order to forestall their elimination, while new

workers had to display their willingness (*disponibilità*) in order to attain the elusive promise of continued work. A workplace of “your death, my life” proceeded in tandem with the individualization of work (Sennett 1998), where the broader structure of the labor market pit workers against one another. Precariousness was constitutive of the material and symbolic *thingness* of mobbing—it was both a cause and effect of mobbing. Precariousness and mobbing emerged as indeed historical foils, two sides of the same coin, inseparable and unthinkable without the other.

## Chapter 4      Feminizing the Inflexible

“The company that bought us has a very precise philosophy: total flexibility.” –  
From film “I like to Work: Mobbing” (*Mi Piace Lavorare: Mobbing*)

“I want more autonomy, more flexibility.”-Giulia, self-identified mobbee

“You can’t have the keg full and the wife drunk.” –Veneto saying

### 4.1.1 *The Seductiveness of Flexibility*

Is mobbing a corporate technique to populate Italy’s work force with women? The question, of course, rests on the premise that a “flexible” work force is socially, economically and politically desirable and viable. The capitalist mode of “flexible accumulation” reduces labor costs not only by outsourcing, but also by building and sustaining a growing body of “peripheral” or semi-permanent labor—flexible laborers (Harvey 1989, Collins 2006). Unraveling the multiple dimensions of the concept, Richard Sennett (1998) illustrates how the modern understanding of flexibility refers to the “discontinuous reinvention of institutions, flexible specialization of production, and concentration of [power] without [the] centralization of power” (47). Here flexibility refers to a capacity to view an institution or practice as the same entity, even as it flexibly adapts and changes (Sennett 1998: 49). The author also refers to flexibility in terms of what Piore and Sabel (1984) discuss as a diffuse network of corporate organization able to change swiftly to market demands, the idea of a “flexible” neoliberal economy that adapts rapidly to market change (Harvey 1989). For working and middle class workers in Italy, the idea of flexibility in Italy is tempered by a notion that flexibility for the employer and/or market necessarily implies precariousness for the employee. From a moral standpoint, the Left-driven discourse of precariousness casts flexibility as an immoral social value incompatible with Italian notions of just welfare citizenship.

Despite these complexities of how exactly flexibility and precariousness are culturally understood, one can still argue that maintaining Italy's economic wealth and status within the neoliberal global economy requires a greater dependency on short-term labor—labor able to grow and shrink fast enough to allow corporations to reorganize around market highs and lows (Blim 2002, Cafruny and Ryner 2003). Mobbing, if understood as a strategic and covert means to reduce the number of permanent and even semi-permanent employees, would thus be a process able to generate a regime of labor around precariously employed workers. Yet I find that a close investigation of mobbing shows it to be more circuitous and less linear. Mobbed women may be denounced as *inflexible* or unable to follow corporate regulations such that, in turn, they become the bulk of Italy's *flexible* workforce. That is, the ideal of “flexibility” is salient in discourses about inappropriate or weak workers even though, at the same time, many Italians seems to refuse the value of “flexibility” labor by deeming labor markets “precarious.” Why is “inflexibility” retained as an appropriate measure to describe particular workers?

Women seem to be continually excluded from being recognized as flexible, despite the practices they adopt and attributes they perform. In fact, in certain cases, women's proclaimed *desire* for work and their *willingness* to work become grounds to name them as unsuitable and ill-adapted to work environments. Paradoxically, however, in feminizing the inflexible, mobbed women are then routed into Italy's “flexible” workforce because there post-mobbing employment is far more likely to be in the form of short-term precarious contracts. Thus, *flexible* (precarious) workers are produced through discursive constructions and exclusionary mechanisms that proclaim certain workers to be *inflexible*.

Much research, by contrast, has detailed how women in industrializing nations have come to be considered the central figures of flexibility par excellence (Kondo 1990, Mills

1999, Collins 2005). In her study of the sexualization of Maquiladora factory workers in Mexico, Leslie Salzinger (2000) argues that women come to be coveted as workers because of cultural beliefs and discourses that link high productivity and pliability to women workers. Thus women are re-fashioned as desirable workers is animated by assumptions that gender “naturally” makes them fit for factory labor, exploiting “natural” characteristics such as “nimble fingers” as highly economically valuable (Safa 1981, Fernandez-Kelly 1983). Carla Freeman, for example, has revealed the complexities of how women in Barbados came to be considered ideal and docile data entry workers (2000, 2002). This chapter calls attention to how proclamations for and performances of flexibility do not always achieve social recognition as flexible. My claim, then, is that even when Italian women may both desire and perform flexibility, they might nonetheless be labeled as inflexible and excluded from the workplace. Paradoxically, women also seem less likely to identify themselves as “precarious workers,” (*lavoratori precari*) a political, classed and gendered subjectivity that as I explore in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Flexibility, in other words, is a very precarious matter.

Anthropologists such as Emily Martin (1992, 1994) and Aihwa Ong (1999) have studied the concept of flexibility as a defining cultural paradigm of global capitalism, crisscrossing the way in which people understand economies, ideas, citizenship, states and, importantly, their bodies.<sup>1</sup> Martin (1992, 1994) has explored how the notion of flexibility, particularly within models of the body’s immune system and defenses, resonates from the Western medical field to various social understandings. She raises the important question of

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<sup>1</sup> Ong’s (1999) idea of flexible citizenship is defined as the “cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political economic conditions” (6) and one in which “strategies of flexible accumulation have promoted a flexible attitude towards citizenship” (17).

how the discourse of flexibility produces certain kinds of desires and shapes subjectivities: the “intense desirability—even the seductiveness—of the ability to be flexible and adaptable” is one that changes the way in which actors think about the world and about their own bodies (149). According to Martin (1992), the flexible model also pervades understandings of the workplace: “An uncritical adoption of this alluring model risks making us think there is a natural basis why flexible, nimble men and women. . . survive in decent jobs” (113). But part of the complexity in the northern Italian case is precisely in that flexibility does not necessarily result in job survival.

Flexibility, while not always socially recognized, is also a specifically neoliberal ideology that connects states and citizens. Daniel Goldstein (2005) shows how notions of flexibility extend from the neoliberal Bolivian state to local understandings of violence and, specifically, to the rise of public lynchings in urban areas:

Lynching, in a sense, fulfills the highest mandates of neoliberal rationality: it represents the privatization of justice, the assumption by individuals of a service ordinarily provided by the state, and so points to the increasing importance of ‘flexibility’ as a personal and communal survival strategy in neoliberal society (395).

Goldstein touches upon the violent potentials of flexibility when deployed collectively by and against the state. Thus, neoliberalism is simultaneously rendered both a subversive social tool and oppressive form of governance.

So, on the one hand, I am suggesting that mobbing expands Italy’s precarious workforce, if circuitously. But this is only one of many trajectories that tie together how and when Italians deploy the term mobbing. Many women, for example, report mobbing by same-level and lower-level colleagues. These cases attest that mobbing, in practice and as a discourse, is not simply a top-down corporate strategy. Moreover, Italian mobbing experts conceptualize mobbing, and its origins, on an underlying assumption of gender and sexual difference, not just economic scarcity. Women workers are sometimes portrayed as marginal

to the problem and at other times as the most visible subject of mobbing. Gender, “a structure of meaning ... around which production itself is designed” has become intertwined in various and diverse ways in the process of employee creation—and elimination (Salzinger 2000:15).<sup>2</sup> This chapter, building on the analysis of the historical makings of the friction between labor safeguards and risks proposed in the last, tackles the process of how such conditions play a role in gendered subject-making. Honing in on the paradoxes of worker *elimination* shows the existing labor regime in Italy to be *not* a rational system that runs on cost reduction and maximized production, but rather a profoundly fragmented and deeply gendered process. After highlighting the production of gendered knowledge about flexibility and mobbing in various discourses in the film, “I Like to Work,” I analyze the significance and implications of the different practices and narratives of women mobbees, who working with women mobbing experts, seek to resolve their suffering and difficulties at work.

#### 4.2 Flexibility Italian Style

In Chapter 2, I discussed how flexible contracts in Italy are understood as “precarious” contracts, a term that evokes the high-risk and uncertainty of indefinite employment from the perspective of the worker. Emilio Reyneri (2000a) defines the flexibility in terms of Italy’s labor market in terms of workers’ malleable and adjustable work schedules, entrance and exit from a corporation and mobility within the enterprise (22). But he also details the process through which flexible employment actually creates obstacles for workers. Such forms of flexibility, he argues, often come in conflict with a sense of professional flexibility, that is the cultivation of professional skills in which a worker could garner an “elevated polyvalent professionalism” coupled with “willingness” to frequently

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<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Carla Freeman (2000) pursues the question of “how gendered notions of work [are] connected to these ‘reclassifications’ of labor” as she traces the emergent subjectivity and class consciousness of women data entry workers in Barbados (55).

adjust to change (Reyneri 2005: 24). He suggests that these forms of flexibility derive from worker's enhanced affiliation and identification with corporate production, something that they are denied when employed precariously. I would add that this "willingness" to be flexible is doubly difficult in work environments in which many workers, regardless of their contract status, share a sense of apprehension and fear about their employment futures.

Flexible organization of labor in Italy has also been characterized by an increased number of quality checks spread through the process of production, whereby the responsibility of control is shifted to workers (Accornero 1999). Therefore, workers must both more fluidly adapt to new production schedules and respond to higher demands and increased surveillance. The unavailability of alternative forms of employment creates new stakes for workers to conform to such demanding schedules precisely because one's employment, more so than in the past, is replaceable.

#### *4.2.1 Corporate Subjects, Gendered Subjectivity*

At the same time, flexibility is a valorized concept frequently imagined in relation to corporations revealing of classed and gendered subjectivities. After asking a young woman assistant to bring me an espresso, corporate manager Gianni Mastinini escorted me to the meeting room, a space adorned with glass surfaces and black leather. Often marveling at his company Contax' innovation and speed, Mr. Mastinini shared the following with me:

You see, Noelle, ... companies are like people. [...] You, at fourteen years old, what were you probably thinking about? You were thinking about going out with your friends, going to the disco, going to have fun, going to meet boys, right? At eighteen years old you probably wanted to meet a boyfriend, or to be with a boyfriend, right? To not go to the disco anymore, enough with the music, you were thinking about doing something else. At twenty years old, you were thinking of something else. At thirty years old, you'll think of something else, right? So, you change, your life changes, companies change. Everything that had once been true, today isn't true anymore. Think, think about yourself and think about the company, it's the same thing.



In his narrative, Gianni likens corporate entities to a growing woman, one who flexibility grows and changes at every life stage. The idea that “everything that had once been true, today isn’t true anymore” evokes an ethos of flexibility, the constant adaptation to change and the total refusal of fixedness and stability. At the same time, Gianni’s imaginary of idealized flexibility also suggests his subject position as male, employer and upper class.

Moreover, while representations of corporations in American mass media draw from analogies of “a defended nation-state, organized around a hierarchy of gender, race and class” (Martin 1994: 51), the Italian corporation, in this instance, is a gendered and quite specifically heterosexual subject, evident in the repeated references to “boyfriends.” Gianni asked me to imagine my subjectivity as that of the corporate structure, an invitation that crystallizes a neoliberal ethic, an idea that Italy’s workers can imagine themselves and corporate structures as interchangeable, gendered subjects.

#### 4.2.2 *Total Flexibility*

Teasing out the relationship between mobbing, precariousness and the high stakes of flexibility can also be understood from the film “I Like to Work: Mobbing” (*Mi Piace Lavorare: Mobbing*), which I deploy throughout this chapter as a rich audiovisual cultural archive about the meaning of mobbing. In one early scene, workers meet with union representatives regarding a posted announcement for workers who would be transferred to a new and distant office. The union leader, a bespectacled middle-aged woman, leads an assembly meeting of the company’s outraged men and women employees:

Union leader: The company has bought us has a very precise philosophy: total flexibility—the complete availability (*disponibilità*) of all employees. They are not interested in your personal problems, family loads, the everyday fatigue, they count for nothing. Total flexibility. It means availability 24 hours out of 24 hours. [...] The transferred department is made up of nearly all women. So what does this mean? Their objective is to bring you in front of a choice between family affections, established relationships, and work.

Woman employee: How can we defend ourselves?

Union worker: You shouldn't choose. This is the true error! It is not right to put women up to this choice. It is not right. Women should continue to work and to maintain their relationships. But it is normal to seek out an individual decision. [...] The harassment that they will carry out against you individually might be extremely violent. Remember that violence doesn't mean they physically assault you. It's enough to leave you with nothing to do. They can take away the dignity of any one of you, of any one of you.

This exchange chronicles the problem of corporate reorganization in gender-specific terms. The union worker tells workers that "total flexibility" can be achieved through mobbing, the non-physical, but still "violent" harassment that can impact "anyone" of the workers. She also reveals a central feature of mobbing in this film and for many of the women I met—separating workers from production. Work reduction, in fact, was largely considered a cruel and deeply immoral mobbing technique. Part of what is reiterated here, then, is how through work one becomes part of an ethical social order.

It is also important here to notice that the union leader hails women as the most unjust victims because of their role within family and relationship networks. While the women are asked not to "choose" between work and family, they are simultaneously comforted about the "individual decisions" that must be made. Thus, rather than issuing a unifying call to all workers—as an alienated or exploited *class*, the critique unfolds according to gendered parameters. Considering Italy's strong history of labor relations and support, it is likewise unexpected to hear the union worker assert that both related work decisions and corporate aggression take place at the level of individual, and the woman worker. Given trade union CGIL's cooperation in the making of this film, this may be indicative of an actual shift in union strategy within Italy, calling upon individual *choice* as opposed to collective action. At the same time, her invitation reflects neoliberal ideologies that recast citizens as self-fashioning and free-choosing subjects (Rose 1996, Beck 1999, Castel 2003).

### 4.3 The Genders of Mobbing

In the next two sections, I turn to various sources in which knowledge about mobbing has been codified and distributed locally, nationally and transnationally. National reports about the gender of who is mobbed tend to vary. Some, for example, indicate statistics as high as 1 in 3 women who say that they have been mobbed, with 40% of cases in large companies and 39% by other women.<sup>3</sup> In their Veneto region clinic, Dora and Lidia have run a mobbing clinic to help mobbees, both men and women. In November 2004, a young undergraduate studying sociology came to interview Lidia and Dora about the gendered effects of mobbing. She asked if there was a “profile” of the victim. Dora, smiling, answered without a pause: “Women.” The next question that followed was, of course, inquiring about the profile of mobbers. This time, Dora shrugged and said: “There is no specific figure.” Having obtained another student’s thesis about their clinic, I found that in 2003-4, their 448 visitors included 199 men (46%) and 244 women (56%) in the twelve month period, which paralleled statistics for first-time visitors (M 40% vs. F 60%).

From the European Commission Daphne Report, a group dedicated to “raising awareness of women and mobbing,” researcher Elena Ferrari (2004) reports that 62% of mobbing victims are women (21). The document characterizes the most common aspects of mobbing involving women victims:

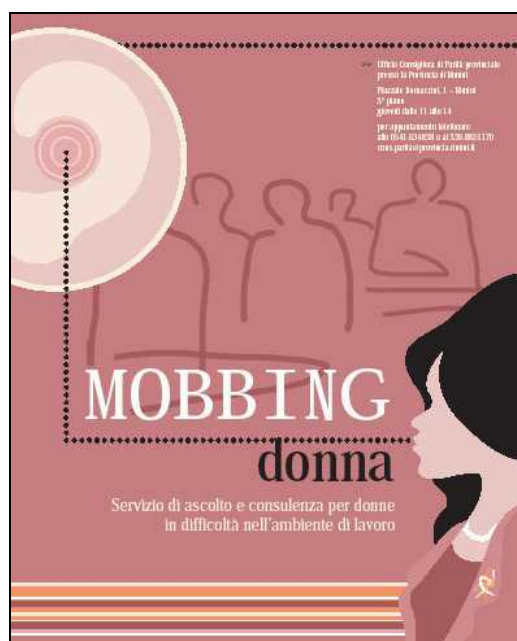
They aim at contrasting their professional growth and isolating the woman from processes that favour their careers, to prevent them from penetrating the male world of management, but also the world in which prevailing women, after conquering elevated positions, create barriers against other women behaving as men (20).

The report consistently emphasized how women also tend to mob other women, a salient aspect of mobbing literatures, due to “jealousy” and hyper-competitiveness (Ferrari 2004).

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<sup>3</sup> 17 October 2005. “Governo: Ricerca tre quarti Italiano vogliono Donna Premier.” *Ansa Notiziario Generale in Italiano*.

In this sense, mobbing serves as a way to maintain gendered hierarchies within workplaces, both between men and women, but also as a mechanism for women in executive positions to penalize other women.



**Figure 1 Promotion for mobbing hotline and clinic for women. “Hotline and Consulting for women in difficult times at work.”<sup>4</sup>**

#### 4.4 Psychiatric Knowledge of Mobbing

Psychiatric and medical models of mobbing reproduce the notion that gender differences are central to mobbing’s origins and dynamics. In March 2005, in a plush red and brown high-ceilinged conference room that was adorned with a hundred or so coats of arms, I waited with a group of about sixty others for a greatly anticipated talk on mobbing. The esteemed author of “Mean Bosses, Mean Colleagues” (*Capi Cattivi, Colleghi Cattivi*), Renato Gilioli, (2001) one of the leading mobbing experts in Italy, was invited to the University of Padua by the Committee on Equal Opportunity to discuss mobbing in Italy. His talk was based on his research on the thousands of clients who have come to the

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.provincia.rimini.it/progetti/po/2004\\_mobbing/img/poster.jpg](http://www.provincia.rimini.it/progetti/po/2004_mobbing/img/poster.jpg)

mobbing clinic he founded in Milan. By training, Gillioli is a neurological psychiatrist, and in 1996 he founded his clinic, “The Center for the Prevention, Diagnosis, Cure, and Rehabilitation of the Work Maladjustment Pathology” (*Centro per la Prevenzione, Diagnosi, Cura e Riabilitazione della Patologia da Disadattamento Lavoro*).

In a recent interview with Varese News (2004), Gilioli reported the following about his clinic:

Those who come to the Work Clinic for mobbing suffer, first and foremost, from medical problems that develop with various kinds of symptoms: psycho-somatic, emotional, pertinent to behavioral disturbances. The subjects somaticize the accumulated stress with pathologies that range from headaches to gastric problems like stomachache, to asthma, ulcers and other common symptoms. Emotional disturbances provoke anxiety and depression; these behaviors can push the person who is the object of mobbing to begin to drink, to take drugs and illegal substances, and to smoke. ... [The pathology] is isolated within weak subjects and brings them to the point of abandoning work after [they experience] harassment that goes on for months. Often whoever is struck needs in-hospital care.

Gilioli also describes the “maladjustment disturbance” (*disturbo dell’adattamento*) as a condition resulting from mobbing and manifested in “weak” subjects who have difficulty adjusting to new demands and social expectations at work—workers, in other words, with medicalized obstacles that prevent them from being fully flexible. According to related psychological and psychiatric models, the “maladjustment disturbance,” alternatively labeled “pathology of poor work adjustment” (*patologia da disadattamento lavoro*), leads to acute psychosomatic symptoms, including headaches, tachycardia, sleep disorders, digestive problems, and depression. While in Chapter 6 I attend very carefully to the idea of mobbing as a medicalized pathology, here it is important to emphasize the pathologization of *inflexible* workers. Within this model Gilioli understands mobbing as more likely to affect people whose bodies are already less accommodating and elastic to new environmental pressures.

“Maladjustment disturbance” emphasizes the importance of the body’s flexible defenses and construes “rigidity” as a physical and psychic disturbance.

#### *4.4.1 The Doubleness of Psychiatric Discourse*

For his talk at the University of Padua in March 2005, Gilioli summarized his findings on mobbees (*mobbiizzati*) or people who claim that they were being mobbed from his clinic records. He analyzed the basic demographics of this group, describing them as between the ages of 35 and 44, with an eighth-grade level of education, at a regular employee level (as opposed to lower level workers 18% and executives 12%), and from the private sector (64%). To many, these findings were surprising because mobbing is often considered more likely in the public sector where labor protection laws have made it difficult to downsize for a longer period of time. Many Italians also assume that unlike private sector workers, public sector workers almost never voluntarily leave their jobs and therefore are more likely to be forcefully ousted. The private sector has far more at stake than the public sector in terms of political economic gain with the creation of an intensively flexible labor market. These assumptions are based on economic logics, the rational rule of minimizing costs. The fact that both private and public sector workers and both lower-level and higher-level employees identify their experience as mobbing also attests to the fact that mobbing is not simply a “rational” corporate technique for downsizing.

Turning from the origins of mobbing to the gendered dimensions of this phenomenon, Gilioli described how he had found a nearly even distribution of men and women mobbees (52% M and 48% F). Yet he also suggested that men and women were distinguished in the causes and styles of mobbing used against them. For men, Gilioli asserted, mobbing often involved being transferred to new office locations, demotion from higher positions within the workplace, or the assigning of meaningless tasks to complete.

Gilioli used the term “strategic mobbing” (*mobbing strategico*) for this type of mobbing, and attributed it to 72% of men’s cases in his study. Strategic mobbing included vertical demotion, “irregular” flow of work, and a change in superiors for the employee. It was most likely to occur when men would return to work after an accident, or during a corporate merger or reorganization. Alternatively, he continued, 68% of women’s cases compiled in Milan were more likely to endure what he called “emotional mobbing” (*mobbing emozionale*), involving “exclusion, marginalization, isolation, humiliation, offenses, taunting, and sexual harassment.” He elaborated the idea of emotional mobbing as an effect both of women’s natural sensitivity and as a result of feminized relational practices of pettiness, jealousy, gossip and unimportant but constant strife. When it was time to take questions from the audience, I asked Gilioli if he had any information regarding the gender of mobbers, as opposed to mobbees, the targets of mobbing. While he did not have exact statistics, he said men tended to be mobbed by other men, while women were mobbed by both men and women. His comment, “Women are attacked on all fronts,” was met with laughter and some “it figures” comments from the audience.

Gilioli, thus, viewed mobbing as a medically urgent problem that falls according to gendered lines. Men, as prime victims of strategic mobbing, were more likely to be mobbed as a result of mergers. Men are mobbees, in this formulation, as a result of economic shifts in transnational labor markets and the market-driven need to maintain low costs of labor. The verbal and practical weapons for mobbing men, according to the psychiatrist, remain within the realm of received notions of an unfair job—constant demotion, lack of new tasks, lack of advancement, disorganization of hierarchies. The proper advancement of men’s labor is interrupted by an incoming force of corporate mergers or accidents, both construed as beyond the scope of the worker. Men, then, seem to be imputed little agency in relation

to global capitalism. Rather they are considered the victims, worker-citizens deprived of their labor. Ultimately, the male mobbee emerges as a man who is dispossessed of labor, information and productivity as a result of tightened economic markets, not any pre-existing gendered aspect of the worker himself. Nonetheless, this model of mobbing positions men as passive victims rather than successful agents of capitalism (Gibson-Graham 1996).

Women's labor, according to Gilioli's logic, is not necessarily altered by the movement of transnational labor and capital. Rather, understood as victims of "emotional" mobbing, women are produced as precarious workers due to their affective states of being. These findings reinstate a familiar Western Cartesian dualism between mind and body— i.e., mobbing targets men's minds and women's hearts. Ideologically feminine characteristics such as sensitivity, fear of isolation, and expressiveness become precisely those characteristics that render women more vulnerable in the workplace. That which is already socially constructed as typically feminine, then, rather than neoliberal market shifts, makes women more vulnerable to mobbing. The effect of this discourse is that women, unlike men, are constructed as necessarily more likely to be inflexible. The idea is that women who are able to adapt flexibly to the workplace—and evade maladjustment disturbances—are actually an exception.

Gilioli reported that the onset of mobbing for women was related to reporting sexual harassment, returning from maternity leave, or returning to work after plastic surgery, noting: "Times are particularly delicate after breast enhancement surgery." For Gilioli, sexual harassment was both a cause and an effect of mobbing. In other words, women who denied sexual advances may be punished by mobbing, and women may be sexually harassed as a means to intensify mobbing. Though I dedicate Chapter 7 to mobbing and sexual harassment, it is necessary to underscore here that sexual harassment becomes a "natural"



work place feature for women, bolstering another related idea—that women’s sexual subjectivity at work is necessarily generative of conflict and strife. Plastic surgery, and particularly breast enhancement, may over-eroticize women in the workplace in ways that transgress notions of appropriately sexualized or asexualized workers. Mobbing therefore stands for a punitive effort to discipline and exclude eroticized women workers, where sexuality and desire find visible manifestation in large breasts. Thus, harassment and exclusion punishes not simply the bodies of women, but their desire to be desired in a forbidden place—the office. Psychiatric knowledge about mobbing, then, instructs women about what kinds of behaviors in the office are risky and what kinds of practices disrupt gendered and moral orders.

Gilioli’s speech, underscoring the psychiatric and medical views of mobbing, both reflects and reproduces gender difference as an organizing framework for mobbing. The presentation and representation of this kind of knowledge, common both in public discourse and highly specialized circles, produces certain kinds of gendered subjectivities. The mobbed subject emerges in the context of a set of norms, expectations and variations that are based on gender. The body of knowledge about mobbing shapes and subjects worker-citizens to read particular practices in gendered ways. It simultaneously produces notions of deviance, based on how and when subjects are mobbed, where gender identity may not match certain kinds of work practices or experiences—thus exacerbating feelings of exclusion or isolation, as multiple forms of marginalization overlap with one another.

#### *4.4.2 Employment Rates, Gender and Veneto*

A closer look at the demographics of the work force in the Veneto region complicates Gilioli’s data on the gendered incidence of mobbing. In order to gain a better understanding of the gendered dynamics of mobbing within Veneto, we must first analyze

employment rates and contract types that produce the basic parameters of the labor market. The Veneto region enjoys a rather low unemployment rate, at 3.4% in 2003 compared with the 8.7% rate for Italy (Veneto Lavoro 2004: 20). However, the unemployment rate varies significantly by gender with a rate of 1.9% for men, and 4.8% for women in Padua and its provinces (Veneto Lavoro 2004: 83). One of the defining features of employment in Italy is a significant and persistent difference between men and women's participation. The gap between men's and women's employment is also high for the Veneto region: 65% for men and 39% for women (Veneto Lavoro 2004: 83). Gilioli's statistics on the gendered incidence of mobbing fail to consider the proportion of men and women in the workplace. If we take these statistics into account, then we could conclude that women would be twice as likely to be mobbed as men in Padua because of women's lower overall employment rates.

Women in the Veneto region are far less likely to be granted undetermined time contracts, making them more likely to be flexible workers to begin within. In fact, only one in four women, as opposed to one in three men, secures the desirable lifelong labor contract (Veneto Lavoro 2004: 102). Alternatively, 56.2% for women's employment comes from determined time contracts and 43.8% for men (Veneto Lavoro 2004: 102)—quite significant considering the lower overall proportion of women workers. And while part-time labor constitutes only 15% of the total labor force, it makes up one third of women's employment (Veneto Lavoro 2004: 102). Thus, women are *less* likely to gain long-term stable employment, more likely to be given short-term contracts and more likely to remain unemployed, rendering their labor more precarious than men's, economically, socially and politically. While employment statistics are very helpful in constructing the gendered parameters of the labor market, however they alone can tell us neither the frequency nor specific dynamics that gender mobbing.

#### 4.5 Mobbing Protagonist Extraordinaire: Anna

Unlike the experience of most mobbees, mobbing is depicted in the film as a more intentional and simplistic psychological assault of a worker. Based on compiled true stories, the 2004 film “I Like to Work: Mobbing” (*Mobbing: Mi Piace Lavorare*) tells the story of a single mother in Rome who is mobbed as a result of a corporate merger. To make the film, director Francesca Comencini collaborated with the mobbing clinics of the Rome branch of national trade union CGIL’s, General Italian Labor Confederation, (*Confederazione Generale Italiano del Lavoro*). Co-produced by Bim Distribuzione, Bianca Film and Rai Cinema, the film received much critical acclaim, won an award at the 2004 Berlin film festival, and is well-known among mobbing professionals.

Films, in my view, are not simple reflections of cultural meanings about mobbing, but constitutive and productive of meaning as well (Ginsburg et. al 2002, Schein 2004).<sup>5</sup> This particular film is illuminating because it encapsulates many dynamics of mobbing in one contained narrative. What this project will entail is a careful teasing out of the representational regime that governs mobbing and close attention to the various subject

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<sup>5</sup> The use of film analyses in ethnographic practice and writing has become increasingly common as anthropologists track discourses, images, meanings and new desires and practices across various forms of visual media, revealing “how media enable and challenge the workings of power and the potential of activism, the enforcement of inequality and the sources of imagination; and the impact of technologies on the production of individual and collective identities” (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002: 3). In her analysis of a film about Chinese rural society, Judith Farquhar (1999) suggests that what we find in film are “manifestations of very material, if diverse, social technologies. Technology practically materializes complex systems of knowledge and institutional networks, and it serves to alter the efficacy of users in the context of ordinary practices” (Farquhar 1999: 156). Louisa Schein (2004) deploys what she calls an “ethnotextual approach” to anthropological media analysis, tracing “intertextual interpretations. . . locating them in the wider play of cultural signification that exceeds the video medium” (436). Here, Schein proposes a methodological approach combining situated viewing, interviews about media involvement itself as well as mapping media consumption of an entire genre of film. Though I did not adopt this full methodology, I will draw from this theoretical and methodological insight to closely read one film as a set of very important practices, discourses and cultural meanings.

positions generated within the film—and new desires and fears. As I recount various details of the film, I underscore how the narrative of mobbing masculinizes the logics of a flexible economy, while feminizing those workers unable to conform to new standards, that is, inflexible workers.

The film tells the story of Anna, played by acclaimed Italian actress Nicoletta Braschi, who also starred in *Life is Beautiful* (Miramax 1997). Tall, pale and very slender, Braschi's presence embodies the character's femininity and vulnerability in her demure and pretty features and slight frame. In the first scene of the film, workers are told by four well-dressed male managers that the company has merged and that they must expect a series of changes within the corporation. Yet, the company—its scope, product, and organization—remain generalized and anonymous throughout the film. The CEO makes a speech to employees as opening credits roll:

All of us must work to conquer the new effects of the market. We should confront this new market by being number one, knowing that we are second to no one. Because it is only by our shared enthusiasm that we can obtain those results, and because it is the only way to defend our jobs. Nowadays you defend your job by conquering more work.<sup>6</sup> You don't defend it anymore as if it were an act that someone bestows upon us *ab divinis*.<sup>7</sup> You defend your job by conquering more work.

The CEO lays bare the critical and emergent discourses of Italy's neoliberal shift—and the effect on the workplace. With its military metaphors of “conquer” and “defend,” his speech crystallizes a historical shift in Italy between conceptualizing work as a citizen's right and rethinking work as victory booty. As I have argued, culturally specific expectations in Italy frame the chance to maintain a stable job as a reasonable expectation, if not a fundamental right, of every citizen. Within the new market logics, however, the CEO calls upon the

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<sup>6</sup> The verb conquer (*conquistare*) may translate more naturally into English here as ‘winning,’ but it would lose the use of this verb.

<sup>7</sup> The Latin phrase “*ab divinis*” means “from the divine,” meaning something spiritual or from the heavens.

employees not as Italian citizens who consider stable employment a right, but rather as soldiers who must “conquer” their work. They are soldiers who must work against one another in order to secure their own work, and yet, must work together as a team for the sake of the corporation. Importantly, *all* workers are interrelated to “conquer more work,” pooling undetermined time contract holders and determined time workers into landscape he envisions as a defensive market. This indicates a shift insofar as the workplace become a site in which workers with lifelong contracts are fashioned as precarious workers, regardless of the contract they hold. They are “precarious” precisely because their job security suddenly depends on their ability to conform to a new regime of production and not necessarily their existing legal safeguards of a contract. That he relegates the notion of secure employment to the supernatural realm: divine intervention (*ab divinis*) casts these workers as competitive, rational, self-striving actors who shall depend on *only themselves* to secure stable labor.

#### 4.5.1 Desirable Worker

Anna is depicted as a desirable and productive employee, professional in neutral-toned suits, lightly applied make-up, pinned-back hair and brainy brown glasses. The film displays her good-natured relationships by showing Anna at a pizzeria with two women co-workers. Given Anna’s undetermined time contract, Anna’s colleagues remind her that she is “protected” (*tutelata*). That Anna is the targeted mobbee and has this kind of contract is very important because the viewer sees how a worker, accustomed and reminded that she is “protected,” lives through circumstances that completely evacuate this idea of protection. Her “barrel of steel” contract, paradoxically, seems to subject Anna to greater risks and uncertainties than other short-term workers insofar as she becomes a target of mobbing. While it is the short-term determined time contract laborers whom are indexed as “precarious” in Italian discourses, we actually see that Anna, dubbed “protected” by her

colleagues, is just as precarious, if not more so. The company's new regime of labor, then, structures mobbing and sustains the growth of additional "precarious" workers.

From the outset, we see that Anna's understanding of her protected job position does not mean that she has slowed or taken this position for granted. On the contrary, her colleagues marvel at her great "meticulousness" and financial discipline, while Anna admits: "I allow myself nothing, nothing." Anna's character is defined by her hard work, self-discipline, precision and ability to make financial sacrifices. In one scene shot in the office corridor, viewers watch a colleague from the warehouse shyly ask Anna for a date. She graciously denies his invitation, citing her evening responsibility to her pre-teen daughter, Morgana, as a primary reason she's so busy. Anna's polite refusal situates her as an ideally and femininely sexualized worker in that she is desired by her colleague, but at the same time she exhibits sexual control in the workplace. She is also portrayed as a caring mother and dutiful daughter in a variety of scenes full of affectionate touches and a familial sensuousness. Viewers are transported inside Anna's home to peruse the loving and intimate moments between Anna and her daughter, pre-teenager Morgana. Anna is thus an ideal woman and worker for multiple reasons: she shows a desire to be a disciplined and careful worker for the company, she does not exhibit sexual desire towards her co-worker and she exhibits a great sense of duty and dedication to her daughter and her ailing father.

The first hint of trouble comes when she can't find an important notebook during a meeting with a client. Panicked, she scurries around the office, searching anxiously, even accusing a colleague of stealing it. Later, Anna is told by the administrator that it was purposely taken away, because she will no longer be keeping those books. Anna continues, however, to show herself as a productive employee. Days later, she enters her office and the colleague asks: "Didn't you have a day off? Well, you really do like working, don't you?"

The comment begins to show how “liking work,” a desire to labor and toil, can have severely negative consequences. Anna’s earnest desire to work becomes the premise for her emotional unraveling. It is also deeply paradoxical because a ‘desire to work’ in other cases allows women to be recognized as flexible laborers, able to adapt to new regimes of labor. Yet Anna’s will to toil seems anomalous to co-workers and perhaps also viewers, her desire to work emerges as the protagonist’s fatal flaw—she does not recognize the futility of this desire.

Mobbing is shown as something that soon everyone participates in. One morning Anna finds another colleague has taken over Anna’s desk. After silently gathering her belongings, Anna walks dejectedly to a communal office with eight other workers. Implicitly, the viewer probably recognizes these workers as determined time workers. Thus, Anna’s is demoted and punished by joining the ranks of her newest competitors, the short-term laborers who must labor, disciplined by the hope of obtaining an undetermined time contract. Here, they are suddenly paired together in the same scene and the viewer is reminded of the tension and uneasy relations between them.

These scenes of this film clearly illustrate common practices in the day-to-day realities of mobbing—abrupt and drastic change in assignments with no prior notice and office relocation, both creating an intensely uneasy micro-climate for the employee. Importantly, they also reveal how a subtle and unseen action by corporate management confirms workers’ concerns that their actions are being monitored and calculated. Thus, the film *Mobbing* reflects and produces a variety of day-to-day fears that concern contemporary work life in Italy—fear that one’s labor is unappreciated, fear of secret plotting by supervisors, fear of unpredictable, hostile colleagues, and fear that one’s lifelong labor contract is not an effective safeguard. The film *Mobbing* disrupts a normative expectation

about work—neither a safeguarded (*tutelato*) contract nor greater productivity are preventive measures against mobbing.

While initially, the viewer might consider the new administrator (who remains nameless in the film) to be Anna's primary antagonist, and believe the conflict is primarily one-on-one, the escalation soon becomes difficult to pin on a single individual. Soon Anna is seen eating alone in the cafeteria, not being greeted by co-workers, and looking increasingly anxious and frightened. The film accurately touches upon two aspects of mobbing: one, the agent of mobbing remains elusive; two, once the mobbee is recognized by others as a target she is socially marginalized to a greater extent. Italian viewers likely sympathize with Anna during her rapid marginalization, as she shows herself to be earnestly abiding by corporate regulations. A contemporary audience might also identify with the subject positions of co-workers who distance themselves from Anna, necessarily driven to safeguard their own jobs. The film presents Anna's co-workers as actors driven towards self-protection and resistant or unable to create a sense of class solidarity or action with Anna. Considering the sponsorship of Left-wing trade union CGIL in the making of this film, this representation reflects an explicit discourse about workers' underlying motives. The narrative of what causes mobbing in Leftist discourse is the idea that workers refuse solidaristic actions in order to save their own jobs. In other words, the Left proposes a narrative that uncertainty and risk remakes workers as unable to compassionately join Anna in her struggle. Rather, according to this notion of precarious labor, the workers' own precariousness poisons them against her.

Days later, when she finds her computer mysteriously malfunctioning, Anna is asked by the new administrator to find some invoices in the company basement warehouse. That night she sneaks into the administrator's office and finds the requested invoices in his desk.



When he asks her for them the next day, Anna responds that the files may simply be misplaced—or in someone’s desk. Scowling, he offers Anna another “chance” to prove herself as worker who can adapt to and thrive in the company. Yet Anna’s new “chance” means training a new hire, a young woman in her late teens. And diligent Anna does so with patience and kindness, despite the irony of being asked to train her replacement. Here the film references the Biagi Laws and rapid legal changes which facilitated the hiring of younger, temporary workers on “internship” contracts.



**Figure 2 Anna’s alienation.**

The film highlights how many women seek to show that they are dutifully cooperating with the new emotional and economic regime. In one scene, we see one of Anna’s friend who has recently given birth remind Anna about a 5 o’clock meeting saying: “I must show them I’m working.” In the fluorescent-lit company bathroom, she furiously tries to pump breast milk. Distraught that she is unable to fill the pump, she pours the amount down the drain and rushes out of the bathroom. Among the constellation of meanings in this film one of the most highlighted is the gendered violence of late capitalism as particularly forceful for mothers. It is also a reassertion of a cultural ideology in which the

ideal female worker is one who is, first and foremost, dutiful to her family. In fact, that this character is unable to provide adequate breast milk, suggests that neoliberalism disrupts familial and patriarchal orders in Italy.

Meanwhile, Anna's next task is to dutifully record every transaction (time, length, reason) at the hallway photocopier where much of the time she sits without anything to do. Anna goes to the administrator, and says: "It's just that I don't have anything to do. I don't do anything. And not working tires me greatly, much more than working. I like to work. (*Mi Piace Lavorare*)."

Anna's plea to work is heart-felt and emotional, as if she is pleading for her return to normalcy within the corporation. More work should, or perhaps did, mean tranquillity for Anna. Once again the logics of Fordism—high productivity enhances the value of a worker—break down. Anna's plea to work also became the title of this film and animates this struggle that without work something very big is at stake for Italian society. Anna shows that her economic precariousness is very much entangled with a sense of meaning for her life—it recalls and echoes Carlo's point made in the previous chapter that stripping workers of labor means stripping workers of their "humanity." If work is the lynchpin of citizenship in Italy, then the *lack* of work means social exclusion and isolation.

Just as her occupational life contrasts with an earlier period of contentment for Anna, so does the depiction of her home life. Anna makes time for Morgana by taking her shopping and buys an expensive jacket because her daughter had selected it for her. Yet when Anna wears the white leather jacket to work, the new administrator chides her: "How have you come dressed to work, didn't take off your pajamas?" Whereas before Anna embodied properly feminized sexuality in the workplace, she is now coded as inappropriate and publicly mocked.

#### 4.5.2 *Anna's Gendered Exile*

Anna's final assignment entails her transfer to the all-male employee storage warehouse and the duty of enhancing the efficiency of the warehouse. The male factory workers, from inside the porn-adorned walls of their office, eye her with great anger and resentment. Nonetheless dutifully Anna tries to carry out her new assignment, timing their every procedure and following the men around with a stop clock and clipboard.

As tensions rise, Anna confronts her boss directly: "I can't stay down there..there's too much tension. There's a very, very aggressive atmosphere. I'm the only woman and I'm having a bit of trouble. [...]I'm a bit afraid to stay there." Anna both declares her fear, and genders this anxiety by reminding the manager of her status as the "only woman" among many men. Shortly afterwards, the men receive a letter from the company that there will be imminent job cuts in the warehouse. When Anna arrives they blame her, calling her the corporate "spy" and insist that her actions must have led to their imminent job loss. Here, the factory workers struggle to pinpoint and find a single actor to blame for their precariousness. Once again, the overarching film narrative shows that this deep feeling of devaluation and precariousness for workers incites them to turn on and mob other workers.

The camera shifts between Anna's perspective and a third-person shot in which five large men crowd around her, closing in on her physically, shouting and pointing their fingers at her. Screaming "Don't touch me," Anna runs out of the office, locks herself in the bathroom and faints. This episode also reveals how the practice of mobbing may be elaborately crafted, intentionally or unintentionally, to intensify gender-specific fear. Deliberating causing Anna's physical breakdown would have required the unlikely confluence of the precise timing of her specific job task within the warehouse, the manager's

refusal to re-assign her and the announcement of job cuts. The sense within the film, however, is that this event has been maliciously and intentionally orchestrated.

Sexual tension and exchanges between workers serve as a viable flashpoint for larger geopolitical shifts (Stanko 1988, Yelvington 1996, Salzinger 2000). There is a palpable physical tension in this scene in which the viewer senses a heightened risk of Anna's physical assault by these men. Though this is not the outcome of the scene, it does raise a question as to how this event rests on specific sexual tension, and sexual danger, between men and women. It is likewise significant that, at least within representations, the culmination of mobbing surfaces through the anomalous presence of sexual tension in a traditionally all-male workplace—the warehouse. The sexualization of workers, either as part of mobbing or, more broadly, as part of corporate discipline, troubles any claim that “sexual harassment” is either a cause or effect of mobbing.

#### 4.5.3 *Sick Leave and Resolution*

Home on sick leave, Anna is tenderly taken care of by her daughter, as she remains pale, bed-ridden and exhausted. She is also visited by an “occupational doctor” (*medico del lavoro*) a form of “medical police” that originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Italy, who under Italian law may check on workers out on sick leave. The visit, in effect, reminds workers that the corporate discipline extends to the domestic sphere. The fact that mobbing deteriorated Anna's psychophysical health affirms both that mobbing is bodily endangering and also that women, in particular, are particularly sensitive to the stressors of the workplace.

After her return, the CEO calls Anna into his office, showing her a letter of her resignation:

We've left you with the same activity as before. [...] You were supposed to work as a team instead you created a void all around you. You had a series of problems with colleagues and finally, the episode with the factory workers who—because of you—were about to strike on me. You have a bunch of personal

problems, for pity's sake. [...] But you also have a responsibility in the company. I think that you are not suited to this company. You have great abilities, but with respect to the company's rhythms, you are not right. Perhaps you need a calmer company with a smaller scope.

The executive's message to Anna reiterates exactly what I have attempted to highlight in this chapter—the feminization of inflexibility. He hails her as *unfit* to the fast-paced company and negligent of corporate responsibilities. He also blurs the cause and effect of the careful corporate tactics and Anna's role as employee, such that she alone is blamed for disrupting social relations in the workforce. He suggests it was Anna's *individual* problems that led to various conflicts within the corporation, that there was something naturally part of her character that made her “not right” for “company rhythms,” confirmed by her physical breakdown. That Anna mounted an effort transgressed the gendered orders, that women should naturally desire “calmer” and “smaller” work sites.

The letter of resignation is also a clue to indicate for viewers that the boss is utilizing a tactic as a means to avoid having to directly fire Anna. Firing workers with lifelong contracts is difficult and costly for employers and workers have the right to sue for their positions. The route to Anna's elimination is very circuitous: she is blamed for being ineffective and then urged to resign. In effect, the manager reasserts a specifically neoliberal ideology in which he relates to Anna as an “autonomized” individual (Burchell 1996: 27). By autonomized, I am suggesting that Anna is construed as “freely” responsible for her choices and her welfare, as if these were independent from other social actors and state structures.

#### 4.5.4 *Anna as Working Mother*

Within the context of both Catholicism and Italy's low birth rate, the fact that the only feature film about mobbing features a working mother as a mobbee takes on a particular kind of significance. Anna is a single mother, and the effects of mobbing on her

family life are central to the film. Recently, scholars like Elizabeth Krause (2001) have investigated Italy's low birthrate and the racist demographic discourse that positions women who do not have children (or have only one) as irrational actors who invite immigrants to overload the nation. In the scientific discourses Krause (2001) brings to the fore, women who work are particularly targeted as neglectful of motherhood responsibilities. The meanings of job loss, precariousness, and instability take on greater moral significance as the threat of Anna's unemployment puts family stability and mother-child relationships at risk. It is also within this context that mobbing is depicted as a morally reprehensible act with severe consequences, precisely because it disrupts women's role as mothers.

The resolution follows rapidly as the film cuts sharply to her meeting with the union representative who counsels her on pressing charges for mobbing. In the very next scene, Anna returns to the office to collect a check for the mobbing case she has successfully pursued. Presumably, Anna successfully sued the company for mobbing and received a worker's compensation settlement. In the last scene, she and her daughter exit their house with suitcases in hand. Anna fumbles for her phone and wonders out loud if she should call her new job. Morgana stops her, smiling sweetly, "Stop being scared of everything! I'm here with you!" They then joyously run down the street. Once again, the maternal bond is situated as tempering and curative of the fear of Italy's labor market. The ending scene satisfies the viewer by re-establishing multiple moral orders: secure labor and restored familial love. Morgana's plea to her mother to not be "scared of everything," however, reveals the film's unresolved tension. What remains problematic is the fear that even in Anna's next job, or in any job, existing labor protections and dutiful productivity will fail them once again. It is this sense of doubt and apprehension that the familiar safeguards,

historically available for Italian workers, will no longer protect them from hostile employers and co-workers—rendering them all vulnerable and precarious.

#### **4.6 Mobbed by Her Staff: The Case of Michela**

The ideological undertones of the film, though not the seamless narrative, resonate with the lived realities of mobbing. In April 2005, I met Michela Lorenzetti who had already met the two other members of the mobbing clinic present that day, Daniele and Helena. This clinic was staffed mostly with women university affiliates and local volunteers, often with a background in counseling or the social sciences. We met on a weekday afternoon in a small room, lovingly furnished with two soft sofas and low lighting that made it a warm and comfortable space. I was joined by Daniele, a young graduate in his late 20s, who became involved in the clinic to pursue studies in clinical psychology and secure his post-graduate internship. Daniele was feeling tired and feverish and remained very quiet for most of our meeting. Helena was in her mid-50s and had established some seniority among her colleagues given her extensive trade union experience and long-time involvement in the labor rights and women's movements in Italy.

Michela was employed with a lifelong contract at a university-affiliated teaching hospital in Padua as a staff coordinator for approximately fifty therapists in the physical and rehabilitative therapy ward. Michela was in her late forties, with blonde hair and turquoise blue eyes framed by black plastic-rimmed glasses. This day, Michela had come to talk about how the group of physical therapists that she supervised, together with hospital administrators, were mobbing her. As she began to talk, tears streamed down her face and she said, "I decided to change jobs and quit." Helena gently requested that she begin by telling us a bit more about her present job. Michela slowly admitted that she had been mobbed by the workers in her ward for a number of years, a group predominantly of

women. Lately the situation had become quite grave and insufferable. Michela clarified that she reported to Dr. Sanceni, the administrative head of this division, who had recently received a hand-written letter from five members of her ward, calling for a meeting to discuss problems and the negative report regarding Michela sent to the hospital's union. Doing this, the group had skipped over the medical administrator Dr. Orbi, who had been more supportive of her position and closer to her status in the hospital hierarchy. Michela described how the meeting had been a series of "insults" directed at her, to which she "shut up" or silenced herself upon the advice of Dr. Sanceni. Somehow, she said, she documented the meeting and recorded minutes of each complaint.

Some of the issues raised included: the problem of compensating staff for overtime hours, accusations that Michela wrote false disciplinary letters about the staff and that she was being "oppressive" about tardiness. But, she added, shaking her head and searching for tissues: "They clock in and then they go change. But I can't schedule a patient at seven, when they come in at seven fifteen."

Helena reminded her gently that workers required to wear uniforms have the right to change during work hours. Michela added:

Another woman goes on vacation in two weeks. They all have to be equal to one another for treating patients. I say, 'I'll put you in the pediatric ward. Exchange shifts between group members. One person per ward, so there'll be continuity of therapists. I can change with you one time, two times, but not three! It's the patient's right!

She raised her voice and spoke in the first-person, as if she were telling one of the therapists directly. Helena nodded gently and met her gaze, "Sometimes you have to decide whether to be well yourself, or to follow the rules. You can't be so heroic for something that doesn't involve you." Michela read from her minutes and cited workers, one of whom said "I've only learned to justify myself (and my actions)," "I've been here for two years and I've given



everything and received nothing,” and “It’s a difficult work environment. We should have more meetings.” Michela felt that the meeting itself represented a collective attempt to coerce her into leaving her position as coordinator. These complaints about Michela suggested to me that these workers, most likely a combination of short-term and long-term workers, were struggling with a more hostile work environment and the anxieties of a new organization of labor. Just as Anna had become the “face” of the male factory workers’ precariousness in the film, was Michela held responsible (mistakenly) for the deeply felt insecurity of her staff?

In defense of her writing disciplinary letters, or reports to hospital administrators regarding behavioral or administrative problems among staff, Michela described a recent event. One therapist on her staff had been missing in the division for two hours only to be seen later re-entering hospital grounds on her moped. When confronted, the employee claimed she was in the bathroom and so, Michela explained, she received a disciplinary letter for her second unjustified absence. She wiped tears from her face, and blew her nose: “There are people who don’t realize that patients are people, and these are people that don’t like being controlled, but it’s the company that wants this. I didn’t choose to be the coordinator!” In Michela’s narrative of mobbing, she herself is the subject of hospital regulations— she is the enforcer of norms related to attendance, tardiness, patient treatment, and scheduling. When workers do not abide by hospital policy, Michela, as unit coordinator, takes on the role of discipliner and enforcer of hospital rules. It is precisely at this moment that mobbing emerges. Michela recognized workers on her staff as calling upon hospital administrators to punish or mob her because of her desire and capacity to implement and enforce regulations. Michela, in other words, seemed to be mobbing them because she represented the negative aspects of the (faceless) workplace structure. Michela, in turn,

received the brunt of their hostilities and viewed the hospital administrators as necessarily complicit with this harassment.

Helena asked what they suggested at this meeting. Michela said they wanted further divisions and to have additional professional levels between the role of coordinator and the therapists, to “create bureaucracy between them.” Michela concluded her story by describing how she had received a letter recently from a hospital administrator saying she would have to be “shadowed” by a psychologist. This meant that a psychologist would closely monitor every decision made by Michela and observe her every action with her staff. This represented the pinnacle offence, the one that most humiliated and her, the one that she considered a cruel attack on her competencies as therapist and manager. Holding the rough draft of her resignation letter in her hand, she said: “I have to get away. Tomorrow I’m writing (them). I’m quitting.”

Helena looked at her and leaned forward, and in a gentle, but insistent tone, just above a whisper said: “You need to allow yourself a break. Tomorrow go and get sick leave and go on vacation. You can’t go on like this. But do not quit. Okay, Michela? *Do not quit.*” Helena affirmed that it was not her fault but what probably happened was that the employees had filed a complaint about her to the administration and the trade union, so the hospital was simply trying to appease the workers, to avoid further “political” conflict. In other words, Helena interpretation was that Michela was being mobbed only as a way for the hospital administrators to discipline and monitor her staff. Deploying this narrative, Helena convinced Michela that the mobbing was *not* due to her intellectual or emotional capacities or failures, but rather due to a macro-institutional practice of conflict aversion and union appeasement. A half-hearted smile brightened Michela’s face, if briefly, and she said there wasn’t anyone who would be able to substitute for her while she was gone. Grinning,

Helena pointed out that they wouldn't have anyone for a very long time if she decided to quit. Seeming convinced, Michela nodded again, gathered her belongings and headed out of the clinic.

Two days later I discussed Michela's case with Daniele and Helena. Helena said she thought Michela had an "overactive superego" and a "fragile identity" which made her care about hospital regulations to an extreme degree: "She tends towards identifying with the institution." Daniele noted that she seemed to talk about the hospital as if it were another person. Both agreed that they tended to side with the workers' point of view, which made Michela's case more difficult as she was the coordinator of the group. I said that it seemed to me she had high standards for the way in which her division should be run. When I expressed this point of view, Helena and Daniele smiled at each other, and Helena joked that my opinion reflected my "being American," in that Americans idealize the rules and believe they should be enforced. I found that many Italians believed that rules and regulations in the United States are followed, and viewed Italy as a nation of collective improvisation of law and rule. Sighing, Helena concluded, "The public sector is full of calumnies, terrible organization— [it's] a dump full of mobbing."

One week later the three of us met again with Michela at the clinic. She had come from a meeting with the medical administrator, hospital administrator Dr. Orbi, and Dr. Trattini, the psychologist who had been asked to shadow her. Dr. Orbi had scheduled this meeting in order to take the next steps in reorganizing her division and assigning Dr. Trattini to assist Michela. They had no plans to demote her, and as Helena explained to Daniele and me, public sector tasks are legally protected after a three-month period.

"I said," Michela began, "I'd like time to reflect. He (Dr. Orbi) knows that I've always worked for service and for the patient so I would not be disrespected in front of

everyone. We are here to discuss this and —I’ve been crucified.” Helena told her that she was mistaken in trying to be “too democratic” and advised: “You didn’t show them your iron fist and they hurt you.” Helena expressed a growing tendency to expect that worker mobilize tactics of self-defense and aggression as preliminary ways to protect against conflicts and acts of aggression by co-workers. In this way, Helena’s understanding of mobbing adhered to a Leftist understanding that precariousness made workers strike out at one another—*mors tua, vita mia*.

Michela continued, describing how the administrators had reprimanded her and reminded her how “many opportunities” she had had to be more collaborative with workers. Administrators will often blame employees for individual failure and neglect to recognize structural or collective difficulties. Michela was outraged because she felt she had done everything to uphold the regulations of the hospital, only to be then punished for not being collaborative with workers. She got overwhelmed and began to cry, her words addressing Dr. Orbi: “What did you want (from me)? Suicide? Not that, not that.” It was horribly clear that these events meant extreme pain, sadness and depression for Michela. Michela had great trust in Dr. Orbi and felt that his inability to protect her from both her staff and hospital administrators represented a painful betrayal.

Michela said that she believed it was the ineffectiveness of the hospital administration that sabotaged her authority within the division: “They don’t do anything. Basically, everyone does whatever they want.” There had been a therapist who had treated seven patients in just three and a half hours, which meant, she “ran through” all of them. “What do I do? I write her up and it doesn’t matter. She says, ‘Whatever, I’ll go on because she (Michela) can’t do anything.’” Michela had come to see the lack of rule enforcement by the hospital as an explicit and hostile act of aggression against her.

Michela wrote the clinic emails during this time, while she wrote the following to me, Helena and Daniele:

Hello everyone! [...] I'm quite disoriented...I don't know if I can continue to stay here...I keep having the urge to throw up every time I come to work. [...] I spoke with Dr. Orbi and I don't understand if he knows more than what he's telling me or if he actually can't do more than he's doing. [...] He can't "sell me" or "leave me" in the hands of people who use their power to delegate the faction's privileges or the privileges of acquaintances or friends. We are at a breaking point that is so strong that I am convinced I am truly not able to manage a department that takes *as a rule the very absence of rules*. Besides that today I got the confirmation that a physical therapist who shares my work, has asked for a transfer and another has retired. Another one will graduate [...] and he'll leave too...maybe it's better that I get out of here before I get hit with having made the personnel (want to) escape, as people are already starting to say. I talked with Doctor Xelli [...] She put her hand on my shoulder, she told me that she understood me, she told me that she was sorry, that I don't deserve this, that everything is horrible, that they've behaved like vultures...but that she can never say what she thinks out loud, nor what's she's heard because she has to live in this place for many many years to come. (Email communication, April 2005, emphasis mine)

Michela's frank testimony refers to a group she calls the "faction," in the sense of a political group constituted by physical therapists in her division with the hostile campaign to oust her. In this letter, we also see how Michela is well-aware of the heightened anxiety of the situation which leads to further accusations—that it was she who will be blamed for employees' retirements and resignations. She has been socialized into a new climate within the hospital in which she is deeply suspicious and doubtful about the actions of all those around her—the administrators may co-opt workers' resignations as leverage against her, her boss may be hiding more information and people may say things just to protect their public personas. The idea that the hospital has become a place that takes "as a rule the very absence of rules" also attests to the sense of day-to-day precariousness that Michela feels—nothing is predictable, there are no logical or rational orders. This precariousness clearly has real effects also for Michela's health, her daily nausea and "disorientation." But even if these reactions may be viewed as "adapting" to this persecutory environment, these

psychophysical manifestations also prevent Michela from showing herself to be adaptable to new work stressors. At the same time, what is evident in Michela's case, from what she told me at the clinic and in her letter, is someone who believed she exhibited a willingness and desire to work. In other words, she expressed an ability to perform as a flexible worker.

#### *4.6.1 Michela's Sick Leave and Re-entry*

Three weeks after our first meeting, Daniele, Helena, Michela and I met in the comfortable counseling room of the clinic in mid-afternoon on a Wednesday. When Michela entered the room I was surprised at how relaxed and radiant she appeared. Tan and smiling, she presented us with some marzipan (almond paste) sweets from her stay at her husband's family house in southern Italy. However, after having returned the prior Monday, she was asked to meet again with Dr. Trattini. Her calm disposition soon shifted into an upset and anxious state, crying as she recounted the events: "It's a punishment if I leave now." Unlike her first visit, she expressed how quitting would put herself at a great disadvantage because she would risk losing retirement and health benefits. She decided to ask to be transferred within the hospital to be coordinator of a medical research program, largely funded by the European Union. She would never leave her patients, she said, though she regretted leaving Dr. Orbi who had been an esteemed supervisor for Michela and disappointed her greatly: "He always did whatever was in his interests, and never did what he could have done (for me)."

Michela also informed us that she had spoken to a lawyer and friend about the possibility of suing for mobbing. She asked us whether or not her case could be pursued legally as mobbing and Helena answered her.<sup>8</sup> Helena responded: "In the future, if you want

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<sup>8</sup> Though I presented myself as an anthropologist within these clinics interested in studying mobbing, I was often concomitantly indexed as "mobbing expert" by both visitors and research collaborators. In such cases, I would explain that I was more interested in understanding how mobbing was defined in terms of each person and case, not imposing my ideas

to press charges, you have to get a medical certificate from a neurologist, who will prescribe meds, and you write about all the existing conditions.” Michela nodded: “I have all the certified letters, meeting minutes, and I told a university doctor about my disturbances.”

Helena helped Michela make of list of the steps she would need to take in the coming weeks, including, 1) asking for a written invitation to every meeting with Mr. Trattini; 2) seeking a legal doctor who could verify her physical disturbances; 3) finding out more about her plan of being research coordinator, and, 4) continuing to write and log ongoing and past occurrences.

The next day Michela then wrote us the following letter:

I hope that this solution to stop working as coordinator and continue to work here will be possible, without having to lose financially, it is comforting to me. [...] So, when I came to the division this morning, I received an official letter from Trattini, formally stamped, having the object “convocation for first meeting for the revision of the organizational-relational model [...] Objectives: verify and evaluate the relational model, verify and evaluate the organizational model, individualization and planning of the following plans to improve points 1 and 2.” I don’t know what kind of action would be best to take...the letter seemed rather formal and it depressed me a bit.

Here, Michela reveals yet another common strategy used in mobbing: exchanging formal letters. Doing so leaves a material trail in the case of future contestations and works to the advantage of mobbees when they need to demonstrate a deep history of abuse. Yet, for Michela and many other mobbees, the official language of the letters maintains an emotional distance that produces a greater sense of alienation. What we also see from this was how the hospital administration evoked the rhetoric of improvement, “individualization” and “organizational-relational models” as a frame for creating an ethos of worker self-monitoring and improvement. In addition, managing the risks of workers would

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or definitions of it. This view, however, was clearly deviant from the notion of the mobbing clinic, where expert advice about the existence of mobbing was dispensed freely.

be left in the hands of a specially-trained expert staff (Burcell 1996) able to effectively “evaluate the relational model” of Michela and her staff.

I met with Michela and Helena again in mid-July. When Michela came in, even more tan and relaxed than we had seen her previously. She joked that she had “lost all her wrinkles” because she had finally given herself time to rest. She was given twenty days of sick leave, after which she returned to work for two days, and then took an additional twenty working days of sick leave with another doctor’s note, taking her to early July. She said that she had trained one of the physical therapists, one of the few men in the unit, to take on her role, and that now he was the new object of criticism and calumny within the office. She was working and writing letters to get her transfer to the new position passed as quickly as possible. Suddenly she turned to me and said in dialect: “Dogs don’t eat other dogs,” (*Canon magna de can*). The adage refers to the idea of tightly-woven informal networks among high-level people in an economic or political arena—clientelism and cronyism. She suggested that she was faced with greater difficulties in getting her new position passed because of the off-record collaboration of hospital administrators. The adage works within a moral economic framework, conveying the idea that workers are more likely to be exploited because of close personal ties between the corrupt class of politicians, executives and officials who collectively protect one another from contestation. She reasserted her notion of economic justice—cronyism had no place in the workplace.

For Michela, her staff at the hospital remained difficult to understand. They had agreed to a five-day work week, alternating one Saturday per month each to accommodate weekend clients. Recently, she added, they had met again and wanted to return to the six-day workweek. Michela looked exasperated: “What does it cost them? They are driving him (the new coordinator) crazy.” Helena shook her head: “It’s useless to just stay there to be



mobbed.” In August 2005, Michela’s new job had not yet commenced though she hoped it would soon. For the time being, she was collecting documents for a possible legal case on mobbing, though she had put her intentions to press charges on hold.

#### **4.7 Consequences for Rule Enforcers**

Michela’s experience of mobbing included the banding together of mostly women workers for whom she served as coordinator. For Michela, tardiness and mistreatment of patients were treated as regulatory violations and she disciplined workers according to hospital standards. However, abiding by institutional regulations, particularly when regulations had not been consistently enforced at higher administrative levels, seemed capricious to the therapists on Michela’s unit. Michela made it clear that many conflicts involved a lapse between her expectations for rule abiding and those of the workers. For Michela her staff’s efforts to thwart hospital rules and the inability of the hospital to enforce regulations worked to doubly endanger her job. She viewed the hospital administrators as the ones who originated this harassment, both in the generation of the rules she was obliged to enforce, and in their inability to reinforce her disciplinary actions for workers. By becoming the agent for broader hospital organization and discipline, Michela embodied hospital regulations and norms and, accordingly, was positioned to be a target of transgression and disobedience. Her staffs transgression and disobedience, moreover, was structured by their own precariousness such that Michela became the figure held responsible. Here we see that the neoliberal ideology of independent and autonomous worker-citizens also sustains an idea that actions *should* be traceable to single actors. Michela, then, rather than the faceless structure of labor, became the recognizable agent of neoliberalism.

Michela’s experience resonates with that of Anna. There is something quite subtle about the effect of Anna’s new tasks as photocopy monitor, work trainer and warehouse

supervisor. In fact, with most of these new responsibilities, she becomes subject to anger and resentment from colleagues, whether it is because she never takes a day-off, monitors the copy machine or times the tasks of the factory workers. In a high-anxiety and precarious climate of many workplaces, most employees already feel threatened by the potential of corporate restructuring and bear a constant fear of job loss. Positioning women as rule-enforcers, then, situates them in a very precarious role, more vulnerable to co-worker and manager hostilities and persecution. Women are positioned as orchestrating others' precariousness even while they are simultaneously made precarious themselves.

These findings suggest a new kind of trend counter what other research has shown. Scholars have carefully demonstrated that women, often cases of industrial or low-skill laborers, have been objects of corporate discipline and panoptical space (Freeman 2001; Salzinger 2000, 2003). In the case of mobbing, however, the practice of surveillance becomes two-fold. Women are subject to the corporate panopticon, monitoring, meetings, and regulations. At the same time, however, women become visible agents of the corporate surveillance and discipline, with the effect of reproducing often patriarchal hierarchies. When colleagues identify women as complicit with institutional regulations, they become marked, mistreated and further marginalized. Rather than direct action towards the institution, workers in both Anna's firm and Michela's hospital directed their anger and frustration at these women. In these neoliberal workplace environments, Anna and Michela have become the subjects of various acts of corporate surveillance that led to gendered conflicts among peers. We are perhaps witnessing a new corporate strategy—situating women as the subject, rather than the object, of surveillance which, in turn, results in their marginalization in ever more subtle and indirect ways.

In Michela's case, she learned not only the futility of applying hospital regulations but also the futility of her own productivity. In June, she sent us this attachment entitled, "An Ant's Story" and said it reminded her of her own story.<sup>9</sup> The narrative recounts the life of a "productive and happy" ant who works on his own, without supervision. The general manager hires a supervisor and, in turn, each new hire produces a new 'need' for another position, multiplying the hierarchical divisions within the company. The resulting environment becomes so large that it merits an expensive study to analyze the company's rising high costs. When the results of the study conclude that the company is bogged down by a surplus of employees, the general manager fires Ant. Here is the moral to the story:

Moral: Don't ever get it in your head to be the productive and happy Ant. It is preferable to be useless and incompetent. Incompetent people don't need a supervisor, everyone knows. If, despite everything, you are productive, don't ever show you are happy. They'll never forgive you. Occasionally make up some mistake, something that gets you some compassion. If, despite everything, you commit yourself to being the productive and happy Ant, own your own business, at least you won't have the yellow jackets, roaches, spiders, flies, crickets, suckerfish and owls at your back, and above all, they won't be able to get rid of you with the excuse that what "their" lack of productivity costs depends on "your" presence in the production line!!

This fable, fitting of global capitalism, articulates the constant revision of cultural understandings of bureaucracy, workplace dynamics and productivity. Michela's struggles with hospital administration and self-understanding as "productive and happy" worker parallel the Ant's story. The fable's humor relates to a broader Western cultural phenomenon of "audit cultures," a heightened attention to monitoring, accountability, and micro-organization (Strathern 2000). It is a fable suited to the work ideologies of late capitalism insofar as workers learn that productivity can also be risky and self-jeopardizing. Worker's *lack* of skill and ability may become effective shield against increased control and

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<sup>9</sup> I used [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) as an rough measure of its circulation in Italy, finding 433 results matching a long quotation from the story in January 2006.

discipline by employers. The “happy and productive” ant becomes a figure relegated to the past in that he represents a moral imaginary of intense labor as satisfying and rewarding. Within this story is also the call for workers to “own their own businesses” to themselves become capitalists, to self-manage their own labor. It is a very different kind of interpellation in that it does not call for collective action or union intervention, but to adopt strategies and face the market head on—and individually. The story of Ant is a didactic moment in which worker-citizens learn how to become effective workers—flawed, unassuming workers remain at work while highly skilled workers may be ousted.

#### **4.8 A Confrontation for Giulia**

What other social expectations and moral orders does this economic transition disrupt? Like Michela, Giulia Rossi also found Helena’s mobbing center and also like Michela, she found that what she had expected at work no longer seemed to hold true. Giulia, a woman in her early forties, worked as a technical assistant in a university social science department and held a lifelong contract. Technical assistants, unlike administrative assistants, were in charge of telephones, photocopying, file-keeping, maintaining office supplies and general office assistance. At the first meeting with Helena and me, Giulia seemed very uneasy and nervous, looking down, shifting in the chair, swaying back and forth. Though her work responsibilities were multiple, Giulia was particularly upset that lately she had been “checking the toilet paper, checking the paper towels, watering the plants, replacing toner and doing photocopies.” Poor relations with colleagues who she felt maliciously forced her to do these less desirable jobs was part of the problem: “The department just wants more “cococo.” Here, Giulia referred to a new contract that had been passed by the Biagi Laws, a “continuing and coordinated contract of continuing and coordinated collaboration,” (*contratto a collaborazione coordinate continuative*) which was a contract

for an ongoing, though not full-time, work by members of professional associations, similar to an American contract for consulting work. From the outset, Giulia framed her case of mobbing in the context of a broadly shifting workspace in which the value of short-term, temporary workers was a specter of instability for long-term workers like Giulia.

In order to pass the to next level, and be assured of avoiding what she viewed as menial labor, Giulia would have to learn to be proficient in Word and Excel. Giulia told us: “They told me to apply for the next level, but then I have to promise to be able to do those jobs.” Moreover, Giulia viewed the application process as corrupt and fixed, seeing the chair’s assurance to promote her if she applied as merely an additional “blackmail” (*ricatto*), adding “it makes sense for them to keep me so they can keep doing whatever they want.” Her comments revealed a deep mistrust of the departmental authority and fear that she would inevitably be exploited. She insisted that she heard the chair say he “did some mobbing” (*abbiamo fatto un po’ di mobbing*) to favor other workers: “It’s a real plot, I didn’t invent it!” The new position wasn’t a very desirable option for Giulia. More than that, she asserted: “I want more autonomy, more flexibility.” Paradoxically, then, Giulia’s desire for a flexible position reveals how actors shape and reconstitute the same ideologies that exclude and marginalize them.

Helena calmly reminded her that she could, alternatively, refuse to do the jobs people asked her: “Don’t do something. It may help you defend your identity, [show] that you can still resist and they haven’t walked over you.” Giulia responded: “My psychiatrist gives me meds, and I go see a psychologist once or twice a week.” Her response was hard for me to connect to Helena’s suggestion. In my fieldnotes, I specifically wrote that, in effect, Giulia’s responses seemed to jump unexpectedly from one point to another. Giulia appeared to have

read Helena's suggestion as a coping strategy for her current situation and remarked that, in effect, so too were her medications.

Within the next two weeks, Helena had organized a meeting for Giulia and her boss, Antonio Bartali, professor and chair of their department. Before the meeting began, Helena whispered to me that Antonio had asked her to photocopy a book on mobbing just days prior. I found that Helena and Giulia agreed that the boss's request was meant to be read as direct and hostile threat of mobbing for Giulia. They believed, it also seemed to me, that he was reading the book (a history of mobbing and its effects) in order to effectively practice mobbing. He had then written a letter to university administrative offices describing Giulia as unstable, and requested her transfer from the department. Giulia was content about the transfer, hoping it would offer her additional "guarantees" of better employment.

With Antonio's arrival, Helena opened the dialogue with: "She would like to help build a new path." Giulia cupped her face in her hands, and held her oversized handbag on her lap, not making eye contact with the director. Antonio explained that the transfer might actually mean a raise for her, adding: "You were doing fine with us." Giulia, almost all at once, raised her voice:

With Marco and Paola! There's been a little mobbing. Ever since they arrived it has been the end for me! Answer the phone, the phone was broken, files are missing. You were all against me and I had no support. Even you said, 'Yes, we have been doing some mobbing.'

Antonio looked perplexed: "I said this? No." Giulia continued: "They don't give me access to any information. I get no training, no real and actual training. They spy on my telephone text messages!" She felt that her requests to take vacation days were "always denied, the others get to go," adding, "I am always penalized, tied to my co-worker's relational problems."

As Giulia went on, it became clear that much of day-to-day conflict surrounded her relationship with two new colleagues, centrally Paola and Marco, and accused Antonio of being complicit with her mistreatment. The arrival of new precarious workers in effect reminded Giulia of her own precarious position. Events in the workplace were then attributed to their arrival. Indeed many of Giulia's frustrations pointed to a new normalized organization of labor in Italy that results in the continuous movement of semi-permanent workers. In addition to being often "by herself," she found the constantly changing personnel was equally frustrating: "I can't ever manage to be with just a fixed person!" Here, "fixed person" (*persona fissa*) refers to worker who would hold a long-term, stable contract. She also added: "I was the last to know the department was moving!" At the same time, however, her changing work responsibilities were also highly frustrating. While Antonio pointed out: "But we gave you a chance for mobility." Giulia rebutted: "Changing toilet paper is not a work responsibility!" At the same time, with reference to most of the colleagues that Giulia described as having mobbed her, Antonio explained their situational or health problems, one had "really big problems," another went "to the psychiatric hospital," and a third saw "a psychiatrist." His statements echoed Giulia's own recognition of "relational problems" of those that surrounded her. He seemed to suggest that working with emotionally and mentally strained colleagues had, almost inevitably, produced an environment in which Giulia felt ill at ease herself.

Antonio did ask her, and quite kindly, what she wanted to do in terms of her role in the department, or whether she preferred to accept the offer to be transferred. He said they may need someone to head the front office. Giulia however, immediately refused, citing "the heaviness of so many hours with the public" as her reason. Just when Antonio seemed more willing to discuss other solutions, Giulia seemed even more nervous and angry. She

began to yell at him, and spoke about a previous raise she had received in the department: “You told me you helped me with the raise! But I did it all myself, no one helped me! And you dared to put that in my face (*rinfacciarmi*)! You’re not professional!” Antonio looked rather uncomfortable and quiet. Helena broke in, offering to keep discussing options with Giulia before she made any final decisions about the job offer. After they both left, Daniele looked relieved: “I was worried she was going to start slapping him.”

#### *4.8.1 Conflict between Mobbing Counselors*

Giulia’s case engendered a crisis within the mobbing clinic surrounding how Helena had handled her case. While the clinic workers were mostly volunteers, it is important to recognize there their authority as mobbing specialists was at stake in how the mobbing cases were managed. Moreover, these women also worked at the same institution as Giulia’s boss and much of the anxiety was due to the fact that he was called into the clinic. We seem to be seeing the reverberations of precariousness precisely because workers, including mobbing experts, must nonetheless face anxieties about their own employment. Publicly shaming this department head might have had real effects for Helena and her colleagues in their respective positions.

Helena, above all, but Daniele as well were highly criticized by members of the center’s staff for taking Giulia’s case and for setting up a direct confrontation with the chair. An urgent meeting of the entire clinical staff was called, and Helena called me personally to come and attend. Calling her “psychotic,” staff members of the clinic said it was well-known university knowledge that Giulia was “unstable,” “depressed,” and on “psychiatric medication.” Helena, however, informed her colleagues that her ingestion of psychopharmaceuticals did not mean she did not deserve better treatment at work. For her colleagues, however, Helena had erred in inviting an esteemed professor to the clinic for



talks, especially because Giulia was considered a mentally “unstable” worker. To this, Helena retorted that her colleagues judged her only because of class differences they perceived between her, in an administrative university position, and Antonio, a faculty chair. Denying class as a motivator, the rest of the staff focused on Helena’s failure to confirm their consent before setting up the meeting. I was reprimanded for not having “reminded Helena to follow protocol” and the continuation of Daniele’s contract was put on the table for discussion. Though this conflict merits greater analysis, I mention these dynamics briefly to illustrate a few salient aspects of Giulia’s case and the mobbing industry in general. The mobbing industry is itself a gendered field, with women holding positions as psychologists, clinical staff and consultants, while men are generally mobbing-specialized lawyers, trade union workers, medical doctors or public health workers. Notably, mobbing-specialized psychologists and psychiatrists known on national level, such as Renato Gilioli and Harald Ege, are men. What this tells us, however, by and large, is that there is a division in the production of knowledge about mobbing, with women centered more as first-responders, while men tended to play a greater role in the production and dissemination of knowledge (medical, state and legal) about mobbing.

Giulia’s case of mobbing was framed in terms of her own mental instability and medical consumption. While in Chapter 6, I take up the question of sickness and mobbing very carefully, it bears saying immediately that, for Giulia, mental health was a primary measurement through which the integrity of her mobbing claims were evaluated. Much of this results in a process of depoliticizing mobbing, especially as it becomes entrenched with women and with workers already, or becoming, mentally ill. As was evident in Giulia’s discussion with Antonio the mobbers were also being pathologized, and her alienation a product of their ongoing mental health struggles. What was less emphasized by mobbing

clinic staff, except by Helena, was the extent to which Giulia's rather awkward social persona, and psychological pathologies, actually positioned her as a more likely candidate for mobbing to begin with.

Giulia, however, like Michela and Anna, was a woman who showed a willingness to work, someone who desired greater "autonomy" and "flexibility." Practices that deprived her of information, distanced her from colleagues, carefully monitored her daily routine and created obstacles to her advancement were precisely those which she called mobbing. Much of Giulia's situation might also be examined as the product of a particular kind of work environment that suffered from both rigid protectionism and neoliberal reform. For lifelong contract holders, job security does come often with less career mobility and limited options for training and advancement (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004). Yet, market-oriented reforms created the legal conditions for the department to hire more short-term workers. As such, Giulia had to constantly recreate and forge new working relationships such that she felt, at once, overwhelmed and yet isolated. For Giulia, the "sword of Damocles" was her fear and apprehension that departmental job offers, promotions and holidays were necessarily a means of further exploitation and persecution. But the problem is beyond the intentionality of her co-workers and boss. For Giulia, much of the suffering of mobbing was the degree to which every practice and initiative at work seemed saturated with undesirable risks and outcomes. These risks and uncertainties were managed and mediated, in part, through the relationships with her boss and new colleagues.

#### **4.10 The Labor of Mobbing**

Is mobbing gender discriminatory downsizing? To answer a simple "yes" positions neoliberal capitalism as a rational and logical system. The stories of mobbing I have presented here show that flexibility is precarious insofar as the terms are constantly shifting;

productivity, willingness, rule enforcement are not necessarily safeguards. What also helps to break down assumptions that workers are alienated only as a means for corporate cost-saving is the sheer labor that mobbing appears to require. The existence of mobbing reveals that capitalism does *not* proceed according to fixed and stable logics. Rather it seems very much to be generated by the wide-spread precariousness and ambivalence that pervades Italy's work environments. What does appear to be relatively stable, however, is the articulation of the feminine with inflexibility, made robust by invoking an authoritative collection of emotional regimes, medical models and notions of motherhood and family. The effect is the production of and naturalization of flawed neoliberal workers as gendered—who suffer severe consequences, in some cases, for being made to stand in as the agents of neoliberal change and, in others, for being asymmetrically excluded from full social recognition as flexible workers.

## Chapter 5      Emotional Regimes, Worker Discipline

### 5.1 Emotions, Language and Social Change

“He’ll also be bloody pissed off at you but he still greets you, he smiles at you, he shakes your hand, but inside he’s thinking about killing you.” With these words, Italian engineer Alberto described the executive officer of his company DataGisco and identified a set of particular emotions—feigned compassion and masked anger. How can we make sense of this utterance? To begin, one must recognize that Italian companies have become sites of accusation and anxiety for many workers, as neoliberal reform has led to plummeting job security and an increased chance of job termination (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004). The heightened “risk regime” (Beck 1999) of labor has created a sense of precariousness for all Italian workers. Alberto, for one, believed he was being coercively ousted by the executive officer’s next-in-command. Yet he did not define this as “mobbing.” His case, then, becomes a means to examine why certain social actors may not deploy the term. Moreover, unpacking what Alberto says about emotions reveals workers’ heightened sensitivities to colleagues’ and managers’ emotional styles and communicative practices—as they could represent the onset of mobbing, harassment and job ousting—and ultimately imminent social and economic insecurity. Whereas in the last chapter, I described how mobbing as a gendered cultural discourse and set of practices, this chapter invites a closer look at micro-level cultural production and affect as well as the investigation of practices of isolation and exclusion that are *not* named as mobbing.

What speakers say about their own and other’s emotions tells a great deal about their historical and political economic contexts, and how they understand and relate to one another (Lutz and Abu-Lughod, 1990; Goodwin and Goodwin 2000, Ahearn 2001, Ahmed

2004). Moreover, day-to-day dialogues between social actors play a role in socializing actors to likes, dislikes and “affective schemas” (Ochs et. al 1996: 23). The language Alberto uses must not be viewed as an isolated descriptive, but rather as a form of social action that reveals and reproduces an emotional regime, one in part shaped by heightened risks and uncertainties in the workplace (Beck 1999). A close investigation of affective language offers a fruitful way to uncover the overlaps between saying, doing and feeling.

Often the object of interdisciplinary inquiry, emotions are situated as important points of intersection, at once individual and social, mental and bodily, personally embodied and collective (Besnier 1989, Mitchell 1990, Giddens 1992, Ahmed 2005). Scholars tend to agree that emotions defy dualistic boundaries and categories, and thus represent an area of human experience that cross-sects various domains (Illouz 1997). Particular emotions, woven complexly into specific bodily, social and political orders, thus, have their own complex histories (Stearns 1994, Stearns 2006, Orr 2006). Wary of Western discourses that construe emotions as innate, spontaneously occurring and natural, Catherine Lutz (1985) has pointed out how a “cultural knowledge system implicit in the notion of depression and other emotions is necessarily evaluative” (66). How emotions inhabit morally and politically charged spaces has therefore been increasingly the focus of inquiry. In recent years, along with the greatly expanded study of globalization and transnationalism, scholars have delved deeper into the economic and political aspects of emotion (Lindholm 2004): how emotion is commodified and exchanged (Brennan 2004, Hochschild 1983, 2003), and how socioeconomic change transforms cultural understandings of sexual intimacy, love and marriage (Kendall 1996, Rebhun 1999, Ahearn 2001, Hirsch 2003). Additionally, studies have shown how emotions play critical roles in social movements (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001) and institutional organization and development (White 2005).

Studies of language and emotion have been also been a productive way to analyze social change and the production of meaning (Lutz 1988; Irvine 1990). In particular, research has also contributed to the nexus of study around linguistic practice, emotions and economics by examining, for example, how economic development plays a role in the emergence of new linguistic ways of expressing emotion (Ahearn 2001), as well as how emotional expression and performance allow actors to negotiate and critically evaluate their social and political positions (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; Briggs 1993). Yet social actors may paradoxically reconstitute differentiation, recreating the same structures that sustain their own alienation and marginalization (Kulick 1998b, Kulick and Klein 2003). The study of language and emotions, I seek to show, in the context of Italy's changing labor market, can expose how transnational economic structures play a role in what many actors experience as most intimate: how they feel. And, in recursive fashion, I attend to how emotions structure the kinds of meanings that actors give to their jobs and the loss of their jobs, engendering, in turn, specific labor practices.

In Chapter 2, I described the remarks of Elenora Pagnan, one of DataGisco's top executives: "And therefore I think, without a doubt, employees always have this sword of Damocles, this constant fear of ...not having your own job." It was here that Elenora summed up one aspect of the emotional regimes at work at DataGisco: fear. How and when human actors express emotions is a product not only of communicative practice, but also of broader social contexts. Laura Ahearn (2001) examined how Nepalis redefined love in connection with economic development programs that played a role in raising literacy rates, particularly for women, and in facilitating the emergent practice of love-letter writing. Situating the transformation of an emotion in the context of everyday language use, she reinstates the importance of linguistic practices and historical contexts and "the

interconnections between text and subtext—between love letters and the social environment in which they are written and read” (Ahearn 2001: 48; see also Ahearn 2003). In Italy, the generation of fear in the workplace seems to part of a new emotional regime, one requiring workers to grapple with high-risk and uncertainty (Beck 1999) because of neoliberal economic reforms that facilitated downsizing, outsourcing and subcontracting of labor. As unexpected layoffs and coerced resignations have become more common, accurate monitoring of one’s own and other’s emotions in the workplace becomes entangled with the question of maintaining one’s job, and one’s prized economic security and social well-being.

This chapter anchors a discussion of emotion, gender and language in a conflict between Alberto and his supervisor, Roberta. By juxtaposing multiple perspectives of employees within the company, I use an ethnographic and dialogic approach to best approximate the lived complexities of mobbing. I begin by framing a discussion of emotives, words about or informed by emotions that act on the world, and highlight the importance of gender in interpreting such statements (Reddy 2001). Following this conceptual exploration, I examine Alberto’s work conflict through his narration and those of his close colleagues in order to rethink the workings of fear and anger in Italy’s neoliberal workplace.

## **5.2 Conceptualizing Language and Emotions**

In his examination of approaches to the study of emotion in cognitive psychology and anthropology, historian and anthropologist William Reddy (2001) reveals that he is deeply concerned about the place of history, or more precisely, its absence, within a constructionist framework. He instead proposes to underscore the “interaction between our emotional capacities and the unfolding of historical circumstances” through what he calls “emotional regimes” (Reddy 2001: 45). For Reddy, the notion of an emotional regime,

always historically situated and culturally variable, is a “complex of practices that establish a set of emotional norms and that sanction those who break them” (Reddy 2001: 323). Thus, emotional regimes are sets of ideals and regulations produced within particular communities and to which all individuals are subject (Reddy 2001: 62). But being subject to emotional regimes varies by culturally specific understandings of difference. Reddy’s (2001) theoretical framework shows deep concern with the politics of emotion: “A normative style of emotional management is a fundamental element of every political regime, of every cultural hegemony” (121).<sup>1</sup> How do emotional regimes uphold two kinds of hegemonic processes: gender difference and capitalist labor relations? The notion of emotives may be fruitfully expanded to delve further into this question.

Drawing from speech act theory and performative language (Austin 1975), Reddy (2001) introduces the concept of “emotives” in order to explore how speakers, in effect, *do* things with emotional words. What emotives do is perform an act of translation between emotional states and language, serving also as tools to alter, mask and emphasize emotions (Reddy 2001: 105). While Reddy does not believe that utterances about emotion are performative in the same way that performatives such as “I promise” or “I bet” are (Austin 1975), he draws the parallel to performatives in order to emphasize that emotional talk is a form of action (see also Rosaldo 1982; Hall 2000). For Austin, “I bet” was performative in that the saying was the doing—uttering “I bet” in the first-person constituted the action of, in this case, the bet. When speakers make a first-person statement about their emotions in the present tense, according to Reddy (2001), they contain three central elements: a “descriptive appearance,” “relational intent” (that is, they are oriented around particular relationships, events and actions) and “self-exploring effect” in that utterances are tied to the

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<sup>1</sup> Reddy (2001) ultimately prefers the notion of “navigation” to management when discussing emotives as it focuses less on the intentionality of the speaker and highlights the “self-altering” effects of emotives as well (122).



activation of various networks of thought (100). The latter is where Reddy builds a bridge between anthropology and cognitive psychology: “Emotion lexicons actually offer ways of talking about, of ‘describing’ the landscape of activations that currently presents itself to attention” (321). For Reddy, emotives work on a sort of culturally situated psyche and may have unpredictable effects on subjects, but are not necessarily actions in and of themselves.

My interest here is in pushing the performative aspect of emotives towards an understanding of performativity (Butler 1993), viewed as a series of actions that contribute to making and sustaining gendered subjectivities (e.g., Hall 2000, Kulick and Cameron 2003). By contrast, Reddy’s (2001) is actually quite critical of poststructuralism, viewing such theories as lacking in historical context and agency (72-76). Informed by Austin as well as Derrida (1972), Judith Butler (1993, 1997) applied the notion of performative language to gender, a process dependent on the discursive enactments—saying/doing—that continuously recite and produce a recognizable gender identity in various contexts. Emotives, understood here as productive and reflective of both emotional and gender regimes, generate and craft subjectivities and effects in which gender remains a highly salient principle of difference. Performativity, unlike simple performance, focuses on how “particular uses of language, be they authorized or not, produce particular effects and particular kinds of subjects in fields or matrices of power” (Kulick 2003: 140; see also Livia and Hall 1997, Weiss 2005). Ethnographic studies of performativity have carefully parsed the notion of performativity, highlighting its relation to agency, social change and cultural contexts (Hall 1997; Cameron 1997; Kulick 1998a).

Aligned with an interest in emotion and subjectivity, James Wilce (2003) has developed the concept of “feelings-*talk*” that helps frame the kinds of speech that emphasize meta-narratives about emotions: “When we engage in feelings-*talk* we attend closely not only

to inner feelings but also to others' reactions. Feelings-talk translates subjectivities into words" (Wilce 2003: 854). This idea by Wilce poses a problem in that it is premised, to an extent, on a notion of a subject that can be disarticulated from the language.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the idea of "translation" attends to processes of both a kind of embodied unconscious recognition of emotion, as well as the communicative practices about emotions that are simultaneously socially and symbolically constructed, altered, and monitored—not untouched "inner" sanctions. For Wilce, "*emotives* cannot be straightforward 'expressions of feeling' since they are in part responses to the pressures of emotional regimes" (Wilce 2003: 854). Also, while Reddy (2001) does not consider utterances about the emotions of a second or third party as emotives, Wilce constitutes feelings-*talk* about a third person's emotions as key in unraveling the production—and continual revision—of subjectivities (Wilce 1998).

### 5.3 Italian Gendered Management and Emotional Regimes

Prevalent gendered norms in Italy, though certainly in flux, converge on the ideal of attaining proper femininity through motherhood, care-taking and domestic realms or, and often conversely, as icons of beauty and desirability (Horn 1994, Goddard 1996, Krause 2001, Ginsborg 2003:78, Plesset 2006). Meanwhile, Italian norms of masculinity surface through the idea of men as rational actors with abundant heterosexual virility (Spackman 1996, De Grazia 1993) and public patriarchal authority (Ginsborg 2003: 105). Specific linguistic practices, such as altering tone of voice, accent or the use of dialect or standard Italian also diverge in terms of gender appropriateness (Cavanaugh 2006). Scholars have

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<sup>2</sup> The idea of the subject "before" language is an idea that goes against basic poststructuralist understandings of the subject as a product of discourse (e.g., Cameron and Kulick 2003). For example, Foucault argues: "The individual, that is, is not the *vis-à-vis* of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects" (Foucault 1980: 98). Judith Butler builds directly on this Foucauldian insight: "If 'identity' is an effect of discursive practices, to what extent is gender identity...the *effect* of a regulatory practice that can be identified as compulsory heterosexuality?" (Butler 1990: 24).

traditionally been careful about the use of Euro-American theories on affect in non-Western contexts (Lutz 1985). I further detangle assumptions about European and American as I detail Italian understandings of emotion and suggest that one cannot assume that the United States and European countries are necessarily similar. What will become clear is that while gender ideologies in the United States cast women as unable to express rage, ideologies in Italy cast women as *more* likely to express all emotions, including anger.

Normative gender ideologies extend to understandings of emotion, with feminized ideals of “calmness, cooperation, joy and tenderness,” opposing masculinized “aggression, struggle and belligerence” (Businaro et. al 2006: 80). Consider also an article by Italian psychoanalytic psychologist:

If men have, for example, a friend who's upset and is recently separated, they will try to help him by saying, 'Hey, come on! Let's go to the disco!' A woman who has a friend who's upset and recently separated will say, 'Come over and let's talk together.' [...] Men construct themselves as subjects who hold their emotions at a distance from themselves, recovering instead all of their social power in terms of self-affirmation, independence and autonomy (Arcidiacono 1999: 65).

By contrast, Arcidiacono suggests that Italian women “have to manage the hate, anger and aggression of children and adults, in order to immediately care for them” (Arcidiacono 1999: 64). These dichotomous social discourses produce different emotional styles, feminizing the tendency to share and interpret emotions and masculinizing emotional insensitivity and hostility. But what is also important here is that the feminization of emotional sensitivity also suggests specific linguistic practices, that is, women's desire to speak as an outcome of their self-evident emotional inner core, whereas men's penchant for activity over discourse is an effect of their emotions.

A similar understanding of gender, language and emotion was apparent to me at Contax, a neighboring company in Padua. In an interview in June 2003, executive Gianni Mastinini explained how he managed workers differently according to gender:

With girls you have to be a little, how can I say? A little more patient because usually girls are better, but they [...] are a little more fragile. Meanwhile, with guys you can be a little more rough. You can say, 'Like this' and that's enough. But with a girl you have to say, you say, 'Look, Noelle, it's different, it's not like this. You have to see thing in a different way.' You have to do this because women need more dialogue and guys don't. [...] You have to kind of play their friend (*far un po' d'amico.*)

Thus, what Gianni illustrates is not only divergent emotional styles, fragility versus roughness, but once again the appropriate gendered speech, verbosity versus pithiness.

When addressing his female worker, Gianni spoke directly to me as if to perform what and how he would speak to one of these workers. He softened his voice and took on a more gentle tone to approximate both the feminized language and “playing” the feminized friend role. At the same time, part of the gendered subjectivity of middle and upper class men in managing or executive positions like Gianni is one in which sensitivity is *not* expected (see Chapter 3). In Italy, the figure of the entrepreneur, business “man” is a highly masculinized category (Goddard 1996, Bruni et. al 2004: 426; Yanagisako 2002). Open hostility and anger become normalized as part of both their masculinity and corporate status. Cris, one of Gianni's sales agents whom I discussed in Chapter 3, told me that Gianni would often casually say cruel and callous remarks “as if it were nothing.” I would argue, however, that this type of linguistic practice conforms to gendered understandings both of men's emotional subjectivity and of the normative (masculinized) managerial role.

These gendered orders were present across diverse spaces. One day I accompanied DataGisco project manager Davide (whose opinions on precariousness I discussed in Chapter 3) to an off-site job location where he was in charge of making a digital archive of documents. The staff, almost all women, was rather displeased with the work that had been completed. To Davide's perturbed silence, they showed him numerous scanned images that were not satisfactory. Since the documents were historical records for the community, they

contended that even slight blurriness would compromise vital information. The conversation and their tone were rather charged and it was clear that they were both angered and frustrated with the progress so far. Davide, in turn, explained rather defensively that the scanning process was simply “imperfect,” adding that the time and resources allotted to the project were unreasonable. When, hours later, we left the site, he turned to me and exclaimed: “Do you see that women are like hyenas?” A “hyena” in Italian is often the symbol of something wild and uncontrollable—a popular television comedy sketch show is called “The Hyenas” (*Le Iene*).<sup>3</sup> Davide applied this available cultural symbol to call attention to his clients’ explosive emotional temperament, suggesting it was typical of all Italian women.

Another example of how the role of manager fits within Italy’s gendered order concerns two book publications, displayed in the bookstore together when I purchased them in 2002 (Figure 1). The first book, *Hearts of Managers: Love, Passion and Power in the Stories of 50 Golden Men of Italian Capitalism* (Setta 2002) centers on actual Italian entrepreneurs, portraying them as savvy, cosmopolitan and sexually vibrant men. The book is premised on restoring the “soft” side to the men’s hard capitalist hearts. Much of the book revolves around each man’s relationship with his current partner (girlfriend, wife, second wife), detailing his romantic practices within this heteronormative framework. What is reiterated here is that for Italian men, passion and sexuality are necessarily interlocked with their role as capitalists. However, the men’s *emotional* intimacy nonetheless is for home, not work. The second book about women managers, *Women that Love Work and Life: The Feminine Way to Success*, describes how women balance their roles as corporate managers and as mothers, and how they

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<sup>3</sup> That the comedy sketch show also takes the name of hyena suggests to me that hyena also represents uncontrolled laughter and glee. It is also true, however, that hyenas are also believed by Italians to be vicious, fearless and prowling—and connected to anger and rage.

struggle to manage time (Sasso 2002). There is neither great attention to the women's partners, nor to portraying the women as *desiring* subjects as wives and managers (Cameron and Kulick 2003). That is, in not having to explicitly demonstrate women's romantic and sexual practices, this book reinscribes the cultural norm that feminized capitalists as split between their roles as loving caretakers and capitalists, as opposed to sexual agents and capitalists.



Figure 1 Two Books. (Left) *The Heart of the Manager: Love, Passion and Power in the Stories of 50 Golden Men of Italian Capitalism*. (Right) *Women that Love Work and Life: The Feminine Way to Success*.

Yet it appears that there are negative effects when women in the workplace do not conform to certain cultural ideals of compassionate and loving. For instance, the workplace is also represented as something that can threaten the “natural” emotional nature of women.

One article headlined, “2007 Marks the Return of Femininity and Emotions,” suggests: “2007 will be a year of femininity, a year characterized by an ‘emotional futurism’ ... that marks the end of an age of incensed careerism and women modeling everything on men.”<sup>4</sup> Within this ‘emotional futurism,’ we see a strong nostalgic vision for the rightful restoration of Italian women to their emotions, their lack of “careerism,” and their wrongful appropriation of “men’s” models. What this also suggests is that women who defy these social orders will not go unnoticed.

In Chapter 4, I discussed a lecture by Dr. Renato Gilioli, a leading mobbing specialist in Italy.<sup>5</sup> One of the most salient gender differences in the workplace, he argues, is that women are more likely to be victims of “emotional mobbing,” brought on by open acts of jealousy, secrecy, cattiness and hostility between them, and women’s greater emotional sensitivity to cruel criticism and isolation. Men, by contrast, are subject to “strategic mobbing,” characterized by hierarchical feuds with other men induced by severe competition or corporate restructuring. These ideas confirm what I have so far been establishing in that Italian women in the workplace are thought to be necessarily more subject to their emotions. But this does not mean that men are not sensitive to hostility; rather it suggests that there are different gendered orders for what is culturally legible and framed by others’ as deviant and normative. These gendered orders may govern how emotional expressions are differently labeled, but not necessarily embodied or performed. This is precisely why linguistic practices are of great importance. Gilioli also discusses a particular ideology about language usage in the workplace. He began his lecture by explaining what he believed to be the specific causes of mobbing in Italy. He argued that Scandinavians had a low tolerance for raising one’s voice at work. Italians, by contrast, use a

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<sup>4</sup> January 7, 2007. “Società: Studio 2007: Segna Ritorno Femminilità e Emozioni.” *Ansa Notizario Italiano*.

<sup>5</sup> I have retained his actual name.

wide range of animated and often loud speaking voices in both home and the workplace.

This, he explained to the audience, led to a delay in recognizing mobbing in Italy, in addition to a greater degree of normalization of mobbing practices. But how does the gender of the speaker who is speaking loudly, perhaps angrily, matter?

To summarize, the gendering of Italian emotional styles is bifurcated in terms of the supposed frequency and facility with which one expresses one's own emotions and a sensitivity and empathetic ability to comprehend other's emotions (Table 2).

	<b>Control of Expression of Own Emotions</b>	<b>Consideration of Others' Emotions</b>
<b>Women</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Men</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Managers</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Low Level Workers</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

Figure 2 Gendered Emotional Norms in Italy.

At the same time, the masculinized figure of the corporate manager seems to have more ability, in fact, to diverge from the gendered norms to a greater degree than women corporate managers. In other words, emotions overtly revealed or even excessive outbursts by men are construed as an effect of *outside* influences—stress, work, situational. While for women managers, on the other hand, they are seen as intrinsically due to their femaleness. Thus, when women managers convey a state of rage, for example, two simultaneous processes are underway. While they may confirm cultural ideologies that Italian women fail to manage their emotions in public, they transgress cultural expectations about what managers, a masculinized category, are expected to do. In the end, then, the gendering becomes relevant *not* just in the performance of affect, but also critically in how that is labeled and *spoken about* by others. In the last chapter, for example, I discussed the case of Michela, a coordinator of a physical therapist hospital unit, who felt extremely persecuted



both by staff workers and hospital managers when she expressed anger at workers for not following hospital rules. In fact, her case of mobbing is very much related to how Michela transgresses gendered affective norms for managers, even as she performs gendered norms for women. The gendered emotional and linguistic regime illustrated above lives in tension with various co-existing regimes—economic and political.

#### **5.4 Managing Emotion: The Case of Alberto**

Formed over the past decade through a series of mergers between eight smaller companies and made up of nearly five hundred employees, DataGisco specializes in information technology and digital communication, environmental science and geography. I worked most closely with two divisions, the Map, Information Technology and Environmental division (MITE) and the Digital Archives division (DA), that together with a Banking and Finance Sector, Public Administration, Research and Development, and Internet Resources make up DataGisco. The MITE (Map, Information Technology and Environmental division) division competes for mostly public works projects such as the building of bridges and roads, and collaborates with engineers, architects, and designers. They primarily use GIS (Geographic Information Systems) technologies and Autocad, a design engineering program, to create rich informative maps that display various layers of information —environmental, ownership titles, and civil infrastructure. The DA (digital archive) department also competes for various public and private projects to make digital archives, via scanners and/or data base entry, of large paper-based archives and document systems. They are responsible for all aspects of the digitalization: the software design and development of the digital archive, physical scanning of documents, quality control and maintenance of the database. DataGisco had two executive officers, Ettore Del Vecchio and Franco Santonini, who formed the apex of an organizational structure with six division

directors. In the following (Figure 3), I provide a quick flow chart of the hierarchical relationships among DataGisco workers whose interviews are included here.

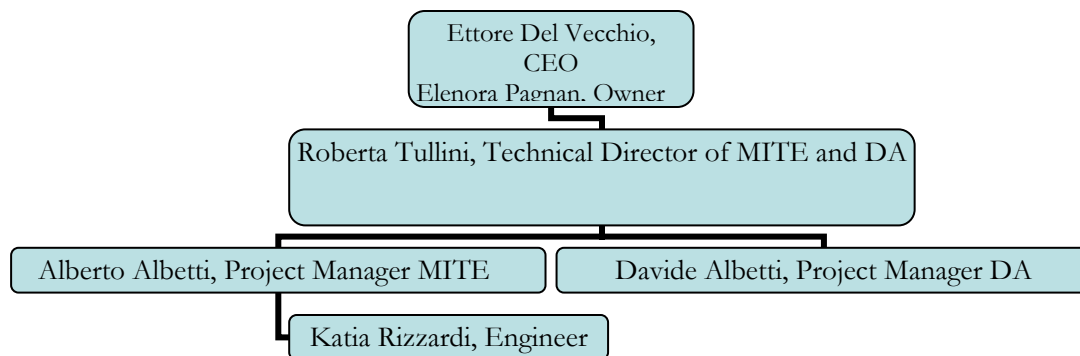


Figure 3 Hierarchical relations at DataGisco.

Roberta was the technical director of the corporate branch that encompasses both the MITE and DA divisions. In Italy, there are not many examples of women in positions of corporate leadership; this makes Roberta part of a very small minority. In 2003 for the city of Padua, there was quite a low employment rate for women (34.7%), and women held only 6% of positions as corporate directors or managers in Italy.<sup>6</sup> While many workers shared with me that they viewed Roberta as a competent manager, just as many were quite critical about her management style. Her floor of DataGisco, where I was situated, was undoubtedly dominated by her presence. Among the most striking aspects of Roberta's presence in the office were her high-pitched peals of laughter. Her laugh was, in fact, one of

<sup>6</sup> Regione del Veneto. *Il Mercato del Lavoro nel Veneto: Tendenze e politiche. Rapporto 2004*. Milan: FrancoAngeli, p. 83.

the few distinctive sounds that stood out from the noise of keyboard clicking, computer whirring, phone ringing and paper shuffling. Employees would share a knowing smile or roll their eyes on the many occasions when her laugh could be heard from across the office. In the large cubicle-divided office, Roberta was also one of the few people to physically move around the space. In fact, she spent little time in her enclosed, glass-paneled office—the only enclosed office in this entire division.

Married and in his early forties, Alberto Albetti has been working for Roberta for over ten years. He was a project manager within the MITE division and handled the aspect of environmental consulting in particular. Alberto was hired in 1990 for one of the smaller companies that later merged with others to form DataGisco, and had close connections with the men who became the CEOs of DataGisco, including Ettore Del Vecchio. Alberto's problems stemmed from his relationship with his direct supervisor: Dr. Roberta Tullini. Underpinning Alberto's description of this relationship were cultural and historical understandings of corporate governance, linguistic practices and affect, particularly anger. Affective and linguistic ideologies shaped the expression and concealment of anger in speech, in addition to cultural shifts (Lefkowitz 2003) and the changing nature of speech genres (Kulick 1998b; Jamieson 2000).

I had seen Alberto and Roberta interact around the office many times as well as in meetings with Ettore. Alberto and Roberta's dislike of one another and strained relationship were evident and frequent topics of work gossip. Once, for example, I sat in on a meeting in April 2005 with the heads of all divisions and Ettore. In their newly renovated meeting room, with bright yellow walls and framed images of golf courses, we sat around a shiny wooden table. Before the meeting began, I noticed as Alberto counted the number of people in the room and moved a chair from a nearby office to accommodate another

person. He returned and placed a single high-backed chair at the center of the table for Ettore. Roberta, I noticed, eyed him suspiciously and told him there were already enough chairs. Roberta told me afterwards that she thought it was “absurd” Alberto was attempting to “impress” Ettore with the larger chair. I was surprised by her reading of his actions as we had clearly been missing chairs in the room. It is worth noting that Roberta herself had a complex relationship with Ettore. On the one hand, she openly esteemed him, but she also described him as a pathological liar, lying about “even where he had dinner the night before with his wife.”

In May 2005, I was completing interviews with various employees and Alberto and I decided to meet. When I asked him if there were weak points in company management, he responded:

Well, I'll tell you very honestly that I've had problems with Roberta for a long time. And lots of other colleagues have problems with Roberta. But uh up until a few years ago up until three or four years ago- three years ago we got along ok. [...] She has a personality that's very particular, really impulsive, not inclined to listen. Well, she appears to be listening, but then she doesn't care at all and makes up her own mind. [...] And I believe that Roberta is very smart about uh organization and managing personnel. [...] She's much much less good at managing those that can bring in work, those that basically have more years of experience, have different opinions, sit her down at a table and say to her, 'I don't think the same as you and I believe there are other and different things to be done.' In these cases, she hardens, puts up a wall.

Much of his above critique of Roberta draws from and contrasts Roberta with notions of appropriate gendered traits of women—emotional availability, cooperativeness, receptivity. In fact, Alberto reveals two ways in which Roberta deviates from a notion of proper femininity. He describes her as failing to listen and being emotionally distant. Yet she also seems to adhere to certain cultural expectations of managers, by not consulting with others in her decisions. He also distinguishes between her positive ability to manage low-level employees and difficulty in interfacing with higher-level workers. He later added that

he believed she hired employees without college degrees in order to build a greater sense of her own authority, paraphrasing this strategy as: “You’ve gotten here from nothing so now you’ll do what I say or else I’ll fire you.” Thus, she was interpellated as a person who cruelly threatened new workers, showing little regard for *their feelings*—something non-normative for a woman, even as it may be fitting for a boss. While I am not suggesting that Alberto’s criticisms of Roberta rest entirely on her culturally unusual position as female director, I believe the dissonance between norms of appropriate femininity in Italy and her actions is significant.

Hoping to clarify whether or not Alberto himself had wanted the position as Technical Director, I asked him quite directly. He insisted on his interest in more technical positions and called it a “thankless job,” denying any interest or desire in this role. My sense was that the conflict was much more complex than simply being about his envy or desire for her position. He explained that the more important and critical issue, fueling the conflict between himself and Roberta, was that she came between himself and Ettore, the CEO. He then shared the following about Ettore:

I found out from a colleague, [...]Ettore has a certain way of doing things. You say, he’s the boss. But he doesn’t really want to be the boss. He doesn’t want to, how do you say, pull you by the ears and tell you, ‘Great.’ He’ll give you a note that says: ‘This might need to be done. Let’s talk about it.’ In a way, you know, a bit vague. If you tell me that I have to go climb a tree, I will go climb a tree. [Imitating Ettore, cocks head] ‘Well, I don’t know, let’s see, seems like we should go climbing, but I don’t know.’ I don’t know if I have to go climb it or not. If you want it, I’ll do it and if you don’t want it, I won’t, right? And there was once this problem when there were just four of us. We had two computers and there were four of us. A sales promotion for computers came out and I left him the page from the newspaper with this ad and a note, [mimicking Ettore’s indirect style] ‘If you want, let’s talk about it.’ My colleague told me that he got pissed off, ‘How dare he! What is the thinking?’ It was a simply a joke I mean there’s this thing that maybe you saw, but given that there’s four of us with two computers if we could get another two it wouldn’t be a bad thing. That time he got really distant, but he’s one who-Ettore will be bloody pissed off at you but he still greets you, he smiles at you, he shakes your hand but uh inside himself he’s thinking about killing you. He never told me these things. I found out only after many years.

In this example of feelings-*talk*, Alberto constructs the gendered norms of affective language in the context of workplace relations using interdiscursive practices. For Alberto, Ettore displays an unclear communicative and emotional style, despite his place within corporate hierarchies. Ettore, unlike Roberta, “doesn’t want to be the boss” and Alberto effectively critiques Ettore for lacking a desire to manage—something that perhaps he believes should come more naturally to him because he is a man. Ettore transgresses a gender norm by not wanting to “be boss” (*fare il capo*). For Alberto, what Ettore says and doesn’t say is enacting his role as executive officer. The effect of Ettore’s approach is to produce a pervading sense of ambivalence and doubt for Alberto.

Reported speech is a common speech device when speakers name and perform emotions in narratives (Besnier 1995). Alberto uses reported speech twice, first showing Ettore’s lack of decisiveness where he imitated Ettore’s speaking style (slow and nasal), body language (cocked head) in order to mock him and moreover, his verbosity. Rather than giving a quick command, Ettore used a series of verbal hedges. Alberto, in turn, framed Ettore as having indecisive speech, which effectively betrayed a feminized speech style antithetical to the pithy and direct language of male managers. In this way, Alberto’s speech is both a *performance* in the sense of embodying and displaying Ettore’s idiosyncrasies, but also *performative*, in that it has an effect of making a particular kind of gendered subjectivity more apparent.

In the case of the computer ad, Alberto uses feelings-*talk* to imitate Ettore’s angry voice. Part of what may have made this event so memorable for Alberto was that the boss’s anger was not directly expressed to him. Why would unexpressed anger wax so critical to Alberto? Why doesn’t he just attribute it to his stressful position as executive? The importance of masked sentiments may, in fact, be because they represented Alberto’s

*exclusion* from critical knowledge about others' emotions. The *unsaid* is significant, as the uncommunicated anger is what is most endangers his position within the company (Kulick 2005). On the one hand, Alberto's seeming disgust with Ettore's guise of kindness connects with the idea of "emotional mobbing," in which women are seen as more likely to practice secrecy and falsity in ways that create workplace conflict. Had Alberto been less concerned about the duration of his employment, on the other hand, I believe he would have been less disturbed Ettore's ability to hide his anger behind "smiles" and "hand shakes." Precisely because Alberto fears that he is being slowly eliminated makes him more apprehensive about what these gestures mean. Alberto's immediate context also shapes the way in which one might interpret the frustration he expresses about Ettore's inability to give him clear commands. Alberto's metaphor of "climbing the tree," in effect, suggests his desire to perform as a good worker. He shows a desire to properly complete a task, if only he can identify *which* task he must complete. But the obscure and "vague" boss who cannot effectively make demands on the worker does not give him the chance to effectively show his merit. This puts him at a disadvantage because he cannot show himself to be "worthy" of his employment position.

Later, I asked if his communication with Roberta was more direct, he replied:

She's not good at hiding her feelings like Ettore. If she's pissed you can tell because of the way she moves, she won't look at you, she's agitated, she'll say something gruff, meanwhile with Ettore you can never tell. [...] That's the biggest problem. The problem is that I don't work for Roberta, I work for Ettore [...] I tried to explain things to her but she won't listen, really won't listen. Well, I am quite willing to listen to someone else's reasons, but the other has to be willing to listen to my reasons in order to find common ground. Either we won't try and just not get along, but we have to listen to each other to understand the problems because one of us gets angry because the other is angry.

Alberto's use of emotives positioned Roberta as someone whose expression of anger was unpredictable and volatile. Roberta's behaviors seem both gender-normative and

gender-deviating at the same time. While, as a woman, her inability to “hide her feelings,” distinguish her from Ettore, insofar as Roberta’s emotions are far more transparent, visibly embodied and audibly apparent to Alberto. Yet she is also inattentive to his feelings, which seems to infuriate Alberto, as this betrays a feminine emotional style. Taken together, this suggests that Roberta’s style is not legible as a normative woman, as a figure who should be able to hide feelings. His assertion, “I don’t work for Roberta, I work for Ettore” uncovers his more abiding allegiance to Ettore as the CEO, even though his day-to-day projects are most directly supervised by Roberta. Saying it, in this case, does not, however, performatively rearrange the chain of command.

Alberto had begun his career working closely with Ettore the present CEO, with whom he must now deal solely through Roberta. Such a reconfiguration of corporate relations is not uncommon in the Veneto region where small companies merged throughout the 1990s. Yet negotiating the new terrain of hierarchies created by new intermediary positions, such as Roberta’s, that generated new protocols for workplace communication is not a simple process. Considering the previous selection as well, Alberto viewed Roberta’s initiative and desire to handle problems on her own unjust—yet seemed to desire a more authoritative stance for Ettore. Underpinning this is a language ideology with moral views about the way in which anger should be expressed and by what kind of gendered subject (Ochs 1992; Kulick 1998; Irvine and Gal, 2000, Keenan (Ochs) 1974).

The “linguistic practice of handling anger” sustains a broader cultural discourse about men and women (Kulick 1998b). Ideologically, women in Italy may not be any less likely to be angry than men, yet their anger is considered more expressible and, thus, more culturally legible than men’s anger. Alberto read expressions of anger as gender-normative when contained for Ettore and expressed for Roberta. What subjects affirm and deny can



be highly revealing of the workings of power and classed status within workplaces. Exploring diverse sexual scenarios, Don Kulick (2003) argues that acts of saying ‘no’ to sex enact culturally specific female sexual subjectivities, such that a woman’s ‘yes’ to sex is culturally and linguistically unmarked in ways parallel to how a man’s ‘no’ is marked. One example, he suggests, would be women’s defense in rape or sexual harassment case where her ‘no’ to sex becomes culturally unrecognizable, while a man’s ‘no’ to sex might render him feminized, even suggest his homosexuality (Kulick 2003: 141). Kulick (2003) illuminates how language has the effect of situating a subject within particular gendered fields of meaning: “What is important to interrogate is the way particular iterations of language performatively produce particular subject positions; positions which may in fact undermine the performance of a coherent gender identity” (143). Alberto’s narrative sheds light on how actors use language to situate themselves *and* other actors within various kinds of regimes—emotional and gendered. In this sense, Roberta’s “yes” to anger was marked in ways parallel to Ettore’s “no,” their management styles undermining their gender identities (see also Kulick 1998b). Put another way, Roberta’s anger is unsurprising insofar as she is identified as a woman, but surprising insofar as she is identified as a manager. Precisely the opposite applies to Ettore: his anger does not seem perplexing to Alberto, but his unwillingness to manage does. I would also conclude that this parallel suggests that certain emotions, such as anger, may indeed be flashpoints where gendered regimes must be adhered to more strictly.

	<b>Control of Expression of Own Emotions</b>	<b>Consideration of Others’ Emotions</b>
<b>Ettore</b>	Yes	No
<b>Roberta</b>	No	Yes

**Figure 4 Gendered Emotional Norms at DataGisco.**

#### 5.4.1 *The Gender of Emotional Exclusion*

During my fieldwork at DataGisco and at the time of my interview with Alberto, I wondered whether Alberto viewed this conflict as a form of mobbing, but I did not want to put words in his mouth. Therefore, I framed the question carefully, “Well, let’s be frank, are there people you think that either by Roberta or other people who are a bit pushed towards the door?” (*Parlandoci chiaro, ci sono dei ragazzi secondo te adesso da Roberta dagli altri che sono un po’ spinti verso la porta?*) He met my gaze and raised his hand in the air with a wistful smile. I said, “You? Seriously?” He nodded and jutted his chin forward and upwards, a typical Italian facial gesture similar to a shrug, suggesting a kind of reluctant admission. I asked if it was because of his division, one peripheral to the larger divisions of DataGisco, as he had already mentioned. He then described how his job position had been disrupted and constrained by various economic processes, listing poor company profits, a stalled economy, and delays on particular projects.

While Alberto identified as being “pushed towards the door,” he does not explicitly use the term mobbing, though I also did not formulate my question using the term. I believe this may be due to fact that mobbees have begun to be associated with women (see Chapter 4), lower middle or working classes (see Chapter 3), Italy’s political Left (see Chapter 3) and poor health and psychological difficulties (see Chapter 6-8), against which Alberto positioned himself. Rather, he constituted his own position as shaped by broad economic circumstances. As I described above, recent mobbing-specialized psychologists have argued that most men are mobbed following corporate mergers—at a time when economic constraints seem most evident, while women are victims of “emotional mobbing,” brought on because of women’s self-evident affective sensibilities. Yet Alberto also realizes that emotional incompatibilities are very much a part of the conflict:

In about a month you can get back a hundred thousand euro. And she didn't even say, 'Nice! Great! Good result!' It was as if she were saying, 'Oh guess who I ran into the other day on the street?' Fresh water, nothing, zero. So it's clear that it's not about the sector's profits. It's a scripted game as if it started being something they didn't want to handle anymore.

In the above passage, rather than directly using emotives, Alberto performs the difference in emotional stances using his vocal tone and quality. The affirming terms, "nice," "great" and "good result," he says in a warm, stronger tone, suggesting positive feelings and approval. Roberta's inability to express kindness to him moves counter to feminized emotional norms—warm communicative capabilities. By contrast, he switches to a first-person embedded voice of Roberta and changes his tone to flat and deprived of warmth, which he describes using the metaphor of "fresh water" to mean "dead pan" or without emotion. It is the emotional distance that Alberto read from Roberta's speech that he identifies as a key indicator of his marginalization, disrupting a framework that excludes men from emotional mobbing.

When I asked him whether his concern about being ousted impacted his life Alberto described his emotional effects of workplace marginalization even further:

You lose sleep at night, you also lose smiling, the desire to joke around and laugh, tease people, mess around with folks a bit yeah and also with myself...I've lost the ability to smile about things...Now I'm slowly, slowly trying to get back to laughing about this like before. Because, in the end, it's just meanness that doesn't deserve more than two seconds. But, when it happens to you, you try to defend yourself.

In the above selection, Alberto translated the experience of feeling marginalized within the workplace into feelings-*talk*. But most of his utterances are not first-person emotional disclosures, such as, "I feel sad." Rather he described his sadness by discussing loss of smiles and laughter or indirectly uses a second-person generalization (e.g. "you lost smiling) in ways that create distance between himself and his own sadness. I also want to

note how he ends this, the idea of “defending” yourself against “meanness.” In Chapter 3, I examined the question of how social actors understand what drives other workers to practice acts of hostility and exclusion. In Alberto’s formulation, his own actions stem from a sense of defense, a self-protective response to his own perceived marginalization.

#### *5.4.2 The Value of Transparency*

For Alberto, one of the most pressing signs that suggested corporate abnormalcy were poor and secretive communicative practices:

That’s the whole thing, it’s a matter of understanding and of scarce transparency of things. It’s better to say shithead, but to your face, rather than keeping it inside and thinking it or maybe even saying it to someone else. Better than creating misunderstandings that don’t have- maybe it would be easier to be healthy.

“Transparency” as a social value cuts across both discourses of free-market capitalism and Western ideas about emotional maturity. It has recently been a ‘buzz word’ in the discourse of ethical corporate practice that often creeps into discussions of neoliberal corporate governance (Strathern 2000a, Best 2005). Does this represent a newly poignant desire for Italians to be able to see and predict corporate practice just as it becomes more elusive and indirect? At the same time, Alberto also links expressing emotions explicitly—transparently—in language as a sign of emotional maturity and a desirable quality. But it is also apparent that the language ideology that values verbal clarity in emotional discourse has a thick set of further implicit rules and norms. Emotional transparency for anger by Roberta appears to be frustrating to Alberto, even though he views certain measures of emotional and verbal transparency as “healthy.” Ettore’s practices of non-transparency—his feigning kindness—was also deeply troubling to Alberto. Here, too, in the context of the Italian workplace where information, emotional or otherwise, is a vital commodity and the stakes for long-term employment have radically changed, expressing emotions in a way that is culturally visible and legible may seem particularly vital and crucial.

Asking if he had ever tried to resolve things, Alberto proceeded to describe a moment in which his own response was *not* transparent:

She won't accept, ((shaking head)) two or three times. Really just to sit at a table but she won't listen, there's no w-she just starts crying and runs away. If you tell her: 'You're tall, beautiful, blonde, fantastic.' That's fine. Once I told her that just to tease her, 'Oh yeah you're so great, you're kidding me, there's no one else like you!' She doesn't get sarcasm. 'And so, well anyway, what's the problem? Tell me.' No, she takes it like a compliment and takes it and goes away, get it? It's tough—it's tough to understand this stuff, you know?

In Alberto's above narrative, his sarcasm might be likened to a sort of "hidden transcript" (Scott 1985). He embedded an exchange between the two of them where he used irony to criticize her managerial and interpersonal style and embedded her voice into his narrative to show how she may have responded ("What's the problem?"). He suggested that Roberta has split emotional responses, one characterized by strong feminized emotions—hyper-sensitivity and crying fits—and the other by an emotional gullibility. He re-enacted his joke, evoking a figure of the "beautiful blonde," a term which in Italy is almost always used in reference to a woman.<sup>7</sup> In the second instance, he again complimented her, calling her "great," insisting there's "no one else" like her. He then explained his outrage that she *believed* him. Why was this peculiar to him? Part of the 'in' cultural joke is that not only did he *not* believe that she is a beautiful blonde woman, but it seemed to Alberto to be self-evident mockery in that he complimented her both on her outstanding managerial style *and* her feminine beauty. But is this ironic utterance an expression of anger and hostility? Here it is critical to consider both the context in which Alberto sees his position at risk and the workplace climate of uncertain employment. It may

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<sup>7</sup> In order to illustrate this, consider just a few of numerous examples of media titles which reference simply "a blonde" and index a woman. The early 1990s American television series "Step by Step," starring blonde haired actress, Suzanne Somers, was called in Italy, "A Blonde for Dad" (*Una Bionda per Papà*). The 1993 American film starring blonde haired actress, Kim Basinger, "The Real McCoy" was called "A Golden Blonde" (*Una Bionda Tutta d'Oro*). The 1991 American film "Switch" was entitled "In a Blonde's Shoes" (*Nei Panni di una Bionda*).

be, perhaps, that Alberto practices sarcasm as a way to make his anger *less* transparent precisely because of how carefully he monitors escalations of conflict with Roberta. Increased conflict with his boss may hold severe consequences for his employment future.

### 5.5 The “Personality”: Multiple Voices and Views

In this section, I present additional layers of detail about this conflict between Roberta and Alberto by adding two more views of DataGisco co-workers, Katia and Davide. How might multiple perspectives uncover an existing emotional regime more vividly? One week after the interview with Alberto, I was at DataGisco for the day, and I had lunch with Roberta and her two closest friends and project directors: Davide and Lina. We passed Alberto as he was coming back from one of the cafés and the two of us exchanged greetings. As he walked by, he told Roberta he was coming by her office later. She hurriedly waved a hand at him, as if to respond to what he had said, then swiftly turned around and huddled close to Lina and Davide as she continued to the café. At lunch, Roberta told us how Alberto had been annoyed that morning and had been “angrily” shoving things around the office “tun tun tun” she said, imitating the sound of objects hitting the desk, giggling.

She also began to talk about Katia. Katia Rizzardi is a 36-year old environmental engineer and works in Alberto’s group. My impression of her had been that she was extremely shy and often seemed anxious. About Katia, Roberta told me over lunch, “She’s scared of everything, even her own shadow, but she’s not scared of me. What just drives me crazy about her is that she is not at all scared of me” (*Ha paura di tutto perfino la sua ombra ma non ha paura di me. Mi fa impazzire che non ha paura di me.*) Again fear is a common emotion that is deployed in ways that make apparent power relations in the workplace. Roberta’s frustration that Katia was not scared of her indicated that Katia did not defer to her role as manager. Yet once Roberta had left, Lina admitted to me that she thought Katia was

actually scared of both Roberta and Alberto, and constantly came to her for help. I later spoke with Katia about working at DataGisco and her relationships with co-workers and supervisors.

- N: Who are the most problematic people?  
 K: I think Roberta is certainly problematic [...] She is very good at her job but, basically if she were always calm and kind it would be perfect.  
 ((Laughs))  
 N: Yeah, and does any episode come to mind in which you-I mean, you had difficulty with her?  
 K: Fortunately I have little to do with her. But she even gets angry for things that maybe a ((nervous laugh)) person like me wouldn't even imagine. Or nothing's happened, how come she's angry about this thing? [...] And even for the things that maybe she sees but in reality they don't even exist. Or maybe she'll speak to you in a tone that's a bit arrogant and that could be a bit strange. Yeah sometimes things happen, not just to me—it's a bit towards other people. [...] She gives responses that are a bit like this.<sup>8</sup> [...] Alberto certainly has his moments when he's stressed. Sometimes ((Laughs)) [...] he had these sudden bursts of anger [...] But really it was during one time. Because he was actually stressed.

Katia distinguishes two different kinds of anger. Roberta's anger, expressed in an "arrogant tone," seems irrational and unjustified to Katia. By contrast, Alberto, who she contends exhibits "sudden bursts of anger" is justified by "stress." Why are some people entitled to justified anger and others not? Part of this answer, I believe, rests on gendered notions of anger expression. While *managers* are supposed to suppress anger, Roberta does not. However, women are doubly at a disadvantage because men's anger, as we see here, is linked to external sources (stress) and not to a specific character flaw.

### 5.5.1 *Swallowing Anger*

Davide Albetti is the 37-year old head of the DA (Digital Archive) division and a distant cousin of Alberto. Davide had begun working in the smaller company with Alberto and Ettore before merging into DataGisco. Unlike Alberto, Davide has a close relationship

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<sup>8</sup> I believe "like this" refers to the arrogant tone she had mentioned earlier.

with Roberta, whom he calls “Berta,” and shares his lunch and coffee breaks with her on a daily basis. Throughout the year I spent in Padua, I was often invited to grab a quick panino with them at their favorite café—a café not frequented by hardly any other DataGisco employees. In addition, I closely followed some of Davide’s projects, spending time in meetings, on-site checks, and discussing projects with him. Davide conforms to gendered norms both in the way in which he displays his emotions and also his management style. All of his closest staff members confirmed that he had a rather abrupt style of management; he was often unaware and to a degree insensitive to how certain commands would impact workers. Yet he viewed himself as someone who was in command. Once when I heard him muttering about all the “bullshit” (*cazzate*) he had to handle, I asked him to share them with me. He sighed and responded: “I’d *like* to work but I have to always say, ‘Do this! Do that!’” On another occasion, when Davide had to fire a temporary worker for not completing her tasks efficiently, he was met with some hesitation by the worker’s immediate supervisor. Davide, however, remained aloof, announcing sternly: “No, today she’s going home (*va a casa*).”<sup>9</sup>

In May 2005, I met Davide at this favorite café after work for an interview. He described how he and Roberta got along:

She has a personality, but she’s also got a lot of responsibilities. She has to kind of impose herself (*imporrsi*) on others, but when she impose herself she shouldn’t lack respect. [...] She starts yelling. Sometimes when she makes this mistake, I’ve said something to Berta, knowing that we’re friends, so it touches her more.

In the above passage and throughout the interview, Davide repeated the notion of Roberta having a “personality” (*ha un carattere*). Her flaws, then, make sense as a result of her “personality” and her responsibility in the company hierarchy. The way in which this

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<sup>9</sup> “Going home” (*andare a casa*) is an idiom that Italians use to suggest being fired.



concept is often deployed in Italian is actually quite different than the English term “personality.” Whereas in English, it suggests a kind of quirkiness or uniqueness, in Italian it implies a person that is rigid, obstinate and harsh—emotionally obtuse. Davide softened his criticism by ascribing Roberta’s flaws by to what he posits as an ongoing, durable condition—“having a personality.” A difficult personality, in this sense, becomes something an individual “has” not “does,” and thus has the effect of morally absolving her for acting harshly with employees.

Davide did not necessarily object to the kind of sentiment that Roberta has, but the way in which she expresses it—through yelling. This suggests that language ideologies are distinct from, though overlapping with, moral understandings of manager’s emotions (Rosaldo 1980; White 1990). Earlier in the paper I showed how Davide described women as “hyenas,” when they expressed anger. One salient difference was that these women were his clients and low-level employees, while Roberta, in the masculinized role of corporate authority, is held to a masculine norm of *controlling* her anger.

I had heard Roberta complain about Alberto many times during lunch breaks so I felt comfortable asking Davide why, in his opinion, they didn’t get along. Yet right at the moment when I began to ask him, Davide suddenly broke into a hearty laugh and gestured for me to turn around. There was Roberta, about ten feet away, stopped on her moped. Davide had told her earlier that day that he and I would speak that evening. Grinning, she asked us how the interview was going then wished us a good weekend and zoomed away. “See what I mean?” Davide said to me, shaking his head in disbelief, and muttering, “Incredible.” Her unexpected visit to his interview was another reminder of her ability to constantly monitor employees (and visiting anthropologists). Once she left he finished describing his thoughts on Alberto:

- D: He's always calm, does his work. I don't know. He doesn't work with me. I know about this whole thing. I have fights, I have problems, but you just swallow it. But I just swallow it. But she has her way of pushing it: I have to do white and you have to do it black, so I just shut up because the director has decided black.
- N: As for Ettore?
- D: He trusts Berta a lot. Contacts [with him] are infrequent. Once they were more frequent, clearly with a company of four hundred people if everyone decided to go to him- So Berta brings everything to him. She takes the load of problems and brings them to Ettore. It's the hierarchical scale.
- N: Can you bypass her and go and speak to him?
- D: She would feel that. If I go to Ettore, I warn her right away, but I think it's the woman [in her.]
- N: Yeah? ((Laughs)).
- D: Yeah, I mean as a woman, not like her (*come donna, non come lei*). It's true!

Davide distinguished himself from Alberto, not in the level of difficulty in managing a relationship with Roberta, but in his affective and communicative response to her. Describing “swallowing” (*mandare giù*) suggests that anger is imagined as a substance that can be blocked—the same bodily metaphor of swallowing has been linked to anger suppression in Brazil (Rebhun, 1994). New communicative practices in relation to the appropriate expression of emotion make emotional “swallowing” an important communicative strategy—the erasure of that which disturbs corporate hierarchies. Davide, I believe, referred to both swallowing words and emotional responses in order to, if indirectly, maintain his powerful alliance with the supervisor of his entire division and bypass direct verbal conflict with Roberta. Therefore, “swallowing” anger may be a form of “emotion work” (Hochschild 1983) in which individuals who hope to be interpellated as good workers must properly manage the way in which they express certain emotions in order to displace workplace conflict and unwanted attention from co-workers or managers.

In the last line, Davide viewed Roberta's actions as fundamentally gendered, such as Roberta's dislike for employees speaking directly with Ettore. Davide suggests that he analyzed something as not specific to Roberta's particular character insofar as she is a

woman, but rather as a characteristic of all women. The above example of “emotional mobbing,” for instance, ties mobbing to women’s supposedly natural likelihood to be jealous and competitive with one another. In this instance, Roberta’s unwillingness to “share” her relationship with Ettore, then, reflects something that Davide appears to view as innately feminine. At the same time, I wondered whether Davide is more likely to accuse Roberta of keeping her relationship with Ettore, the top executive—a rich resource of capital, information and knowledge—because of the large-scale work conditions in Italy that make employment more precarious.

### **5.6 Fear and Anger in Late Capitalist Italy**

Emotives *do* something important in the narratives of DataGisco employees—they are tools with which actors position themselves in relation to one another, to ongoing conflicts and within a changing emotional regime—that also seem shaped by Italy’s neoliberalized workplace with the ever-present but silent sword of Damocles. For Reddy, “emotives are essential to understanding the political significance of ideology, law, state ritual, coercion and violence” (Reddy 2001: 331). In this chapter, I have explored how emotives and emotional regimes are produced in the context of a workplace where there is much at stake in properly interpreting and expressing emotions. The effect of a pervasive sense of fear in the workplace led to workers’ intensified monitoring of emotional silences and articulation. Disclosing anger, demanding both intense caution and heightened suspicion, bears highly gendered consequences for rule-breakers (Ochs 1996).

“[Emotion] is the idiom in which social bonds are negotiated and maintained, the substance of which social tactics are made” (Rebhun 1995: 375). The complexities of relationships between Alberto and his colleagues emerged when emotional and emotion-rich discourse was exposed. At the same time, one can better understand how certain social

strategies and behaviors develop within a moment of economic flux and instability—and they produce a climate in which a phenomenon like mobbing could develop. Within the world of corporate Italy, multiple kinds of economies—neoliberal, affective, linguistic and gendered—come together to shape what Italians say, do and feel in the workplace.

## Chapter 6      Living It on the Skin

“An institution, even an economy, is complete and fully viable only if it is durably objectified not only in things . . . but also in bodies.” –Pierre Bourdieu (1990: 58)

“It was the spirit of capitalism made flesh.” –Upton Sinclair

### 6.1 Introduction: A Health Chronology

In 1984, Swedish psychologist Heinz Leymann used the English term “mobbing,” a word that had previously been reserved for collective animal attacks, to describe group attacks against a single individual. German psychologist Harold Ege picked up the term in the 1990s to describe collective harassment of a worker with the aim of impelling him or her to resign. Naming what many workers were experiencing, the term caught on throughout Europe just as the neoliberal economic drive to reduce labor costs became increasingly more urgent. Throughout the late 1990s, the word mobbing expanded beyond the Ege’s notion—forcing a worker to quit—and encompassed a variety of work practices or events, such as: job transfer, unpredictable workloads, new work assignments, excessive fiscal checks and hostile colleagues. As the definition of mobbing expanded in popular imaginaries, its effects on workers’ health became increasingly central to discussions. An article from 1999 described the problem as follows:

For years Italy ignored mobbing. . .now, on the other hand, medical doctors, union leaders and even the Parliament have discovered that behind the depression, the panic attacks, the sweat, the hair loss and identity loss that at least four percent of Italian workers are suffering from is the harassment of colleagues and bosses.<sup>1</sup>

Then, in the year 2000, Italy’s Minister of Health Umberto Diesi listed two issues, “cigarette smoking and mobbing,” as Italy’s top two national health problems, adding that

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<sup>1</sup> Ardu, Barbara. “Ecco il Mobbing Veleni in Ufficio.” *La Repubblica* (24 July 1999.)

mobbing was “a mass phenomenon” affecting as many as two million workers.<sup>2</sup> This peculiar place of mobbing, listed right after a carcinogen as a national health problem, strongly reiterated a culturally particular view that certain work practices were indeed imperiling the health of workers, and in quite grave ways. Moreover, saying that “mobbing” was endangering health was becoming linked to a generalized work environment, rather than a group of harassers. Bodily symptoms, bolstered by the robust authority of medical knowledge, allow subjects to “know” mobbing, an otherwise elusively defined practice. Discussions of mobbing in Italian society have circulated so persistently within health and medical sectors that it has become almost entirely unquestioned—its natural place.

Mobbing reached a new apex of medical recognizability in 2003 when a state occupational insurance agency codified a new illness, “Organizational Coercion Pathology” (OCP) that resulted from mobbing.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in less than ten years time, mobbing had become not only a salient way of describing a set of vexing practices within the work environment, but also a psychological and physical medical pathology that could be ground for worker’s compensation. A set of elusively defined work practices, already linked to vast neoliberal economic change and Italy’s historical labor protections, became inextricably tied to bodies and health. What is also compelling about OCP is that there is not necessarily an agent or instigator of the harassment—in effect, it pathologizes the organization of labor as causing the illness. Why did this view of mobbing as physically endangering the bodies of workers develop in Italy? And how did the process of harassing a worker become recognized by state institutions as a serious health risk?

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<sup>2</sup> “Il mio decalogo per vivere bene.” *La Repubblica*. (13 December 2000).

<sup>3</sup> INAIL (Circolare n. 71 del 17 dicembre 2003). A more literal translation of “Disturbi psichici da costrittività organizzativa sul lavoro” would be “Psychological disturbances from organizational coercion at work.” INAIL refers to both “psychological and psychosomatic pathologies” so I have retained a more general gloss of “pathology.”

In this chapter, I show how a mobbing-related illness at once grants workers new discursive pathways and institutional mechanisms to critique neoliberalism and their own devaluation, while also resulting in increased state monitoring and a need for biological proof for all claims. The medicalization of mobbing simultaneously expands workers' potentials for benefits and resources, even as it produces new structures of state surveillance that limit such possibilities. As workers struggle to define an agent behind their ill health, the body's everyday breakdown becomes a way of knowing one's subjectivity as a worker and as a citizen. Quite ironically, then, precisely at a moment when the post-industrial workplace poses less visible physical risks "health becomes the locus for discourses on civilian versus state rights and responsibilities" (MacEachen 2000: 323). In this sense, the management of health becomes a vital technique of neoliberal governance:

In the name of social and personal wellbeing a complex apparatus of health and therapeutics has been assembled, concerned with the management of the individual and social body as a vital national resource and the management of 'problems of living' made up of techniques of advice and guidance, medics, clinics, guides and counselors" (Rose 1996: 37)

What this also requires and what we will see as critical in the making of OCP are a variety of specialized experts who manage the problem of mobbing. These specialized knowledge producers, concentrated in the medical field, play a role in creating the ways in which worker-citizens can interact with the state.

I have so far maintained that mobbing represents a clash, a way of mapping the disjunctures between and complex simultaneity of neoliberal labor reform, precariousness, and welfare state safeguards, protection. The duality of the state, in turn, produces unpredictable, dualistic and often negative effects for citizens. How neoliberalism is "lived on the skin" becomes, for Italian workers, a way to renegotiate the relationship between

worker-citizen and state. But neoliberalism is not the only political discourse and ideology in effect here. Cultural understandings about the role of state in safeguarding of bodies of worker-citizens are informed by a unique friction between neoliberalism and Italy's Fascist past that have produced conditions in which work is closely related to bodily health. OCP became not just a way to medicalize forms of work harassment—but also to pathologize what is fast becoming a set of normalized practices in Italy. The creation, institutionalization and contestation of Organizational Coercion Pathology allow me to delve into the complexities of sweeping economic change as embedded within Italian moral and social orders and bodily realms.

## **6.2 Fascist Histories: Work and Bodies**

“Organizational Coercion Pathology” may have emerged as a codified psychological and physical illness in Italy, but it was institutionalized specifically as a work-related illness. Its definition, shot through with histories of Italian fascism, rests on a particular articulation between the state, the employer and the health and bodies of workers. In an age of industrial labor, work-related illnesses and accidents related primarily to malfunctioning machines and equipment, falls, fires and explosions—the primary dangers for the Fordist-period factory worker. Preventing and compensating for physical dangers to workers became the basis for building labor protections and insurance programs and began during the industrial age. Following the General Regulation for Accident Prevention of 1899, the first institution in the world dedicated to the study of work-related illness was opened by Luigi Devoto Work Clinic in Milan in 1902 (Grieco et. al 2003: 96, 98). This same site now hosts psychologist Harold Ege's mobbing clinic. At the turn of the century two additional laws (Health Regulation, 1901, and Consolidated Act of Health Laws, 1907) were passed that further promoted worker safety for very dangerous industries, such as electric power plants



(Grieco et. al. 2003). Part of recognizing health risks within the workplace, however, also transformed bodily risk into an expected, though undesirable, aspect of industrial labor: “the normal course of their functioning may cause injury” (Cherubini 1977:33 cited in Horn 1994: 36). Thus naming the workplace as a site of bodily and mental harm simultaneously renders these types of risks as seemingly natural to post-industrialist labor.

Shortly after the “Work Charter” of 1927 (*Carta del Lavoro*), the Italian Society of Occupational Health (SIML) was founded in 1929 under a Fascist government, and established to research and prevent work-related diseases and accidents at the same time the state worked to prevent worker uprisings and oppress the workers’ movement (Grieco et. al 2003). The agreement between workers and the state was a social agreement, not a direct means for indemnification; rather “the state intervened in the arena of work accidents in order to defend and strengthen the social organism” (Horn 1994: 40). The Fascist notion of the nation was premised upon its overall productivity and the robust bodies of men as worker-citizens who worked as their “social duty” for the state (Haider 1968: 269). The health of workers, though momentarily localized in the body, articulated workers’ bodies as inherently interconnected with one another—and the nation.

Likewise, it is under a Fascist state that the notion of “bodily integrity” became a principle of work:

From the principle that work is a social duty, and that the development of production is an essential element of the life and progress of the Nation, derives the consequence that the *bodily integrity*, health and physical resistance of the worker constitute a ‘good’ that must be protected, not only and not principally for individual ends, but for the ends of the superior interest of the Nation (Roberti 1928: 393 in Horn 1994: 41).

Building from this historical trajectory, Italy’s Civil Code certified Article 2087 in 1942, which declares: “the employer is obliged to adopt measures within the enterprise

necessary to safeguard the physical integrity and moral personhood of employees.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, the first case filed as mobbing was from a tribunal court in Torino in 1999, citing legal protections from Article 2087 (Amato et. al 2002:79). From this law, workers are able to sue employers for biological damage and eventually for “psychic” and “moral” damage. Made a separate category in 1986 (Constitutional Court decision n. 184/1986), *psychic* damage, “an unjust disturbance of the mental equilibrium determined by a permanent or temporary change in mental health and mental health functioning” (Terpolilli 2004: 24) was added to what was protected by Article 2087. Therefore, the Italian state, unlike other nations, made employers accountable for *both* physical and mental health. The makings of mobbing laws, still only on a regional level, adopted this article as the foundation for new policies. For example, the central region of Umbria passed a law in 2005, entitled, “Protection of Person’s Psycho-Physical Health in the Workplace and the Prevention and Campaign against the Phenomenon of Mobbing.”<sup>5</sup> In addition to promotion and funding for mobbing clinics, the laws also provide for “socio-health” (*socio-sanitari*) institutions and medical-legal assistance and research.<sup>6</sup> This law rests on specific public services such as SPISAL (Agency for Prevention, Hygiene and Safety at Work) and various mental health centers followed by work inspectors, prevention institutions, trade unions, mobbing clinics and human resources personnel.<sup>7</sup> Though these laws have not been recognized by federal courts as constitutional, they attest not only to the friction within the Italian state, but also the persistent attention given to health matters.<sup>8</sup> Though Italy has a number of precedents for mobbing case studies given the state protections of bodily integrity, it is not the only country in Europe where

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<sup>4</sup> Translation: “l'imprenditore è tenuto ad adottare nell'esercizio dell'impresa le misure ... necessarie a tutelare l'integrità fisica e la personalità morale dei prestatori di lavoro.”

<sup>5</sup> 14 April 2005. “Le Legge Regionale sul Mobbing.” *Lavoro Oggi*.p. 51.

<sup>6</sup> 14 April 2005. “Le Legge Regionale sul Mobbing.” *Lavoro Oggi*.p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> 14 April 2005. “Le Legge Regionale sul Mobbing.” *Lavoro Oggi*.p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> 23 June 2006. “Il Mobbing é Questione Regionale.” *Italia Oggi*. p. 40.

mobbing is tied to health; cases in Germany are tried as a violation of “personal freedoms and health” (Zippel 2006: 188).

In the 1980s, a critical ruling preceded a series of changes in the understanding of “biological damage” in terms of legal settlements, “not only in the strict sense of patrimonial damage, but for all of the damages that hinder the self-actualizing activities of human beings” (Corte Costituzionale 14 July 1986 n. 184 cited in Buffone 2005), thereby allowing the notion of “moral” damage (di Guidice 2004). The notion of “moral damage” in the realm of worker’s compensation expanded to include intangible loss, and paralleled similar codifications of “*prejudice physiologique*” in France and “pain and suffering” in the United States (Buffone 2005). Moral damage amounts to “spiritual suffering” and thus it is not necessary that a subject suffers physically or psychologically in order to demonstrate moral damage (Amato et. al 2002: 20: 112).

Finally, under Article 2087, “existential damage” has also been awarded in mobbing cases in which the measurable and biological damage were not sufficient in capturing the kinds of damage suffered by a mobbee. Existential damage is the immeasurable loss of actualizing herself as a person in the workplace: “altering their life habits and the relational assets belonging to them, upsetting the quotidian and depriving them of the occasion to express and actualize their personalities to the external world” (Serrao 2005). Existential damage, then, names a kind of future-oriented loss of potentiality in one’s career and personal life (Amato et. al 2002: 128). Cases related to mobbing, tried under this Article, award material amounts for these specific damages: a Pisa tribunal court awarded ten million lira (five thousand dollars) for biological damage in 2001 and, in another case, approximately thirty thousand dollars for existential damage (Amato et. al 2002: 160). Following the progression of modern labor from physical to increasingly psychological toil, so, too, has

Article 2087 shifted from “biological” damage to “existential” damage for work harassment.

Harking back to the turn of the century, and following the Luigi Devoto Work Clinic in 1902, there was, in fact, an earlier interest in work-related accidents such as the 1894 founding of the Industrial Association to Prevent Work-Related Accidents (Willson 1985).<sup>9</sup> This became a precedent for the current SPISAL (Agency for Prevention, Hygiene and Safety at Work) which has a number of responsibilities: promoting public awareness of work-related health issues, preventing work-related accidents and illnesses, inspecting private and public facilities, conducting research on related issues and keeping track of causes and outcomes of work-related accidents and illnesses. Later, the Fascist state also created INFAIL (National Fascist Institute for Insurance against Work-Related Accidents) in 1933 (Willson 1985: 241) which later became INAIL, the site of the codification of OCP.<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that the fascist state established these institutions while the workers’ movement was simultaneously severely repressed and workers’ strikes abolished (Willson 1985, Horn 1994). Thus laws and policies that safeguarded worker’s bodies have not been and should not be analyzed as simply benevolent. They show how worker’s health, moreover, was not protected as an individualized entity, but rather as a security for the collective body (Horn 1994). Fascist state interests in quelling workers were compatible with those of industrial leaders of the time. State protections, as in the case of the Fascist state, may be simultaneously granted in tandem with expanding an oppressive labor regime. Certain protections reinvoked within the dynamics of contemporary Italian state also carry both beneficial and harmful effects for workers.

The undetermined time contract, protected by Article 18 of the 1970 Work Charter,

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<sup>9</sup> Associazione degli industriali d’Italia per prevenire gli infortuni.

<sup>10</sup> INFAIL (Istituto nazionale fascista per l’assicurazione contro gli infortuni sul lavoro) and INAIL (Istituto nazionale per l’assicurazione contro gli infortuni sul lavoro)

also articulates with the notion of good health. Its origins emerge as a reaction to fascism as employers had a full and wide range of possibilities to fire workers during fascism (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004). For organizations with more than fifteen employees, this law allows citizens protections for sick leave, pension and retirement, and it is often evoked as a principle and necessary predecessor for marriage and family. When I explained to Italians I met that we did not have the same right in the United States, there first question was often: “What do you do if you’re sick?” With an undetermined time contract, not only are workers offered benefits that cover extended sick leave, but they are also assured that they will be not be fired because they have taken sick leave. Additionally, in 2003, there was a national referendum to extend Article 18 to companies with fewer than fifteen workers that was ultimately not approved. During the campaign, however, left-wing political groups mobilized campaign slogans that situated Article 18 specifically as a health protection: “Voting yes for the referendum is an ethical duty. It means you support defending your right to health.”<sup>11</sup>

Given these significant historical precedents, Italians have developed a sense that work and health are intimately intertwined—creating a cultural ethos in which workplace harassment may result in ill health. The risks of the neoliberal workplace are not tangible in the same way that machines or fires were visible and recognizable dangers—they are traceable neither to a specific human agent nor to a material object. But workers nonetheless feel deeply threatened and fall ill. Without the physical or material cues to indicate where precisely the danger lies, the failures of the body become that which can verify workplace harm. In this way, worker-citizens reinstate the historical role of the state

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<sup>11</sup> 31 May 2003. “Referendum e Salute.” *Il Manifesto*.  
[<http://www.ilmanifesto.it/articolo18/interventi/3ed8cd95a5a80.html>]

in ensuring their bodily integrity onto a modern state teetering towards forms of self-governance and dominated by free market ideologies.

### **6.3 Mobbing as Illness**

#### *6.3.1 Biology and State Welfare*

Over the years in which mobbing has been a recognizable cultural category for Italians, it has garnered much attention from various health agencies in Italy and Europe. Tracing the medical discourse of mobbing from its emergence to more recent years reveals the underlying cultural notions that tie specific practices within the workplace to good and poor health. Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) have cautioned that symptoms of the individual body must be read as always contingent with and reverberating into the social body and the body politic: “Medicalization inevitably entails a missed identification between the individual and social bodies, and a tendency to transform the social into the biological” (10). Just when the idea of the precarious new economy dominated public discourse, so too did the idea of precarious bodies in the workforce begin to emerge.

At the same time, the cultural dynamics of social and biological health reflect and refigure the management of health and illness by the state. Working in China, Arthur Kleinman (1994) found that bodily suffering became an exploitable tool to counter the state: “The exhausted, painful, vertiginous body—the body that has lost its social force and moral force—became the grounds for negotiations over jobs, time, responsibilities and resources” (716). Though the state’s coercion and objectification of human bodies has been widely recognized and debated (e.g., Foucault 1975, 1978; Martin 1984; Aretxaga 2001, Comaroff and Comaroff 1993), the changing parameters of citizens’ management of biological vulnerability has been, until recently, underanalyzed. In relation to the explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in Ukraine, Adriana Petryna (2004) theorizes “biological

citizenship” by illuminating how biological claims enable citizens to make demands for forms of state welfare based on “medical, scientific, and legal criteria that recognize injury and compensate for it” (261). It is important, however, to recognize that the biologicalization of the organization of labor in Italy and a national biological disaster such as that of Chernobyl have quite diverse starting points. Just as the case of post-Chernobyl “biological citizenship” bears the traces of post-socialism, so does worker-citizenship emerging in Italy rests on a post-Fascist articulation between bodily integrity and labor. In Ukraine, “the injured biology of a population has become the basis for social membership and for staking claims to citizenship” (Petryna 2004: 261); whereas in Italy, it is the injured labor market *mediated* by a body constituted through regimes of biological knowledge that has become a basis for worker-citizenship. OCP does not derive from a clear biological and mortal danger like that of Chernobyl. Rather, a national *labor* crisis has become, in effect, a biological phenomenon.

Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas (2003) have a slightly different understanding of biological citizenship than Petryna (2004). While they also underscore the importance of biological assumptions and biomedicine in the concept of late modern citizenship, they link this process of a global historical reconfiguration of social and biological or “the biologization of politics” (440; see also Rabinow 1992). They argue that it is the very pliability of biology that enables differently-located citizens to mold biology around diverse kinds of claims, desires and beckonings of the state. Rose and Novas (2003) also share a largely hopeful vision of how citizens, acquiring biological literacy, can enact change (452). In this form of biological citizenship, new ethics emerge in which “life is productive of economic value” (Rose and Novas 2003: 459). The biological negotiations taking place with mobbing as a work-related illness reveal how this equation is reversed, how an Italian belief

that economic exchanges produce and structure biological life changes how Italians conceptualize work. Mobbing-related illness shows how citizenship, when tied to biological epistemologies, may produce unexpected, and often negative effects. At the same time, the fractured state, both enabling and opposing biological claims, produces often unpredictable and opposing responses to citizens. Understandings of mobbing, from its inception to the definition of OCP, sit precariously between a sense of somatic disruption and psychological pain. Moreover, that mobbing encompasses both labor and bodily risk forces not only a revision of “work-related illness,” but also the articulation between citizen and worker.

The process that comes as necessarily prior to a medical diagnosis related to mobbing is the conceptualization of mobbing as a form of harassment that is disturbing to both body and mind. Often cited within the field of mobbing-specialized psychologists, doctors and union workers are the six phases of mobbing as defined by psychologist Dr. Harold Ege (1998). Dr. Ege is an acclaimed mobbing specialist and also the founder of Bologna’s clinic *Prima*, “The Italian Association Against Mobbing and Psycho-Social Stress.” Below I cite Ege’s (2002) descriptions of the six stages of mobbing:

Phase 1: Generalized conflict within workplace becomes directed against one subject who is increasingly marginalized, isolated, criticized.
Phase 2: Deterioration of social relations; group acts as if subject does not exist.
Phase 3: Mobbing becomes symptomatic and subject shows insecurity, sleeplessness, depression. Subject’s self-doubt becomes the object of further torment.
Phase 4: The subject’s professional and private life are subject to attack. Subject’s work tasks are often limited or removed, or above or below his/her abilities.
Phase 5: The attacks have a greater effect on the subject’s mental and physical health. Mobbee is often on sick leave, harassment may continue by repeated visits of legal doctors to check on mobbee’s status. <sup>12</sup>
Phase 6: Mobbee seeks to end job by quitting, early retirement, and most gravely, suicide.

**Figure 1 Ege’s Six Stages of Mobbing.**

<sup>12</sup> A “legal doctor” in Italy refers to a medical professional who is authorized by the state to verify medical claims for legal proceedings. Sometimes they are referred to as “occupational doctor” (*medico del lavoro*) or “fiscal doctor” (*medico fiscale*). Consider that Anna in the film was visited by a legal doctor.



Ege (1996, 1998) then divides the effects of mobbing into three categories: 1) emotional disturbances (anxiety, depression, irritability); 2) psychosomatic symptoms (headaches, gastro-intestinal maladies, back aches, difficulty in concentrating, respiratory and skin –related problems); and 3) behavioral (increased use of cigarettes and alcohol, loss of appetite, reduced desire to engage socially, self-isolating behaviors) (see also Bertinaria 2004). Ege’s stages succinctly show a gradual progression of work harassment and its complex escalation. While Ege includes certain kinds of practices that account for mobbing (isolation, marginalization, criticism), for the most part, mobbing remains rather elusive. It is unlike other threats to workers as it does not represent direct physical danger with visible material injuries and effects. The very nature of post-Fordist labor, producing mental anguish in workers, forces a reconceptualization of original labor protections that focused on safeguarding workers’ bodies. The manifestations of mobbing, defined by drawing from the notion of a “psycho-somatic” body, become more pronounced and important in the latter phases. The definition of mobbing thus becomes retro-actively defined by the kinds of mental and bodily symptoms experienced by the victim. The mental fragility of workers was further emphasized in 2001 when psychologists warned of “pseudo-mobbing,” a form of pathological mobbing hypochondria: “An individual can develop an abnormal interpretation, excessive, based on a pathological and extreme hyper-sensibility, regarding these stimuli that are, in other cases, considered normal.”<sup>13</sup> The task of defining what constitutes “real” mobbing remains obscure and difficult for workers to discern and, in turn, contest.

For mobbees I met in Italy, it was often difficult to decipher the organizational ‘intentionality’ of lost files, inconsistent workloads, and unpredictable colleagues—

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<sup>13</sup> “Il mobbing prospera nella new economy.” *La Repubblica*. (26 March 2001).

happenstance or calculated hostility? The medical discourse of mobbing produces the body as a means to know one's social environment. Determining whether or not one was being mobbed, according to an ideology that focused on work practices, might be: "Are my managers and my colleagues mistreating me, overly critical, or ignoring me? Am I being mobbed?" That health issues became more visible and wide-spread to the problem created the conditions for different epistemological grounds for mobbing. Workers are invited to ask, first and foremost: "Am I experiencing depression, sleeplessness and anxiety related to work?" and then: "Am I being mobbed?" Knowing one's body, then, has become a way to navigate the workplace and one's role within corporate power relations. The impetus of change is placed on the employee to validate biological claims, rather than on the employer to prevent them. The existence of the coercive practices that constitute mobbing must be confirmed through the lens of biological and psychological symptoms. Whether or not specific abusive or persecutory work practices were taking place against the worker seemed to come secondary to the "proof" that bodily suffering is being experienced by the 'victim.' Part of this also relates to how mobbers seem to drop out of the mobbing, replaced by pathogens like "generalized conflict in the workplace" (see above). Ege's stages, in this sense, are the global economic conditions that create "generalized conflict in the workplace." Discourses of mobbing reiterate this cause-effect reversal between work practices and "psycho-physical" symptoms. Though the effects of mobbing oscillate between physical (gastrointestinal maladies) and psychological (depression), both are conceptualized as biological responses to workplace harassment.

#### **6.4 Healthy Workplaces, Healthy Bodies**

Understandings of mobbing within Italy reflect various and continual input from the supranational governance of the European Union. The European Union made evident that

it placed importance on the protection of workers' health and safety when, in 1996, member states of the European Council signed an agreement, the "Carta Sociale." This agreement among member states protected worker's health and promoted worker's right to dignity, and created a general aim to improve the social rights of workers (Staino 2003). In 2001, the European Parliament approved a resolution related specifically to mobbing, and called attention to the "devastating effects" of mobbing on worker's health, noting that women were particularly at risk.<sup>14</sup> This resolution urged member states to create anti-mobbing legislation and to reduce mobbing, estimating it affected at least twelve million people in Europe (Di Martino and De Santis 2003:139). The same year a study reported that at least 8% of workers in the European Union were being mobbed (Amato et. al 2004: 65).

European Union recognition conferred a significant degree of validity and importance on the problem of mobbing within Italy—not to mention that it expanded the available funds for clinics, research and programs. Yet, just as we have seen in Italy, mobbing was framed as a *health* problem on the European level. In 2002, the Luigi Devoto Work Clinic in Milan, in collaboration with support of ISPESL (*Istituto Superiore per la Prevenzione e la Sicurezza del Lavoro*), and the European Agency for the Security and Health at Work issued a special pamphlet on mobbing, "Mobbing in the Workplace."<sup>15</sup> Shortly after, the World Health Organization issued, "Psychological Violence at Work: Increasing Awareness" (*Violenza psicologica sul lavoro: accrescere la consapevolezza*), the fourth in a series on

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<sup>14</sup> Mobbing in the Workplace A5-0283/2001.

<sup>15</sup> Established in 1980 (D.P.R. 31 luglio 1980), ISPESL is (*Istituto superiore per la prevenzione e la sicurezza del lavoro*) Institute for Prevention and Security at Work, an organ of the national health care apparatus, evaluates whether health norms and regulations are enforced. They conduct research to prevent work-related accidents and illnesses, developing new health requirements and assessing risk for new materials, technologies, tools and machines. ISPESL develops projects to prevent accidents and protect works, in order to standardize methods used to evaluate health risks and enhance security measures. Technical and scientific consulting for the conformity of products and procedures, as well as certification of health safeguards also fall within the responsibilities of this institution. In addition to research activities, the institution promotes public awareness campaigns and organizes educational courses for employers and health representatives.

protecting workers' health (Cassitto et al. 2003). Here the authors, including famous Italian mobbing psychologist Dr. Renato Giglioli, defined mobbing as “repeated and irrational behavior, towards one employee or a group such that it creates a health and security risk” (Cassitto et al. 2003: 12). Mobbing, then, surfaces as “irrational” behaviors that create health problems for workers—though their formulation encompasses a set of practices that are increasingly wide-spread in Italy. The medical model of mobbing, in tandem with an understanding of citizens' bodily integrity, created the ontological conditions for new political subjectivities to modify not just mobbing but the organization of work.

The idea of mobbing is often positioned as something that provokes ill health, as an immoral consequence of “rational” cost-cutting economic systems. For example, Elena Ferrari (2004) reports for the European Commission Daphne Programme, and describes “strategic” mobbing:

It is a kind of *mobbing* strategically used by organisations in order to dismiss undesirable subjects. They can be subjects belonging to the previous management or assigned to a department that is to be eliminated, or they are too expensive (a senior costs more than two newly employed people) or no longer corresponding to the expectations of the organisation. It often takes place in those enterprises whose staff, after a restructuring, a merger or a change, is redundant and needs to be partially dismissed. Thus, *mobbing* becomes a real business strategy (6).

A similar view of mobbing can be found from a statement on mobbing from various occupational doctors at Italy's many Medical Institutes of Work:

In the past years, mobbing has been increasing for macroeconomic reasons (globalization, big international mergers, fusions, recessions, etc.) and because of the change in the typology of work and for related work risks (Giglioli et. al 2001 in Di Martino and De Santis 2003).

These texts, thus, view mobbing from a materialist standpoint, as a form of “strategic” cost reduction yet simultaneously a deviant practice according to welfare ideologies that constitute workers as subjects with rights to bodily integrity. It is in this latter sense that

legitimizes an intervention by health authorities. The authors of *Psychological Violence at Work* (2003) make a concerted effort to coherently detail the immoral practices that make up mobbing:

- damage to personal objects
- derision, in the presence of colleagues and superiors
- diffusion of false information
- exclusion
- intrusion into private life
- isolation
- instigation from colleagues
- continual bad talk
- threats of violence
- sexual harassment
- verbal assaults
- provocations
- humiliation (Cassitto et al. 2003: 14)

What is unusual about this list is that since these actions may be carried out by one individual or many, the focus on a kind of mobber that would likely be demonized, or at least profiled, is entirely absented from this account. There is no kind of manager that emerges as the “perverse mobber”—a popular conceptualization in France unlike in Italy. Instead, this list offers a vague set of actions and behaviors that many workers might identify with, at least some of the time. Moreover, situating sexual harassment as a cause of mobbing erases the sexualized dynamics of mobbing, and the gendered asymmetries of men both sexually and “morally” harassing women.<sup>16</sup>

In order to further distinguish mobbing from a turbulent work environment, the pamphlet goes on to include a table that describes what distinguishes “healthy conflicts” from mobbing in the workplace (Cassitto et al. 2003: 15):

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<sup>16</sup> Mobbing is often glossed as “molestie morale” (moral harassment), making it parallel in structure to “molestie sessuale” (sexual harassment).

<b>Healthy Conflicts</b>	<b>Mobbing</b>
Clear roles and responsibilities	Ambiguous roles
Collaborative relationships	Uncollaborative behavior, boycotts
Common and shared objectives	No perspective
Clear interpersonal relationships	Ambiguous interpersonal relationships
Good organization	Organizational anomalies
Healthy fights and confrontations	Unethical repeated and systematic actions
Clear and transparent strategies	Equivocal strategies
Open conflicts and discussions	Submerged actions and negation of conflicts
Direct communication	Oblique and evasive communication

**Figure 2 Healthy Conflicts versus Mobbing**

The table attempts to distinguish the kind of workplace environment in which mobbing might grow. Later in the document, the authors indict the late modern work environment as a contributing risk factor to these conditions:

The international work environment requires a highly flexible work environment for the schedule, employment and working status. This aspect, together with downsizing and corporate restructuring, can favor precariousness and fear of being unemployed and represents a favorable terrain for the development of mobbing (Cassitto et al. 2003: 25).

They also cite “horizontal management styles” that promote inter-colleague competition and a decline in ethical values as key contributing factors to mobbing (Cassitto et al. 2003: 23).

Paradoxically, however, the practices defined as antithetical to “healthy conflicts” are economically favorable for conforming to flexible work regimes and increasingly the norm in Italy. For example, “ambiguous roles” and “ambiguous interpersonal relationships” have become common for many workers as corporations restructure and shift around responsibilities according to personnel reorganization (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004). “No perspective” and “submerged actions” are part of the generalized unknowing and left-in-the-dark style of management style where most workers are not allowed to know about the next

steps for closures, lay-offs and off-shore investments (Collins 2003, 2005). Information related to a corporation's off-shore expansions or closures has great value, as it may suggest plans to terminate employment contracts. Employees therefore become more suspicious of who has this kind of information, as news that circulates around the workplace has potentially damaging personal consequences—job loss. The resulting environment, typical within the neoliberal flexible regime that I found in Italy, and exemplified by the vagueness of Ettore's management style, as described in Chapter 5, operates by *expanding* “oblique and evasive communication” and “organizational anomalies”—or what the authors claim is “unhealthy.” Thus, the practices characteristic of “mobbing” are emerging as the norm, while “healthy conflicts” represent more of an ideal or nostalgic vision of workplace relations.

The pamphlet, highlighting mobbing as gravely anomalous, describes the psychological and physical effects of this allegedly unlikely work situation on the worker. Symptoms are divided into psychopathological, (e.g., mood change, apathy, and flashbacks), psychosomatic (e.g., asthma, headaches, heart problems) and behavioral (e.g., drug/alcohol consumption, smoking, sexual dysfunction) (Cassitto et al. 2003: 16). Certain medical symptoms, such as mood disorders, emerge in an already gendered discursive realm that articulates gender with particular medical symptoms. Women, for instance, are assumed to suffer from mood and affective disorders more often than men. Rather than an emphasis on a particular pathologized mobber, the World Health Organization document authoritatively links a set of organizational practices and the structure of work relations to ill health. The structure of work itself is a pathogen.

## 6.5 Mobbing as Epidemic in Italy

In Italy, as mobbing's connection to occupational illnesses became increasingly widespread, newspapers were quick to link mobbing to the most devastating effects on health. In 2002, a prominent national Milan-based newspaper reported on mobbing: "The 'work-related sickness' (*malattia professionale*) consists of: psychosomatic reactions, headaches, tachycardia, gastritis, arthritis pain, disturbances in equilibrium, but also, anxiety, shifts in moods, even extreme reactions like anorexia, bulimia, alcoholism."<sup>17</sup> In 2003, Torino medical doctors organized a conference, "Headaches and Mobbing."<sup>18</sup> The Veneto-region newspaper, *Il Gazzettino*, described the importance of codifying a single definition of mobbing in 2005: "No matter what you call it, by now mobbing is considered a sickness. It's actually nearly an epidemic and this is precisely its new frontier."<sup>19</sup> The article also reported that "19% of the victims are diagnosed with 'stress disturbances' or with maladjustment disturbance. Other symptoms include ulcers, dizziness, headaches, or memory problems [...] sleep disturbances, bulimia, drug and alcohol abuse."<sup>20</sup>

A 2004 article described mobbing as a "new social pathology."<sup>21</sup> In many descriptions, mobbing is continually invoked as an unpredictable violence with dire consequences:

It's rather diffuse and often that female and male workers don't have the strength, nor the protection to rebel, maybe even fearing the worst: because in mobbing you inject the subtle venom into the more or less hidden threat of the worst: a transfer or otherwise, that forces the weak one to be subordinated to everyone, that [produces] damage against one's dignity and one's physical and psychic health."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Working sickness" refers to "malattia professionale." "Mobbing: Malattia da 20 miliardi di Euro." *Corriere della Sera*. (1 September 2002).

<sup>18</sup> 22 November 2003. *La Stampa*. "Spettacolo e Tempo Libero a Torino."

<sup>19</sup> Bignotti, Gigi. *Mobbing, Incubo per Centomila*. *Il Gazzettino* 9 January 2005, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Bignotti, Gigi. *Mobbing, Incubo per Centomila*. *Il Gazzettino* 9 January 2005, p. 3..

<sup>21</sup> 5 May 2004. "Regione Lazio: Nuove Proposte di Legge per il Mobbing." *Ansa Notiziario Generale in Italiano*.

<sup>22</sup> Filippone, Bruno. "Mobbing: Cos'è?" *Fogli* 4: 16/31 March 2002.



Discourses identifying mobbing as a type of health problem were both widely circulated and linked to institutions whose knowledge production held often unquestioned validity: the European Union and the World Health Organization. For Italians, discourse that espouses the medical effects of mobbing made available and convincing the idea that mobbing would be lived, first and foremost, as a bodily experience.

## **6.6 Living It on the Skin**

The growing pervasiveness of ideas about mobbing as something detrimental to health was evident, importantly, in the narratives of those who felt they were being mobbed. During fieldwork in mobbing clinics and corporate sites in the northeastern city of Padua, I found that almost every person who had encountered what they defined as mobbing tied their experience to particular bodily reactions—skin rashes, anxiety, sleeplessness, depression, vomiting, among others. In previous chapters, I have discussed other cases of mobbing in which health and bodily illness has been evident and central. Michela (Chapter 4) suffered various psychosomatic symptoms, from depression to vomiting, and her sick leave was instrumental in her recovery. Giulia (Chapter 4) also described her poor health as a result of ongoing harassment at work and was also taking psychopharmaceutical medication. Anna, the film protagonist, was also portrayed as having a fainting spell, depression and was bed-ridden for a period of the film. Honing in how workers reacted to mobbing, both physically and mentally, allows me to analyze the question of how, on one level, mobbing became linked to embodied experiences, and moreover, how neoliberal economies are chronicled in the somatic registers of a population. The embodied subjectivity of mobbee, with proof of ailing health, at once made compensation a viable option and disproved suspicions that the mobbee had undergone simply “healthy conflicts.”

In their small office, in a larger building hosting music schools and various social clubs, Dora Carroni and Lidia Vetri have co-directed their “anti-mobbing” clinic since 1997, co-funded by the Veneto regional government and non-profit organizations. They identify themselves as mobbing survivors and explain that they founded the clinic based on their own work experiences. Dora, in her early fifties, is a tall woman with shortly cropped blonde hair, a friendly face without cosmetic adornment and a genuine smile with prominent teeth. One afternoon, Lidia, in her early sixties, Dora’s shorter and darker-haired work companion, alternated between the desk and her position near the open window where she ashed her cigarette. A middle-aged trade union man came to the clinic and described how he’d taken a course on mobbing and wanted to do something more, to be involved in preventing it. After his departure, I commented on their evident disinterest and asked why they didn’t want extra help. Lidia glared at me, horrified, and said in all the years that she, as a mobbee, had suffered and gone to every place she could think of: “Every door shut in my face!” “Noelle,” Lidia continued, “I’ve used myself up in this lifetime (*Mi sono consumata in questa vita*),” and, “And I know I will not grow old because it [mobbing] is something I will always carry with me.” In one sudden movement, she leaned closer to me and yanked up the arm of her sweater, swatting the pale skin repeatedly with her other hand and shouting, “I’ve lived mobbing on this skin! On this skin! (*L’ho vissuto mobbing sulla pelle! Sulla pelle!*). My eyes fixed on the now-reddened patch on the fleshier under part of her forearm, and breathed in the cigarette smell of her breath and the desk’s ashtray. Almost as quickly as her face had become red a moment ago, her entire posture relaxed and she grinned at me. In her signature raspy voice she said, “Don’t worry, Noelle; this is just how I talk.” Lidia’s painful experience of being mobbed was measured in terms of permanent bodily trauma, one that I, as someone who had not been mobbed, would only dare to question. Her

rejection of the man's offer, I believe, was a rejection of the trade union for not having helped her earlier when she was being mobbed. Dora and Lidia's clinical practices were generally indexed towards psychiatrists and lawyers, revealing their overall mistrust of trade unions. Important are also the gendered dynamics of mobbing professionals in Italy. While many clinical workers, psychologists and activists are women, many men hold roles within unions, labor ministries, public health institutions and legal firms. Refusing to collaborate with unions also means keeping the management of mobbing cases away from men's involvement.

Underpinning Lidia's reaction were also cultural understandings of the body that merit attention. Mobbing "lived on the skin" materializes a kind of embodied subjectivity that mediates between economies of bodies and capitalism. The phrase itself, "lived on the skin," is one in which Italians may use to represent life-changing experiences that resonate to the core of the body. The following are some examples of other experiences invoked as "lived on the skin": emotional abuse, religion, poverty, medical school training, a city and political upheaval.

Links between bodily experiences, and specifically the skin, have also resurfaced in written materials on the topic of mobbing. The book, *Mobbing: Reflections on the Skin* (Ascenzi and Bergagio 2002) chronicles the experiences of mobbing of "R.," a woman who worked as technical director for a travel agency in Palermo, Sicily for fifteen years. In 1995, the director asked R. to collaborate with her employer during a transition phase of enlarging the growing company. Progressively, R. lost all her colleagues and staff and remained on the job by herself for over a year until a psychologist was sent from corporate headquarters to observe her. For R., this represented a hostile act by her employers indirectly designed to push her to quit. When she did not, and the company made several offers of severance

packages for her, R. was sent to the northern city of Verona and was forced to leave her husband and son in Sicily to preserve her position. In Verona she suffered serious depression: “My health got worse because my mind ordered my body to express itself, and it was indifferent to the external attempts at help (drugs, psycho-pharmaceuticals, family and friends)” (Ascenzi and Bergagio 2002: 22). During her sick leave, the company sent medical professionals to check on R.’s status, reduced her pay, and denied her access to information and job training. Once again, in 1999 she was transferred to Perugia where she was hospitalized for a combination of asthma, Raynaud’s syndrome, and high blood pressure. Eventually, she visited Dr. Gilioli’s health clinic in Milan. She began building a legal case in 1997: “When everything is done, if I get justice, if I’m right, what we have *lived on our skin* will be absorbed. And inside of them, of those who are dear to me, it will un-removable, forever” (Ascenzi and Bergagio 2002: 28, emphasis mine). Like Lidia, R. describes mobbing not only as capable of marking the skin, but as something that engages bodies in the process of absorption.

Lidia’s exclamation of “living on the skin” reiterates the permeability of the body, rather than proclaiming the skin as the body’s enclosed and protected “end” (Haraway 1991:178; see also Grosz 1994).<sup>23</sup> The experience of mobbees suggests a conceptualization of the body’s skin as vulnerable and alterable. Indeed “living on the skin” suggests a particular Italian conceptualization of the body that is without a strong separation between “flesh” and “body.” Italy’s medical history is, in fact, deeply shaped by humoral medicine that viewed the skin/body as highly permeable (Whitaker 2003). According to Whitaker

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<sup>23</sup> Within the field anthropology of the body, the notion of the always already “social skin” (Turner 1980) has been a starting point for delving into the ways social practices and discourses interact with bodily experience. Andrew Strathern (1977) recognized, “The skin is the immediate point of contact with the physical world outside. . .and can also conveniently symbolize the point of contact between themselves and the social forces that surround them” (101). Feminist theorists have pointed towards understanding the skin less as a barrier and more as a porous entity across which mutual exchange occurs—between machine and organism (Haraway 1991).

(2003), Italians engage in practices that involve drying and covering the skin in order to stave off atmospheric influences that weaken the body. For example, Italians are extremely wary of catching a gust of coldness (*prendere freddo*) or coming upon a shock of cold air (*colpo d'aria*) because it is believed it will instantaneously block digestion, resulting in various intestinal ailments. Additionally, people suffering from stomachaches will wrap the stomach in blankets to prevent this sudden environmental disturbance. Moreover, one can find Italians putting on sweaters in the summer so that the skin, damp from sweat and susceptible to gusts of air, remains protected. Given how Italians draw from biomedical and humoral medical frameworks, it is not surprising that “living on the skin” represents a deeply embodied experience.

On another day, a few months later, I was back at the clinic with Dora and Lidia. Dora was on the phone and Lidia waved me in the door. An article was published in the newspaper for the northeast, *Il Gazzettino*, describing a local government official who had reportedly lost his patience with a social worker during a meeting. The paper described the episode as mobbing, to the passionate objection of Dora and Lidia. “We’re calling the paper,” Lidia said, as Dora held the line. A single hostile encounter could not be counted as mobbing, not only for because it did not encompass long-term harassment and suffering, but also because the victim did not experience any serious ill effects. Their own bodily suffering in relation to mobbing, I believe, makes them highly sensitive to the ways in which media outlets, like newspapers, might co-opt the term. Naming something as mobbing that strays from their definition somehow undermines worker’s claims who have indeed suffered. Lidia explained further: “With mobbing, if you’ve endured it then you think you’ve done something wrong, and if you’ve endured it then you understand how you suffer, those people suffer. This is the only way to know if it’s mobbing or not.” For Lidia, the suffering

that mobbees endure, experienced as bodily sensations, psychological and physical ills, became the important measure of knowing it more profoundly. This practice of calling the newspaper can also be read as an assertion of their epistemological framing of mobbing.

Many of their visitors told Lidia and Dora about the biological symptoms they had experienced as a result of mobbing. Pino Arturini, for example, was a 47-year old municipal police officer whom I met at Lidia's mobbing clinic. Though he had a long career with the police department, trouble began when he was promoted to vice director. Rather suddenly, he explained, he was left with neither work assignments to complete nor officers to coordinate. The new title, he explained, was a just a trap to mob him. Likening himself to a "ghost who wanders the halls of his workplace," he explained how he was shut up in a room and left only with the civil and penal code to read. As Lidia had encouraged him, he collected various medical certificates documenting his trauma, which for him had been bright red spots that appeared all over his body, anxiety and depression, and the loss of ten teeth in six months. He had also collected evidence of his lack of work. Over the past few years, Pino has taken various sick leaves from work. In the process of building his legal case of mobbing against the city, Pino was suing for demotion and "biological damages." His visible, biological symptoms refigured the way in which Pino was able to make claims on the welfare state. We also see how he developed a particular practice of rigid documentation of his day-to-day work life and bodily condition. In this way, the responsibility of Pino's welfare as a worker-citizen rested on his capacity and desire to track his body and utilize public services, like mobbing clinics. This is one example of a far broader shift in neoliberal governance in which welfare services are diffused and depend on documentation and intermediaries, often specially trained or expert professionals, between citizen and state (Rose 1996, Ong 2006). Collecting medical certificates had also been publicized as a strategic

tactic for mobbing cases. According to an “expert in labor rights” and lawyer in Milan: “First thing is that victims must produce a medical proof of their state, in order to scientifically validate their psychological status.”<sup>24</sup> Given the scarcity of mobbing specialists in the region, this same approach adopted by Dora and Lidia had significant effects as they solidified the medical management of mobbing cases on a day-to-day basis.

Certain key actors like clinical workers Lidia and Dora played a particularly important role in the circulation of medical knowledge and the normalization of these self-governing practices or, in the Foucauldian sense, these “techniques of the self.” These practices were evident in multiple ways and across various mobbing cases that they handled. One of their clients, Maria Crema, a cafeteria worker in her forties, began by describing to them how she had been given a month and a half of sick leave for a series of health problems incurred because of mobbing. Maria described how her employers, desiring her to quit, had instead given her impossible tasks to complete. For example, she described, they insisted she prepare particular dishes without ordering the necessary ingredients, for which she would then be reprimanded. She was transferred to another location, her vacation and overtime hours were taken away and her weekly time schedule was reduced. She also received orders to be transferred via mail without any prior warning or explanation from her employer, in addition to being hired one level inferior to her appropriate employment level.<sup>25</sup> Anna and Dora counseled her to not return to work after the month and a half of her sick leave had expired, and made sure she had collected a variety of medical certificates documenting her back and arm pain. Suggesting an appointment with their psychiatrist, Dora listened sympathetically and added: “Yes, mobbing is very psychosomatic.” Here, it is important to

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<sup>24</sup> “Mobbing: Malattia da 20 miliardi di Euro.” *Corriere della Sera*. (1 September 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Employees’ contract lists a specific hierarchical level which corresponds with work assignments and minimum salary.

note that Dora's understanding of a "psychosomatic" body embeds a Western medicalized term for the transformation of psychological stress into bodily effects.

They assured Maria that their doctor would be able to give her at least another month of sick leave and necessary medication. Lidia and Dora told me privately that many of their clients had turned to anti-depressants because they had become suicidal. Knowing how the problems would escalate, they explained why they recommended an early meeting with their "partner" psychiatrist as a precautionary measure for clients.

As the link between health and mobbing has become more explicit, Italian workers share a greater ability to sue their abusive employers—if they can make mobbing show on the skin. At the same time, the skin seems to be an important element of mobbing as both a psychological and somatic phenomenon. While many mobbees clearly recognized the mental and existential pain to what they were experiencing, there was also a physical or measurable manifestation—rashes, back pain, teeth loss—that was seen as an outgrowth of psychological alienation. The marked skin suggests the effects of a traumatic experience, though does not necessarily specify the preceding events or cause. For mobbees in Italy, what shows on the body becomes the medium around which they can hold the state responsible for the sometimes intangible economic and social effects that have come with neoliberal change.

## **6.7 Instruction as Redemption**

I encountered mobbees with health problems and difficulties at other clinics, and in one case, had the opportunity to visit the corporate site of one mobbee. The following case history provides additional evidence of the bodily registers of mobbing, offering a glimpse at the practices and understandings of the mobbee's colleagues. I met Cinzia Vanni in September at Councilwoman Fiore Montiglio's clinic, the Equal Opportunity Office, a state-



elected political institution present in every province of Italy that caters to mostly women's employment issues. Appearing rather timid, Cinzia had large brown eyes and chin-length brown hair. She worked in the sales branch of one of Italy's largest and oldest textile companies and held an undetermined time contract. Cinzia began to describe her mobber, Jessica, who had worked as an administrative assistant in Cinzia's department for the past seven years, and who had been actively harassing Cinzia for the past four. Described to us as someone who "is always first in line," Jessica always "had her peace flag" and went to many political demonstrations. Fumbling nervously Cinzia added: "But that's her public face, then she drops comments like whoever isn't part of a union is a parasite." She explained how Jessica rarely spoke to her directly but insulted her via her conversations with others. Jessica would usually amplify her hostile comments in the close office quarters of in communal office space to maximize, Cinzia felt, her isolation and humiliation. Cinzia said she knew the comment about unions was specifically designed to humiliate her because she was not part of a trade union.

Cinzia continued with another episode of mobbing in which she had accidentally responded to one of Jessica's telephone calls. When she passed the phone to her, Jessica said: "Everyone has a cross to bear." Fiore asked her to clarify what this meant. Cinzia began to cry and trembled noticeably: "That *I am* her cross. That I am difficult." These, and other similar episodes, had also provoked physical symptoms for Cinzia including hand rashes and sleeplessness, in addition to anxiety and depression. She also didn't feel comfortable talking about this problem to her husband, and she felt it had a negative impact on her family life. Like the men and women I had met at Dora and Lidia's clinic, episodes of mobbing were closely linked to corporeal disruption.

In an unexpected resolution, the corporation had decided to transfer Jessica out of her department, freeing Cinzia from these unbearable encounters. Cinzia added that she was actually somewhat regretful that Jessica was leaving because she had not had the opportunity to defend herself. But she had devised an alternative way to deal with mobbing in the workplace. Cinzia asked Fiore and me to come to talk about gender discrimination and mobbing during the union assembly meeting at Bireni. This also struck me as a way to recuperate her political subjectivity as a trade union activist, which Jessica had attacked. She felt it was very important that her colleagues fully understood not only what mobbing was, but its dramatic and damaging effects on health and lives of workers. Cinzia also mentioned that we might use the film *I Like to Work: Mobbing*. She remarked that she had seen it with friends, but was upset when her friends criticized the female protagonist Anna for not having done enough to defend herself: “They don’t realize how much it (mobbing) makes people suffer,” she said quietly. And by suffering it was clear that Cinzia implied multiple levels of human suffering, psychological and physical.

Fiore sent an official letter to Bireni to request a visit from the local Equal Opportunity Officer. For me it meant an uncomfortable departure into the role of limiting or fixing what mobbing meant, as opposed to charting its many cultural meanings. But I saw how vital this was to Cinzia and decided to get involved. In our next meeting, Cinzia suggested she write a questionnaire in order to determine workers’ opinions regarding workplace conflicts. Her plan to publicize the trauma of mobbing for her colleagues had various steps. First, she didn’t want questions explicitly about mobbing, only about conflicts, so we could later confirm the presence of actual mobbing practices. Cinzia also wanted the survey to show that mobbing could be between colleagues, not just from

superiors. She also wanted a section on people's values, as well as various questions the effects of mobbing on workers' health.

Over the next few weeks, Cinzia prepared a version of the questionnaire, together with Fiore's office assistants. In late December, we went to Bireni and were escorted to a large conference room with two tables and lined with large and colorful spools of fabric. Following Cinzia's instructions, we had to pretend we had never met her. I scanned the audience for someone who would fit the Jessica's description, but later found out she did not attend. Fiore opened with a twenty-minute discussion of the role and responsibilities of the Equal Opportunity Office. She spoke about "economic strategies of the new economy" that led to strong divisions among workers and the rise of many interpersonal conflicts, like mobbing. There was a critical moment in which Fiore's introductory comments set up, if implicitly, the notion that precariousness created the conditions from which mobbing would emerge.

After Fiore's introduction, I spoke for about five minutes about mobbing, basing my presentation on what was most often cited in mobbing literatures. Thus, I spoke about where the word came from, various forms of mobbing (horizontal, vertical, double), recent legal cases on mobbing, related health problems, and a list of available resources. Not all of the workers at Bireni had heard of mobbing. Some suggested that it was "always a problem" while others argued that it was indeed new. We then distributed questionnaires to everyone present and waited to collect them. I received an email from Cinzia after our meeting where she said she felt absolutely "electrified" by our visit and that the visit had created a buzz in the company about the importance of work relations and mobbing. Though she admitted to feeling disappointed that Jessica did not attend, she added that she was very pleased about the meeting in general.

After we compiled the questionnaires, we counted a total of 56 (32 women and 20 men) of 85 Bireni workers. The results revealed a work environment plagued by a heightened sense of persecution. For example, one question asked: “Is there anyone trying to put you in a bad light or get you in trouble?” The responses for this question were divided by sex and office rank (colleague, inferior and superior). 45% of male employees indicated another male colleague and 10% of male employees suggested a female colleague. Nearly half of the male colleagues, then, thought someone else was actively engaged in practices that would jeopardize their position in the company. To the same question, female colleagues were more evenly split in that 25% indicated a man and 28% a woman. 8% of Bireni workers responded that someone *below* them on the corporate hierarchy was trying to “get them in trouble,” while 32% suspected an office superior. In a related question, 20% of workers felt that someone in the company was spreading nasty rumors about them.

There seems to be a general climate of alienation and anonymity among co-workers prevails at Bireni. A relatively high number of employees, 37% of our sample, said they felt ignored and isolated by colleagues. The majority of women (54.8%) and nearly one-third (30%) of men employees found their job tasks to be “senseless” and “humiliating.” Finally, nearly half of the participants (49.1%) said they had been “attacked” for their character of their way of being (*modo di essere*) in the workplace (48.4% F and 45% M).

In the section on health, employees were asked to check off from a list of symptoms those that were imputable to workplace conditions. Nearly 60% of participants circled at least five symptoms, such as headaches, sleeplessness, digestive ailments, back problems, high blood pressure, and anxiety. In fact, one quarter of respondents listed eleven symptoms, bringing the average number of symptoms per person to nearly six. In another section, respondents were asked to identify the determining factors to workplace problems.

The overwhelming majority listed two factors: the first, a general dissatisfaction tied to lack of gratification and scarce personal valorization, and two, related to organizational structure and job responsibilities. The Bireni questionnaire supports the fact that Italians may view the workplace as a pathogenic environment and share a sense of apprehension about their colleagues and superiors. Moreover, they viewed the causes of workplace conflict as deriving from both deindividualization, an aspect of existential precariousness, and organizational structure.

Cinzia had come to speak about the results of the questionnaire and visited in July for lunch. She said that Bireni had recently closed one of their factories in Umbria, a fact that had left many at work demoralized about their own jobs. She said: “Now it’s very slippery, no one even knows what they’re supposed to do, everything’s changing so fast.” She added that the managers were always away, either in Umbria or in New York, to manage a newly acquired firm. Bireni’s economic expansion, relying on the neoliberal economic tactics, had produced in effect a precarious work environment for their employees. The extent to which this shaped the perceived animosity and hostility between colleagues is vitally significant, as are the ways in which worker-subjects embodied their own social and economic instability and risk.

## **6.8 An Embodied Critique of Neoliberalism**

I want to take seriously the process of how subjects psychosomaticize large-scale social instability. The subjects of mobbing defy a reading of the body as bounded or passively “inscribed,” and reinstate a notion of embodiment as active and socially mediated (Csordas 1994, 2004). The kind of distress experienced by mobbees emerges in the context “precarious” labor market, one shaped by both economic risk and existential transformation. Precariousness also suggests a workplace in which fear and anxiety about one’s future

employment are extremely common, and the expendability of post-industrial laborers is deeply felt. As Italian workers are in the process of alienation and worker exploitation within Italy's neoliberal economic regime, they may encounter such changes as embodied experiences.

The bodily experiences of mobbed workers, implicitly recognizing the devaluation of their labor, indicate a kind of embodied response to ongoing economic changes. The word mobbing allows workers to name their own perceived replaceability and decline. The connections between large-scale social turmoil and "idioms of distress" is one that anthropologists have documented (e.g. Kleinman 1994, Csordas 1994, Obeyesekere 1986). Aihwa Ong (1988) has explored how amid rapid economic change in Malaysia, young Malay women working in factories began to experience forms of spirit possession. Ong (1988) elucidates how "struggles over the meanings of health are part of workers' social critique of work discipline, and of managers' attempts to extend control over the work force" (35). For subjects who identify as victims of mobbing in Italy, episodes of illness might also be read as a way in which actors chronicle, and furtively critique, the violations of a neoliberal workplace and state deregulated economy that increasingly undervalue the labor of employees. What self-identified mobbing sufferers register is not only the bodily outcomes of extreme stress and harassment, but a more complex negotiation of their ongoing and increasing devaluation.

## **6.9 Institutionalizing Mobbing as Work-Related Illness**

### *6.9.1 The Workplace as Car Wreck*

As mobbing became more self-evidently considered a bodily ailment it is likely that local medical doctors' immediate knowledge of mobbing expanded as patients came to them with new symptoms and narratives of turmoil at work. Prior to the diagnosis of OCP, there

had already been an ongoing process involving mobbing's institutionalization by Italian health institutions in national and transnational arenas. This is not, however, to suggest that one historical process follows another in chronological succession. As more and more workers had access to the idiom of mobbing as a source of physical and psychological strain and suffering, it is also probable that mobbees increasingly turned to family medical doctors for help. In multiple ways, then, knowledge about mobbing slowly centralized within the medical field. At the same time, when public authorities like Italy's Minister of Health recognized mobbing as an urgent health problem, specific public health agencies began to view themselves as key actors in its resolution.<sup>26</sup>

Re-established in 1965 from its Fascist precedents, INAIL (National Institute Against Work-Related Accidents) is a state agency responsible for preventing, and tabulating occupational illness and accidents, and is the central agency that insures workers. Beginning in September 2001, INAIL began an investigation into the management of reports of "psychological pathologies and psychosomatic disturbances determined by organizational coercion at work" which I have dubbed "OCP" as it was a new psychological "pathology" of "organizational coercion."<sup>27</sup> INAIL selected over two-hundred cases in order to "monitor the phenomenon and develop a diagnostic approach."<sup>28</sup> The scope of the project was also to verify whether OCP would be considered a work-related illness (*malattia professionale*). Two years later, in 2003, INAIL issued a critical ordinance that officially created the category of illness "Organizational Coercion Pathology" and marked a significant change in how the public understands work-related illnesses and state responses. During fieldwork, I visited in

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<sup>26</sup> "Il mio decalogo per vivere bene." *La Repubblica*. (13 December 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Delibera n. 473 del 26 luglio 2001.

<sup>28</sup> INAIL Relazione del 26 luglio 2001 N. 473/2001.

some INAIL agencies in the Veneto region during which one time health official from INAIL described why he deemed this project necessary:

Doctors used to use the diagnosis ‘mobbing.’ But saying that someone is suffering from mobbing is like saying that someone has a car wreck. You don’t *have* car wreck, the car wreck creates another kind of disturbance.

OCP was a also way for INAIL to standardize and script how they would deal with mobbing on an institutional level and for them to manage the growing number of mobbing cases being reported.

Unlike work-related illnesses of the industrial age, OCP is one in which the critical damage is far more difficult to prove on a legal basis, much because of its coding as a psychosomatic illness. There are not necessarily faulty machines or chemical burns, but rather anxiety, depression, only sometimes made “visible” either by medical authorities prescription pads or “psychosomatic” symptoms, skin rashes, weight loss. INAIL thus asserted that their intervention was justified by referring to an Italian court decision stating that mental illness can be legally considered a “work-related illness” entitling workers to the same insurance protections provided that work conditions were determined to be the primary cause of injury.<sup>29</sup> Also new was how the agency described what caused the pathology as something far more elusive than chemicals or machines, namely the “organizational structure of work.”<sup>30</sup> They stated: “The imbalances of organizational

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<sup>29</sup> Sentence: Sentenza della Corte Costituzionale n. 179/1988 and Decreto Legislativo n. 38/2000 art. 10, comma 4. Article 13 (D.Lgs 38/2000) states: “the worker is protected by an obligatory insurance against work related accidents and illness that includes biological damage such as harm to the psycho-physical integrity of the worker as evaluated by a legal doctor. The rate of indemnity does not depend on the capacity to produce by the damaged person.” This right is also recognized by the Worker’s Statute (Article 5 of L.300/70) that prohibits repeated visits by doctors to check on sick leaves of employees. The Constitutional Court (sentence n. 184/1986) had ruled that psychological damage would be considered part of biological damage. INAIL also accomplished this status via modifications they issued in D.M. del 27/04/’04.

<sup>30</sup> INAIL Circolare n. 71 del dicembre 2003.



processes can become mental risk factors for the worker.”<sup>31</sup> What the agency did was indeed novel in that it expanded the definition of “work-related illness” to include psychological trauma stemming from poorly structured work environments. They specified which practices were part of this malfunctioning “organizational structure” of work: “marginalization from work activity, removal of responsibilities, forced inactivity, unjustified and repeated transfers, the assigning of tasks below the qualifications of the employee’s professional profile, systematic and structural obstruction to information access and exasperated and excessive exercises of control.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, INAIL, an public health institution, did not identify a mobber, nor do the practices necessarily result from specific agents—in other words, the pathology stems from broadly conceived labor relations.

By relating “organizational coercion” to the structure and organization of labor relations, INAIL bypassed the problem of intentionality of a single person that was often central for civil and penal violations harassment violations based on “intent to harm” (Terpolilli 2004: 18). In other words, it was not the pathological action of a colleague or manager that was central, nor necessary to prove. How could the labor organization be a causal factor in a legitimate illness, when this same organization was becoming normalized for all workers in Italy? In fact, INAIL sought to define what might be a “normal” job-related occurrence that resulted in health problems for workers and which would *not* be insurable for workers. They included the following:

Organizational/management factors tied to the normal occurrences of the work relationship (new assignments, transfers, lay-offs); situations influenced by the common psychological-relational dynamic in work and life (interpersonal

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<sup>31</sup> INAIL Relazione del 26 luglio 2001 N. 473/2001 which maintained that OCP was “psychological and psychosomatic illness caused by dysfunction from work organization” (*malattie psichiche e psicosomatiche da disfunzioni dell’organizzazione del lavoro*).

<sup>32</sup> INAIL Circolare n. 71 del dicembre 2003.

conflict, relational difficulty and conduct recognizable as purely subjective behaviors, which, in this case, will inevitably be a matter of interpretive discretion).<sup>33</sup>

But which kinds of “relational difficulties” are recognizable as ‘normal’ as opposed to bodily endangering? This distinction was clearly a very slippery one insofar as there is no precise measure to determine what may be simply an “relational difficulty” (not insured) and what counted as “excessive exercises of control” (insured). The distinction, it seems, would rest on the “interpretive decision” of INAIL employees.

Indeed INAIL detailed precisely how OCP manifested itself in bodies and behaviors and what kinds of tests would be necessary to prove it. First, however, the symptoms of OCP would have to be properly verified and documented. Early psycho-somatic warning signs of OCP, they proposed, included: “motor tension, hyperactivity, hypervigilance, and hyperattention” (Terpolilli 2004:19). Further medical conditions most correlated to OCP were: “anxiety, depression, behavioral alteration, emotional and somatic disturbances,” as well as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (*Disturbo Post Traumatico del Stress*) and “maladjustment disturbances” (*Disturbo dell’adattamento*).<sup>34</sup> To claim that they are experiencing “OCP,” a worker must have “at least one” of the above elements and the kinds of behaviors must be “long-lasting, objective and documented.”<sup>35</sup>

Utilizing OCP to show mobbing circumvented the need to show a single subject’s intentionality. But INAIL did not dismiss of the possibility that certain subjects might

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<sup>33</sup> INAIL Circolare n. 71 del dicembre 2003

<sup>34</sup> Though used in the great minority of cases, PTSD, according to the DSM-IV, includes certain specific criteria including the presence of persistent flashbacks and intrusive thoughts related to the trauma, an increased state of arousal and hypervigilance. Maladjustment syndrome (*la sindrome da disadattamento*) or “Adjustment disturbances” (*Disturbo dell’adattamento*) which “manifests itself with clinically significant emotional and behavioral symptoms in response to one or more identifiable stress (non-extreme) stress factors” (DSM-IV in Relazione del 26 luglio 2001 N. 473/2001). According to DSM-IV, “adjustment disturbances” must develop within three months of the determining stress factors and the reaction that surpasses a prevalent response to the given stress factors. The most common symptoms, diagnosed as either acute or chronic “adjustment disturbance” are depressed mood, anxiety and psychosomatic manifestations. Acute refers to symptoms persisting in a period of six months or less.

<sup>35</sup> INAIL Circolare n. 71 del dicembre 2003

experience psychological and physical trauma *and* be able to prove that intent to harm. Thus, INAIL distinguished “strategic mobbing” from “organizational coercion” where the former would be characterized by the *specific* aim—strategic and premeditated—to end the worker’s position, even though both forms of harassment could result in OCP (Terpolilli 2004:18). Therefore, a case of “strategic mobbing” in legal protocol would require that the employee garner proof of either specific corporate or individual intentionality. Most mobbing cases, however, would be extremely difficult to prove. Consider for example Pino’s case, there is nothing particularly illegal about asking a police officer to study the penal code—finding evidence that this was an intentional and hostile act would be very difficult. Many times, an employer can justify actions such as office transfer or changed job responsibilities. It is, however, legally significant that INAIL recognized that a *series* of supposedly “legitimate” actions could nonetheless produce an environment that would be physically and psychologically endangering for workers. However, we must also see that this definition puts the employer at a great disadvantage precisely because they are all *legitimate* actions. At the same time, it is also extremely difficult for mobbees to build a strong case when practices, *if examined one by one*, were neither illegal nor posed health risks. This is also why mobbing can so often be masqueraded behind a facade of “healthy conflicts.” When Francesco Gallo, a lawyer specialized in mobbing cases, spoke to me about mobbing, he emphasized how mobbing was in fact, “an illness caught at work, very often as a consequence of *legitimate* acts. Even if it is from legitimate acts then INAIL should still intervene.”

My point here is that building a legal case around “organizational coercion” became a more viable option for worker-citizens than generating a case of “strategic mobbing.” This is because no intentionality had to be proven, employees’ psychobiological symptoms were

sufficient evidence and because “legitimate” practices could be re-read as problematic. At the same time, these new parameters moved the resolution of labor conflicts into individual court room battles and away from collective bargaining and negotiation. It was a development that has become characteristic of the culture of neoliberalism, as “the personal is the only politics there is” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 15). Under neoliberal conditions, making and documenting claims based on the individual body becomes a new technology of labor re-organization and governance (Rose 2007).

INAIL’s codification, unlike the other definitions, represented a locally viable means of standardizing the institutional management of mobbing and measuring the material claims that could be made. Notably, the mobbees I met at Dora and Lidia’s clinic did not use the term OCP. This fact suggests that various actors were working simultaneously (though not always in tandem) in the medicalization of mobbing. At the same time, the document structured a new medical act—diagnosing OCP—that was itself deeply entangled with late capitalist transformation—an act that affirmed that bodies were vulnerable to the “organization of work.” Codifying OCP confirmed that perhaps, the workplace as a whole had been re-imagined in the subject-position of mobbing—it stood in as the elusive mobber.

#### *6.9.2 Managing Biological Claims*

While OCP could potentially expand worker’s ability to make claims, the public health agency also introduced new structures of intervention and monitoring of workers. For example, they required documentation both for the cause of the illness that had to be in accordance with their definition of “organizational coercion,” as well as the resulting illness itself. On-site inspections, only when authorized and carried out by INAIL, were allowed as a measure of proof. Thus, the state agency made itself responsible for evaluating co-worker and employer testimonies, as well as determining how much the employer had acted to

safeguard worker's health and protection within the company to begin with.<sup>36</sup> This elaborate illness verification process also requires a neurological medical visit, as well as psychological diagnostic tests: personality tests (MMPI), depression/anxiety scales (MOOD scale, BDI), rage/anger scales (STAXI), post-traumatic stress tests (MSS-C) and projective tests (Rorschach, TAT). Italian public health institutions, in other words, demanded that the "truth of mobbing" be validated by scientific measures (Foucault 1978). The process of institutionalization was the foundation upon which a set of procedures to quantify and measure mobbing/organizational coercion could be mobilized, rendering the very complex narratives of employees a quantifiable and highly scrutinized entity.

Defining and codifying OCP was designed to *prevent* INAIL from indiscriminately awarding material benefits to workers without standards for diagnosis and verification. In addition to detailed symptoms, duration, and prior case history that a worker would have to document, INAIL also carved a larger role for their officials and experts in the workplace vis-à-vis on-site intervention, in-take interviews and testing. The elaborately detailed protocol thus transfers the verification of mobbing within the locus of state medical institutions and professionals. In the section, I call attention to how this process of medical institutionalization takes place in the everyday: exchanges between actors, meaning-making and various negotiations along the way.

### *6.9.3 OCP and the Negotiation of Professionals*

On a hot day in early July, I sat in on a meeting at an INAIL in the Veneto region who was meeting with members from SPISAL. The multi-floor building holds research facilities and various medical laboratories and rooms. Its gleaming surfaces and doors are styled with contemporary clean-lined office furnishings, odor-free purified air and white-

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<sup>36</sup> Italy's law (Civil code article 2087) requiring that an employer "safeguard the bodily integrity" of workers is a part of an essential history of worker's mobbing claims.

robed employees. The meeting was planned to discuss how they would proceed and organize a protocol on OCP and mobbing cases, possibly shared between the two agencies. Around the meeting room table sat four doctors and administrators from INAIL, one doctor from SPISAL, one female SPISAL intern and me. The room itself had little other décor: two large glass bookcases and a crucifix in the middle of the wall. They began by discussing the distinctive but complementary roles of the two health agencies. Members of INAIL discussed their concern about hiring more psychologists who would be able to conduct the standardized testing required by the OCP mandate. Both institutional representatives hesitated to include other medical research centers, such as one in Verona, as they would have to pay per patient to have the necessary psychological testing completed. In addition, the INAIL psychologist expressed his concern at the continuing diagnosis of “mobbing” without regard for the newer OCP guidelines. One of the medical doctors from INAIL responded: “We have to look for counterevidence every time, have objectivity and we must go to actual companies.” The director of INAIL also voiced his concerns about how time-consuming in-take interviews with workers had been for his staff. While the SPISAL director offered to join resources for this task, the INAIL director maintained that their responsibilities should remain separate.

No specific action was taken or course of action was set in motion by the end of this meeting. There was only a slight clarification of the roles of each agency. Still, the meeting itself demonstrated a shared institutional investment in the problem of mobbing. But the frequent assertion of their distinct roles was also evident; the meeting ended with the statement of the SPISAL director: “There are no conflicts between us, the work can be shared...we are two entities for the different solutions. And this way, we’ll avoid any future conflict of interest.” During the meeting, however, I also sensed that the men were

somewhat wary of one another and did not designate explicit pathways of institutional collaboration. It was clear that INAIL worked towards resolving conflicts once they were pronounced, and did not want to transfer activity entirely to SPISAL's primarily preventive goals. While INAIL's OCP codification and its potential effects are certainly significant, the ability to standardize such procedures would take a great deal of face-to-face work and institutional change.

I have described INAIL's plan at length to underscore how the new diagnosis structured state intervention and introduced technologies of medico-scientific management of workers, if workers were to transform their rights as worker-citizens into medical practices and terms. After issuing this protocol in 2003, INAIL announced that only 15% of their 200 cases could be defined as OCP and, therefore, limited the number of cases that could be insured.<sup>37</sup> OCP thus represents a medical diagnosis that could be utilized by medical professionals and INAIL to severely restrict the number of mobbing cases eligible for financial support for related mental and physical ailments. The effect of this was two-fold, while the state was ideologically realigned with safeguarding citizens, it simultaneously limited workers' ability to make claims on the state.

The conditions of a neoliberal economic regime are also at work in the role of the state health agency—they had to rapidly produce new structures in response to a quickly-changing typology of insurance claims. Even state institutions, also within a regime of market-driven medicine and deregulated labor market, produced and constrained the

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<sup>37</sup> INAIL Circolare n. 71 del dicembre 2003. In September 2004, INAIL published a report regarding reports of mobbing or "psychopathologies related to organizational coercion at work. This report included 482 cases between 1999 and 2004, 1% of cases in 1999 and 55% of cases reported in 2003-4. The average reporter was more likely to be male (60% of cases), between the age of 41-50 (35.3% of cases), a mid-level employee (56.2%), and from a northeastern region (28.8% of cases). INAIL's case history was one of the few groups that showed more men than women, as other studies tend to report women in the service sector as likely mobbees (Ege 2002). However, it is also important to consider the employment rate gap, where 40% of their cases come from around only a 30% employment rate for women.

production of biological claims that could result from market-driven labor reform. Their detailing and defining of the illness, and call for inspections and protocols resulted in a diminished eligibility for worker compensation. They, therefore, ultimately decreased their direct involvement in the problem of mobbing. It is also true, however, that they needed to rapidly constitute and rearrange organizational energies around OCP interviews, testing, on-site visits and paperwork. Both workers who requested monies for mobbing-related suffering or pain, and the health institution itself shifted how they related to one another as part of this ongoing economic restructuring in Italy. Rather than producing a critique of the existing labor market, however, citizens on both sides were encouraged by state health agencies to build a more individualized and highly medicalized view of the their own political subjectivity (Petryna 2003). I have called attention to a dual process: just as workers could utilize bodily suffering for their own material benefits, so too could the state health professionals expand and elaborate their control over verifying these bodily effects, deflecting attention away from neoliberal reform and global economic processes.

## **6.10 Marked Bodies, Unmarked Capitalisms**

### *6.10.1 The Flesh of Precariousness*

It may seem up until now that, more or less, mobbing's place in a medicalized trajectory produced a set of legal and political pathways for negotiation, interaction with the state and resources. Still medical understandings altered how mobbing was understood at most basic levels—who it 'afflicts' and why, often resulting in a changed understanding of mobbees. Medical specialists within Western medical traditions, in seeking the reasons why certain subjects become ill, have also delved into the pre-existing qualities of subjects in order to predict and prevent pathologies. Similarly, in their search of identifying such pre-dispositions, medical specialists in Italy have increasingly discussed the individual, health and



behavior inadequacies of those who are mobbed and for those who suffer from OCP.

Mobbing specialist and director of Bologna mobbing clinic, Harold Ege (1998) describes inflexibility as increasing the chances of being mobbed, in addition to the worker's envy of other workers, nonconformity and independence. A trainee of Harold Ege, psychologist Paolo Terpolilli (2004) describes the likely mobbee as a "hardly flexible and scarcely malleable" person (24). Here, we find that health became more deeply enmeshed with the social value of flexibility (Martin 1994). Terpolilli also predicted that OCP was more likely in a person who "bases his/her life on work and takes on a social role contrary to others who identify with family" (Terpolilli 2004:19). Similarly, Dr. Renato Gilioli, prominent psychologist and director of Milan mobbing clinic, has said, "[The pathology] manifests itself primarily in weak subjects."<sup>38</sup> These statements represent an overall shift in the conceptualization of the sufferer—weak, envious, work-obsessed, and inflexible become trademark characteristics of the mobbee. In Chapter 4, I showed that "inflexibility" has also been gendered insofar as it articulates more deeply with Italian women workers. Definitions of "unfit worker" begin to overlap with and draw from cultural notions of good health as balanced life between work and family life. Ironically, poor health was being defined as those who "based their life on work" right at the moment when Italian citizens seemed most unable to do so. As the labor market was structured to exclude many citizens from building their life around work, those desiring a return to prior orders (when one could build life around work) become social rejects. And this process, as I have pointed to in previous chapters, is a gendered one as certain kinds of gendered actors are more likely to be construed as deviant. As in the case of film protagonist Anna, her desire for work was deeply pathologized.

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<sup>38</sup> [http://www.vareseweb.it/lavoro/articoli-lavoro/2004/marzo/5-3mobbing\\_clinica.htm](http://www.vareseweb.it/lavoro/articoli-lavoro/2004/marzo/5-3mobbing_clinica.htm)

As the metaphor of illness becomes more prevalent for mobbing, so too will the salient difference between the worker who adapts to the demands of the late capitalist workplace as flexibly-bodied, modern, and even morally superior to the victim of mobbing as rigid and ‘traditional’—inflexible. The notion of a particular “susceptibility” in particular kinds of workers must also be viewed in terms of preventative medicine that aims to forestall illnesses. Isolating OCP within particular worker populations raises concerns about refashioning the workplace as a site in which to monitor the bodies of workers. Legitimizing a link between inflexible bodies and the presence of mobbing renders all workers’ ‘healthy’ bodies subject to examination and inquiry. But it is not, I believe, only the psychic internalization of a medical model of mobbing that is at work. The fear of job termination in a period of economic precariousness contributes to an intensifying self-modulation and cultural expectation of persecution in the workplace. Many Italian workers had come to expect that they could be targeted for job elimination or harassed by managers and colleagues. Thus, Italian workers and, in particular, mobbees may experience new forms of alienation and exploitation, creating a hyper-vigilance about their own jobs, and their bodies.

As mobbed workers suffer from bodily symptoms—they may be, in turn, reconfirmed as bodies less elastic to new environmental pressures. In this way, “the medical gaze is... a controlling gaze through which active (although furtive) forms of protest are transformed into passive acts of ‘breakdown’” (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987: 27). Seeking “pre-dispositions” for mobbing-related illness and confirming the biological “inadequacy” of certain workers masks the embodied signs of a disrupted economic and moral order within Italian society.

In this way, medicalization depoliticizes mobbees’ claims, and only those workers that can make their claims legible by the state are recognized, thereby—excluding those

mobbees who can't document their bodily trauma. Paradoxically, this process of medicalization also puts workers who remain healthy at a disadvantage. This process is one with deep contradictions and complexities. In various ways, being mobbed epitomizes an epistemological ambush—it is hard to 'know' if you are being mobbed, as it is a sum total of a series of harassing and persecutory actions that are simultaneously normalized as "work" in Italy. My point here is that culturally-situated knowledge of the body's pain, shaped by scientific and medical epistemologies, changes how people come to *know* what they call "mobbing." On the one hand, institutionalized medicalization changes how people know and document their bodies—placing a focus increasingly on the traumatized body as a critical measure of truth—and less on abusive work practices. Defining an illness that was caused by the structure of labor, on the other hand, pointed towards neoliberal restructuring as deviant and pathological. The articulation of the mental and physical wear on workers' bodies with Italy's precarious work regime, distinct from the physical and traceable bodily risks associated with industrial labor, offers a more complex understanding of human illness and bodies. The illness of workers', at the same time, mirrors a broader social pathology (Kleinman 1994). As one journalist put it, "It seems that Italian offices are, in reality, sick from...mobbing"<sup>39</sup>

### **6.11 How will it be lived on the skin?**

In order to promote awareness of mobbing, the authors of *Mobbing: Reflections on the Skin* (Ascenzi and Bergagio 2002) include a variety of anti-mobbing slogans in the appendix of their book, including: "Mistreating other people is always dangerous. At work, it can be deadly!" (90), and "Mobbing increases the use of drugs, alcohol, smoking, [and rate of] homicide and suicide" (96). The authors explicitly reference mortality in their discussion of

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<sup>39</sup> Ardu, Barbara. "Ecco il Mobbing Veleni in Ufficio." *La Repubblica* (24 July 1999.)

mobbing, illness and suffering—the potential for the loss of life. By analyzing how mobbing has become medicalized, we see that multiple kinds of precariousness collapse into the idea of a precarious body. We have before us a very dynamic meeting point—a traceable fusion between the concrete manifestations of neoliberal capitalism and bodily suffering. Thus, we begin to see a deeply embedded cultural understanding of mobbing as both workers' embodied critique of neoliberalism and also a state-sanctioned medicalization of labor dynamics. These are processes of cultural legibility and visibility: the surfacing of mental anguish becoming visible on the skin, the perception of the pathological aspects of new workplace regimes and the recognition of political subjectivities channeled through bodily realms. The doubleness of OCP in its effects for citizens, allowing new claims yet inviting new controls, is matched by the duality of the Italian welfare state—simultaneously protecting and limiting laborers' rights.

## Chapter 7     The Sex of Mobbing: Moral Harassment as Mask

### 7.1 A Lesson from Maria

The following story was presented to me as a didactic example in the training sessions held for a group of women, many of whom were employed in research universities, planning to open a mobbing clinic in Padua. Our guest lecturer for the day's training in Fall 2004, a visiting psychologist and mobbing specialist, had distributed Maria's case and photocopied it for everyone to read and discuss. Forty-year old Maria, an assistant professor at a research university, has been collaborating with full professor, Sandro, on research projects and publications for scientific journals for the past year. A few months after she began, Sandro began complimenting her regarding her physical appearance constantly, calling her "sweetheart" (*tesoro*) and maintaining a close distance to her when they worked together. He also began making sexual allusions and innuendos while they were together that made Maria feel extremely nervous and uncomfortable. During a conference weekend away, Sandro openly sexually propositioned Maria and she refused his advances. At first he seemed to accept her decision. But upon their return to the university, he began confiding in various colleagues that he had serious doubts about the quality of Maria's work. Moreover, aspects of the project that had been handled by Maria were reassigned to other colleagues in their department. Unexpectedly, he decided to remove Maria's name from their joint publication. Maria has begun to worry whether or not she did something that could have erroneously provoked him in some way.

On the bottom of the handout were three questions: 1) What else would you need to know about Maria's case? 2) What kinds of solutions would you propose? 3) How would you act in order to reach the pre-determined goals of the staff? All of the women had

expressed in previous sessions that they were committed to the idea that they were a “listening clinic” (*sportello d’ascolto*) in that they themselves were not experts, but would offer support and references for incoming visitors. The project had initially began as a mobbing clinic, though the women were increasingly concerned about whether or not they had enough specialized knowledge about mobbing. After reading Maria’s case, Tina, a woman in her fifties, exclaimed, “Normal (*normale*)! Just today I saw something like it.” The other women, nine in total, nodded and muttered agreement. The way in which the term “normal” is often evoked in Italian not only means an everyday commonness, but also implies a sense of expected, as if to say, “Obviously.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the discussion revolved around how Maria was being *mobbed* because of her refusal in the case of sexual harassment. Thus, the practices of unwanted sexual attention were distinguished from the latter events that resulted in Maria’s removal from the project. The women in training discussed various possible solutions that could safeguard Maria’s academic career, while not necessarily having to publicly denounce the professor, including: requesting a job transfer or initiating direct but private confrontation with Sandro. Tina commented that whatever Maria decided, it had to be done with “cleverness” (*furbiizia*.) Tina proposed a strategy of “cleverness” might be that Maria’s public disclosure center on mobbing, rather than on sexual harassment.

Through this pedagogical moment, we were asked to reframe how women as worker-citizens negotiate their rights as workers, by imagining a collectivity of mobbees, not “victims” of sexual harassment. The counselors framed the debate around mobbing as a viable and strategic option to negotiate a woman’s role within the workplace and to call upon state and supranational governance in the process. Maria’s case was one pedagogical instantiation of how social actors in Italy increasingly view mobbing and sexual harassment

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<sup>1</sup> For example, one might say they were tied up in traffic on a holiday weekend and an interlocutor will respond, “Normal!” (*normale*).

as two highly intertwined events. But this co-mingling of workplace violation is not without a notion of ranking, sustained by moral understandings of sexuality, bodies and gender (Kulick 1998, Aretxaga 2001). In fact, as I show in this chapter, sexual harassment has increasingly been slotted as a precursor or cause of mobbing in mobbing-specialized discourse, as well as public debates, creating the conditions for Maria's case to be handled as was above. Yet the relationship between sexual harassment and mobbing is more than simply causal—it is *hierarchical* and governed by moral and gendered orders specific to Italy. With respect to sexual harassment (*molestie sessuali*), mobbing, sometimes called “moral harassment” (*molestie morale*) has become a political modality that “passes” as a gender-blind form of harassment, but never fully.<sup>2</sup> A great deal of social, cultural and legal work has taken place in Italy for sexual harassment to have become both a separate category on its own and yet still folded within the landscape of mobbing.

Culling from the legal histories of sexual harassment and mobbing, and building from the previous chapter, I show how worker's bodies were, by and large, understood as physically and mentally endangered by mobbing, but not by sexual harassment. Even though mobbing is considered a profoundly *psychological* phenomenon and “morally” abject form of harassment, it has nonetheless become far more deeply connected to violations of “bodily integrity” than sexual harassment. What I propose is different about sexual harassment is that it exposes a basic paradox of social democratic citizenship. It interrupts the apparent seamlessness of the rights of citizenship for workers that were predicated on safeguarding male workers' bodies (Horn 1994), not necessarily female bodies with sexual desires and agency. It is necessary, then, for mobbing to be both loosely defined and seemingly gender-neutral in order for it to become a privileged site for managing worker-

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<sup>2</sup> 26 October 1999. *La Stampa*. “Seminario del Comune.” P. 39.

citizenship. Sex, however, cannot be stripped from bodies: “Sex (including sexual fantasy) is part of a complex lived embodiment that is necessarily contingent on its historical moment” (Farquhar 2002: 244, Butler 1993). Part of this process of producing a notion of mobbing as gender and sex free, then, necessarily entails the erasure of patriarchal dominance over the sexed bodies of workers and the patrolling of sexuality with respect to labor relations (Salzinger 2000, Mascia-Lees and Sharpe 2000, Zippel 2006). Still, mobbing, as a politically mobilized framework that can ‘pass’ as gender-neutral, may indeed create a broader nexus of social support and economic assistance for women with respect to sexual harassment.

## **7.2 Sexual Harassment Law in Italy**

The history of sexual harassment in Italy is deeply shaped by the supranational governance of the European Union. The problem of sexual harassment gained greater public attention in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s coinciding with an increase in female participation in the labor market (Gregory 2000). In this period, member states began to investigate gender relations in the workplace and devise ways to safeguard women’s role in the labor market. The issue became important in multiple domains, extending from legal to public debates, as more European states published studies and crafted workplace comportment regulations. A German woman’s magazine published a study in 1981 indicating that 59% of secretaries said they were sexually harassed; in 1983 the first guidelines on “Sexual Harassment at Work” were published in Britain, and the Belgian state conducted a nation wide survey on the matter in 1984 (Gregory 2000). By 1991, the European Commission adopted a recommendation to protect “dignity” at work, defining sexual harassment as “unwanted, unreasonable and offensive to the recipient” (Gregory 2000: 180). This marked a political and legal shift as the behavior was defined by the recipient’s definition of offensive, whereas previous discussion had focused on whether the



harasser knew if his/her behavior was offensive or not. After the 1991 ruling, member states could adopt their own legal codes. But there was yet to be urging on the part of the European Union to legally consider sexual harassment with sex equality and discrimination laws, there was only encouragement to pass a law against sexual harassment. Italy passed a resolution against sexual harassment in 1996 (Zippel 2006: 18).

Within Italy, sexual harassment legal decisions are fraught with cultural understandings of gendered sexuality insofar as they pivot around the question of sexual desire. Legal decisions frame sexual behaviors for Italian women as social actors always already *desiring sexual attention* and Italian men as endlessly battling their uncontrollable *desire for women*. Desire, or even desiring desire itself (Ahearn 2003), becomes a central mode of differentiating gender identity (Kulick 2003: 140, Kulick 1998, Cameron and Kulick 2003). For instance, in 1998, Italy's highest court ruled in favor of a man who grabbed his female employee and attempted to kiss her lips only to miss and kiss her cheek. The Court ruled that sexual acts were only those "*originally* directed towards an erogenous zone" and thus, this act was not accorded recognition as a form of harassment or molestation.<sup>3</sup> Thus, state decisions govern a specific sexualized body, whose pre-determined erotic landscapes shape what may be legally punishable by law. At the same time, this ruling reflects the ways in which Italians interpret and experience bodies. Despite the European Union's urging to consider the definition of offensive by the recipient, the Italian court upheld the importance of the accused harasser's intentions. Similar logics extend to cases of violent sexual assault. The Court of Cassation ruled against a woman in a 1999 rape case because she was wearing tight jeans (Zippel 2006: 106). The Court proposed that the woman's perpetrator could not have removed her jeans on his own, suggesting that this served as evidence that she could

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<sup>3</sup> 11 June 1998. *La Stampa*.

not have been raped: “We must consider that it is a fact of common experience that it is nearly impossible to remove jeans on another person without the wearer’s active cooperation” (Cass., sez. tre, 6 Nov. 1998 in Van Cleave 2005: 448). This court ruling thus sexualizes the wearing of fitted jeans. At issue in this case was whether or not the victim “voluntarily” removed her clothes. Yet because this was the pivotal marker of whether or not she was raped, it completely forecloses the possibility that women should be not be raped even if she “voluntarily” removed her own clothing. Many women, for example, especially in cases of date rape may remove their clothing and engage sexual acts (e.g., kissing, touching, etc.) before they are raped. The state, in this sense, puts into effect an ideology of sexual violence based on presumed and naturalized liability of women’s sexual personhood. That is to say that women’s dress or comportment, if read as sexual, is likened to her willing desire, and thus, consent.

Italian courts have a legacy of rulings, influenced by Catholic and Fascist ideologies, that uphold a regime of women’s virtuous virginity and men’s patriarchal authority and sexual propriety (Spackman 1996). Until the 1990s, rape was considered a more serious crime when a woman was married because it was considered an offense to her husband. Under Fascist law, men who killed their female relatives or wife to save the family “honor” were eligible for a penalty reduction. In Italy, much of the women’s movement in the 1970s worked to establish rights for women against the control of the reproductive body and familial patriarchal authority (Horn 1994). These included the legalization of divorce in 1970 and the legalization of abortion in 1974 (Gregory 2000: 106).

Sexual harassment case law, in many ways, fails to diverge from a more pernicious gendered regime present in Italy’s state codes. In 2001, Italy’s Supreme Court ruled against a woman whose male superior had swatted her on the bottom because the pat was “isolated

and impulsive.”<sup>4</sup> Calling it “an act of libido,” the court’s ruling was premised on the supposed voracity of the man’s unmediated sexual will rather than the coercive gendered relation between him and his employee (Zippel 2006: 106). Such high-profile rulings mirror and, in turn, generate and reproduce cultural understandings of men’s sexuality as driven by unruly desires. For women, the courts continue to privilege and protect women if they have shown a sense of sexual innocence, while punishing those who exhibit any form of sexual subjecthood. Italy’s highest court, for example, ruled in 2005 that molesting a young girl was more serious if she was a virgin.<sup>5</sup> It is within this juridical frame that statistics on ongoing sexual harassment take on specific historical and cultural meanings. Reports of sexual harassment for Italy remain very high; a 2006 ISTAT study estimated 900,000 reports by women of sexual coercion, *quid pro quo* sexual harassment, at work.<sup>6</sup> But coupled with juridical bifurcation of gendered sexual subjectivities, such population indicators also bolster a national imaginary of Italian men as lusty and desirous.

Public discourse regarding sexuality in the workplace mirrors understandings of sexual harassment propelled by the naturalness of spontaneous sexual expression in the workplace. A 2000 published study reported that 14% of Italians wanted a romantic love relationship at work, but more, 80% of under 30 year-olds, wanted some sort of amorous affair (*un flirt*).<sup>7</sup> In 2001, a news report indicated that seven in ten Italians hoped to “eroticize the work atmosphere.”<sup>8</sup> Another article entitled, “Office Satyr. And If She Likes It?” reports that many men considered “jokes, allusions, propositions, pinches, heavy compliments, and licentious confidences” part of something that just “comes naturally”—

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<sup>4</sup> 3 February 2001. “Pat the Bummy.” *The Toronto Star*.

<sup>5</sup> 19 July 2006. “Victory for Wife.” *MX*, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> 23 November 2006. “Istat: 10 Milioni di Vittime.” *La Corriera della Sera*.

<sup>7</sup> La Stampa. 22 November 2000. “Sondaggio sull’amore in ufficio”

<sup>8</sup> La Stampa. 25 September 2001. “L’ufficio e’ fatto per amare”

practices that are both “normal” and “spontaneous.”<sup>9</sup> In fact, reportedly nearly sixty percent of the interviewed men believed that women in the workplace “liked being in the center of sexual attention of men.”<sup>10</sup> Women’s subjectivity as desiring to be desired remains paramount to gendered understandings of sexuality, regardless of whether the act is ‘mundane’ practice or violation.

Since the year 2000, sexual harassment law has changed within Italy’s national court system in response to and by the mandate of the European Union. In 2002, the European Union issued a new directive that construed sexual harassment as a form of discrimination against the principle of equal treatment under the law. In addition, the corporate agency or institution would be held legally responsible to show that all measures had been taken to *prevent* sexual harassment (Zippel 2006: 83).<sup>11</sup> Thus, the European Commission shifted towards *prevention* of sexual harassment rather than simply building sanctions against it. The amendment required that member states adopt their own similar legislation by the end of 2005.<sup>12</sup> In 2004, Italy implemented the European Union directive (Equal Treatment in Employment and Work Conditions (n. 2000/78) in the law “Equal Treatment of Men and Women at Work” (Dlgs 145/2005) which was revised from their original Equal Treatment Law 903 of 1977.<sup>13</sup> The European Union definition of sexual harassment is now linked to the notion of sexual discrimination, and thus “provides a gender-specific term clearly linking sexual harassment to gender inequality” (Zippel 2006: 116). In Italy, the 2004 Equal Treatment law considers sexual harassment a form of gender discrimination, defining it as “unwanted conduct related to sex that takes place with the purposes or effect of affecting

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<sup>9</sup> La Stampa (15 February 1992) “Il Satiro in Ufficio ‘E Se a Lei Piacesse?’”

<sup>10</sup> La Stampa (15 February 1992) “Il Satiro in Ufficio ‘E Se a Lei Piacesse?’”

<sup>11</sup> Il Sole 24 Ore (18 April 2002) “Norme e Tributi”

<sup>12</sup> *La Stampa*, 24 April 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Fei, Cristina. 30 October 2006. “Il rispetto sul lavoro si impara giocando.” *Il Sole 24 Ore*. 21 July 2005. “Questura Condannata: Discrimina le Donne.” *Corriere della Sera*.

the dignity of the person and creating an intimidating, hostile, offensive or disturbing environment” (Dlgs 145/2005, Dona 2004: 180). The European Union laws’ emphasis on the “unwantedness” of behaviors at once valorizes women’s sexual subjectivities as well as allowing for consensual sexual relationships in the work environment insofar as it allows for *desired* sexual attention (Zippel 2006).

Within Europe, legal definitions of mobbing draw from definitions of sexual harassment, such as in France (Saguy 2003: 149). Given that Italy has no law exclusively for mobbing, local governments have found ways to invent state actors who would respond to the problem, often drawing from precedents of sexual harassment or gender discrimination law. In 2003, the local government of Padua posted announcements for “Councilperson of Faith” (*Consigliera di Fiducia*) to serve on and coordinate various committees that aimed to prevent mobbing.<sup>14</sup> This creation of the “Councilperson of Faith” was actually an application of European Union laws that require member states to safeguard the dignity of men and women at work. Though the law refers to sexual harassment prevention, the Italians have applied this law to create new figures for the prevention of mobbing.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, however, the councilman had reportedly resigned unexpectedly because of allegations of sexual harassment.

Because the definition of sexual harassment is variable and centers on the victim’s definition of harassment as unwanted behaviors, Equal Treatment laws can be more easily grafted onto to other forms of experience, equally elusive and hard to define, such as mobbing. Definitions of mobbing take up what we might call a target-centric model of sexual harassment in that they require that the mobbee define the behaviors that were hostile, isolating and marginalizing. In Italy, however, most women and men are not using

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<sup>14</sup> 17 June 2003. *Corriere del Veneto*. P. 8.

<sup>15</sup> 15 November 2005. “Mobbing: Consigliere di Fiducia.” *Ansa Notiziario Generale in Italiano*.

the Equal Treatment laws in cases of sexual harassment. Rather, sexual harassment has often become part of mobbing and prosecuted under Article 2087, Italy's civil code that ensures that employers protect the bodily integrity of workers.

### *7.2.1 Pedagogical Moments*

As Foucault (1978) has pointed out, understandings of sexuality circulate in various public domains, including educational institutions. In the course I was taking on mobbing and gender discrimination at the University of Padua, guest lecturer Professor Massimo Santinello gave a lecture about sexual harassment. In all, there were about thirty students in the classroom for Professor Santinello's lesson. He began with the question: "What is the difference between courtship and sexual harassment?" No one answered immediately, but with some encouragement one student raised her hand: "In sexual harassment, one person isn't interested and the other keeps insisting." Nodding, another student raised her hand and added: "With courtship there's no fear, with harassment there's a certain fear." One student didn't seem satisfied with the responses. She objected: "Somebody might tell me I have my hair all over the place, and it may be pleasing to me or it may not be. I have to end it and say that it's harassment." A muttering of other students agreed. One spoke out: "It has to be defined by the person who undergoes it." Professor Santinello took this point as an opening to introduce the European Union law defining sexual harassment as "undesired behavior." The Equal Treatment Laws that allow a more fluid definition of harassment invites subjects to personalize the law, molding their protection around individualized understandings, desires and preferences. While this may be advantageous in many ways as it avoids essentializing certain practices or utterances as always harassing in nature, it also, I believe, melds with a neoliberal understanding of selfhood as autonomous individuality (Beck 1999, Ong 2006). With neoliberal and late modern understandings of the human, subjects are

encouraged to view themselves as differentiated by their own set of desires. Thus legal categories that likewise center upon “individual” choice, desires and experience, I would argue, are more likely to shape cultural understandings of these complex events than those that rest on broader gendered orders.

### **7.3 Moral versus Sexual Harassment as Mind versus Body**

The students in this university class had a separate lesson on sexual harassment in a class dedicated to mobbing and gender discrimination. Thus the class structure sustained a far broader and far-reaching cultural understanding of mobbing and sexual harassment as distinct. The story of mobbing and sexual harassment unfolds in two parts, both of which take a great deal of cultural, legal and institutional work. The first of these was the distinction between sexual harassment and mobbing, and the next shift was around temporal order for the two in which sexual harassment is constituted in medical and state discourses as a *precursor* to mobbing. What I also found, however, was a third and simultaneous process, that is, a *moral* hierarchy between these two—mobbing as a both ethical and physically endangering affront to workers. The cumulative effect of these discursive practices is that mobbing emerges as a morally advanced, superior form of harassment and suspiciously gender-neutral. Sexual harassment, then, becomes a morally “backwards” practice that shows perpetrators not to have properly contained their “natural” bodies. The seemingly un-sexed and un-gendered office phenomenon of mobbing is, I argue, an entirely gendered practice, though it has become far less recognizable as such within public imaginaries.

#### *7.3.1 Two Separate Things*

The first phase, then, is ontological separation. When many Italians talk about mobbing, they describe it as form of harassment and abuse not characterized by sexual

innuendos or sexualized language. A psychologist, for example, quoted in a 1999 news article, warned: “Mobbing is phenomenon that doesn’t exclude any work environment and doesn’t distinguish between the sexes.”<sup>16</sup> Beginning in the late 1990s, the term “moral harassment” (*molestia morale*) was also adopted as a gloss for mobbing by Italians.<sup>17</sup> The term appears to originate with the work of French psychiatrist, Marie France Hirigoyen (1998) who wrote the book, “Moral Harassment: Perverse Violence of Daily Life” (*Le harcèlement moral: La Violence Perverse au Quotidien*). Extending mobbing within the French sphere, Hirigoyen defines this harassment as:

All abusive conduct, notably manifesting itself by behavior, words, acts, gestures, or writing that can harm the personality, dignity, or physical and psychic integrity of the person, put their employment at risk, or degrade their work climate (Hirigoyen 1998 in Saguy 2003: 146).

Notably, Hirigoyen’s emphasizes, just as in Italy, the bodily endangerment of workers. In Italy, the notion of mobbing as a form of this term of “moral harassment” is often qualified with definitions such as “psychological violence that produces effects for the health until it creates an authentic work-related illness.”<sup>18</sup> Mobbing (moral harassment) is, thus, repeatedly represented as a psychological event. In 2002, for example, an Italian newspaper article defined a French woman’s “anti-mobbing” struggle as a “battle for the legal acknowledgement of [...] harassment that is not sexual, but a psychological type.”<sup>19</sup> I found consistent and similar discussion of mobbing as something profoundly mentally and physically disturbing, though not sexualized, in my mobbing and sexual harassment class, and among mobbing professionals. Mobbing, unlike sexual harassment, articulates explicitly with morality, with the psyche and with mental wellness.

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<sup>16</sup> Ardu, Barbara. “Ecco il Mobbing Veleni in Ufficio.” *La Repubblica* (24 July 1999.)

<sup>17</sup> 26 October 1999. *La Stampa*. “Seminario del Comune.” P. 39.

<sup>18</sup> 26 October 1999. *La Stampa*. “Seminario del Comune.” P. 39.

<sup>19</sup> “Denunciata dai dipendenti l’eroina anti-mobbing.” *Corriere della Sera* (12 April 2002).



Behind this distinction between the moral and the sexual realms lingers not just a “Western” or Cartesian understanding of the body as split from the mind, but more so a cultural understanding that *men’s* sexuality is centered in bodily realms. As is clear from Italian legal discourse, sexual harassment in Italy has been repeatedly hailed as an outgrowth—or mishap—of men’s naturalized bodily desires. These important cultural and historical precedents produced a symbolic bifurcation such that as mobbing became its own ontological category, increasingly separate from sexual harassment. And it became increasingly associated with the mind, psychology, morality and rationality. Sexual harassment, then, became mobbing’s more animalistic, inferior and corporeal other.

Hiding within educational literatures available on mobbing is also a progress narrative between ‘older’ types of violence and ‘more advanced’ forms of workplace violence. By “progress narrative,” I mean a narrative premised on the idea that society naturally advances, a discourse steeped in histories of 19<sup>th</sup> century European imperial domination. The violence of mobbing, unlike sexual harassment, is described as more subtle and sophisticated: “A psychological terror, a nerve war capable of transforming a simple worker into a victim.”<sup>20</sup> As I have explored in this dissertation, the discourse of mobbing overlaps with a constellation of meanings associated with late capitalism. Take for example the following historical and psychological overview of mobbing:

This phenomenon [of mobbing] is supported by positive images of men-‘manager’ ‘top manager’ capable of absorbing with disinterest the drowsiness of jet lag, that speak English perfectly (actually that *think* in English) and that give orders from their palm pilots from one to another part of the world. It’s about subjects who have lost their human identity and their knowledge of being cajoled with stimulating ‘fringe benefits’ to the usual end of rendering the usual services to whoever pays him; that doesn’t even know who their bosses are because their bosses don’t have faces.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ardu, Barbara. “Ecco il Mobbing Veleni in Ufficio.” *La Repubblica* (24 July 1999.)

<sup>21</sup> Nistico, Fausto. *In Corso di Pubblicazione su ‘Informazione Prevedinziale:’ Mob, Mobber, Mobbing.* [www.unicz.it/lavoro/NISTICOMOBING](http://www.unicz.it/lavoro/NISTICOMOBING). (p. 2) Accessed 4/16/2003.

The mobber in this passage is masculinized even though the victim of mobbing and the process itself remain, seemingly, gender neutral. The mobber is figured as a distinctly cosmopolitan subject; the various commodities (Palm Pilots), skills (English speaking) and practices (travel), construct the mobber as a masculinized, mobile citizen who is technologically savvy and commodity wielding. Like the figure of the mobber, the practice of mobbing describes the abusive work practices characteristic of neoliberal regimes of labor. For instance, the mobbee is:

[L]oaded up with marginal tasks [and] the assignment of impossible objectives, of useless assignments, drawn up on exaggerated disciplinary actions, [subject to] declassification of duties, given excessive visits by fiscal agents, excluded from meetings.<sup>22</sup>

This set of practices associated with mobbing, no doubt, departs significantly from the abusive use of sexualized language or sexual coercion. Still, within these cultural associations I find two simultaneous processes. At the same time that mobbing becomes the “moral” and “psychological” harassment, it also becomes associated with all that is modern and masculinized while sexual harassment remained a vestige of primitive, female-associated bodily chaos. Mobbing’s articulation with forms of historically specific late capitalist “advancement” animates its progress narrative. Hence, mobbing becomes the masculinized harassment of the neoliberal workplace. Sexual harassment’s status as a “lower” form of harassment, I argue, results in its becoming something that could be considered temporally as “earlier” and historical prior to mobbing.

### 7.3.2 *Mobbing as Progress*

Sexual harassment was considered a precursor or prior to mobbing not only because of men’s “advancement” and the “advancement” of capital, but also of women’s “progress.” One of the mobbing counselors at the clinic in Padua wanted me to meet two of her friends

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<sup>22</sup> “Un milione di lavoratori maltrattato dai capi.” *Corriere della Sera*. (18 January 2003).

who had worked for CGIL, the ex-Communist trade union. In July 2005, I met Barbara Valentino and Diana Camillo for an informal chat about their impressions of how work had changed. Barbara worked for over twenty-five years in the hiring department for CGIL and helped workers in negotiating benefits and contract stipulations. But having worked for so many years in the trade union they had also seen many workers who claimed to have been mobbed. I asked her what she had seen specifically done to the workers when they were mobbed. Barbara listed changing work schedules, office location, demotion of work responsibilities and forced inactivity. But, she added:

Years ago there was more sexual harassment, but women today are better equipped. Today, they attack your professionalism. Or they force you to take vacation even when you don't want to; [...] It's all psychological criticism, you fall into this mechanism.

Diana's version of sexual harassment adhered to a more widely circulating cultural understanding that mobbing was *after*, both temporally and in its complexity, sexual harassment. But for Diana this seemed to derive from the fact that women would no longer tolerate sexual harassment, while mobbing, aiming at their psychological and moral integrity, could be more pernicious and dangerous.

What also distinguishes the discourse of mobbing, unlike sexual harassment, is that women can make culturally legible how women undercut other women in the workplace. Sexual harassment, by contrast, has been used almost exclusively to describe men's harassment of women. Diana told me: "Maybe I'm your boss and you're a woman and I'm a woman. But, if you disturb something in me then I'll do anything to eliminate you." Barbara nodded and exclaimed: "Women are just terrible! You end up a hamster that everyone can unload on, everyone can insult, feeling authorized to throw themselves onto you." Diana looked at me and took a more serious tone: "Mobbing lets out the worst that we have inside of us." She also told me that her male colleagues mobbed people even at the

union's office. Trade unions, in other words, were no safe haven. She shook her head, recalling that when she was the head of the sexual harassment division no male colleague would talk to her. Sexual harassment, even at the institutional level, became a way in which Diana's colleagues marginalized her.

Diana's description of mobbing as letting out the worst gives us great insight into how this relatively new way of describing human comportment resonates with a notion of the human as corruptible by collective forces. The act of collective harassment reflects the idea of an unmediated human interiority that can harm and devastate others, if not disciplined and quelled. For Barbara, mobbing is a kind debasement that transforms the human into the *less* than human, ie. "the hamster."

#### 7.4 Subsuming Harassment as Precursor to Mobbing

Ultimately, this ideological work of sexual harassment as less than or prior to mobbing enables the placing of sexual harassment as something that activates or propels mobbing. In fact, sexual harassment is often placed "before" of mobbing, in the sense of an instigating practice, in legal and medical models of mobbing in Italy and Germany (Zippel 2006: 123, 189).<sup>23</sup> I found evidence of this pattern multiple times during fieldwork and in reading literature on mobbing. In the late Spring 2005, I interviewed a medical doctor in residency to work as an occupational doctor, specializing in occupational illnesses. He told me:

Sometimes a case originates as sexual harassment, mobbing follows the refusal and then it gets transformed into mobbing. Meanwhile, within mobbing cases there can be some form of sexual vexations (*vessazione sessuale*) like if I do this, and if she suffers, then she'll leave. Other men have also done this, but they were strongly attracted to these people.

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<sup>23</sup> See also 14 April 2005. "Salute, dall'Umbria regole antimobbing." *Lavoro Oggi*, p. 49.

The doctor distinguished sexual harassment as a causal element of mobbing, and also retained sexual harassment as an outcome of men's sexual attraction. Later I asked him who mobbed whom, generally. He reflected: "Men harassed by women? No case. But women get harassed by both [men and other women]."

The order is important and picked up within various forms of mobbing literatures of various kinds. A 2002 news article described mobbing as "psychological persecution," and named sexual harassment as one form of it.<sup>24</sup> In the book *Mobbing*, Vittorio Di Martino and Roberto De Santis (2003) list what kinds of behaviors constitute mobbing and include "harassment (even sexually)" along with acts that are "persecuting, oppressing, threatening and excluding" (19). The pamphlet the World Health Organization issued, "Psychological Violence at Work: Increasing Awareness" (see Chapter 6) lists "sexual harassment" as one of the recognizable behaviors that constitute mobbing (Cassitto et al. 2003: 14). Psychiatrist Renato Gilioli, an author of the above pamphlet, spoke about mobbing at the University of Padua in March of 2004. Gilioli discussed findings of mobbees who had come to his clinic, "Center for the Prevention, Diagnosis, Cure, and Rehabilitation of the Work Maladjustment Pathology." He described how 68% of women's cases compiled in Milan were what he called "emotional mobbing" (*mobbing emozionale*), involving "exclusion, marginalization, isolation, humiliation, offenses, taunting, and sexual harassment." He emphasized this point at a well-attended public lecture in Padua in early 2005 (see Chapter 4). There is also the Daphne Programme, a European Commission program based in the United Kingdom that supports a multi-member state program, "Mobbing: Raising Awareness of Women Victims of Mobbing."<sup>25</sup> The Daphne Programme hosts a number of country reports on women and

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<sup>24</sup> 3 April 2002. "I Danni del Mobbing," *La Stampa*, p. 3. See also 14 April 2005. "Salute, dall'Umbria regole antimobbing," *Lavoro Oggi*, p. 49 and 15 September 2005. "Danno non patrimoniale," *Italia Oggi*, p. 45.

<sup>25</sup> Website: <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/politics/cse/daphne.htm#booklets>. Accessed 3 December 2006.

mobbing, from The Netherlands, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In Italy's report, Elena Ferrari (2004) suggests the following:

A very peculiar kind of mobbing is the sexual one. Women can often have to face cases of sexual harassment caused by the *mobber*. Sexual harassment itself is not a category of *mobbing*; it becomes *mobbing* when the denials of the victims are followed by threats. Sexual harassment is only partially considered as *mobbing* when the aggressor, after being refused, threatens the victim, thus becoming a *mobber*. This is sexual *mobbing* (6).

Though this is the only reference I have seen to “sexual mobbing,” it is evident that sexual harassment has been fully incorporated as an action that may incite mobbing.

Why do order and hierarchy matter? What they demonstrate is the recognition that mobbing is sexualized, but the sex is only part of an over-arching psychological phenomena. Thus, with sexual harassment as a pre-cursor to mobbing, understandings of mobbing become more complicated, but more pliant. Mobbing can be a sexualized behavior, but this rests on the idea of deployed sexuality as a means for further marginalization, not as sexuality as part of worker's subjectivity. It is more morally abhorrent in this form because it is construed as sex not coming from spontaneous bodily desires of men, but from precise, mental calculations.

## 7.5 The Politics of Erasure

Even with the work done to distinguish these two forms of abuse, it is important to be cognizant of how this is not in any way a seamless narrative—sex cannot be extracted out of mobbing. In other words, if sexual harassment can purportedly cause mobbing, then it is quite difficult to sustain a narrative of mobbing as a gender-neutral or asexual harassment. I outlined the first inconsistency above in that while mobbers are masculinized figures to some extent, Italian women often talked about women mobbing other women. Michela's case (Chapter 4) and Cinzia's case of mobbing (Chapter 6) both involved almost exclusively women. Consider also, for example, the review for the film, “Secretary,” which calls the

sado-masochistic love affair between the boss and his secretary “company mobbing between perversion and true love.”<sup>26</sup> There have even been a few reports that suggest that more men than women get mobbed. For example, the Italian Society of Psychopathology (*SOPSI*) reports that their group of cases included 57% men and 43% women.<sup>27</sup> Despite these various inconsistencies, the majority of articles do indeed describe mobbing as gender neutral;<sup>28</sup> although many describe it as predominantly affecting women.<sup>29</sup>

But the cultural work done to maintain mobbing as “gender-neutral” is rather rigorous; single reports may dub mobbing gender-neutral, right before providing additional information that reveals it affects more women. One news article states that gender-blind mobbing impacts 560,000 men in Italy compared with 540,000 women.<sup>30</sup> Only later does the article state that women are actually *twice* as likely to report being mobbed than men considering their employment levels.<sup>31</sup> This jumbling of information allows for flexible reader interpretation. Another mobbing study indicated that while only 5% of women admit to being sexually harassed, one in three admits to having experienced some form of mobbing, and 55% suggest that sexual harassment is “the worst part of mobbing.”<sup>32</sup> What this reveals is that mobbing is just gender-neutral *enough* to cloak accusations of gendered and sexualized behaviors.

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<sup>26</sup> Nepoti, Roberto. “Al cinema il mobbing aziendale tra perversione e amore vero.” *La Repubblica* (5 April 2003). Accessed online [www.repubblica.it](http://www.repubblica.it) 4/16/03.

<sup>27</sup> 23 February 2005. “Psichiatria: Fino a 18% Lavoratori Vittime del Mobbing.” *ANSA Notiziario Generale in Italiano*

<sup>28</sup> 24 November 2004. “Mobbing: CISL in Europa 13 Milioni di Vittime.” *ANSA Notiziario Generale in Italiano*.

<sup>29</sup> 14 May 2004. “Mobbing: Condannato Capo Produzione.” *Ansa Notiziario Generale in Italiano*. See also 5 May 2004. “Regione Lazio: Nuove Proposte di Legge per il Mobbing.” *Ansa Notiziario Generale in Italiano* and 2 March 2004. “L’Identikit delle Vittime.” *La Stampa*, p. 37. 3) 5 March 2004. “8 Marzo.” *ANSA Notiziario Generale in Italiano*.

<sup>30</sup> 2 December 2005. “Censis: Decelera Mercato Lavoro.” *ANSA Notiziario Generale in Italiano*.

<sup>31</sup> 2 December 2005. “Censis: Decelera Mercato Lavoro.” *ANSA Notiziario Generale in Italiano*.

<sup>32</sup> 17 October 2005. “Governo: Ricerca tre quarti Italiano vogliono Donna Premier.” *Ansa Notiziario Generale in Italiano*.

It is precisely because sexualized abuse became an antecedent of mobbing that the subjects are able to adopt mobbing as an over-arching cultural term for cases that may have once been named as solely sexual harassment. Scholars who have studied sexual harassment have been troubled by what is behind the popularity of mobbing. Mobbing, a popular concept in Germany, creates the conditions for the erasure of “power differentials between men and women” (Zippel 2006: 220). Sociologist Abigail Saguy (2003) also found that “moral harassment” in France was often represented as “devoid of any discussion of discrimination, sexism or sexuality” (128). There is now a law in France against moral harassment, greatly supported by the public, in the French penal code (Saguy 2003: 147). Saguy (2003) points out that moral harassment also avoids the trappings of what French see as “American excesses” of sexual harassment, a point I believe holds true in the Italian context as well (13). Saguy’s refers to the ways in which European feminists often found American feminists concern with sexual harassment an outgrowth of a Puritan sexual ethos, preventing women from expressing (heterosexual) sexual desire and claiming sexual agency. Italian women, in fact, would often tell me that sexual harassment in the United States seemed to deny that women may *desire* to be desired by fellow employees. It seemed that they viewed American definitions of and policies against sexual harassment as something that would forestall compliments about women’s beauty or bodies and exchanges that they saw as pleasurable affirmations of their sexual desirability (and, hence, gender identity). In my course on mobbing and sexual harassment at the University of Padua, the instructor about sexual harassment quipped that when one of her male employers grabbed her bottom she realized that she “wasn’t half bad-looking.” Here she clearly did so ironically, but I believe this humor resonates in Italy because they see such actions as desirable, even when they recognize their problematic outcomes. Finally, Italians often see the American desire to



end sexual harassment as a way of producing “unrealistic” models of ascetic, asexual interpersonal engagement at work. For instance, Italians often link the Monica Lewinsky scandal, for instance, as evidence of Americans “absurd” concern about sex and sexual harassment at work. These attitudes about sexual harassment are also reflected in the cartoon below, where the man says: “Love, I’d marry you right away if I didn’t fear sexual harassment.” The humor of this cartoon rests on the idea of claims about sexual harassment being absurd.



Figure 1 Sexual Harassment Cartoon (Venerdì di Repubblica, September 2003).

Mobbing, perhaps, offers a desirable way to recognize women's sexual subjectivity. Adopting mobbing as a name for sexual harassment, however, also serves as an erasure for the ongoing reproduction of gender and sexual hierarchies. For example, "ArciGay," a prominent gay organization in Padua published a case history about how Anna, a gay-identified professional woman, was mobbed.<sup>33</sup> Anna described how she was forced into an all-male department so she would be purposively isolated from other women. She stated: "From the moment of revelation, the boss took aim, trying to isolate me, not censoring sarcastic remarks like, 'You have to take out your new girlfriend.' This is a type of mobbing that is impossible to prove."<sup>34</sup> Calling such abuses mobbing works to disguise sexual and gendered inequalities and steer attention away from the ongoing persecution of social actors who deviate from socially prescribed sexual identifications.

Women may gain certain social, legal and economic benefits, however, by deploying the term mobbing, and exploiting the many resources dedicated to "moral harassment" within Italy. Examining the case of sexual harassment and mobbing in Germany, Kathrin Zippel (2006) has found that "judges have been more generous to victims of mobbing than to victims of sexual harassment, with significantly higher monetary awards" (188). According to Zippel (2006), this may be because mostly men judges find victims of mobbing more sympathetic while sexual harassers are assumed to be mistakenly prosecuted. Thus losing the stigma related to victims of sexual harassment earns mobbees a greater chance of garnering welfare state benefits through the legal system (Zippel 2006: 211). In Italy, mobbing, unlike sexual harassment, also allows worker citizens an effective way to negotiate settlements with employers and avoid the deep presumptions about women's sexuality that

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<sup>33</sup> 11 April 2002. "Emarginata perché lesbica." *Il Gazzettino*.

<sup>34</sup> 11 April 2002. "Emarginata perché lesbica." *Il Gazzettino*.

undergird sexual harassment case law. How precisely this unfolds in Italy is linked to laws that safeguard the worker's body.

## 7.6 The Importance of Erasure and Health

Why mobbing nearly eclipses sexual harassment has much to do with an unusual twist based on the laws in Italy protecting bodily integrity and health. As I discussed in Chapter 6, Italians increasingly view mobbing a national health problem. Central to this problem is that worker's rights center on the protections of bodily integrity. Claims that mobbing violates bodily integrity, predicated on Article 2087 of Italy's Civil Code, is also predicated on a body that is not overtly sexualized. First, let me reiterate how public framings of workplace sex articulate with understandings of the health of the worker. Flirting in the workplace, for instance, was reported to relieve anxiety and stress as well as strengthen relationships with partners at home.<sup>35</sup> In this formulation, heterosexual expression in the workplace helps to maintain the health of the body as well as sex that is heteronormative and bound by the vow of marriage. Just as "healthy" workplace sexuality can maintain familial sex relations, mobbing can ruin them. From the magazine, "Donna Moderna" (*Modern Woman*), a woman writes in asking for help because her husband is a "victim of mobbing."<sup>36</sup> What follows is the response of psychiatrist, mobbing expert Renato Gilioli: "Helping someone who, little by little, loses the will to make love, to go out, to have hobbies, is quite tiring."<sup>37</sup> The columnist cautions that "love is not enough" to help one's husband and suggests seeking a psychologist or a specialist and encourages giving him

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<sup>35</sup> The Gazette (Montreal) 26 September 2001.

<sup>36</sup> Grasso, Gabriella. "Mobbing." *Donna Moderna*. 23 September 2002.

<sup>37</sup> Grasso, Gabriella. "Mobbing." *Donna Moderna*. 23 September 2002.

emotional and psychological support.<sup>38</sup> Here the male mobbee, still considered an exception to the majority of female mobbing victims, has lost his sexual desire.

Courts in Italy have quite rarely construed sexual harassment as bodily endangering. In 1991, as debates about sexual harassment increased in public discourse, headlines shouted that “sexual harassment may have devastating effects on one’s health.”<sup>39</sup> In a sexual harassment case in 1993, the male boss had to pay 32 million Lira (approximately 16,000 dollars) to his secretary. The unnamed plaintiff’s lawyer states, “It is the first time in Italy that the biological damage [of sexual harassment] gets acknowledged.”<sup>40</sup> Like mobbing, the negativity of sexual harassment emerged as signs of disorder within bodily realms. But the body disrupted by sexual harassment is a distinctly sexed body, unlike the notion of a gender-neutral body for mobbing. The above case serves as an exception to a cultural ideology that deems sexually harassment insufficient grounds for biological damage. In 1997, the Court of Cassation ruled against a woman suing for biological damage due to sexual harassment because her boss had “profound feelings” for her and thus “would not connote violence, petulance or superficiality.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, men’s sexual desire and amorousness otherwise linked to health, strongly limited the possibility that actions based on these benevolent feelings could cause biological damage. Above I showed how the courts understand women’s sexuality subjectivity in sexual harassment cases as necessarily desirous and consensual. It is this persistent conceptualization that makes sexual harassment incompatible with the notion of injured bodies and health—how could a body desire its own injury?

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> *Il Sole 24 Ore* (11 July 1991) “Donne: Eva Al Lavoro—Piu Tutela Dalla Cee”

<sup>40</sup> *La Stampa* (20 February 1993) “Trentadue milioni per un bacio”

<sup>41</sup> 20 August 1997. “L’amore assolve le molestie.” *La Stampa*. P. 15.

Article 2087, requiring employers to safeguard the physical and psychological integrity of workers, has become the most commonly used law for mobbing cases. But, indirectly, it has also altered how courts grapple with sexual harassment. In 1999 in the first legal case tried for mobbing from a tribunal court in Torino that awarded biological damages to the employee.<sup>42</sup> Importantly, this case also included sexual harassment as one of the precursors to full-fledged mobbing.<sup>43</sup> In this significant legal case dubbed “a first for moral harassment,” a woman working in a plastic factory in the Torino-bordering city of Borgaro was put to work on a machine in a severely enclosed space.<sup>44</sup> The worker’s boss asked her for sexual favors in exchange for her location transfer and the factory worker began suffering from agoraphobia, anxiety and depression.<sup>45</sup> The judge, hearing her case of “mobbing” and the violation of her bodily integrity, awarded the plaintiff ten million Lira (five thousand dollars) recognizing “the disturbance suffered by the woman provoked a reactive depressive syndrome.”<sup>46</sup> The effect here is to legitimate bodily harm if and only if it exceeds sexual violation and can be framed as mobbing.

The body violated by mobbing is understood as psycho-somatic, psychological distress in tandem with physical effects. There was another similar legal case of three teachers in the region of Piedmont that went up to a third court of appeals (n. 19342 of 25 October 2005). Three teachers sued their employer for damages from a year of mobbing and “moral violence” against them that caused severe state of anxiety and depression and the use of medical cures and drugs in addition to anti-depressants. The ruling upheld the first court ruling (14 January 2002) granting a degree of moral damage at 15-18% amounting to

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<sup>42</sup> 17 December 2002. “Esordio del ‘mobbing.’” *Il Sole 24 Ore*. P. 20.

<sup>43</sup> 17 December 2002. “Esordio del ‘mobbing.’” *Il Sole 24 Ore*. P. 20.

<sup>44</sup> 11 December 1999. “A Borgaro il primo caso giudiziario per ‘molestie morali.”” *La Stampa*. P. 40.

<sup>45</sup> 11 December 1999. “A Borgaro il primo caso giudiziario per ‘molestie morali.”” *La Stampa*. P. 40.

<sup>46</sup> 11 December 1999. “A Borgaro il primo caso giudiziario per ‘molestie morali.”” *La Stampa*. P. 40.

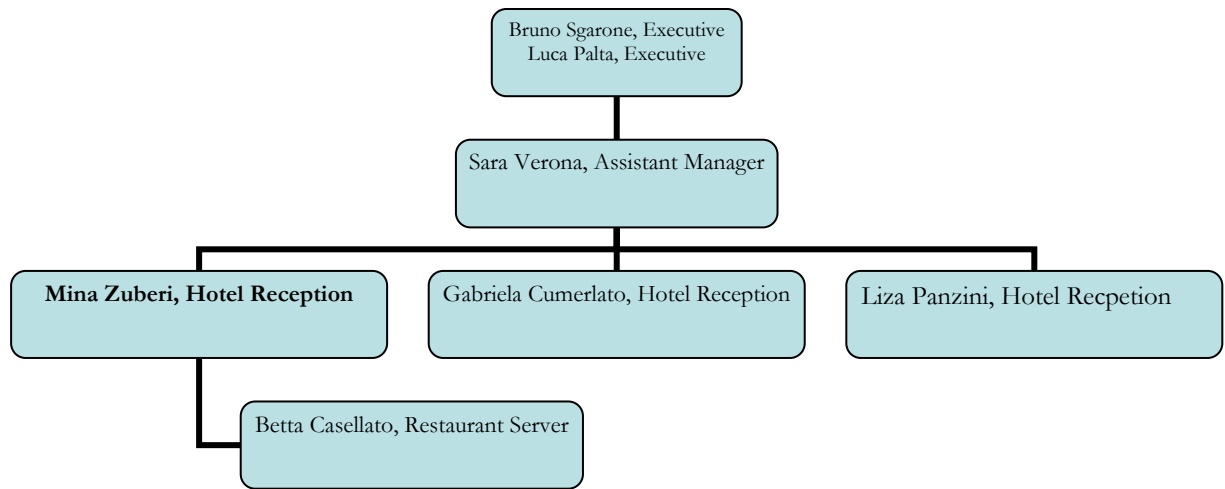
1,665 Euro in addition to covering their legal expenses. The ruling extends the definition of mobbing as “harassment...with the consequence of gravely affecting the psychic equilibrium of the employee, reducing his/her work capacity and faith in oneself and provoking emotional catastrophe, depression and even suicide” (n. 19342 of 25 October 2005). Mobbing is wholly embedded in a landscape of both deep psychological pain, but also biological and physical trauma. Thus, even as it is, on the one hand, portrayed as a psychological form of abuse, its effects are registered on the body.

### **7.7 Enlightenment Projects and the Citizen Body**

The cultural and legal dynamics I have described here reflect deeper historical genealogies and understandings on sex, bodies and citizenship. English professor and chronicler of gay rights, Eric O. Clarke offers some insight about the articulation between sex and citizenship. Drawing from Kant, Clarke (1999) argues that part of the project of Enlightenment civil society entailed an understanding of “sex for its own sake is...a defilement of body and soul” (164). Taking this insight to Italy, I would suggest that recognizing certain sexual acts, however, taints women’s bodies more so than men’s, in part, because of the way in which men in Italy are seen as acting on natural, impulsive libidos and women as evoking such desires. According to Kant, “the sexual inclination a man feels for a woman does not regard her as human but rather purely ‘sex’” (Kant *Lectures*, 164, 206 in Clarke 1999: 172). I would suggest, then, that certain notions of sex used to and still do pertain to *male* bodies as primary sites of modern citizenship in Italy. With the lingering notions of civil society at work in Italy, certain women cannot disarticulate their political subjectivity, premised on the notions of sex as defiling, from their claim of sexual harassment. In the presentation of Mina’s story, I show how sexual harassment, mobbing and bodily trauma collide in one painful story.

## 7.8 Mina's Story

Mina Zuberi was a woman I had met at Fiore Montiglio's Equal Opportunity Office and mobbing clinic. Through the retelling of Mina's story, I focus on how differently positioned actors negotiated a series of sexualized and gendered vexations using the public



**Figure 2 Hotel Organization**

discourse and legal codes of mobbing. An Egyptian woman in her forties, Mina has been in Italy for over fifteen years and has become an Italian citizen. Mina worked as a receptionist at a large hotel for many years, the structure of which I have summarized in Figure 1.

When I first met Mina in February I saw that she had been living through a great deal of pain—there was a heaviness to her presence and she wept at many intervals while she told Fiore and me her story. Mina began by explaining how the hierarchy of the hotel was divided by gender, women at front reception and men as bookkeepers, managers and executives. Then, in the year 2000, a new manager arrived, Bruno Sgarone, who wanted to get rid of the “old staff” in order to hire more men and/or younger women. This was

apparent not only in Mina's narrative but also in the narratives of several colleagues who came to Fiore's office. First, Sgarone hired an additional male manager to control the all-female reception staff. Bruno would also criticize Mina on a daily basis and frequently referred to her as "the dirty Tunisian whore" (*la sporca troia tunisiana*) and sometimes "that black one" (*quella nera*). Even though Fiore pointed out the elements of sexual harassment and racial discrimination of these vicious comments, she, too, eventually adhered to Mina's prescription of her case as one of mobbing.

Bruno also immediately cut the additional profits that the reception staff made from the commissions the staff made by referring clients to certain restaurants or service providers and through the hotel's monetary exchange service. Mina explained that within the hotel business were various aspects of "under the table" informal earnings that were, she argued, quite normal and mundane. For example, Mina, together with the other receptionists, would add a small percentage to the exchange rate listed by the hotel for clients, a practice understood but apparently not publicly acknowledged by hotel management. This way, for every transaction they would make a small profit from the exchange that would be divided among all the receptionists. Many economic transactions at the hotel were "under the table" (*in nero*)—this included tips and a variety of invoices and services, Mina contended.<sup>47</sup> In addition to the exchange, Mina also received additional commissions from transportation services and restaurants when clients arrived via her recommendation. Bruno decided that they would have to end these practices and instructed hotel employees to treat Mina and her colleagues at reception, Liza and Gabriela, as if they were "thieves." The intensified marginalization and isolation created a severe and disturbing work climate for Mina. Informal economic transactions between hotel clients and Mina

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<sup>47</sup> The phrase "in nero" literally translates as "black" economy, but means the informal economy.



became the basis for the hotel's case against Mina. As I discuss further below, the hotel's claims for economic transparency served, in my view, as a convenient disguise for multiple and pernicious forms of employee abuse.

One particular day, a few months later, Mina said she was asked to explain certain aspects of her bookkeeping to Bruno and another assistant manager. She described how she was in the office with Bruno and subject to their persecutory and humiliating accusations of faulty bookkeeping. They also reminded her that "it takes a good head to manage finances." For Mina, they were explicitly suggesting that her being a woman made her unable to perform these duties properly. Their threatening and angry accusations upset her greatly and she left work early that day. The next day, Mina went to the hospital for her "acute anxiety," was prescribed antidepressants and obtained permission for two months of sick leave from INAIL (National Institute of Insurance for Work-Related Illness). Mina told us that it was INAIL that had first verified that her case was mobbing. The hotel, following this event, formally charged Mina with leaving work premises without permission and accused her of dishonest financial management. The hotel management claimed that her unannounced departure, not following protocol, made her ineligible for sick leave benefits. In response, the hotel hired lawyers who filed a brief stating that Mina's response was due to the fact that she was someone who "already suffered from nervous and emotional disturbances." By seeking to establish Mina as an *already* mentally unstable and weak-bodied individual, the hotel management sought to make her ineligible for paid sick leave. Mina won the original case, though the hotel had appealed the decision and the case as of April 2007 was still pending.

Once Mina returned to work after her sick leave, she was no longer permitted to continue her bookkeeping duties by hotel management. Bruno hired a few young men in

their twenties to work at reception who would systematically criticize and humiliate her. Mina also told us that she and her reception colleagues, upon instruction from Bruno, had their passwords to the hotel computer deactivated and thus, no longer had access to the electronic reservation system or any digital information. Mina told us that she, Gabriela and Liza were rarely left without one of the new male hires who would serve as strict supervisor. Mina was deeply troubled by these events, and described how she was facing deep depression and anxiety, only able to endure this because of the support of her son and her psychotropic medication. She had begun visiting local mobbing centers and asking for advice.

In January 2005, Bruno died suddenly of a stroke. Bruno's untimely death changed of course the possibilities for the course of legal action. Without being able to charge him personally, the hotel would have to be charged, making the case more complex. Even without Bruno the daily hostilities continued. In March, Mina said one of the new reception managers had screamed at her for speaking to a client and accused her of stealing money from the register. She was then fired because one of the reception managers said Mina had "threatened" him after the incident. Sara, another colleague who had told Fiore and me her version of the story, heard that Mina had "provoked" the manager. In response to his question of where she was going, Mina responded, according to Sara: "To the bathroom. I have my period. Do you want to come?" It was this comment, Sara said, that caused the manager to lose his patience and fire Mina. The day after the episode at work, Mina received a certified letter immediately terminating her contract and describing her behavior as "threatening, outrageous and insubordinate." Mina had first gone to the trade union CGIL who had sent a letter to the hotel citing her case as mobbing and requesting moral and biological damages.

Mina's lawyer explained that he was still building a case of mobbing because he still had to prove the connection between Mina's poor health and her work environment. INAIL (National Institute Against Work-Related Accidents) had acknowledged Mina's case, in particular the documents from her visit to the emergency room, as work-related illness. Then, he said: "They changed their minds," though it was not clear to me why her case was deemed ineligible. Her lawyer concluded that in order to press charges for mobbing and biological damages according Article 2087 of the Civil Code, in which the employer is obliged to protect the bodily integrity of the work, he must first dispute INAIL. Fiore, however, urged him to find sufficient evidence to prove that Mina was mobbed. Thus, Mina's compromised psycho-physical integrity became the centerpiece of her legal and political subjecthood as mobbee. Mobilizing her identification as a victim of sexual harassment would preclude the legal course of action around her health. These processes were highly dependent on the idea of mobbing as bodily endangering and the role of INAIL in codifying OCP.

Mina's case is layered with several forms of structural violence and ongoing and systematic marginalization—rife with situations that could be named as sexual harassment, gender and racial discrimination and mobbing. But what I found was that Mina, Fiore, Fiore's lawyer Lina and Mina's lawyer handled and discussed Mina's case solely as mobbing. Consider the extent to which bodily illness was central to this case. One of the primary and important frames that shaped the way in which various actors saw this case was that of health. For Mina, the ongoing stress and persecution at work accumulated and resulted in psychosomatic symptoms, as verified by the state health institution INAIL. The state health agency, thus, played an important role in Mina's case by intervening in the recognition of mobbing vis-à-vis her medically documented biological trauma and the award of sick leave.

But Mina also experienced the violence of being called a “whore” or the “the black one” though these remarks were *not* given great importance. I don’t believe this was a practice accountable to the social actors involved, but rather the absence of a cultural ideology that holds racializing and sexualized language as injurious. That her colleague pinned Mina’s ultimate departure on her candid discussion of her menstruation also suggests that Mina’s identification as a sexualized subject ignited additional disruptive forces.

Given the severity of the case, Fiore asked to speak with Mina’s colleagues, her lawyer and the new hotel director. One by one various hotel employees came to speak with me and Fiore over the course of the next several weeks. Overall, I was struck by the clear consistencies among the various interviewees and the extent to which they attested to Mina’s narrative. I will only detail some of the narratives in order to convey the fierce and profoundly gendered hostility present in this workplace.

I met Betta Casellato who worked as a waitress in the hotel and was immediately offered an undetermined time contract by Bruno. When she began working, however, Bruno asked Betta to bring coffee to his private room where she found him wearing nothing but a bathrobe. He asked her to bring the tray to his bedside and proceeded to compliment her, tell her she was beautiful, that he “drove him crazy” (*fa impazzire*) and that “he could give her things her husband could not.” Here, the notion of “driving him crazy” refers to the idea of his losing control of his reactions and emotional responses to her. He touched her, meanwhile exposing himself. This behavior continued though Betta said she would steer clear of the bedside after this day, bring his tray and quickly leave the room. She also felt overly criticized and humiliated by the head waitress, who seemed to Betta to have been specifically authorized by Bruno to mistreat her. One day the head waitress pushed a tray into her on purpose and with that, Betta quit. Afterwards, Mina told us, Bruno referred to

Betta simply as “the woman who lent out her ass” (*la donna che dava il culo*). Betta had no legal case pending against the hotel.

Gabriela Cumerlato, a woman in her early forties, worked at reception with Mina. After suffering a major back injury, Gabriela could no longer work standing up. One day, Gabriela recounted, the chairs and stools within the reception area had mysteriously disappeared. Bruno told her that he could not put any chairs or stools near the reception, as it would look “unprofessional.” However, he added, he would be happy to transfer her to Torino, a city on the Western coast of Italy, or Sardinia, an island west of mainland Italy. He refused her request to work as a hotel operator, where she could remain seated, and instead hired a twenty-five year old woman. Her request for two half-shifts rather than a full eight-hour shift were also denied. Gabriela wrote SPISAL (Agency for the Prevention, Hygiene and Security in Workplaces) and requested that they document her physical difficulty and the absence of adequate facilities at the hotel.<sup>48</sup> She continued on intermittent periods of work, sick leave and vacation time for the next several months. Gabriela, like Mina, confirmed that Bruno had hired young men managers at the reception desk who continually spoke about sex, making them all feel very uncomfortable. Gabriela told us how her male colleagues would talk incessantly about women, saying “All women are whores,” and continuously commenting on other women’s bodies, as in “What an ass!” “What tits!” “Nice pussy!” during their shifts. In June and July 2005, Gabriela continued to work with intermittent sick leaves until December 2004 when she resigned. Her letter, detailing how her physical condition made it impossible for her to work without proper accommodations, was central to her severance case. In hearing her story, Fiore began to talk about a collective mobbing case, pointing to the compromised bodily integrity of both Mina and Gabriela.

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<sup>48</sup> SPISAL: Servizio di Prevenzione, Igiene e Sicurezza negli Ambienti di Lavoro.

Mina's colleague Liza Panzini gave an account that paralleled Mina's and Gabriela's, though Liza was the only one of Mina's close colleagues who remained at the hotel. Liza also experienced what she identified as mobbing in that she felt deeply isolated by the new workers who refused to speak or collaborate with her, Gabriela or Mina. She told us: "I was shocked at how soon it began." She noted that she even saw certain colleagues reprimanded when they did speak openly with them. In fact, she told us, Bruno instituted a new rule that no worker would be allowed to speak to anyone at the front office without his official permission. Gabriela was also instructed to pass all incoming phone calls to the newly hired male colleagues working with them. Both Mina and Liza also described how their requests for shifts were almost always denied and that they were assigned new shifts that were inconvenient to their long-established schedules. The new male colleagues, however, not only had their preferred shifts but also two consecutive days off. By law, workers must be given at least one day of rest for every seven working days. Liza told us that she no longer was given consecutive days off. As Liza had requested day shifts so she could care for her ailing mother in the evening she was forced to use additional leaves of absence to continue to attend to her family. Liza also said that her male colleagues would also keep track of every time she went to the bathroom. She also detailed that this record would include when she had bowel movements, though she did not specify how this information was obtained. She also had a few direct confrontations with Bruno, who had repeatedly asked her "why someone like her that made any man's head turn was wasting her time working at place like this." Fiore pointed out to her that had the situation been reversed, and a man been propositioned by a woman she would see that it was an offer for sex: "Such an offer implies a threat." Liza nodded and shrugged.

Over the course of Bruno's management, Liza had obtained multiple prescriptions from her doctor to face the ongoing stress and her intensifying depression, including anti-depressants, sleeping pills and tranquillizers. However, Liza was one of the few that remained in her position and had not taken legal action. When she came to Fiore's office in July, she described how the new director, Luca Palta, had initiated a series of reforms and improvements: "I want to work in peace. I have no intention to press charges now." Her health, as a result, was improving and she was able to stop taking anti-depressants but continued with sleeping pills. She said that the new director, Luca, had joked with her that he can't even tell her that she has nice hair because she'd call it sexual harassment. Liza laughed: "He told me the hotel is in shit up to here!" holding her hand over her head and referring to his awareness that Mina's case was being investigated and that she had a lawyer.

Another colleague visited Fiore's office to give another account of what had happened, even though she had been absent on maternity leave for most of the period. She said: "The directors were happy to eliminate Mina. She was getting in the way, raising her own head." To which Fiore responded:

Mina is a woman who didn't lower her head. Because of strong jealousy she was punished by other women. Women can do terrible things and are very jealous on an unconscious level. Instead of admiring a woman like this they ask, why is she getting ahead? Because she put herself in antithesis to patriarchal law (*le leggi del padre*).

Fiore illuminated a deeper process of how Mina's isolation hinged upon gender deviance—a woman's refusal to accept patriarchal authority. What Fiore was also pointing to the way in which other women, understood as necessarily jealous and competitive, were complicit not only in marginalizing Mina but also patrolling gendered hierarchies. Even though most of Mina's harassment was by her male colleagues, Fiore, I believe, was pointing to other female colleagues, like Liza, who did not openly defend and support Mina.

### 7.8.1 *Director Meeting: Discursive Standoff*

In July 2005, I was with Fiore Montiglio for her meeting with the new hotel director, Luca Palta, to discuss to Mina's case and the ongoing legal suits. Though he arrived after Mina had left, he was now in charge of all hotel operations, including how the hotel would proceed with her case. Fiore and Luca's charged exchange about Mina offers an entryway into two culturally specific narratives that clash with one another: Fiore's understanding of gendered power, expressed through mobbing rather than sexual harassment, and Luca's lens of market determination. What became increasingly salient is the point with which I began—workplace conflicts, with mobbing as a prime example, are deeply shaped by understandings of late capitalism and the problem of labor.

Luca Palta entered Fiore's office with shining white teeth, a monogrammed suit and his lawyer. Fiore, opposite him, sat with the lawyer of the Equal Opportunity office, Lina, and me beside her in chairs. After a series of brief introductions, Luca began by describing that Bruno had come to the hotel with the intention to eliminate employees: "He was cutting, wanting fewer employees." Then pausing, he reflected: "A hotel doesn't sell a product. Rather it offers a very particular service." Luca's narrative moved abruptly between downsizing and the hotel relationship with a global economic market, something he did repeatedly throughout the conversation, though I didn't quite understand what this meant until later in this meeting. Fiore reminded him sternly how that there were other "modalities" one could use in order to make such changes, instead of using harassment and mobbing. Luca's lawyer remarked curtly that Mina had been the one had threatened the reception manager. He then wondered aloud if Mina was consuming some psychotropic medications as well: "I've lived through some troubles myself frankly, but if I'm in some form of trouble, I deal with it." Fiore was both cross and serious: "They don't *have* power."



Taking up the framework of Mina's ill health, Luca attempted to make her moral claims about her illness illegitimate by emphasizing her pharmaceutical consumption and supposedly prior instability. He, on the other hand, defined himself as a man whose health can be *self-managed*, his body governed by his own autonomous control, not by outside intervention or prescriptions.

Luca said, once again: "We don't sell screws or armchairs. We have services." I was once again puzzled by this sharp disjuncture between Fiore's response and Luca's move towards describing the hotel as an economic entity. Indeed, the manager's remarks only make sense in the context of neoliberal ideologies, the notion that markets demand certain kinds of labor and action. Luca viewed Mina as a kind of troubled worker in the context of the hotel's challenging economic position insofar as it produced no material product. It seemed, therefore, that for him giving more information about the challenges of *immaterial* production worked as a justification for the challenge of managing *immaterial* labor. It was as if he assumed that had they produced material objects then the physical labor and toil of employees would be easier to monitor and measure.

Fiore then asked him about the unsupervised and undocumented commissions that Mina earned from recommendations for restaurants, stores and car rentals. Luca continued: "I'm happy if my employees make a commission. It comes back to my hotel and I avoid having to raise salaries—it's an indirect return." But such returns, he exhorted, could not be tolerated because they were not "transparent" financial transactions. Luca reported that Bruno himself had told him that it was "time to clean things up (*fare pulizia*)."<sup>1</sup> Referring to Mina, he added: "That woman cut us out. (*Quella donna ci ha tagliato fuori*)."<sup>2</sup> Note also that the use of "that" as a modifier is as derogatory as it would be in English. Indexed specifically as a gendered subject (that woman), Mina, it seemed, had transgressed a field of

economic relations reserved for men. Luca mobilized the hotel's main defense in Mina's case as a matter of fiscal responsibility: "Bruno blocked this flow [to her]. We admit he did this in a very harsh way. Naturally [he was] rule-abiding, but harsh. [...] So Mina rebelled against this." The lawyer agreed: "Mina called it abusive in order to do a bit of personal shopping." The defense, in short, was that she had to mobilize a worker's compensation claim in order to make up for the hotel having blocked her informal earnings.

Fiore was visibly outraged: "The bullshit is rising. Excuse my language, but there was a new *man* in power and we need to be attentive to this." The lawyer shook his head: "This created a situation of tension inside, but it doesn't matter whether he was a man or a woman—it was the same thing." Fiore, however, was not at all convinced: "Let's say the new director wanted some of these commissions? He couldn't accept that these women had this power and he tried to find elements to eliminate them." Within this debate were two contrary narratives of conflict that serve to explain Mina's conflict at work. For Luca and his lawyer, it was a genderless narrative of a disgruntled employee, morally undeserving of capital, especially considering the obstacles of a pinched service market. The explanation rests on the idea that the worker who shamelessly desires and coercively obtains more than her share deserves punishment—moral, social, economic. For Fiore, on the other hand, the contested behavior derived from gendered relations of power and Mina's transgression of specifically gendered norms, desiring capital, refusing submission.

Luca raised the issue of another female employee who had gone to the union to report her scheduling problems: "I had made a joke, saying she wanted Saturday and Sunday because she had a boyfriend." Lina, Fiore's lawyer, spoke up: "See how important precedents are? This kind of comment like 'how beautiful you look today.' It's too bad but the situation is sick (*malatta*)." She smiled: "We want to give you a hand to make this

environment healthy.” Drawing from the metaphors of health, Lina offers collective memory as a framework in the “precedents” of sexual harassment and mobbing created apprehension in the workers for future sexualized abuse. Benign compliments and practices were spoiled by the “sick” environment in which women didn’t know whether a given utterance or action would portend abuse. The unnamed woman apparently did not go to discuss sexual harassment, but rather her scheduling problem. Luca’s statements to his female employee were evidently premised on indexing her as a sexualized subject, and assuming her request for weekends derived from her heterosexual relationship. Luca, on the other hand, mobilized a narrative about the already gendered weakness in women employees: “She has a persecution complex.” Fiore stared back at him: “But the women who have come here *have been persecuted*.” Continuing to defend his position, Luca said:

I spoke with the unions and they got back to me. Fantastic. We’re grateful. I resolved the problem for her. As I said before, we don’t sell screws or balls, we sell services. She could say, ‘Thank you Director.’ [...] But she says, ‘I’m going to the unions.’ And I have to make a profit. How can I?

Fiore exclaimed: “These people are afraid, such damage doesn’t come from nothing!” Fiore and Luca’s frameworks of analysis chafed sharply against one another. While Fiore views the workplace as a collective environment that, once damaged and made precarious, alters the consciousness of workers and produces mistrust, fear and ill health. Luca, on the other hand, seemed to view his employees as morally undeserving subjects in the context of the more important challenge of economic gain in the global service industry. Luca’s understandings are not limited to one “hungry” capitalist, but fit within a broader and specifically neoliberal moral economy.

Later, Fiore urged him to re-hire Mina, though Luca firmly insisted that he had no such intentions. Luca maintained that Mina’s “dishonesty” in the informal commissions was contrary to the management’s expectation to keep “everything in the light of day that

beforehand was under the table.” Hotel practices, predicated on neoliberal values of transparency and accountability, foreground the moral stance of the director against Mina (Best 2005). Revealing, however, that this view was undercut by gender ideologies, he also insisted that the trade was Mina’s way to control her women colleagues: “Forget about it with women” (*tra donne non ne parliamo*). Without an already prevalent gendered emotional regime in which women are cast as jealous and competitive, this comment would have little cultural legibility. He then detailed some of the other problems he faced as an executive of only three months, saying: “With all these legal cases, I’ll have to commit to some form of damage. She says it’s mobbing, but in my opinion, it’s just trendy (*va di moda*).” Fiore looked back at him, telling him fiercely: “There was mobbing. And how!” He replied flatly, “Mobbing isn’t done” (*Il mobbing non si fa*).<sup>49</sup>

I must call attention to how this moment reveals the very precariousness of mobbing itself. Mobbing is widely imagined as a narrative of ousting and coercive office abuse. But, as Luca reveals here, it is also the product of shifting collective understandings. Mobbing does not offer, in any way, a stable or permanent way to cohesively frame the marginalization and exploitation of workers. Moreover, Luca portrayed accusations of mobbing as a strategy for unworthy workers to claim benefits—a tool for the lazy, unethical worker. I heard this same view reiterated many times during fieldwork from male entrepreneurs and professionals. “Employees,” Luca continued, “want compensation and it’s hard to have them understand that justice doesn’t exist. They are used to a tribal justice: worker’s compensation.” Being a moral worker-citizen, in Luca’s neoliberal vision, does not entail any safeguard or guarantee of state protection. He envisions the use of Article 2087 protecting the bodily integrity of mobbees as an immoral exploitation of worker’s

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<sup>49</sup> His comment means both “Mobbing isn’t done” but since he uses an impersonal verb tense, it could also be translated as “No one does mobbing.”

compensation laws. Evoking the notion of “tribal” justice, he frames mobbing as an inferior and lowly co-optation of the state. In this formulation, regimes of labor become something incompatible with the neoliberal ideal of justice, upon which modern citizenship has been based. Thus, just compensation becomes the moral failure of the new neoliberal worker-citizen insofar as it rests on a relationship of rights and safeguards between worker and state, rather than between an autonomous subject and the market. Mobbing cases, if increasingly associated with the “tribal justice” of undeserving—and mostly female—citizens, risk stigmatization.

### **7.9 The Body of Neoliberal Citizenship**

This chapter has explored how the discursive distinction between mobbing as bodily endangerment, and sexual harassment as an expression of the “natural” body, produced a set of discourses and practices that altered the ways in which worker-citizens interfaced with the state and with each other. The kinds of verbal harassment and practices experienced by Mina and her colleagues strongly fit the European Union definition of sexual harassment as “unwanted conduct related to sex that takes place with the purpose of or effect of affecting the dignity of the person and creating an intimidating, hostile, offensive or disturbing environment” (Dlgs 145/2005, Dona 2004: 180). But the epistemological distinction and hierarchy between two forms of violence in Italy shaped the outcomes and understandings of Mina’s case. Here, the uneven ranking of sexual harassment and moral harassment are confirmed and re-generated by various actors and many among them are mobbing specialists.

Sexual harassment in Italy is viewed as written on the sexed bodies of citizens—the “naturally” alluring women and uncontrollable urges of men—and fails to emerge as way to legitimize worker’s rights and their bodily and moral integrity. It is precisely the gender-

neutral mythologies of mobbing that create an alternative site around which women can renegotiate their status as sexualized worker-citizens because of how mobbing moves away from the idea of workers as sexual citizens and gendered subjects.

The story of mobbing is a social history of what happens when one form of harassment emerges as something considered ethically superior to another, and, in turn, becomes the dominant explanatory model for workplace conflict. Mobbing—moral harassment masquerading as a gender-neutral phenomenon—became an ethical violation worthy of social support and institutionalization on state and European levels, its victims worthy of social recognition. When deploying mobbing as a means to dispute the gendered and sexualized abuses of the labor regime, subjects are called upon to mask the sexuality of their legal and political subjectivities. Italian legal rulings enforce a legal regime of bodily endangerment premised upon two critical political imaginaries—the citizen's asexual body and relations of hierarchy as 'free' of gender. The courts are able to recognize bodily endangerment in cases of mobbing, when citizens are applying laws that were designed for the male body. Mobbing, as I show in previous chapters, is also figured as something that puts male workers, upon which a core of Italy's social welfare has been built, at risk. The same legal and juridical apparatus, however, fails to recognize how sexual harassment may also be bodily endangering. This latter would require the recognition that workers' right to bodily integrity is a right implicitly made and applicable for male, not female, subjects. This recognition would undermine the fiction that Italy's welfare citizenship is premised on sexual and gender equality, rather than on hierarchical orders. At the same time, these discourses reflect and generate normative understandings of gender premised on the notion of citizen-subjects whose desires are dichotomous (men desiring women, women desiring desire).

In effect, these processes both work to maintain a distinctly male-dominated engagement with the state.

As social actors continue to slip sexual harassment under the cloak of mobbing, the narrative of mobbing as sex and gender-free may no longer be sustainable. If mobbing claims are unveiled as a weapon of the weak—for female and exploited workers—then it may lose its force as a convincing social, political and legal modality for confronting the precariousness of neoliberal labor. And yet, by embedding sexual harassment within the domain of mobbing, sexualized and hierarchical relations may not only be masked, but reinforced.

## Chapter 8     Project Wellbeing: Mobbing Prevention as Health Risk Regime

### 8.1 Worker Wellness

“Protecting the health of the worker must be understood as their wellbeing (*benessere*) and not just as an absence of pathology.”<sup>1</sup> In 2005, two years after the official recognition of a mobbing caused work-related illness, INAIL (National Institute Against Work-Related Accidents) publicized a message to health institutions to focus on wellbeing, not pathology. A concentration on wellbeing as a key objective for the workplace was not limited to INAIL. Rather, workplace wellbeing suggests a more enduring change in the management of mobbing—and labor regimes—in Italy in that the focus switched towards *prevention* rather than resolution of work harassment or conflicts. In October 2006, for instance, the region of Lazio together with the Province of Frosinone, co-funded a conference called: “Mobbing: Educating Yourself for Prevention.” Various medical professionals attended panels such as: Preventing Mobbing: The Role of the Occupational Doctor, Mobbing’s Psychological Damage, Legal Medicine, Mobbing and INAIL Safeguards and Organizational Wellbeing and Corporate Conduct Codes.

What kinds of new cultural practices and understandings are generated by a politics of promoting worker’s health as opposed to eliminating what is believed to endanger it? How does the notion of organizational wellness extend medical intervention in the workplace to both ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’ workers? When occupational psychologist Mariella Mazzuchi told me in early 2005: “Everything’s moving towards wellbeing (*benessere*),” she confirmed a growing sense that I had in both disconnected and contingent sites that the “healthy” workplace and its ethos of worker wellness had become a new and

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<sup>1</sup> 16 June 2005. “Mobbing: L’INAIL Punta sulla Prevenzione.” *Lavoro Oggi*, p. 49.



seductive narrative in the mobbing industry. This suggested that *prevention* and *wellbeing* were the foundational tropes around which a new kind of health risk regime of laboring worker-citizen subjects was being assembled. These notions are also central to the project of creating a class of expert professionals that mediate between worker-citizens and the state. Mobbing prevention programs could enable new structures of power for experts who deployed “know-hows of enumeration, calculation, monitoring, evaluating” and “manage[d] to be simultaneously modest and omniscient, limited yet apparently limitless in their application to problems” (Rose 1996: 54). How are certain actors authorized to *prescribe* a healthy workplace?

In Chapter 6, I showed how the new illness category of “Organizational Coercion Pathology” (OCP), refiguring cultural understandings and state structures of occupational illness under neoliberal conditions, was itself dependent upon the understanding that the organization of labor was endangering the bodies of workers. In recognizing OCP, mobbing was defined in terms of its potentials and risks in creating psychophysical pathologies in workers. Moreover, the *causal* conditions for this bodily harm was largely attributable to loosely defined work practices and organizational conditions created within neoliberal economic regimes. In other words, the generalized workplace and work practices were pathologized rather than a “perverse” individual mobber. My examination of OCP was largely past-oriented, tracing the causes of workers’ bodily disturbances and worker-citizens’ protected bodily integrity to a series of emergent work conditions, on the one hand; and practices specific to Italian state and juridico-legal history, on the other. The paradox of OCP lay in the fact that worker-citizens, while able to make new claims based on medical evidence of bodily harm from work conditions, were also subject to a new series of medical controls to verify and measure their own biological disruptions. Within the discourse of

mobbing, plans to minimize workplace health risks and develop “organizational wellbeing” (*benessere organizzativo*), by contrast, are *future*-oriented and broader in scope. Understanding the social and political effects of the promotion of organizational wellbeing demands that I recover a genealogy that creates the conditions for specific Italian imaginaries of how workplaces *should* be, of what may happen tomorrow, of potentials and estimates—a mapping, in other words, of *risk*. Unveiling Italian plans to prevent mobbing and promote wellbeing lays bare a process of how social actors conjecture and seek to contain the anticipated dangers of the neoliberal workplace. The ethics of organizational wellbeing that have materialized in Italy are also a moral lens through which mobbing—and labor—ought to be managed. It is indicative of a new form of governmentality in which the Foucauldian notion of biopower—around bodily and intimate management—meets the neoliberal ethos of risk: “Governing through risk therefore means .. [subjects] are encouraged to conduct themselves in the most beneficial ways to their health, wealth and happiness in ways that are rational, self-interested and calculating” (Isin 2004: 220).

I show here how prevention programs have merged two forms of risk: work/economic risk and bodily/health risk. The apparatus built around the risk of mobbing reveals that, for Italians, the process of precarious-ization blurs the distinction between labor and society. This chapter attends carefully to the paradox of intensified concern for worker-citizens’ health precisely when stable, lifelong work is simultaneously promoted as something vital and always already healthful, yet at once something increasingly scarce. An anthropology of the *future* of mobbing takes hints from specific Italian legislative changes and cultural ideologies to show how mobbing condenses broader cultural processes—Italy’s uneven transition to a risk society as it unfolds around the bodies of worker-citizens (Beck 1992). Central to health regimes is also how certain medical practices and techniques of

discipline may, in fact, cater to employers' interest. Though the notion of preventing mobbing seems to be a gesture of protection for the worker, the careful monitoring of workers' "risk factors" might ultimately stave off and diminish the ways in which worker-citizens make claims on their employers and the welfare state.

## 8.2 Politics of Prevention

Preventative medicine, from its inception, emerges as a medical model deeply articulated with Western imperialist projects and capitalist development in diverse cultural and historical localities (Porter and Porter 1988, Doyal 1995, Manderson 1999). The 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to Foucault (1973), also marked a shift in medical science towards the promotion of individualized bodily care and technologies of control even as the population remained the assumed unit of control. Foucault thereby illuminates how preventative medicine and individualized bodily regimes create a new form of bodily vigilance for the state. In his analysis of the 18th and 19th century medical apparatuses of disease management in France, Foucault (1973) emphasizes this shift:

Does [medical experience] not involve, because of the special attention it pays to the individual, a generalized vigilance that by extension applies to the group as a whole? It would be necessary to conceive of medicine sufficiently bound up with the state for it to be able...to carry out a constant, general, but differentiated policy of assistance (19).

Foucault (1973) shows how 19<sup>th</sup>-century medicine switched from a governance of pathology to a governance of normality (35), one that would "embrace a knowledge of *healthy man*, that is, a study of non-sick man and a definition of the *model man*" (34). This insight captures a critical process that applies to the study of mobbing. Italian preventative medicine in the workplace is a fusion of two kinds of normative models—the healthy body and the healthy workplace. The cultural and historical distinction between "model man" and "model worker"—one that Foucault is less interested in—may actually help to clarify how certain

health and state regimes are created and expanded. How do the ethics of healthy workplaces, modeled on healthy populations, crystallize neoliberal state apparatuses and citizenship? It was precisely at a moment in which the Italian workplace has been deeply pathologized—thought to be something that causes psychological and bodily harm—that a risk regime could be assembled. Why has an Italian biopolitics of prevention intensified around the healthy worker at the moment in which the “healthy man” seems most disarticulated from full-time regular employment? Part of the answer to this may be in new public techniques of managing health that have developed in tandem with neoliberal forms of governance (Rabinow 1992, Ong 2006).

For example, Paul Rabinow (1992) builds upon Foucauldian notions of biopower in his formulation of “biosociality,” which is premised on prevention. He argues that the unique feature of prevention is:

Surveillance not of the individual, but of *likely* occurrences of diseases, anomalies, deviant behavior to be minimized and healthy behavior to be maximized. We are moving ... toward projecting *risk* factors that deconstruct and reconstruct the individual or group subject (243-3, emphasis mine).

Rearticulating the relationship between government, knowledge practices and citizenship, Aihwa Ong (2006) argues that neoliberalism is “a biopolitical mode of governing that centers on the *capacity* and *potential* of individuals and the population as living resources that may be harnessed and managed by governing regimes” (Ong 2006:6, emphasis mine). Techniques of governmentality, then, mobilize uncertainty as:

A characteristic modality of liberal governance that relies both on a creative constitution of the future with respect to positive and enterprising dispositions of risk taking and on a corresponding stance of reasonable foresight or everyday prudence with respect to potential harms (O'Malley 2000: 461 in Isin 2004: 220).

What these scholars recognize as emergent are forms of governance that utilize prevention as a way to manage populations through the discourse of capacities, potentials and risks.

This fusion of medical risk and state management of risk captures the central dynamics of the Italian health risk regime in that there is both the economic risk understood as the precarious-ization of the labor market, together with a heightened sense of bodily risk. Its effects, however, may bolster protections for *employers*, rather than for workers. If the 19th century moved towards the biopolitics of normality, then might the 21st century be characterized by a biopolitics of risk (Rabinow 1992, Haraway 1992, Serematakis 2001, Petryna 2004)? Ulrich Beck (1992, 1999) fruitfully conceptualizes this bio-economic fusion between neoliberal forms of governance and biopolitical regimes in what he calls risk society or risk regimes. Beck's conceptualization of risk regimes straddles the social transformation of both biomedicine and forms of neoliberal governance and citizenship.

### 8.2.1 *Health Risk Regime*

Ulrich Beck (1992) theorizes how the focus on risk prevention is a historical way to manage on the one hand, capital and labor, and on the other hand, populations. He argues that the problem of wealth distribution that characterized the age of industrial labor was parallel to the ways in which the prevention and circulation of risk have become a new central problem of post-industrial labor (Beck 1992: 19). Thus, for Western welfare states, as scarcity waned as a crucial economic and social issue, risk becomes a new modality of economic and social focus, control and intervention. For Beck, the politics of lack were replaced with a politics of *possible* lack, shifting the form of governance towards estimating and managing future dangers. Beck (1992) does not assert that wealth and risk were mutually exclusive categories; rather he views them as articulated insofar as the distribution of wealth is understood as an outcome of evading hazardous and endangering risks (20)—it is this process that generates the birth of the “risk society.” Unlike European class society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, risk society's values center on the social and ethical

good of defensive prevention of catastrophes (Beck 1992: 49). But this process can be applied to micro and macro events, practices and processes. In the United States context, for instance, Martin (1994) found that the essential trope of human resource management was not only flexibility, but also “toleration of risk..from management as well as labor” (222).

For Beck, risks are textured and complex, defined as “a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself” (21). Risks operate within neoliberal economic parameters, producing new markets, expanding economic gain, though not necessarily via logical or rational systems: “Risk society produces new antagonisms of interest and a new type of community of the endangered whose political carrying capacity remains, however, an open question (Beck 1992: 47). Risk regimes, therefore, construe differences between subjects based on the variability and density of foreseeable injury. Yet preventing risk for one group may endanger another, and therefore, political apparatuses around risk often create a series of disjunctures and paradoxes (Beck 1992).

Even though risks are measured as a function of their distribution across the population, they also adhere to a process of individualization. Late capitalism, characterized by “individualized social inequality” (Beck 1992: 88) favors a risk regime in that subjects are made through patterns of how risks are distributed through *individual nodes* of a population (Beck 1992: 88). In other words, the rights of the welfare state are geared towards individuals rather than family or class units (Beck 1999:9) precisely because individuals become a “social reference unit” for risk (Beck 1992: 130). Risk society entails individualization on multiple levels, as a unit of risk, and also within highly decentralized work regimes that create an “individualized society of employees” (Beck 1992: 100). It is also here where I draw a parallel between Beck’s conceptualization of the individualization

of risk and Ong's (2006) notion of neoliberalism as favoring "technologies of self-governing" (9). It is not surprising, then, that precisely the rise of Italian neoliberalism, when "governing activities are recast as nonpolitical and nonideological problems that need technical solutions," gave rise to a focus on *risk* as a dominant discourse for managing the workplace (Ong 2006:3). The governing of the Italian workplace through workplace health legislation and protocol seems at first to be a nonpolitical solution. However, as I show below, it erects a new mode of self-governing and vigilance on multiple levels.

For Beck, the destandardization of labor grows within the risk regime as global markets and populations no longer adhere to traditional forms of social, economic and political control. What is *less* clear in Beck's formulation is how, for worker-citizens, the *promise* or seductiveness of evading risks within a work regime becomes a new mode of disciplinary control and subjectification. What I am suggesting is that the discourse of risk management in Italy generates new worker-subject desires, that in and of themselves, are part of crafting a self-governing citizen-subject. This particular historical moment in Italy has seen an emergent flexible regime of deregulated, non-regular work coexisting with standardized employment. The notion of "precarious work" (*lavoro precario*) reflects a cultural understanding of work as beset with danger, and corresponds to a greater desire in worker-citizens to promote projects that control and minimize risk. Beck is certainly right in recognizing the "limited controllability of the dangers" of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Beck 1999: 6). But in tandem with intensified individualism and fragmented employment of neoliberalism, the *desire* for control in worker-citizens is generated by risk discourse as much as new arrangements for state measures of risk control.

What kinds of cultural ideologies and assumptions guide the production of knowledge about workplace risks in Italy? In Italy, the risk of mobbing is a site where two

forms of risk meet—the risk of economic vulnerability due to precarious labor and the risk of bodily injury due to a stressful and harmful work environment. The emergent health risk regime, premised largely on mobbing, focuses a great deal on the psycho-biological risks of the workplace. On one level, precarious workers may find economic and social viability through producing and circulating knowledge about other workers’ bodily symptoms, materialized through the risk regime of work. On another level, a great deal of emphasis is placed in Italian cultural imaginaries on managing workplace health risks. Promoting workplace wellbeing allows citizens to imagine an ethical and safe workplace. The Italian health risk regime crystallizes a set of broader shifts in shaping new neoliberal citizen-subjects. Its construction can be traced through an analysis of diverse legal and political shifts together with the emergence of new cultural discourses and practices.

### **8.3 Prescribing Organizational Health: The 626**

In Italy, the legislative decree of 1994 (D.Lgs. n. 626/1994), known simply as “the 626,” represented a legal shift in how future mobbing cases would and could be handled. The law was built upon the protections of workers’ mental and physical integrity, often shorthand as “psychophysical” integrity (Article 2087/1942 and Law 300/1970). This piece of legislation prescribed numerous measures of “tutela” (*protection*) to safeguard the health and security of working in both the private and public sector. The 626 instituted a new workplace figure to be designated by the employer, the Worker Representative for Safety (*Rappresentante dei Lavoratori per la Sicurezza*) who would be responsible for employee health measures and would be required to meet periodically with the work force to discuss topics related to risk prevention and protection. The representative, according to the law, would be “a cardinal point in the new preventionist politics” (Law 626/1994). One Safety Representative would be required for each company with more than fifteen employees, three



for companies between 200 and 1000 employees and six for all larger entities. The 626 requires that the Safety Representative receive thirty-two hours of training and 120 hours for those serving in larger corporations. In order to insure that adequate information would be given to the Safety Representatives, a Service Committee for Prevention and Protection of Risks must be formed either by employees or by an external agency (Article 8). The Committee must “individuate risk factors, evaluate risks and seek measures for the security and health of the workplace” (Article 9).

Employers are obligated to take a number of new measures to secure the health and security of workers, including expanded access to information, taking certified courses on worker safety with ISPESL, INAIL, National Institute of Social Medicine, as well as promoting the development and participation of state officials with regard to health and safety (Article 10). The employer must also have periodic meetings that include the designated Safety Representative, the head of the Safety Committee, a medical doctor and all employees (Article 11). Doctors must work together with the employer “for the specific knowledge of the company organization, both its productive quality and the risk, for the predisposition of measures that can safeguard health and psychophysical integrity of workers” (Article 17). The psychophysical is an essential element of this legal document, not only in that it is premised on Article 2087 protections, but also as a more comprehensive vision of workers’ health. The 626 does not simply require a calculation of physical risk for workers, but also of psychological risk. The 626, thus, primarily seeks to safeguard the psycho-physical body, a complex medical body where the psyche and the physical cannot be easily separated.

Doctors are also required to update and institute workers’ health cards, one the national health card with hand-written medical histories, and the other, a new “risk” health

card to be carried by every worker and held by the employer (Article 72). The law states that the doctor must evaluate risks from “biological agents and from working modalities” (Article 78, Law 626 of 1994). While the 626 currently emphasizes clear-cut physical and chemical risk factors, Italy’s juridical recognition of psychological illness as work-related illness, suggests that doctors may use their discretion to note all sorts of risk factors: organizational and psychological. Measuring risk is given a new material and traceable index—a portable object. The future mapping of inflexible or at risk bodies of worker-citizens is managed through the state requirement to make it visibly presentable—in the form of the risk card—for employers and state actors. Part of this has an additional legislative function as to measure what an employer can be held accountable for in case of legal suits against him or her—something particularly salient considering the mobbing cases I have so far detailed. This suggests, for example, that employees who enter the workforce with *greater* risks would be less able to hold the employer or the workplace accountable for psychophysical harm or injury (due to mobbing, or various other work situations). Employers, then, would be able to make workers responsible for managing their own risk factors and being active in educating themselves about the effects of these risks. In fact, work representatives, not employers, are the actors encouraged to become part a the Commission on the Prevention of Work-Related Accidents and Promotion of Hygiene at Work, made up of representatives from various national health ministries, institutions and inspection offices. While employers are legally held responsible for these risks, the commissions designs a structure of engagement directly between workers and public health experts.

Law 626 lays the groundwork for the creation of a health risk regime, around which state actors and worker-citizens meet in a new and unique assemblage of figures, committees, supervisors and consultants. Workers’ rights to safeguard their psycho-physical

integrity animates this elaborate labor of risk management—labor to craft the books on safety, to create and facilitate worker training, to create physical and electronic databases of risk cards, to oversee and expand state prevention and security agencies in workplaces. This law installs a regime of knowledge about safety, security and prevention that becomes, in turn, the modality through which worker bodily integrity can be achieved. Specific technologies, such as the worker’s individualized risk booklet, in addition to creating a written trace of the employer and individual accountability, fashion workers as subjects of risk, inviting them to individualize the project of worker safety as it applies to their “psychophysical” body. The effect of this, however, is to diminish some of the employers’ accountability insofar as workers are empowered to care for and acquire knowledge about their own bodily welfare at work. This health risk regime operates by multiplying the points of contacts and the zones of visibility between worker-citizens and states. For instance, there are multiple new political meeting points, such as between workers and visiting doctors, safety specialists and workers, employers and state inspectors, safety representatives and workers.

Thus, at the moment when economic and social risks for workers in Italy have expanded, so, too, has the legal and political apparatus that aims to contain and manage workplace risks. As Beck (1992, 1999) anticipates, the problem of *job* scarcity is trumped by a focus on the circulation, measurement and prevention of *job* risks. The 1990s labor market policy in Italy was focused on the privatization of employment and the promotion of flexible job contracts (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004: 98). Not only Italian but also European law in the 1990s continued to expand the mobility and pliability of the labor force. For example, in 1993, Law 221 legalized a new set of temporary contracts and in 1997, Law 196 lifted the mandate for short-term contracts to “automatically convert” into life-long contracts (Ferrera

and Gualmini 2004: 102). The supranational European and Italian state management of health risks promises and mobilizes an ethical imperative to promote workers' security even as the state simultaneously increases the means for non-standard job contracts and hence, worker insecurity and elimination. The creation of Italy's health risk regime creates an enticing illusion of safeguards and protection for workers even as other laws, such as the 2003 Biagi Laws, have vastly reduced the population of long-term, stable employees. The welfare state seems to expand and contract at the same time. The state performs an investment in worker safety while in the meantime emptying out worker longevity by restructuring job contracts. At the same time, it bears noting that the health risk apparatus requires the creation of flexible jobs. The 626 produces a new need for short-term contracts, for both private and state workers—psychologists, medical doctors, public health workers—to design trainings, visit workplaces, consult with employers and operationalize the new law. Article 2087, according to which the employer must safeguard the mental and bodily integrity of workers, has produced a new narrative and juridico-legal structure spun around prevention.

The 626 has a series of consequences for mobbing cases. Mobbees, if tracked by risk cards, enter the workplace with a document of accountability. In other words, if their health is constantly measured, then they may be less likely to be successful in holding employers or workplaces accountable for bodily harm. With the increased vigilance of state inspection agencies and Safety Representatives, mobbing cases may be more immediately earmarked for further investigation. In this ethos of precariousness, prevention and organization wellness have become the new focus for the mobbing industry.

### 8.3.1 *Law 626 and Mobbing*

The production and dissemination of knowledge about mobbing reiterates the message, and rather consistently, of prevention and risk. The discourse of wellbeing also becomes a narrative mounted on top of risk management. In 2003, mobbing specialists in Torino met for a conference, “Preventative Strategies and Techniques of Recovery for Stress-related Disturbances in the Work World,” where they also discussed a proposal to have a team of on-site team of stress specialists, including a psychologist, a medical doctor and a lawyer, suggesting:<sup>2</sup>

The need for *wellbeing* is rising between computers and desks, in the office. After various companies have opened mini-gyms for their employers...they are beginning to worry about the relationships between people.<sup>3</sup>

Physical risks for workers in a society of increasingly non-standard employment become less salient than psychological risk factors. In 2006, in the region of Valle d’Aosta, there was a similar conference, attended by INAIL, the Office of Equal Opportunity and local mobbing clinic representatives, entitled, “Hardship and Discrimination at Work. What kind of Prevention? What Kinds of Protections?” in order to “promote and maintain an appropriate level of physical and psychological *wellbeing* for workers.”<sup>4</sup> Wellbeing is a narrative articulated with Italy’s health risk regime in that wellbeing is the holistic, psycho-physical objective for risk management. Wellbeing departs from healthy in that it reflects the integrated psychosomatic body that the risk management is premised on. Healthy refers to a body free of disease, while wellbeing refers more to a condition of healthy existence and consistent healthy choices and practices. It follows that wellbeing articulates more with risk because

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<sup>2</sup> 22 November 2003. *La Stampa*. “Spettacolo e Tempo Libero a Torino.”

<sup>3</sup> 22 November 2003. *La Stampa*. “Spettacolo e Tempo Libero a Torino.”

<sup>4</sup> 9 May 2006. “Convegno, Mostra e Progetto su Discriminazione nel Lavoro.” *ANSA Notiziario Generale*.

wellbeing is an imagined condition to be attained if risks are minimized, rather than the elimination of already-present pathogens.

Wellbeing can also be found as a keyword within European Union legislation and protocol. The Commission of the European Community, through their legislative recommendations, “Adapting to the Transformation of Work and Society: A New Strategy for Health and Safety 2002-2006” urged member states toward a “global imposition of wellbeing at work, keeping the transformation of work in consideration and the rise of new risks, in particular, psychosocial risks” (EU/2002/118). Workplace risk, prevention and wellbeing form the foundational architecture upon which mobbing is managed. In 2004, CRAS, Research Center for Social Affairs together with the European Union Daphne Project issued a report on mobbing and gender in Italy and the European Union.<sup>5</sup> They prescribe the following to improve “psycho-social labor” and “prevent” mobbing:

1) Give each worker the chance to choose the modality for executing his/her work.
2) Reduce monotonous and repetitive work.
3) Increase information concerning workers’ objectives.
4) Develop a leadership style.
5) Avoid imprecise decisions about roles and responsibilities.
6) Solicit the ethical commitment ( <i>impegno etico</i> ) from employers and workers to create an environment without mobbing.

**Figure 1 Daphne Program Steps for Mobbing Prevention**

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/politics/cse/daphne.htm#booklets>

Positioned in tandem with a new mobilization of workplace prevention and wellbeing, the politics of eliminating mobbing can also be read as a mapping of social ideals of capital and labor. In the above formulation, “the healthy workplace” is one in which precision, clarity and leadership would thrive, calling upon workers as *ethical* subjects to put in place these values. This is one instance in which the health risk regime shapes worker-citizens desires. In the context of Italy’s precarious labor market, these corrective visions are rendered with particular appeal insofar as they would seem to correct the perceived unethical neoliberal corporate ethos of misinformation and apprehension. The promise and ideals of the health risk regime are built upon the lived fears of Italy’s precarious workforce. These narratives forge public imaginaries of “healthy” and “healed” workplaces, and in doing so, worker-citizens are encouraged to craft a wish list for how to refashion the abuses and injustices of neoliberal *disorders*. Such projects follow closely with Law 626 in that the goal of prevention and minimizing risk are extended to the project of mobbing, applying the authoritative discourse of risk management.

#### **8.4 The Rules of Work Doctors**

Occupational doctors (*medico di lavoro*) become risk managers par excellence in Italy’s health risk regime of labor. The 626 creates a juridico-legal structure for occupational doctors to produce specialized knowledge about workplace risks and increase their points of contacts with both employers and workers. Occupational doctors have also been a particularly important figure responsible for containing, preventing and measuring mobbing. In 2001, a group of physicians representing a number of Italian Institutions of Occupational Medicine published a paper on the new responsibilities of the doctor with respect to “the new risk of moral harassment” (Gilioli et. al 2001 in De Martino and De Santis 2003: 124). This “consensus document” of over twenty physicians, including mobbing specialist Dr.

Renato Gilioli of Milan's Work Clinic (whose talk was detailed in Chapter 4) was an attempt to standardize a post-Law 626 approach to mobbing and "physical, psychological and social wellbeing":

Next to traditional health risks (chemical, physical and biological) for workers, psychosocial and organizational risks are becoming one of the principal causes of alterations in health in the workplace. Among these, 'relational risk' or 'interpersonal risk' have received the attention of occupational doctors only recently, but increasingly so (Gilioli et. al 2001 in De Martino and De Santis 2003: 125).

That risks are increasingly less traceable insofar as they are 'relational' or 'interpersonal' does not make the risk regime less robust. On the contrary, "relational" risks are by definition immaterial and demand the specialized knowledge of a special class, in this case, medical doctors. With respect to Law 626 and the role of the occupational doctor the document outlines how the doctor is legally responsible to *both employee and employer*. According to this document, for employees who feel they have been mobbed, the doctor must be able to offer a "diagnosis of pathologies that can recognize the cause(s) at work," proper "medico-legal certification of the endured damage," references to other health and insurance agencies, and the creation of a certified report to INAIL and other "organs of vigilance" (Gilioli et. al 2001 in De Martino and De Santis 2003: 131-2). Through the maintenance of risk, the occupational doctor is authorized by Law 626 to act as a political mediator for possible labor disputes. In short, "the occupational doctor's principal task is to work in *prevention*, contributing to the diffusion of a *prevention culture* of the risk of mobbing" (Gilioli et. al 2001 in De Martino and De Santis 2003: 133, emphasis mine). Thus, the established importance of mobbing as an undesirable workplace practice becomes a vehicle through which the "prevention culture," a popular understanding of a risk society, circulates and advances. And prevention is the modality through which the medical occupation—and



here I intend both in the sense of medical doctors and in their “occupation” (control) of the workplace—intensifies.

New training programs organized by various city and regional hospitals have applied the heightened role of the occupational doctor (*medico del lavoro*) mandated by Law 626 to the prevention of mobbing. One hospital in Torino, for example, echoes the advice by the Institute of Occupational Medicine consensus that occupational doctors should:

- 1) Effectively evaluate environmental risks.
- 2) Conduct health inspections and health checks for workers, in case of health problems connected to mobbing, at the request of the worker or at their own initiative.
- 3) Promote initiatives for the company to measure the proper dimension of the risk and to prevent it.<sup>6</sup>

This type of formulation is also the basis of an anti-mobbing legislative proposal drafted by the Italian Labor Union (*Unione Italiana del Lavoro*) and Vita di Donna (Woman’s Life), a Rome-based NGO promoting women’s health. The mobbing law proposes that an employer must work effectively with the Safety Representative and occupational doctors in order to “prevent moral and psychological violence.”<sup>7</sup> Vita di Donna specifies that the occupational doctor should evaluate risks and promote the “psycho-physical wellbeing of workers.”<sup>8</sup> Mobbing prevention, like Law 626, places the occupational doctor at the center of risk management.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.oirmsantanna.piemonte.it/web/news/eventi/mobbing/azione\\_medico.asp](http://www.oirmsantanna.piemonte.it/web/news/eventi/mobbing/azione_medico.asp)

<sup>7</sup> [www.uil.it/mobbing\\_nuova\\_proposta.html](http://www.uil.it/mobbing_nuova_proposta.html) Accessed Dec. 10, 2006

<sup>8</sup> [www.vitadidonnait/copia\\_di\\_vita\\_di\\_000070.htm](http://www.vitadidonnait/copia_di_vita_di_000070.htm)

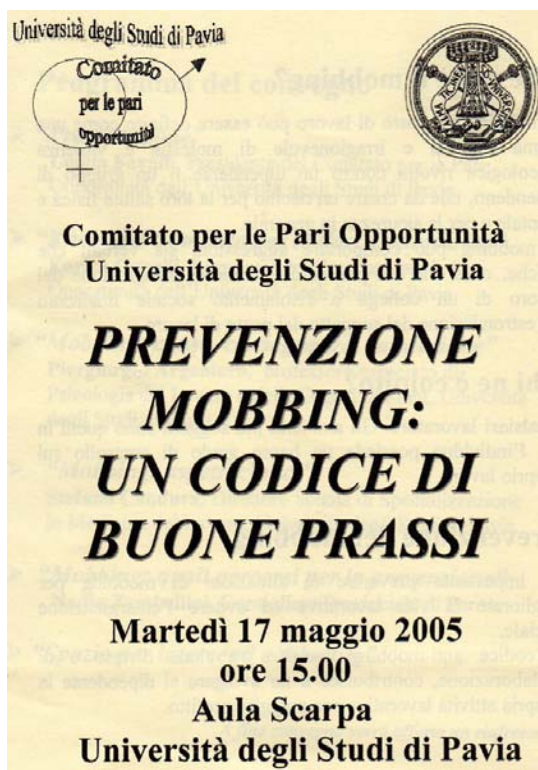


Figure 2 “Mobbing Prevention: A Code of Good Practices,” University of Pavia <sup>9</sup>

The diffusion of “prevention culture” for mobbing hinges upon an understanding of the endangered body. C. Nadia Serematakis has shown how within the neoliberal economic dynamics of “fast capitalism” in Europe has “inscribed new forms of uncertainty and insecurity in the experience of embodiment” (Serematakis 2001:125; see also Holmes 2001). Serematakis (2001) traces these somatic uncertainties through, for example, public fears of disease infection and the aesthetic display of cadavers. In her formulation, the new global order intensifies the body’s medical penetration, where “the fixation of bodily identity makes use of medically derived optics and deploys medical perspectives in decidedly nonmedical contexts, terrain, and situations” (Serematakis 2001: 125). Thus, a heightened somatic uncertainty and precariousness are precisely the cultural forces that propel risk management

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.unipv.it/pariopp/images/mobbing.jpg>

of the workplace. The labor of establishing the workplace as dangerous to the body was one that is both ongoing and achieved within the discourse of mobbing. Italy's health risk regime centers on the *medical* endangerments of worker's bodies, creating new optical techniques and technologies of the state within the labor market. These new techniques favor the employer precisely because they promote new modalities of worker discipline and surveillance.

This regime also works as a kind of symbolic facade of welfare state protection in that it is assembled as the state retracts labor protections. What is evident from these legislative proposals and national initiatives is the changing role of the medical doctor in the workplace. Through the notion of prevention, already residing within an acceptable framework of medical expertise, Law 626 authorizes the doctor as the preeminent risk mediator of the Italian workplace. The doctor's role in prevention transforms physicians into both ethical figures and leading subjects of the state's risk regime.

### **8.5 Project Wellbeing: Policing the Office**

In April 2005, I spoke to Mariella Mazucchi, a psychologist and specialist in mobbing who worked at one of the Veneto region projects for "promotion of psycho-social health" in companies. Meeting at a café on a rainy day, Mariella described the Veneto region multi-year project, the Plan for the Prevention and Promotion of Health in Workplaces (*Piano per la prevenzione e la promozione della salute negli ambiti di lavoro*. DGR n. 3723), a regional extension and specification of Law 626. Drawing from regional and federal funds, the project coordinated various state health organizations including INAIL (National Institute Against Work-Related Accidents), SPISAL (Agency for Prevention, Hygiene and Security in Workplaces), ISPESL (Institute for Prevention and Work Safety) and various regional Institutes of Occupational Medicine, centers for occupational medicine located within

hospitals. She explained how the project was anchored in workers' 'psycho-social health' more generally because mobbing was just "the tip of the iceberg" of their broader campaign to "verify organizational wellbeing." The multi-step plan would include a study of the organizational costs of mobbing, questionnaires, interviews, developing organizational strategies for health, and creating employee focus groups. Objectives of the plan listed in the program materials included:

- 1) Promote a workplace culture oriented towards assuming safe and responsible lifestyles and behaviors through a cooperation strategy with diverse public institutions, associations and organizations.
- 2) Increase the opportunities of worker-citizens (*cittadini lavoratori*) to have a lifestyle and politics oriented towards health.

In this formulation, the notion of health and risk prevention expands to a more global sense of personhood and lifestyle. The narrative of "lifestyle" individualizes the risk project, such that the individual routinized habits become the "social reference unit" for the risk regime (Beck 1992: 130). While risk often refers to a notion of a scientific, medical and biological body as the unit of risk, there is also a sense, Beck poses, that the bio becomes the bio-psychological: "Social problems are increasingly perceived in terms of psychological dispositions: as personal inadequacies" (Beck 1992: 100). The use of *lifestyle* in this discourse captures this sense of personalized and psychologized social problems.

The document includes a section on mobbing and its relation to the fundamental objective of "to plan preventive and rehabilitative interventions":

The mobbing risk (*rischio mobbing*) is closely tied to the organization of labor that does not sufficiently valorize the human component [of labor] and carries the logic of short-term production with the related lack of interpersonal relationships. ... As long as there is no law precisely on moral harassment one must refer to the legislation related to safeguarding health...protected in the constitutional Article 2087 of the Civil Code.

Worker's right to psychophysical integrity ties the regional legislative platform on mobbing risk to the foundational legal protection of Law 626. Under the regional plan,

Mariella and various doctors, psychologists and inspectors had formed a committee that would deal specifically on mobbing through the measures provided by Law 626. New committees would also offer additional research services on health risks to private corporations. For example, she outlined how the plan had already been implemented with a large Italian service sector corporation, Zanella. Beginning in January 2004, “Project Wellbeing” outlined all “psycho-social and organizational risk factors” for the benefit of improving worker’s health and maximizing organizational efficiency. Collaborating medical doctors and psychologists would share the results of qualitative and quantitative research on the risk factors at Zanella to put together an “intervention plan” for the improvement of worker safety and health. In addition, two biological measures of stress were obtained from Zanella workers, cortisol levels in worker saliva and a 24-hour blood pressure reading. Biological testing represents the creation of a biophysical measure of the risk regime, and tangible meeting point between worker-citizens and states. Such tests transform the intangibility of stress and risk into quantifiable units of bodily output. Risk regimes, premised on worker’s right of propriety of their own bodies, paradoxically structure collective bodies as vulnerable to experimentation and invasion to ensure the minimization of risk—expanding, then, the biomedical penetration of the state. The essential difference is that preventative medicine casts such projects as nonpolitical and ethical.

Mariella invited me to one of the group’s organizational meetings to promote a similar Project Wellbeing at another corporate site of Zanella in Veneto. I attended the meeting in April 2005 with medical doctors and psychologists together with a few representatives from the call center of the company. Call centers had been receiving a great deal of publicity in Italy as sites of great stress, mobbing and worker burnout, and therefore, as sites of intense health risk. First, Mariella and her colleagues outlined the idea of Project

Wellbeing, as a way to identify and minimize health risks in the workplace. Then, the workers went on to describe a set of practices that they defined as heightening mental and physical fatigue and illness. Carola, a woman in her mid-sixties, offered: “We are constantly monitored, like a check every five minutes, another kind of check every twenty-five minutes even if you’re not with a caller.” Francesco, the Safety Representative of the company, agreed:

The parameters are constantly changed, and you have to keep track of things for the sales rewards. For example, sometimes it was better to deal with a technical problem *without* sending a technician, in order to get the sales reward. But then you don’t resolve the problem.”

Here Francesco picks up on the irrational aspects of market capitalism, noting the technique of sales that perpetuate contact with clients, but result in inefficient technical operations. Their other colleague, Bettina added: “That’s the problem with the market, to satisfy it you have to sell something. The instrument through which this happens is the call operator who always has to sell.” Bettina described the company’s computer program that would flash symbols and suggestions to the operators of new services and equipment to offer to phone clients. In this meeting, I found that the health risk factors that the workers identified for the Project Wellbeing committee were increased pressure to sell goods, increased monitoring, and frustration with wavering and obtuse corporate policy. In other words, what I saw were the problems of neoliberal capitalism and labor put on the table for medical risk managers.

There was only a small degree of attention given to physical risk factors, such as the cramped spatial organization or the excessively warm temperatures in the office. Next, the workers described the “relational risk” factors, the hostility and condescension of their supervisors. Their complaints included the supervisors’ heavy and unnecessary criticism, constant surveillance and their continuous raising the minimum requirements for satisfactory

work. After the meeting the staff agreed that this would indeed be an interesting and appropriate place to intervene and move ahead. One doctor reflected: “Francesco showed us that these are really moral problems.” Nodding, Mariella said: “There’s no job satisfaction.” The workers had to convincingly perform their own endangerment to the group of professional risk minimizers. In order to access the abundant resources and possible safeguards that the project could offer, the workers had to fashion themselves as precarious subjects, jeopardized by persistent health risks. But the underlying cultural assumption guiding this meeting was that the pressure to sell and low job satisfaction were ethically urgent and biomedically resolvable problems.

#### *8.5.1 The value of vigilance*

Over the next few months I found that Project Wellbeing was, above all, extremely slow-moving. Part of this stemmed from the group’s difficulty to plan meetings through the not-yet-established pathways between health and safety state institutions. The occupational doctors, psychologists and inspectors had various other tasks that had to be accomplished for the state, and this was an additional project. Even the new short-term workers designated to advance the project spend days and weeks gathering information about mobbing or attending mobbing seminars. The letter of acknowledgment to the workers who participated in the initial planning meeting alone took several hours of meetings, cross checks and correspondence between various actors at multiple institutions. Put simply, I found that the structure of state intervention demanded a great deal of labor by multi-tasking social actors. It also showed the gap between the discursive elements of power and the creation of actual corporate and state practices.

In late May 2005 I attended another meeting where the staff discussed a number of challenges. Though they had asked the company Zanella to participate in their project, the

corporation had no explicit legal obligation to fulfill. If Zanella showed itself to be adequately fulfilling the legal objectives of Law 626, then they did not have to allow access to the research group. Thus, though the group was entirely state run or state funded by prevention initiatives, it did not hold any specific legal jurisdiction to oblige companies to be further scrutinized. At this point, Zanella was interested, as long as there would be press coverage of their collaboration. Zanella would be able to mobilize a publicity campaign of its ethics, transparency and care for workers, strengthening the social value of Zanella as a corporate brand. Members of the staff were troubled by this ‘extra’ benefit, but they agreed that its compliance with the program would be highly valuable to workers. There was also the problem of how to coordinate with other regions, and how they would carry out the project at a variety of Zanella worksites. One of the participating physicians, medical inspectors and health institution directors, Dr. Franco Galetto, concluded the meeting on a positive note:

We are setting off on the right foot. We have a regional and a national program, two different plans, one cultural, the other vigilance. The cultural plan is to hear, talk and see all the experiences of the company. [...] But the *vigilance* is local.

Dr. Galetto adopts an important role within the matrix of risk regimes—as a subject of vigilance. Risks demand a very specific kind of watchfulness—a constant and alert readiness. Just as health risk regimes create worker-citizens as subjects of risk so too do they fashion local “sub-political” actors (Beck 1992: 223). The sub-politics decentralizes the power of the state to a more diffuse and localized collective body of actors: “the elimination of the causes of hazards in the modernization process itself becomes political” (Beck 1992: 78). Medical doctors and work site surveyors become a legitimate way for the state to intervene within the work sphere; they are the newest refashioning of the “medical police” with juridical authority of the neoliberal state. Historically, the double role of physicians as



“medical police” dates to late 18th century Europe (Elmer and Grell 2004, Osborne 1996: 105). Medical police were responsible for various aspects of public health, from sanitation to plague management, and represented when “physicians lay claim to being legitimate authorities on the populations’ general wellbeing” (Cohen 2006: 51). Within Italy’s neoliberal economic regime, occupational doctors represent a historical reinvention as the new medical police for worker wellbeing. Given the low number of women physicians in Italy, and hospital administrators (as low as 2.9% in 2000), there is a gendered dimension of power to Italy’s medical regime.<sup>10</sup> Expanding the authority of the medical police simultaneously generates a male-centered site of knowledge production and authoritative control.

#### *8.5.2 Scientific Basis of Prevention*

Mariella introduced me to Dr. Luigi Cannari, head of one of the Medical Institutes of Work in the Veneto region. In July, I went to interview Dr. Cannari about his role in the project. Dr. Cannari was a research specialist and physician, managing various medical projects on mobbing and staffing the hospital’s mobbing clinic. “You can’t put mobbing under a microscope,” he repeatedly told me, explaining the challenge of preventing something as intangible and shifting as mobbing. Dr. Cannari’s comment reveals why the restructuring of power relations within Italy is not solely biomedical or medicalized. Risk society, however, unveils “the fissures and gaps between scientific and social rationality” (Risk 1992: 30). Italians viewed work harassment and alienation of single workers as deeply damaging to health, even though it was not always supported by scientific evidence.

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<sup>10</sup> Corradi, Laura et. al. 2000. “State of Affairs, Concepts, Approaches, Organizations in the Health Movement. Country Report: Italy.” EWHNT. Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Seniors, Women and Youth.

I asked about his participation in Project Wellbeing. Dr. Cannari explained there were various advantages of promoting organizational wellbeing, rather than simply treating the pathology of mobbing and its effects on the body:

How much does poor organization cost? We're putting together some data. Investing in mobbing means wasting a lot of energy and that means disorganization. [...] Now with the Biagi Laws you won't have anymore mobbing, but just anxiety and depression caused by work.

Promoting organizational wellbeing, in his view, is also more *cost-effective* for companies than mobbing. His comments show that health risk management is layered with neoliberal ideologies of efficiency, cost-reduction and organizational excess. He situates wellbeing as an economically desirable goal, whereas mobbing represents a waste of labor and thus, the breakdown of capitalist objectives. Dr. Cannari also envisions a future in which the Biagi Laws, promoting a wide array of short-term “precarious” job contracts, will end mobbing. This rationale suggests to me that he believes mobbing derives from economic pressure to reduce long term labor, secured by Article 18. This position is one contested by Italy's political Left who, alternatively, view the Biagi Laws as an *instigator* of mobbing, not the agent of its disappearance. Regardless of these politically divergent opinions about when and how mobbing will cease to trouble the workplace, most people I met in the mobbing industry envisioned workers as facing persistent “psycho-physical” endangerment. If the post-mobbing workplace is *not* without health dangers then so does it demand the ongoing guarding against risk—and medical doctors' presence.

## 8.6 Worker-Citizens to Customer-Citizens

Worker wellbeing and even “organizational wellness” (*benessere organizzativo*) have become prominent themes throughout official state discourse on the workplace. Just as in Organizational Coercion Pathology, a psychosomatic disorder attributed to mobbing, the idea of “organizational” wellness utilizes the term “organizational” to index corporate

and/or industrial. In March 2004, Minister of Public Functions Luigi Mazella announced a national initiative for “organizational wellness” in public workplaces. Suggesting that employers keep a close eye on “perceived levels of physical and mental strain of his employees” and “mobbing,” he advocated for “fewer hierarchies and a reduction of work bogged down by procedures...more creativity and motivation...an environment that is not only healthy, but also comfortable and welcoming.”<sup>11</sup> The national project would focus on eliminating health risks in particular for state workers. In the nascent forms of Italy’s health risk regime, wellness and health allow subjects to imagine and invent ethical workplace practices. But the Minister Mazella’s plans differed from some of the other mobbing and health risk programs I had previously encountered in Italy. His plan also promoted what he dubbed, using the English, “Customer Satisfaction,” that would systematically promote engagement with “customer-citizens” (*cittadino-cliente*). Mazella’s notion of “Customer Satisfaction” proposed “a model between the [state] administration and citizens based on trust and legitimating public action founded on the capacity to give opportune responses that correspond to *real needs* of citizens and companies.”<sup>12</sup> The state, then, fashions these public medical services as something that may satisfy a “market” of the nation’s “customer-citizens.” Welfare, rather than being an intrinsic right of citizens, becomes something that customers can “purchase” through decentralized services and programs.

Prevention programs in the workplace are predicated on several central assumptions, one, a workplace that is bodily endangering; two, an imaginary of the state as a benevolent provider; and, three, employers who *share* with workers the responsibility for managing risks. What we can glimpse here, however, is also an embedded notion of the neoliberal state as

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<sup>11</sup> 24 March 2004. “PA: Mazzella Travet No Passacarte.” *ANSA Notiziario Generale*.

<sup>12</sup> 24 March 2004. “PA: Mazzella Travet No Passacarte.” *ANSA Notiziario Generale*.

responding to an imagined *market* of citizen demands. The idea of “customer satisfaction” for citizens frames state intervention upon certain legible and actionable citizen *desires*, not inalienable rights. This suggests a rather critical shift between worker-citizens and “customer-citizens” insofar as governance becomes premised on an idea of citizens as autonomous global *clients*—consuming the services of the state. In this way, employers play *less* of a central role in protecting workers. The health risk regime aims to rectify the failings of state policy to adequately protect the *labor* industry and workers. Workers, however, are indexed as “customer-citizens” whose engagement means not guaranteed or absolute rights or safeguards, but rather market-driven welfare. A large-scale restructuring of workplaces that in effect calls back the state under the guise of “risk protection” seems to resemble a strengthening, a return, of the welfare state. But health risk regimes are double-sided—the state caters to decentralized techniques of control *through* medical institutions and promotes the self-monitoring of employers, the protection of employers and the expansion of institutional “organs of vigilance” such as SPISAL and INAIL. The Italian state slips between patriarchal protectionism and decentralized governance. At the same time, citizens, through these same processes, become “consumers” (O’Malley 1996: 203) and the “purchasers who can choose to buy services from the range of options available to them” (Rose 1996: 54).

## 8.7 Defensive Medicine

The model of preventative medicine brings into focus the process of how prevention, and its related apparatus of risk, becomes *defensive*. While prevention suggests that one should aim to minimize or eliminate risks before they materialize, defensive medicine connotes that one guards against risks in a more militarized and aggressive manner. It is the distinction between the two where Dr. Mario Falconi, the president of Rome’s

Provincial Order of Surgeons and Orthodontists criticizes the new role of medical doctors in the workplace, specifically referencing mobbing:

The pressure arrives to the doctor who, in the role of the prescriber, is considered like a faucet through which spending can be regulated. And obviously..the pressure to reduce costs has never been so strong. ... In short, doctors will be pushed further to the practice of “defensive medicine” that does not bode well for public health or citizens (Falconi 2006).

Dr. Falconi explains that the Italy’s Fiscal Police (*Guardia di Finanza*) may reprimand doctors for over-prescribing medication to workers, so preventative health would eliminate the medical costs. However, what might replace this are the costs of diagnosis and exams that must constantly verify the safety and security of workers. Yet doctors are also asked to limit and reduce the populations’ medical costs by the state generating a key modality of neoliberal governance, that is, “relocating experts within a market governed by the rationalities of competition, account and consumer demand” (Rose 1996: 41)

Defensive medicine refers to the ways in which doctors must defend themselves from the state by showing that they are adequately preventing risks, managing work populations and reducing state medical costs. The result, a series of sometimes opposing and paradoxical objectives, speaks to the ways in which Italian neoliberal governance is rife with divisions and opposing aims.

#### *8.7.1 Psychopower and Neoliberal Capitalism*

The health risk regime in Italy, in its regulation of worker’s “psychophysical” body, is beset with a series of political contradictions. In fact, it bears an affinity to the “genealogy” of panic disorder in the United States, exposed by Jackie Orr (2006) in which she calls attention to “psychopower,” a normalizing regime of psychological health with a particular feature that both “makes” and “manages” (14) and both “disciplines” and “produces” (17). Panic disorder is a lucid example of psychopower precisely in how, managed through a

pharmaceutical and state alliance, it limits and expands its subjects, promises healing yet simultaneously creates the conditions for panic. Italy's health risk regime is not dissimilar insofar as health risks are extended and managed, intensified and yet carefully measured. It promises to be the cure for the precarious-ization, but it also relies on the precariousness of workers to justify its intervention. Risk relies on the worker's fear of her own endangerment and her trust in the state to rectify this state of panic. "Medicine," argues Serematakis (2001), "is the discourse par excellence of fast capitalism because it lies beyond social debate despite its reflexive relation to market forces and because its diagnostic powers provide the medical scopic regimes with a high degree of identity endowing power" (125). Preventative medical management, and the alluring promise of wellbeing, discipline Italy's increasingly precarious and discontent workforce.

## Chapter 9

## Conclusion: Precarious Subjects

### 9.1 A Fractured State

The Italian state, rather than being capable of deploying neoliberal economic regimes in a unified fashion, is splintered among diverse cultural, political and economic discourses, practices and historical conditions. To illuminate this point further, I return to the medical diagnosis of Organizational Coercion Pathology (OCP), codified in 2003 by INAIL, Italy's national institute that insures and manages work-related illnesses and accidents (see Chapter 5). Though problematic in various ways, the medical diagnosis of a mobbing-related illness represented a legal and political recognition of the psychophysical strain of the organization of labor. The state institution of public health, in effect, made manifest the human costs of the present and partial neoliberal structure of labor in Italy. As one labor lawyer specializing in mobbing told me: "The insurance entity has the obligation to cover and to indemnify even those illnesses that were *not* the consequence of an illegitimate action, but simply stemming from the fact of having worked." Though putting into place new regimes of medical management had certain undesirable effects for workers, it nonetheless constituted a traceable fusion between the precariousness of labor and the precariousness of human bodies.

In July 2005, I was present at INAIL when one of the directors announced an unexpected court decision regarding Organizational Coercion Pathology, one met with surprise, confusion and outrage by the director and his colleagues. The TAR Lazio (Regional Administrative Tribunal Court of Lazio), a high court of Rome, nullified INAIL's 2003 codification of OCP and modified the extent to which the illness could be classified as

a legitimate work-related illness.<sup>1</sup> The ruling came from a suit filed against INAIL and the Ministry of Labor by Confindustria (*General Confederation of Italian Industry*), Confagricoltura (*General Confederation of Italian Agriculture*), ABI (*Italian Bank Association*), and BNL (*National Labor Bank*) and Nortel Networks.<sup>2</sup> The court invalidated INAIL's 2003 document, stating that the institution's resolution "lacked essential elements indicating serious and rigorous scientific definitions."<sup>3</sup> Defining OCP as a work-related illness, according to the courts, "was against the juridical sphere of entrepreneurs in that it rendered certain actions immediately punishable"—rendering "poor work organization" a legally actionable offense that would incriminate employers.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the court rejected the idea of allowing generalized (and increasingly normalizing) labor conditions become a recognizable and indictable legal offense and insurable illness.

They framed the ruling, however, in terms of jurisdiction and the appropriate exercise of power. In the court's view, INAIL did not have the authority to single-handedly give OCP the status of work-related illness. It is important to note that the lack of "scientific" evidence became the authoritative medium around which OCP was rejected by the court, even though INAIL had provided various "scientific" measures to verify its existence. The court maintained that OCP, caused by work environments, had to include additional physical rather than psychological effects on the worker in order to be officially "recognized" as an occupational illness, adding:

It not possible to consider all the dynamics of work relations within a company and the so-called "organizational coercion." It is certainly not a worker's "right" to work in a professional environment that is ascetic or pleasant.

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<sup>1</sup> TAR Lazio, sez. Roma, 4 luglio 2005, n. 5454.

<sup>2</sup> TAR (*Tribunale Amministrativo Regionale del Lazio*); Confederazione Generale dell'Industria Italiana (Confindustria), Confederazione Generale dell'Agricoltura Italiana (Confagricoltura), Associazione Bancaria Italiana (ABI), and Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL).

<sup>3</sup> TAR Lazio, sez. Roma, 4 luglio 2005, n. 5454.

<sup>4</sup> TAR Lazio, sez. Roma, 4 luglio 2005, n. 5454.



In its mocking tone, the court rhetoric echoed the slipperiness between mobbing and “healthy” workplaces, asserting instead that work environments are necessarily and naturally conflict ridden. It refuses the epistemological premise, proposed by INAIL, that ambivalent and chaotic professional environments can be physically and psychologically endangering to workers. The court frames the ruling in terms of historically available legal protections: the court claimed that mobbees do not need further protection beyond existing laws that protect the dignity of workers, such as Article 2087 of Italy’s Civil Code, which mandates that employers safeguard the “physical integrity and moral personhood” of workers. In short, the state’s existing legal protections for workers should be sufficient to safeguard against bodily harm, the court asserted.

Historically, this was not the first time that Confindustria, a massive employers’ organization, challenged the state on work-related injuries and worker’s compensation. In 1930, Confindustria, established just prior to the Fascist period in 1910, claimed that “70 to 75 percent [of accidents] could be attributed to the workers themselves” (Willson 1985: 242). The case recalls the way in which the state acts as a sometimes unsteady mediator between workers and employers. The differences between the two cases illuminate the salient ways in which the configuration between state, laborer and work has changed. In an age of industrial labor, when bodily trauma was often caused by machines and chemicals, the employers’ organization Confindustria sidestepped Fascist state policy by claiming that workers were themselves responsible. In an age of post-Fordist labor, when *psychosomatic* trauma is purported to be caused by the organization of labor and elusive new categories of “organizational coercion” and “mobbing,” Confindustria sidestepped state policy by refuting the medical and scientific grounds of evidence. Though the ideologies of establishing legitimacy have changed, in addition to understandings of work and bodies, the problem of

worker compensation remains an important site in which the state must mediate between the opposing interests of employers and workers. The court case unmasks the state as fractured between safeguarding worker-citizens and advancing capitalist regimes of labor, as well as the:

[D]isjuncture between a workers' compensation system founded on the assumption of collective, unwilled risk (risk probability) and the mundane administration of an insurance system informed by neoliberal assumptions of individual responsibility for the deflection of risks (risk accountability) (MacEachen 2000: 324).

Workers, increasingly fashioned as self-responsible subjects, are considered responsible for managing risk in their work environments, without the necessary intervention on the part of the state. But injury claims demand that the court assign, at least in part, legal accountability for worker's risk. Moreover, this court ruling reveals a unique historical collision between contemporary neoliberal modalities and the lingering print of Italy's Fascist past.

#### *9.1.1 Diminishing OCP*

Importantly, the court's decision did not entirely eliminate OCP as a recognizable illness, a "psychological and psychosomatic illness due to dysfunction in the organization of work."<sup>5</sup> Its legal status as a work-related illness, however, was changed. The conditions of organization coercion were changed from "specific" risk factors to "generic" risk factors. In the former version of OCP proposed by INAIL, the connection between work activity (its generalized structure) and psychosomatic symptoms would remain a "legal assumption," thus not requiring additional proof to connect the two (Cantistani 2005). In its revised status, the *worker* must prove the existence of the illness, its etiological status and the connection between the illness and the work activity (Cantisani 2005). Therefore, the

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<sup>5</sup> TAR Lazio, sez. Roma, 4 luglio 2005, n. 5454.

potential for mobbees to denounce cases of mobbing and organizational coercion to INAIL remains, for the moment, even more limited.

As a result of the ruling, the distinction between “organizational coercion” and “strategic mobbing” no longer has the kind of legal and ontological distinction that INAIL had initially planned. The former allowed workers’ to indict abusive work conditions *without* naming a single persecutor, while the latter required the proof of intentional action against a particular mobber. The court ruling, then, only recognizes bodily suffering as a result of specific, intentional actors, not generalized conditions of labor. This is a very significant ruling because it forestalls the ability to trace faulty health to the labor organization itself, and, in part, neoliberalizing forms of disrapture, ambivalence and precariousness. What the state recognizes, in other words, is an accountable social actor (body) that injures and causes harm to another worker (body). This ruling, therefore, stays within the tradition of work-related illness and harassment, established in welfare states, as being traceable to machines, equipment or individuals.

INAIL had also originally aimed to recognize mobbing, as different from “organization coercion,” precisely because it may *not* result in bodily trauma. First, their lawyer proposes why the notion of “organizational dysfunction” as a cause was critical:

The protection from work-related illness caused by organizational dysfunction constitutes the realization of constitutionally protected rights that are independent of any responsibility by the employer. Mobbing, on the other hand, is manifested in repeated persecutory behaviors—and results in the obligation to cover the damages unjustly caused to the worked, even if the worker has not contracted any occupational illness from the effect of mobbing.<sup>6</sup>

The court, however, found that organizational problems, “independent of any responsibility of the employer” could not be categorized as a work-related illness precisely because it was

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.inail.it/salastampa/2005/malattie/luglio/27/malattie1.htm>

traceable to the responsibility of a collective of actors. The second part of the above quotation is also key. For INAIL, mobbing should have already been a legally punishable offense *even when* it did not manifest as health problems for workers. The court, however, does not retain this distinction—without the body of the persecutor, no legal claims can be made. Ironically, the notion of mobbing as a without a single intentional actor, was a description that recognized and legally codified the negative bodily effects of *legal* labor practices and yet it was also what also made INAIL's diagnosis an untenable legal solution.

The case raises the fundamental question of who should be held accountable for the effects of the precariousness of labor. By nullifying OCP, the state safeguards the interests of *employers* because the new diagnosis would have rendered employers legally accountable to workers in a new way. In other words, employers would have been held accountable for the psychophysical effects created by the *organization* of work. Still, we must remember that INAIL is also a state organ. Thus, on one hand, the diagnosis by INAIL (a state health agency) allowed this agency to deflect worker compensation costs to employers who did not adequately protect workers' health. On the other hand, the juridical branch of the state disputed which entity should be held more accountable (state insurance agencies or employers) in compensating workers' ill health. In this way, the state's courts ruled in favor of employers and against the actions of INAIL, the *state's own* public health institution. The ruling favored private institutions over INAIL, no longer holding employers accountable for ill health and further limiting how workers could transform bodily symptoms into legal and economic compensation. The case of OCP, I argue, unmasks the state as a deeply multi-tiered and paradoxical entity. The possibility for subjects to critique neoliberalism was both promoted and curtailed from within the *same state*. Debates about withering or mounting state sovereignty with respect to globalizing orders and economies (Held and McGrew 2003,

Strange 2003, Clark 2003, Gilpin 2003) tend to overlook the significance and implications of simultaneous and *internal* divisions within a single governmental apparatus. How mobbing is managed by the state allows us to see the ongoing friction between the protection and precariousness of labor and bodies. Through theorizing the origins and circulation of mobbing, *Protection and Precariousness* illuminates how the seemingly hegemonic neoliberal mode of production, given Italy's splintered political history and cultural landscape, is not a one-way force opposing workers. Rather the idea of mobbing reflects the simultaneous, and sometimes opposing, cultural production of both capitalists and workers, state actors and citizens.

## 9.2 State Matters

“Italy never wanted a state. It has always been a land of communes and corporations.”-  
Umberto Eco<sup>7</sup>

“How does the subjection of desire require and institute the desire for subjection?” –  
Judith Butler<sup>8</sup>

This dissertation has exposed how the Italian state has precariously combined its support for neoliberal dominance with national labor protection and welfare (Agnew 2002, Blim 2002, Ginsborg 2003). It is, perhaps, a continuation of Italy's unique conglomeration that holds together political fragments of socialism, democracy, Communism, Christianity, neoliberalism and nationalism (Crouch 1997). Italy appears to have continued in its tradition of finding politically liminal spaces: democracy-friendly communism (Ginsborg 2003), social democracy as a ‘Third Way’ between capitalism and socialism (Giddens 1998, Della Sala

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<sup>7</sup> Umberto Eco, *La Repubblica*, March 3, 1994, 2-3. (in Berezin 1999: 355).

<sup>8</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 19.

2003), and pre-industrial industrialization (Hardt and Negri 2000). Indeed, the Italian state itself has continually been imagined as a paradox: by Umberto Eco who claims Italy has laws but no sense of rule (quoted in Berezin 1999) and, similarly, Italy envisioned as a “republic without a government” and a “‘working’ democracy” (respectively, Allum 1973 and Putnam 1993 in Berezin 1999: 356). Certainly the reconfiguration of the Italian state proceeds, in part, as an historical process and also one undergoing change as a result of its position in a globalizing world (Gledhill 2000, Strange 2003, Rosenau 2003, Sassen 2003).

This dissertation has charted these paradoxes of governance and law in the daily life of Italians. For instance, the “anti-precarious” movement (Chapter 8), promoted by Italy’s socialist and communist parties, called for the state to resolve the precariousness of labor. However, the current Center-Left government, following the Center-Right Berlusconi-led government, is not willing to forego its allegiance to neoliberal values and economic organizations (Blim 2002, Ginsborg 2003). Consider for example what the Minister of Labor, Cesare Damiano, representing the government of Prime Minister Romano Prodi said:

I agree we must distinguish between *good flexibility*, which must be available to corporations, and precarious-ization, that must be fought against. [...] *Good flexibility* means the ability to hire people for a specified term in order to manage improvisational market demand. [...] Entering into flexibility and eventually stabilizing the present labor situation means becoming citizens, becoming consumers, becoming protected workers (*lavoratori tutelati*) that can invest in themselves.<sup>9</sup>

“Good flexibility” is yet another discursive invocation of a middle ground between a centralized state capable of “protections” and a decentralized state apparatus that caters to market ideologies and policies. Precariousness is denounced at the same time that the discourse of “self-investment” crafts worker-citizen as “self-responsible, self-enterprising subjects” is promoted (Ong 2006: 9). The minister’s rhetoric is underwritten by a tension

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<sup>9</sup> “Rivedere la legge Biagi, una priorità,” *Corriere della Sera*, November 7, 2006. Available online [http://www.corriere.it/Primo\\_Piano/Economia/2006/11\\_Novembre/06/damiano\\_completo.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Economia/2006/11_Novembre/06/damiano_completo.shtml).

between retaining advanced liberalism and simultaneously upholding the value of the welfare state. In fact, Vincent Della Sala (2003: 125, 127) has noted that the Left has adopted Third Way models between social democracy and neoliberalism more as a *rhetorical* strategy to advance neoliberal agendas and appeal to Italy's politically moderate constituents.<sup>10</sup> While Damiano's vision adheres to a Third Way notion of "humanizing capitalism," it does not necessarily advance other forms of welfare (Sandbrook et. al. 2007: 251).

The point here is that the policies of the state matter, as do the moral and political orders with which state discourses and policies ally or contend (Barry et. al 1996, Sassen 2003, Fairbrother and Rainnie 2006). While its sovereignty has certainly been reconfigured (McGrew and Held 2003), "the state remains the only entity with the legitimacy and capacity to capture and redirect wealth that society produces" (Sandbrook et. al. 2007: 253). Under neoliberal economic conditions, however, scholars have theorized that the state was on the verge of decline (Appadurai 1990, Strange 2003, MacLeod 2004, Perramond 2005, Cameron et. al. 2006). This process, for some, has been construed as "structural and irreversible" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 336) and one in which states "have been rendered irrelevant by world market forces because capital has become uncontrollable and keeps moving, at its own velocity" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 28). Yet even as the potentialities for state policies to affect citizen-subjects may be less effective, and the supranational pressures to restructure labor market may be mounting, the state's existing regulation and control remains salient and crucial (Gledhill 1995, 2000; Trouillot 2003, Lentner 2004, Hansen and Stepputat 2005). Thus, my findings affirm the paradox of the neoliberal state as between deregulation (Gledhill 2000, Edelman and Haugerud 2005), national regulations (that may or may not shift national economies) and robust regulation (Castells 1996, Ong 1999, Hedetoft 2003,

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<sup>10</sup> Della Sala is critical of Third Way models (see also Held 2003) because "there is little questioning of the basic principles of economic liberalization" (107).

Dunn 2004, Goldstein 2005). In her examination of the neoliberal Bolivian state, Lesley Gill (2000: 14) articulates a similar conclusion: “Far from shriveling away, the state apparatus is being reorganized and transformed, and state institutions are figuring in this process in different ways” (see also Sassen 1996, Coronil 1997, Dunn 2004). Though states may experience a “decline in the regulatory capacities ...over key sectors of their economy” (Sassen 1998: 195), their facilitation or *partial* implementation of neoliberal labor policies has the potential of producing an enormous difference in resource distribution, health and quality of life for many workers. For many worker-citizen, through the lingering ideologies of social democracy, the state “remains as the ultimate guarantor of the rights of capital whether national or foreign” (Sassen 1998: 199) and “the highest instance in democratic political accountability” (Jessop 1999: 395). The state’s management of labor, employment policy and protections has great implications for its perceived power by the population and for its influence in global spheres (Sassen 1996, Trouillot 2003, Robinson 2007a).

*Protection and Precariousness* shows that the Italian state is not obsolete but rather wavering between and straddling two oppositional programs: one, of safeguarding citizens and two, of promoting the precarious-ization of all social rights. In this sense, then, this work contributes in shifting the debate away from nation-state sovereignty versus market sovereignty (Rosenberg 2005: 25). Instead I have emphasized the social, affective, political, bodily and economic effects when states implement dualistic policies that deal with global capitalism in opposing ways and which are animated by oppositional discourses and practices (Heyman and Smart 1999, Gill 2004, Sharma and Gupta 2006). Indeed it parallels the process of globalization that Jonathan Friedman (2005:166) describes: “double polarization, of cultural fragmentation and of the formation of transnational networks, economic, social and cultural.” The notion that the state “survives by connecting the



national to the global context and adjusting domestic policies to the imperatives of the global context” (Castells 1996: 316) overlooks the ways in which the state may simultaneously promote and inhibit neoliberal imperatives. *Protection and Precariousness* has revealed that the Italian state, too, may be framed as internal and paradoxical “double polarization”: between fragmentation and the creation of global connections of the state’s diverse components. The effect, then, is both the consolidation *and* dispersal of its own power.<sup>11</sup> These conclusions reflect and complicate some of what scholars have noted about the state as a “fragmented policy-making arena, permeated by transnational networks as well as by domestic agencies and forces” (Held and McGrew 2003: 11). It has attended to the “interferences and interactions *between* political processes that persist at national, international and global levels” (Habermas 2003: 545)—and the effects of unusual but nevertheless profound effects of these *intranational* “interferences”. Similarly, Slaughter (2003) describes the state as “disaggregating”: “hydra-headed, represented and governed by multiple institutions in complex interaction with one another abroad as well as home” (190).<sup>12</sup> The history of mobbing encapsulates this process, showing multiple institutions to be simultaneously aligned with and against workers and employers, and how such processes result in the contraction and expansion of neoliberal policies and governance. In ethnographically charting the state as something lived, “complex” and “processual”

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<sup>11</sup> Saskia Sassen (2005) has also examined this paradox in post-September 11th in the United States: “We are seeing a renationalizing of governments’ efforts to control their territory after a decade of ‘denationalizing’ national economies. But we are also seeing new types of cross-border government coalitions in legal, policing, and military arenas” (173).

<sup>12</sup> Slaughter (2003) takes a generally hopeful approach to this kind of state configuration of what she describes as “horizontal” governance that is “potentially both more effective and more accountable than traditional institutions ... and equip State actors to interact meaningfully and innovatively with a host of other actors” (192). In Italy, however, I would argue that the disaggregation of the state actually inhibits state actors from being held accountable and diminishes how citizens can affect long-term change. Slaughter views this process as “piercing the sovereign veil and targeting specific institutions” (200). She does not adequately consider the negative implications and consequences of the disaggregated state upon national subjects.

(Heyman and Smart 1999: 1, Gledhill 2000), this project makes the Italian state's "partial nature more visible" (Carter 2006: 149).

Neoliberalization is a transition which many Italians conceptualize as a foreign intruder: an "Anglo-Saxon" invasion invading the space of European social democracy. It is interesting to reflect upon how Antonio Gramsci (1971) positioned how Europeans reacted to American Fordist models of labor:

In Europe the various attempts which have been made to introduce certain aspects of Americanism and Fordism have been due to the old plutocratic stratum which would like to reconcile what, until proved to the contrary, appear to be irreconcilables: on the one hand the old, anachronistic, demographic social structure of Europe, and on the other hand an ultra-modern form of production and working methods—such as is offered by the most advanced American variety, the industry of Henry Ford. [...]To put it crudely, Europe would like to have a full barrel and a drunken wife, to have all the benefits Fordism brings to its competitive power while retaining its army of parasites who ... reduce competitive power on the international market. The reaction of Europe to Americanism merits, therefore, close examination" (280-281).

While, of course, the historical timeframe differs, it is useful to imagine the implications and parallels between Europe's engagement with Fordism and the contemporary struggle:

Italians wrestling with what they call the "Anglo-Saxon" economic model—neoliberalism and forms of European social democracy (which to some may seem "anachronistic").<sup>13</sup> Like Fordism, neoliberalism is largely construed by Italians to be both "American" and "ultra-modern" even though it opposes certain sedimented "social structures"—specifically, of welfare, of state regulation and protectionist labor policies. Further, Gramsci here invokes a familiar Italian idiom of the 'barrel full and a drunken wife,' imagining a gendered and sexualized metaphor for the state's seemingly impossible conundrum of regulating national and international capital. The notion of being caught between what seem to be opposing

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<sup>13</sup> Hardt and Negri refer to this passage as "one of the fundamental texts for understanding American problems from a European point of view" (383).

programs bears an affinity to the problem for the Italian state at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—between welfare protectionism and, Gramsci’s terms, the “international market.” Under neoliberal conditions, however, it only *appears* that “national” and “global” economic and political interests can be easily parsed (e.g., Jessop 1998, Held and McGrew 2004, Robinson 2007)—a split that Sassen (1996) has called the “global-national duality” (6).

The cultural biography of mobbing reveals that the fragmentalization of the Italian state (Held and McGrew 2003, Slaughter 2003) is a process highly contingent upon *temporality* not only spatiality (Harvey 1989, Castells 1997, Ferguson and Gupta 2002, Sassen 2005). Precisely when Italy’s protectionist regime was in place and the timeframe in which it was partially dismantled mattered in how workers related to new neoliberal policies. That Italy retained Article 18 in tandem the expansion of short-term, atypical work reveals that there were time-specific implications of a particular “legal regime between national sovereignty and the transnational practices of corporate economic actors” (Sassen 1996: 27). Moreover, I have examined the state not as a reified entity that works to seamlessly empower a particular group, class or policy. Rather, “dereifying” the state (Robinson 2007a: 13), I showed the actors allied with the state who directly contribute to crafting, disseminating and applying state policies and laws, are also in many ways split and fragmented between a lasting call and demand for state welfare and an increasingly decentralized state apparatus (Held and McGrew 2002, 2003; Friedman 2005, Robinson 2007a). The result, I have shown, is the state as a whole appears to be “allied” with diversely positioned political groups, capitalists and laborers—*all at the same time*. The effects of this *combination* may indeed just as important as whether the state sovereignty is declining or not (e.g., Gilpin 2003, Rosenau 2003). This work contributes towards an ethnographic charting of the state as an “effect of mundane processes of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, supervision

and surveillance, and representation” (Mitchell 1999: 95). Berezin (1999), however, reverses Mitchell’s argument for the Italian state pointing to the ways that “social effects have ... produced an Italy in permanent flirtation with the nation/State” (374). This tension comes close to a formulation of recursivity between state and culture—the state as an effect the social and the social (and an apparently discrete division between “Society” and “State”) as an effect of the state.

This dissertation has raised the question of how precariousness and risk incite citizens to desire a stronger state, capable of effectively intervening in the problem of labor and global capitalism, and the effects of these desires. In Italy, moreover, worker-citizens have demanded a stronger state. Mobbing reveals this acute sense of alienation among workers, realized through new kinds of affective, medical and gendered regimes. At the same time, many worker-citizens turned to the state to provide safeguards, whether it was in the form of medical compensation or in demanding the abolition of the Biagi Laws. A disciplinary technique of neoliberal governmentality, then, is the generation of a desire for order in a labor force characterized by risk and ambiguity. As certain welfare state protections are lost, workers generate and are transformed by the lure of a more moral organization of labor and enhanced labor protections. Part of this is structured by the fear and apprehension that result from the two-tiered workforce—the “political emotions” made possible through the application of neoliberal labor policies (Berezin 1999: 360).

Worker-citizens’ desire for an ethical state capable of resurrecting these social and political certainties may compel certain practices and identification that reconstitute the welfare state. My findings of citizens’ desires *for* work and for more robust state management challenge and complicate the revolutionary and utopian potentials that Hardt and Negri (2000) predicted and theorized. They, by contrast, imagined “the desire to escape

the disciplinary regime and tendentially an undisciplined multitude of workers who want to be free” (262-3).<sup>14</sup> But in Italy, paradoxically, the response of mobbed and precarious workers was not simply a “mass refusal of the disciplinary regime” (274), but rather a sense of exploitation and persecution at their *exclusion from* the capitalist mode of production and a turn towards the welfare state. In many ways, these desires for state protection overpower concerns about whether or not state policy may *effectively* manage or stabilize the economy (Mann 2003: 139, Rosenau 2003: 228, Gilpin 2003: 354).<sup>15</sup> Indeed Italian historian Ginsborg (2003) warns that the failures of the Italian state in adequately providing justice for citizens “increased perforce the desire for summary justice, exercised, if need be, by a single strong and charismatic figure” (231). In the domain of work, this desire is indeed a *disciplinary* desire because of the ways in which state involvement and surveillance can be masked as a response to these desires and as self-evidently caring and benevolent. Much of these processes begin with the end of fixed, stable labor, and thus, they show the importance of labor—secure employment and its demise—in the reconfiguration of the state (Gilpin 2003: 352; Sassen 1988, 1996).

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<sup>14</sup> At the same time, Hardt and Negri also promote a “citizenship income,” that is “a political demand of the multitude: a social wage and guaranteed income for all” (403). While they tie this desire to something beyond the state, it is important to recognize that citizens’ desire for stable incomes nonetheless recognize and produce the state as a legitimate and desired apparatus. I aim not to “harbor any nostalgia for the powers of the nation-state” (336), I must recognize the ways in which the state creates the conditions around which its regulation is desired *nostalgically*. (The notion of the multitude is the new proletariat who is excluded from capital and not constrained by borders and characterized by nomadism, hybridity and revolution (61, 94).)

<sup>15</sup> Mann (2003: 139) suggests: “Macroeconomic planning was a general ideology surrounding highly abstract concepts that were precariously derived from technical tools and policies.” In other words, it raises the question of whether state-sponsored labor policies would effectively enact desired change.

### 9.3 The Precariousness of Paradox

Mobbing emerged at a particular historical moment when the workplace was characterized by two different forms of employment, stable and precarious. The first, similar to other welfare states, was “based on high degrees of standardization in all its essential dimensions: the labor contract, the work site and working hours” (Beck 1992: 142) and the latter, was characteristic of the current workings of global capital as “a risk-fraught system of flexible, pluralized, decentralized underemployment” (154). The transition between these two labor regimes is one that is reflected in the discourse of mobbing. Let us revisit the definition of mobbing in the World Health Organization issued, “Psychological Violence at Work: Increasing Awareness,” (Cassitto et al. 2003):

<b>Healthy Conflicts</b>	<b>Mobbing</b>
Clear roles and responsibilities	Ambiguous roles
Collaborative relationships	Uncollaborative behavior, boycotts
Common and shared objectives	No perspective
Clear interpersonal relationships	Ambiguous interpersonal relationships
Good organization	Organizational anomalies
Healthy fights and confrontations	Unethical repeated and systematic actions
Clear and transparent strategies	Equivocal strategies
Open conflicts and discussions	Submerged actions and negation of conflicts
Direct communication	Oblique and evasive communication

**Figure 1 Healthy conflicts and Mobbing**

This table, in seeking to define “healthy conflicts” and “mobbing,” is emblematic of the stories of many workers I have discussed in the preceding chapters: the “uncollaborative behavior” of Anna’s colleagues (Chapter 4); Fiore, mobbing counselor and mobbee and her

“oblique” and “evasive” ousting (Chapter 3); Michela’s battle with her staff (Chapter 4), Cinzia’s search for “perspective” (Chapter 6), Alberto’s suspicion of management practices and their “submerged actions” (Chapter 3) and the “unethical and systemic actions” taken against Mina (Chapter 7). The idea of a “healthy” workplace, as an ideal that worker-citizens locate in Italy’s past and as a way to imagine and construct what workforces *should* be, is equally important.

The charged circulation of mobbing points to some possible and unaccounted for effects of the global restructuring of employment that has “reduced [the] need for firms to have full-time, year-round workers” (Sassen 1998: 146). The “casualization” of labor is a process noted by many scholars (Beck 1998, Castel 2003, Harvey 2005); studies have attended to the somatic, political and gendered effects, and new practices, that emerge from this new configuration (e.g., Freeman 2001, Dunn 2004, Ong 2006). Ethnographers have charted how a neoliberal labor organization, paired with ideologies of freedom and choice, produces “a different kind of person, one who is active, mobile, endowed with the ability to choose” (Dunn 2004: 165). This study, however, has emphasized the effects of a particular combination—partial labor protectionism, and partial casualization of labor. Such partiality is productive and there have been various implications and consequences of Italy’s two-tier workforce. Here long-term and short-term laborers adapt to new conditions—in which “the unemployed and usually well-educated youth is contrasted to the middle-aged worker who is ready to collect a pension” (Della Sala 2003: 127). Italy’s leftist traditions, however, have also shaped how workers understand and experience this two-tier structure, particularly in the anti-precariousness discourse and political campaign. Thus, I have provided evidence that “the viability of social-democratic models under neoliberalism is closely linked to strong labor movements” (Sandbrook et. al. 2007: 223). While the new subject of neoliberal labor

is coaxed towards becoming a rational, self-disciplining actor who garners welfare and service for herself, we cannot neglect the emergence of subjects who, in pathologizing this new order of labor, adopt this ethos and set of practices *only partially* and yet may also become apprehensive, anxious and prone to illness—in a word, precarious. The ideal of the “flexible” subject has in a way, a foil, the precarious subject who, molded from a precarious labor regime, may unpredictably be, on the one hand, individualized, but on the other hand, profoundly isolated as they increasingly identify as “risk-bearers” (Maurer 1999). The “growth of employment-centered insecurity” (Sassen 1998: 148) creates the conditions of possibility for workers’ increased alienation even as they are subjects of heightened employer, institutional and state control. The reconstitution of labor relations, thus, plays a critical role in the reconfiguration of the state (Fairbrother and Rainnie 2006: 4).

Through the story of mobbing, I have sought to uncover a more complex process of how social actors create meaning and come to embody this historical simultaneity between rich protection and profound precariousness. What this ethnography of mobbing reveals are the effects of state policies and cultural ideologies in which state welfare, socialist, Fascist and free market-fundamentalism are advanced, *at the same time*. This combination has been of utmost importance for the ways in which this dramatic economic transition has been lived by worker-citizens in Italy. The two-tier workplace is a cultural and economic product of this transition. Historically, Italy’s structure of a highly protectionist labor regimes (Boeri and Garibaldi 2005: 46) created the conditions within which worker-citizens had lived and expected stable work as a social norm, as a right of citizenship and as fundamental to their well-being and health.

The simultaneity and closeness with precariousness, in turn, produced a series of paradoxes. The state kept solid labor protections (Article 18), yet expanded precarious



contracts (Biagi Laws). The cultural value of lifelong work was retained. But the state also passed legal policies that promoted the value of neoliberal capitalism. Undetermined time contracts seemed desirable to many, but workers with undetermined time contracts became targets of persecution and harassment. Work was promoted as the lynchpin for social stability, yet the possibility of securing long-term work was reduced. Workers' psychophysical integrity was protected, yet the ability of workers who could make actual claims was minimized. New members of the "transnational capitalist class" emerged in Italy (Robinson 2007a: 8) who posed an "adapt or leave" policy to workers, yet were not necessarily named as mobbers. Worker-citizens denounced that the end of work was like the end of life. And yet others began to identify as "freelance" workers, compelled by becoming self-enterprising and self-managing subjects. The state expanded women's access to upper management, even though social structures and practices masked the pervasiveness of sexual harassment at work. Worker-citizens attempted to resolve labor problems, yet specialized professionals viewed their problems as "amenable to diagnosis, prescription and cure" (Rose 1996: 53). Prevention and workplace wellbeing were heralded as the new values of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, yet worker wellbeing was jeopardized and diminished by stripping security and protection from the labor market. Market flexibility was criticized as precariousness, yet the Left reinvented a middle ground of "good flexibility."

Structured and generated within a two-tiered workforce, this set of contradictory processes framed the ways in which worker-citizens have made sense of their job decisions, bodily experiences and co-worker relationships. It is precisely this series of deep legal, political and cultural opposing regimes that have formed the consciousness of Italian worker-citizens in this moment of transition. These paradoxes shaped the ways in which precariousness was "lived on the skin" insofar as it enabled certain reactions and discourses:

the diminishing of workers' right was seen as immoral, precarious work was construed as full social exclusion and precariousness itself was lived and discursively constructed as bodily endangerment. Another dimension of this paradox is the precariousness of protection. Sometimes protections generated and sustained the most precarious of relations—asymmetrical, exploitative, gendered and classed. And some protections (e.g., for worker “wellbeing” and workers' compensation for illness) ultimately empowered state officials and employers *against* workers.

Neoliberal governmentality is one that “wants [citizens] to act as free subjects who self-actualize and act on their own behalf” (Ong 2006: 8). In the previous chapters, I have shown various ways in which worker-citizens were called upon to garner welfare on their own behalf: they have engaged in practices of medical documentation, learned about the psychological and physical injury that mobbing causes, become prevention experts, learned about the risks that inhabit the workplace and sought the services of social and medical professionals (mobbing clinics, psychologists, medical risk managers) who have helped them to resolve their individualized labor problems. As Rose (2007) suggests, these experts are critical figures in neoliberalism:

They transform the subjectivities of those who are counseled, offering new language to describe their predicament, new criteria to calculate its possibilities and perils, and entangling the ethics of different parties involved. It is in this sense of managing the present in terms of an uncertain medical future (29).

Workers, in tandem with these new authoritative knowledges and help-seeking practices, become (partially) habituated to these new forms of rule. Through their navigation of Italy's precarious labor regime, thus, Italian worker-citizens become “self-actualizing and demanding subjects of an advanced liberal democracy” (Rose 1996:60, O'Malley 1996). Despite, then, the ways in which they furtively critique neoliberal regimes by refusing

mobbing and precariousness, Italian worker-citizens, paradoxically, become proper subjects of neoliberalism.

#### 9.4 Recognizing Interdependency

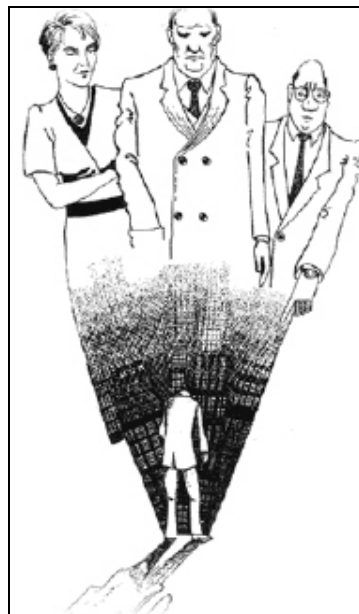


Figure 1 Imposing Mob.<sup>16</sup>

I have argued that mobbing, animated by new political economic conditions and cultural ideologies, is a worksite itself—for the work of rethinking, critiquing and sometimes advancing neoliberal modes of governance and economic structures by workers, citizens, state actors and public experts. Mobbing could also be as, Carlo dubbed it “*mors tua vita mia*” (your death, my life), a moral attack spurred by the “precariousization” of the cultural, social and economic (Chapter 3). After Levinas (1996) and Butler (2004), the problem of

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<sup>16</sup> Image from 2001 news article on mobbing. “Il mobbing prospera nella new economy.” *La Repubblica*. (26 March 2001).

precariousness seems to be in delineating the relationship between Self and Other. The difficulty in defining mobbing reflects how individuals seek to make visible certain invisible “others,” a “mob” of global actors that condition the labor market and create new practices and regimes of risk, emotions, medicine, language and gender. I have argued that the causes of mobbing show the *conditions* of work to be pathological in ways that go far beyond the role played by single individuals. The persistent salience of *mobbing* as a cultural narrative speaks to a human desire to make *legible* and localized deterritorialized globalized actors who, collectively create and sustain global labor conditions. Indeed it reflects a tendency to make sense of large-scale change when, as Scott (1985) aptly notes, “the experience itself arrives in quite personal, concrete, localized, mediated form” (348). The story of mobbing uncovers how actors mediate a basic paradox—mass global collectivities structure a single individual’s everyday life, even as neoliberal ideologies promote the notion that the single individual can triumph over the mob. The elusiveness of mobbing reflects the difficulty in tracing an individual’s fear, illness or abjection to a faceless and invisible global crowd.

## Appendix A

Transcript Conventions<sup>1</sup>

“word”	use of English in Italian
[...]	omit more than three words
...	omit fewer than three words
(( ))	description of particular action during dialogue
[word]	Inserted word to clarify the meaning of the sentence.

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<sup>1</sup> These have been adapted from Atkinson and Heritage (1984) and Besnier (1995).

## Appendix B

## Acronyms

CGIL	Italian General Labor Confederation <i>Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro</i>
INAIL	National Institute for the Insurance against Work-Related Accidents and Illnesses <i>Istituto Nazionale per 'assicurazione Contro Gli Infortuni sul Lavoro</i>
ISPESL	Institute for Prevention and Work Safety <i>Istituto Superiore Prevenzione e Sicurezza sul Lavoro</i>
OCP	Organization Coercion Pathology <i>Disturbi psichici da costrittività organizzativa sul lavoro</i>
PCI	Italian Communist Party <i>Partito Comunista Italiano</i>
RC	Communist Party <i>Rifondazione Comunista</i>
SPISAL	Agency for Prevention, Hygiene and Security in Workplaces <i>Servizio Prevenzione Igiene Sicurezza Ambienti di Lavoro</i>

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## Curriculum Vitae

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