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THE PSYCHOLOGISATION OF WORK THE DEREGULATION OF WORK AND THE GOVERNMENT OF WILL

Crespo, E. and Serrano, A.

Abstract

Psychologisation is a particular way of constructing the modern individual, for which the technology of a certain type of psychology is essential. Moreover, psychologisation is not only a model for individuals, but also a discursive practice forming and legitimating it. Consequently, individuals can be held responsible for situations out-with their control, in turn, leading to the paradoxical situation whereby a discourse affirms precisely that which it negates. Such paradoxical rhetoric is epitomised in discourse pertaining to the labour market crisis, in particular, we will argue, within the example of flexicurity discourse. This article aims to examine the discourse on flexicurity emanating from one of the most important agencies for the construction, and dissemination of work ideologies, and representations of unemployment in the EU: the European Union institutions. Flexicurity, a mixed notion aiming to reconcile that which appears irreconcilable, is the specific term designating a new political strategy for the management of employment and social security, which, for all intents and purposes, refers to workers' moral duty to participate in the self-regulation of their 'own' life. In this polyphonic production process, antithetical discourses are conjoined in a paradoxical process of meaning. Hence, whilst, at once, being a discourse that regulates will and boosts individuals' capacity to take responsibility for their own life, concomitantly, it also undermines collective resources (both conceptual and institutional), potential mechanisms through which workers could exercise control over the asymmetrical nature of employment situations which make them vulnerable.

Introduction¹

A central characteristic of modernity, at least as it has been understood in western culture, is the gradual trend towards the subjectivation and autonomization of the individual, in conjunction with the consolidation of a socio-political demand for the individual to become responsible for oneself. Although western culture—primarily Jewish and Christian—which is deeply rooted in Greek thought, has, over the centuries, formed a conception of the individual as the centre of moral requirement (Gergen, 1999; Harré, 1999; Foucault, 1987; 1990), modern times, by comparison, have conceptualised the individual in increasingly abstract and secular terms. Indeed, our present epoch is epitomised by a real turn towards the individual and subjectivity, which can be characterised as a process of individualism, or individualization².

Concern for the relationship between modernity and individualism has been, of course, a defining feature of critical modern sociological inquiry (Adorno, 1992; Bauman, 2001; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2003; Benjamin, 1973; Fromm, 1974; Habermas, 2008; Jay, 2003). As Giddens (1991:1) says “*Modernity must be understood on an institutional level; yet the transmutations introduced by modern institutions interlace in a direct way with individual life and therefore with the self*”. This idea of the development of modernity being connected with changes in subjectivity, was also researched by Norbert Elias, who entitled one of his best-known works “The Society of Individuals” (and not society opposing or against individuals, as Bauman correctly noted in 2003). Elias returned to this idea in one of his last works “Changes in the I-We Balance” (1990), concluding, that the balance which in the early stages of the development of modern civilization leaned towards the “we” side, has now, in the final stages, shifted conclusively to the “I” side.

Individualization is a global process that creates the possibility for new types of individuals to appear. This transformation occurs in a variety of different spheres, and by and large, is typified by, both, a gradual release from community ties, and the production of a new type of individual; one who has rights, who is, in turn, responsible for oneself, and, to a large extent, his own destiny. Within the political terrain, the ‘citizen’ appears as a new individual, defined through the entitlement of inviolable civil, political and social rights (Marshall, 1998/1950), and by the exercise of freedom (Berlin, 1988/1969; Dumont,

¹ For this article, the authors have taken into account the conclusions of the project “Qualitative Assessment of Activation Policies: Active and Passive Limits” (R&D&I project of the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, SEJ2007-64604)

² The turn in Kantian epistemology, as the basis of the critique, was considered by Kant himself as a Copernican turn, a radical decentring of the classic perspective of knowledge, and a key term in the process of individualization.

1986). This new individual also becomes increasingly manifest within the intimacy of religion, notably after the protestant reform, as well as in aesthetics (Maravall, 1999).

The individualization process, the gradual autonomization of individuals, whilst, undeniably, having positive ramifications- as evinced in the development of new spaces of freedom, and new networks of solidarity- has not occurred without deleterious effects; in particular, new threats to social subjectivity are a cause for concern, since individualization, for many, can mean pure isolation. As Castel (1995) explicates, there is positive individualism and negative individualism (disaffiliation). Release from traditional social ties can be positive, increasing an individual's autonomy in the management of his own life (as opposed to a collective predestined destiny) in a world in which he has strong links of interdependence, in turn, providing him with a strong sense of security and solidarity. However, one may also experience negative individualism; for example, mere isolation in a network in which the individual does not participate, but, nevertheless, are still held responsible for self-governance. In such instances, individualism becomes political isolation (exclusion of the social relations of interdependence), and, therefore, social vulnerability.

Psychologisation is not, as far as we understand it, equivalent, or consubstantial to individualization. Whereas individualisation is a typical process of modernity, psychologisation, rather, is but one very limited way of *realising* that process of individualization. It is an asocial, or antisocial way of understanding the modern individual. Although individualization is linked to the process of autonomization, and, in turn, to emancipation from community oppression, psychologisation is different; it transforms social problems into individual problems, and personal dilemmas. It is, thus, a specific, systematised practice of constructing the modern individual, for which the technology- to use Foucauldian parlance- of a certain type of psychology³ has been, and still is, essential.

³ It is an essentialist and positivist psychology, whose theoretical and ontological premises are founded on a Cartesian myth, according to which, human beings are divided into their observable body located in space, and their intangible internal mind (Crespo, 1995). This method of approaching psychology is based on a "belief in the existence of a reality regardless of the way we access it (...) of their being a privileged method capable of guiding us, thanks to objectivity, to reality just as it is" (Ibáñez, 1996; 329) and a concept of an individual as the "possessor of 'common sense' or 'reason' regardless of their experience" (Elias, 1969/1982).

Psychologisation as Political Production:

From our perspective, psychologisation is a turn in the modern process of subjectivation and autonomization, and, additionally, is archetypal of *one* facet of modern thought (and also *one* type of discursive psychology in practice, which, although hegemonic, is not the only one). It involves, in one respect, an individualization of the social, and, in another, the limited, quotidian contention that the core explaining this individual is psychological processes, understood as processes of an individual, intra-personal and asocial mind.

The psychologised individual is, hence, an asocial individual, for whom the notion of interdependence is secondary. The characteristics- or variables, to adopt the pseudo 'scientific' rhetoric of a certain strand of psychology- determining his behaviour are an effect of exclusively individual processes. As such, explanation of behaviour, and, crucially, the very possibility of intervention and change, occurs merely at an individual level; it is people who ostensibly contain the main determinants of their behaviour and destiny within themselves (attitudes, motivations, values...). This is what has been termed a self-contained individual (Shotter, 1993; 1996), or, as characterized by Norbert Elias (1970) a *homo clausus*. The *homo clausus*- or self-contained individual- is the *homo economicus* of our contemporary socio-political constellation. Indeed, Elias argues that many people feel there is "an invisible barrier [that] separates their 'inside' from everything 'outside' - the so-called 'outside world'" (1970:119). The author considers this is a common, and a necessarily flawed and partial view, one which social sciences, generally, and psychology, notably, have made their own. In contradistinction to prevailing doxa, Elias posits an alternative version of the modern subject, the *homo apertus*, in which the idea of interdependence plays an essential, constitutive role (Newton 1999; Scheff, 2001). In other words, mutual dependence is what makes individual autonomy possible (Ehrenberg, 1995). Psychologisation is not only a model for individuals, but also a discursive practice forming and legitimating it. The discursive practice shaping a moral disciplinary process is constructed as a system of explanations based on attributing causality to events experienced and suffered, and forming unquestioned knowledge.

The attribution of causality is directly connected with the attribution of responsibilities (attributing cause is a way of speaking about attribution of responsibility), and with the legitimation of the various intervention systems. There is a basic distinction as far as the attribution of causality is concerned, which is whether the action can be considered intentional or accidental. The question lies in the fact that certain situations suffered by people, such as, for example, precarity and social exclusion, are transformed discursively by moral discipline into situations which the individual is ostensibly responsible for. Consequently, individuals can then be held responsible for matters out-with their control (i.e. keeping their job), leading to a form of paradoxical discourse affirming exactly what it negates. Or

phrased otherwise, the autonomy and agency of modern individuals is affirmed, precisely as their capacity to control the situation they are suffering is negated⁴. Such paradoxical rhetoric is exemplified in discourse pertaining to the labour market crisis, as will be demonstrated in due course, through our discussion of flexicurity discourse. One important aspect of this paradox inherent within discourse on autonomy and agency, is its weak conceptualisation of the social, through which the personal becomes equivalent to the individual (Butler, 2009). This emphasis upon the individual's responsibilities, not only makes the individual vulnerable, but, moreover, contributes to the depoliticisation of the expression of their unease. Indeed, Ehrenberg astutely observes "it is very difficult to represent the collective in a society where individualization is becoming more pronounced" (1995: 312).

The Psychologisation of Work

The installation of the capitalist production system involved a radical transformation of the existing moral disciplinary system within our societies. The divine manifestation is, after all, patriarchal, and, to a certain extent, human or humanised. God/the father was replaced by the 'invisible hand of the market', since its demands are the result of inexorable laws. The industrialisation process, which would gradually come to characterise the contemporary mode of production, has very precise demands upon the individual, requiring, not only a willingness to work, but also a willingness to be complemented by the machine and rhythm it imposes. The first industrialisation age led to large-scale social and psychological change; poor peasants migrated to the city en masse, thus, becoming proletarianized workers, whereby they were subjected to an intense and difficult programme of psychological discipline. It was a production-oriented disciplinary practice geared towards producing, what Foucault termed, "docile bodies" (Fairclough, 1992:52).

The person who has perhaps best studied this transformational process, of the peasant masses into industrial workers, is Karl Polanyi (2003/1944) in his classic book *The Great Transformation*. Fundamentally, this transformation consisted of converting the workforce into a commodity, governed by some so-called market laws: "but labour, land, and money

⁴ The emphasis in this article on the paradoxes which characterise the psychologising discourse of political institutions, in this case, European ones, does not presuppose that workers internalise this dominant doxa acritically. In a recent study on the implementation of these flexicurity-based intervention and guidance devices to combat unemployment, Serrano *et al.* (2010), identify a wide variety of positions users adopt to these devices, which range from doxic adherence to this responsabilising discourse, to the demand for a collectivist representation framework, and include ironic distancing, and the polyphony or cacophonous multiplication of voices.

are obviously *not* commodities; the postulate that anything that is bought and sold must have been produced for sale is emphatically untrue in regard to them.” (Polanyi, 2003:122-3). The intention to treat work as a commodity has required, and still requires, the continuous intervention of public institutions, both, to create and maintain it. Since the first industrialisation, this intervention has implied an exercise of coercion, and of physical and moral violence. Such violence was essentially psychosocial in form, since it involved the production of a new type of subject- the industrial workman- and a new type of subjectivity, one which would accept the regularity and rhythm imposed by machines⁵. This transformation of poor peasants into wage-dependent workers was a consequence of complex social engineering, founded mutually upon coercion, through the threat of poverty, and a paternalist moral discourse. Monitoring poverty, and the threat of it as a punishment, was the key element in this disciplinary process of subjectivity. The result of which, was the establishment of new living and thinking habits; work became synonymous with employment, and, in turn, personal dignity, and ethical worth became part of the commitment to the job.

As Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) perspicaciously observe, the establishment of this new order required new ideologies to make not only passive acceptance of the new conditions possible, but also to ensure commitment to the new task to be performed. Inducing such adherence was no easy task, since it involved equating an active life with the typical subordination of salaried work. Liberal discourse- which to a certain extent inherited Enlightenment thought- fulfils this ideological task perfectly, since it emphasises an abstract equality; liberty and autonomy of the individual, naturally moved by passions (individual interest, rational calculation, faith in progress, desire to possess goods, limitless motivation for the desire for earnings and profit, etc.). This discourse is buttressed by a particular conceptualisation of the individual as “a piece of nature isolated and separated from other individuals, and which is driven by its internal determinations” (Bilbao, 1996:78), viewing ordered sociability as the free expression of this nature. The market, therefore, is supported by, and, concurrently, consolidates this ontologizing discourse, since, if individuals are considered free and equal, the only “natural” institution of coordination would be the market (Prieto, 1996).

Moving forward, the capitalist economy of the preceding decades has been characterised by an intensification of moral psychological discipline. Psychologisation, today, is

⁵ For Polanyi, as Stiglitz points out, “it is simply wrong to treat nature and human beings as objects whose price will be determined entirely by the market. Such a concept violates the principles that have governed societies for centuries: nature and human life have almost always been recognized as having a sacred dimension. It is impossible to reconcile this sacred dimension with the subordination of labor and nature to the market.” (2003: 28).

not so much an issue of passive discipline, but, rather, an intensification of moral self-control. New capitalism is marked by an increased consideration of workers' psychological and moral resources as a key element of productive efficiency; the workforce, essentially, has transformed in discourse into a *human resource*. The discursive moralisation of work is no longer merely a disciplinary discourse identifying salaried work with virtue, on the contrary, the new capitalist discourse, rather, has made it *ethical* to work (Crespo, 2009)⁶. Moral characteristics (attitudes, motivation, social skills and emotional resources...) are thus no longer only considered as prior requirements to work, but as part of work's contents. Or phrased otherwise, such moral characteristics now form, both, part of the qualifications needed to work- sometimes as important as technical qualifications- and, on occasion, as happens with emotional work (Hochschild 1983; Raz, 2002; Garrety *et al.* 2003), they become precisely the main qualification required.

This discourse of new capitalism becomes apparent in many diverse fora. Probably the most expressive, and most studied, is management discourse, since it is, arguably, the most important sphere of ideological production (Fairclough 2000a; 2000b; Muntigl, Weis and Wodak 2000; Alonso 2001; Fernández 2007). With this paper, we are specifically interested in the discourse emanating from one of the most important agencies for constructing, and disseminating work ideologies and representations of unemployment: European institutions.

European institutions' regulating activity in the coactive sense of hard law is minimal, as there is more emphasis on Europeanization processes in a persuasive sense. The government technology illustrating these processes is the, so-called, open method of coordination (OMC)⁷, which enables a type of intermediate regulation between legislative regulations, considered inappropriate as they are more rigid, and more flexible forms of regulation (official recommendations, information exchange, identification of best practices, development of structural indicators, joint information, etc.). The idea is to increase the legitimacy of actions at a European level, but at the same time to respect the wide diversity of labour markets in the member states, as well as national regulation systems (Goetschy, 1999). The OMC can be characterised as a "post-regulating" perspective

⁶ This moralisation and institutional work on workers' attitudes do not only characterise the 'new capitalism', but they also become a focal point in this stage in disciplinary processes of the workforce.

⁷ The Open Method of Coordination was introduced in the Lisbon Strategy to create an open and flexible means of coordination between different levels aimed at solving common problems. This open form of coordination allows for a type of regulation which falls somewhere between more legislation-based regulation, which is considered to be inappropriately inflexible, and more flexible forms of 'soft regulation' (official recommendations, exchange of information, best practice, and national experience, development of structural indicators, joint information).

aimed at establishing procedures rather than detailed and inflexible rules⁸ (de la Porte, Pochet & Room, 2001). The interest in studying European proposals derives from the important role these institutions play in the regulation of the social question, particularly, as several authors have noted (Palier, 2001; Walters & Haahr, 2005; Serrano, 2009), in the methods of diagnosing and representing the problem of unemployment in several member states of the European Union (EU).

The Discourse of European Social Policies: From Combating Unemployment to Intervention in the Will of the Unemployed

Presently, we are witnessing the hegemony of new concepts to designate ‘lack of work’⁹, as well as new ways of understanding legitimate strategies to combat it. A common trait of these strategies is their attention towards the psychological and ethical dimensions of work, primarily, their concern with psychosocial skills (employability) and moral qualities of job seekers, rather than with modifying the structural conditions of the job supply, *per se*, as occurred with Keynesian policies. The spread of a certain vocabulary (employability, partnership, activation, benchmarking, gender mainstreaming, etc.) within discourses pertaining to employment policies (Barbier, 2004; Behning & Serrano Pascual, 2002; Jacobsson, 2004; Serrano Pascual, 2007; 2009) has contributed to this strategy. Significantly, this adoption of the “language” proposed by European institutions, has had an important ideological impact upon the discursive construction of the vocabulary used to refer to unemployment and/or the social exclusion problem, thus, influencing the outline of the main points of contention underlying the debate, consequently determining the way the problem is discursively framed¹⁰.

⁸ This method basically consists of four stages. First, European institutions propose some guidelines consisting of general measures and goals, structured around four pillars, namely, the promotion of employability, adaptability, entrepreneurship and equal opportunities. Secondly, these guidelines are converted by member states into their national and regional policies. The third stage of the process is the establishment of indicators (benchmarking) to enable comparison between countries and identify best practices. Finally, there is a process of evaluation of National Action Plans (NAP), based on these indicators, by European institutions and peer reviewers.

⁹ The meaning of the terms used to refer to the lack of work has changed constantly, so this category is not only an object of knowledge, but also of political transformation (Lecerf, 2002). According to this author, the working class has managed to take over the unemployment category to establish a positive distinction among the “job-less”, and to give this notion politicizing representations.

¹⁰ We cannot speak of a simple and unilateral process which imposes methods of intervention and vertical representations of the problem. Instead, it is a subtle process with many dimensions, which include the capacity of European institutions, due to the symbolic power they have, of granting more legitimacy to certain political is-

Flexicurity

The concept of flexicurity is the most recent in European rhetoric production. This portmanteau term designates a new political strategy for the management of employment and social security, on the basis of a paradoxical combination of security and flexibility, which, for all intents and purposes, refers to workers' moral duty to participate in the self-regulation of their 'own' life.

Flexicurity is a mixed notion aiming to reconcile that which appears irreconcilable¹¹. The main lexemic nucleus is *flex*-ibility, which semantically defines the *se-cur*-ity nucleus. When flexibility refers to unemployment, it is understood as deregulation of contract guarantees, i.e. as a transformation of labour rights. Based on the flexicurity idea, the regulatory framework of the labour market is called upon to be more adaptable to the demands of the economic climate. Blaming high rates of unemployment on an excessively rigid labour market has become an axiom. The provision of security becomes the cause of insecurity in the rhetorical game. Flexibility appears as an all-encompassing demand and temporary hiring euphemistically becomes known as promotion of employment (Baylos, 1996). Consequently, the political regulation of the employment contract, hitherto one of the ways of protecting workers' social rights in the welfare state, paradoxically now turns into the very cause of its vulnerability. According to this type of discourse, legal regulation, rather than protecting workers, makes them vulnerable, since the production of inequalities is governed by the market- which creates winners and losers- meaning that any trace of possible socio-political conflict disappears.

Inequalities in the sharing of benefits and costs are by-products of market forces, which create winners and losers. With the globalisation of economies, high speed

sues. The selection procedure of the "problems" which are the object of political intervention is a political and ideologically structured process (Muller, 1990). European institutions give certain views and representation frameworks more legitimacy. This helps society to become aware of certain diagnoses on which the conditions of public intervention will be defined, and supports certain social groups which give voice to these views or representations of the problem. In this respect, the interpretation frameworks that embody the notions disseminated by European institutions not only form the majority of the regulatory structures determining the direction of public policies and the procedures to implement them, but they can also be understood as strategic resources capable of being used by diverse competing social groups to promote their proposals in the political agenda.

¹¹ The notions of flexibility and security have been constructed in opposing semantic fields. Consequently, flexibility was synonymous with insecurity, and security with rigidity. This semantic opposition and complementarity has also given rise to a political contradiction between the views defending the way the market functions as a criterion of social regulation, and those that call for worker protection. The balance could lean in one or the other direction, depending on the imbalance of forces, but at no time was the antagonistic structure of these semantic fields questioned.

technological change, industrial restructuring and the dynamics of job destruction and creation, work and the labour market are drastically changing and reshaping the balance between flexibility and security and offering new opportunities to those who are the most employable and adaptable. But they also tend to marginalise those unable to adapt to mobile and flexible work patterns or unprepared to acquire the skills required for new tasks within the knowledge economy (Communication from the Commission, 2001, *Building An Inclusive Europe*).

Security, which is the second lexemic nucleus of flexicurity, and which, in actuality, should be the counterpoint to flexibility, transforms into a psychologising concept. The security of the employment contract, once a social right, now becomes 'self-insurance' or agency, connected with activation and personal employability. In the Communication from the Commission, *Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity*, it clearly states:

Flexibility, on the one hand, is about successful moves ("transitions") during one's life course (...) Security, on the other hand, is more than just the security to maintain one's job: it is about equipping people with the skills that enable them to progress in their working lives, and helping them find new employment. It is also about adequate unemployment benefits to facilitate transitions. Finally, it encompasses training opportunities for all workers, especially the low skilled and older workers (European Commission, 2007, *Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity: More and Better Jobs through Flexibility and Security*).

This semantic shift in the notion of security, from the external conditions of security to individual insurance, is symptomatic of the new employment culture; whose fundamental pillars are the fight against dependence, the achievement of autonomy and the promotion of individual responsibility. In view of this conceptualisation of dependence, understood as a pathology of will, and converted into a *public* problem, intervention techniques are adopted which aim at preventing this dependence and promoting self-governance, thus emphasising the therapeutic functions of the welfare state (strengthening self-esteem, facilitating self-analysis, maximising personal abilities).

Modern social security systems offering adequate unemployment benefits, as well as active labour market policies, are essential components providing income security and support during job changes. Good unemployment benefit systems are necessary to offset negative income consequences during job transfers, but they may have a negative effect on the intensity of job search activities and may reduce financial incentives to accept work. This can be largely offset by setting up efficient job search support and work incentives, ensuring a balance between rights and obligations (...) Active labour market policies, too, have a positive effect on the feeling of security among workers (European Commission, 2007, *Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity: More and Better Jobs through Flexibility and Security*)

Security, within the flexicurity concept, goes hand in hand with a strong call to 'personal responsibility,' in contrast to the safety net of the State-providence (and Keynesian Welfare State), which was founded on the principle of 'collective solidarity'. Unemployment benefits are at the service of employment transitions; these no longer have a main mission to guarantee support in the event of 'loss of means of life', but, rather, to facilitate transitions ('*to progress in their working lives*').

Effective active labour market policies (ALMP) that help people cope with rapid change and ease transitions to new jobs (...) By implementing ALMP such as an efficient job search support and good work incentives, jobseekers can be encouraged to find new employment. Job search courses and job clubs have been shown to be among the most effective measures to help the unemployed find a job (European Commission, 2007, *Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity: More and Better Jobs through Flexibility and Security*).

It is no longer only a case, therefore, of knowing how much security needs to be guaranteed in the face of more flexibility; instead, a new dimension is introduced into the debate. It is not a question of *how much* security, but the *type* of security. It is the notion of flexibility that seems to be unquestioned in these discourses. In this respect, there is a new approach at various levels to distribute social responsibilities in the midst of unemployment, placing more and more emphasis on the role workers must play in their own integration process. This notion moves away from the structure underlying the legal regulation of employment. As the employment legislation of the welfare state has allowed two apparently irreconcilable premises of the liberal system to be reconciled, the condition of heteronomy that characterises every salaried situation, on the one hand, and the recognition of the principle of formal liberty, on the other, the transformation of these employment regulation dialectics has radically modified social cohesion. The spread of psychologising frameworks, representing new social conflicts, dissolves the central contraposition of the production system, again reintroducing liberal dogmas of the autonomy of will.

Flexicurity and the Activation Paradigm

Within the flexicurity framework, the function of public authorities is not to regulate employment, nor the market, in view of the indisputable axiom of flexibility, but, rather, to promote self-insurance. The technique that makes this insurance possible consists of the public promotion of activation. New discursive practices aimed at explaining the unemployment situation, and legitimizing interventions to combat it are part of what has come to be known as the activation paradigm; *active* is the new moral slogan, forming the basis of a whole narrative. Three fundamental factors- which differentiate it from the previous

Keynesian model- have been identified at the base of this activation paradigm: firstly, an individualised psychological approach to the problem of unemployment, geared towards modelling workers' behaviour, attitudes and motivation; secondly, an emphasis on employment, i.e. on the economic aspects of citizenship, rather than on political and social aspects; and, lastly, a strengthening of contract ethics, vis-à-vis the private/liberal contract, based on the criteria of reciprocity and merit (Serrano, 2007).

The intervention paradigm not only puts forward renewed intervention instruments¹² (introduction of penalty mechanisms, toughening of rules to access social cover), but also new criteria to justify and legitimate them, in conjunction with a new concept of social rights. The activation paradigm involves significant innovation in the scope of social policies, since, rather than entailing an intervention mechanism *for* individuals, it actually entails one *in* and *on* them, on their personal ethics. Activation requires public authority intervention to, both, mobilise workers, in general, and the unemployed, in particular, and to improve their adaptability. It demonstrates an increasing process of individualization, as the attribution of responsibilities is transfigured to make them more individual, resulting in the reassessment of issues capable of becoming problematic. Rather than acting as a guarantor of social rights, progressively, the state's primary function is to ensure citizen's responsibilities, ethics and opportunities. Reference to collective solidarity is thus being displaced by an increased emphasis upon the individual's responsibility.

The current economic context reinforces the need for efficient and effective, but especially integrated, flexicurity approaches in all Member States (...) Public employment services will be at the forefront of confronting rising unemployment and need to be better equipped to do so. Adequate social protection systems that at the same time provide incentives to work are necessary to smooth transitions and keep up consumer demand. The following actions are of particular importance in the short and long term: contractual arrangements: reduce segmentation, harmonise conditions for temporary and permanent contracts (...) Modernise social security systems: reduce high marginal effective tax rates on the low paid, boosting demand in the economy and reducing unemployment/inactivity traps... (Council of the Euro-

¹² There is a wide variety of instruments used, both, in national activation strategies, and the ways in which the unemployed are mobilised and penalised (coactive nature accompanying these measures, penalty mechanisms, and the level of pressure and imposition of the obligation to work, the type of option offered, quality of the work offered, connection with the individual's needs, etc., public investment in employment policies (employment expenditure), individualisation of programmes and connection with previous career paths) (Serrano Pascual, 2004) depending on whether a psychologising framework is incorporated in the representation of the problem.

pean Union: SOC 179, ECOFIN 186, EDU 48, Joint Employment Report 2008/2009: p. 8)

Within this discourse, which condemns dependence, and promotes taking responsibility, the language of *rights*, based on the provision of social security as a collective responsibility, is progressively being replaced by a discourse which espouses an ethics of responsibility, the language of *duties* (Dean, 2004). Given this discursive framework, social intervention has to focus on strengthening agency, i.e. each individual's capacity to act according to the manifestations of their will, meaning that, the welfare states role is to combat dependence, as a situation (and "trap"), and passiveness, as an attitude.

Such policies lead to a dualistic form of pressure: exogenous and endogenous. On the one hand, they influence individuals' behaviour by imposing penalties (for example, limiting access to social protection), but, on the other, they are psycho-political policies aimed at producing *standardised* individuals. Within these practices, dependence becomes pathologised; economic and political problems transform into issues of motives and personal will. Furthermore, the emergence of the socio-political nature of social exclusion and social vulnerability is omitted, as the causal connection that can be established between power relations and heteronomy is cancelled out.

*The Paradoxes of Activation*¹³

The principle of activation is paradoxical as a result of its discursive location in a space of intertextuality. As a consequence of this polyphonic production process, antithetical discourses are conjoined in a paradoxical process of meaning. In fact, the activation discourse adapts perfectly to both social-democratic and neoliberal registers. This discourse maintains a hybrid position between using registers that activate empowerment frameworks of individuals' vis-à-vis institutions, and, concurrently, the defence of intervention models that lead to the adaptation to market laws, i.e. a coactive externally imposed situation. Activating would thus be favouring personal adaptability, the availability of the individual, and of his *good will*.

This discourse on activation and security coincides and strengthens the moral foundations of the new ways of regulating work. It is a form of consolidating the individual's responsibility, and agency in the face of conditions that the individual cannot, however, change. Thus, despite being a discourse that regulates will and boosts individuals' capaci-

¹³ See Crespo and Serrano (2005) for a more detailed discussion on the paradoxes of activation.

ty to take responsibility for their own life, at the same time, it also undermines collective resources (both conceptual and institutional), which could enable workers to exercise a certain amount of control over the asymmetrical nature of certain employment situations which make them vulnerable.

Activation could, therefore, be seen as an instrument of social discipline and behaviour monitoring. Indeed, use is made of the framework evoking dependence to disqualify prior forms of intervention (the state's dependence denotes a moral deficit: passivity). However, this use of the concept represents merely one facet of understanding dependence. The badly termed "passive" policies (social protection policies) were rightly produced as spaces of decommodification, and emancipation from conditions of heteronomy and vulnerability, which typify employment relations governed by market laws. Therefore, whilst the, so-called, 'active' policies make it possible to combat economic dependence (of the institutions, of the family), they can, in turn, promote political dependence (of the market).

The notion of activation explicitly evokes an ontological concept in which the individual would be morally autonomous, self-determined, independent and responsible, as well as governed by free will, i.e. a self-governed individual¹⁴. There is, however, an implicit mistrust of the true motives guiding the individual, which leave him vulnerable to welfare traps. Consequently, the notion of the individual as morally autonomous is questioned. This concept thus requires "activated" individuals who are economically motivated by positive or negative penalties. It is a "passive" adaptation, which points more towards a reactive capacity; in other words, viewing individuals as motivated by external factors. This discourse of autonomy, mobility, and quality of work is in stark contrast with the coercive instruments that have been established to increase the rate of activity, and to encourage individuals to work. Activation changes are thus to be understood as behaviour monitoring, and as an instrument of social discipline.

The weakening of social security systems, and the ensuing hegemony of one representation of social security, which disqualifies interdependence, explicates the processes that make the worker's position more fragile. This activation discourse is a manifestation of the contemporary fixation of making willpower something problematic, and the *government of will* the space of political intervention. Therefore, individualization, which promotes principles such as activation, is more on a par with the process of becoming fragile than with autonomization.

¹⁴ The individual required by this discourse is an analytical person capable of weighing up the best alternative in a creative and interdependent context, whilst exhibiting a high level of control over his personal project; ultimately, acting on the basis of his convictions, principles, and own ethics.

Conclusions

The psychologisation of work is a psycho-political process of producing individuals, whose main characteristic consists of the production of a moral discourse aimed at transforming social problems into personal and psychological problems, in addition to transforming their solutions by working on oneself. Such discourse is hegemonic within the field of management, and is supported by concepts that are psychological in origin. In the case of social policies, whose primary purpose was to protect workers from the possibility of unemployment, there has been a pronounced shift from a discourse founded on the notion of rights, to another based on the idea of moral obligation. However, such obligation makes sense as a discourse of psychological realization, in which activity is good, and, above all, passivity is wholly bad. The concept of flexicurity now occupies a prominent position within the framework of the discourse on the activation of workers and the unemployed. The notion of flexicurity naturalises the need for a flexible organisation of lifestyles, and labels worker attitudes that are not in line with it, as problematic. Resultantly, the display of autonomy is conceived as the consequence of successful work on oneself.

This individualising framework omits the importance of interdependence as an inherent factor in agency. Such an omission is problematic, because, as Durkheim (1982) pointed out, the development of industrial societies, and the division of labour, gives rise to a curious paradox, according to which, the more autonomous individuals are, the more interdependent they are. Or phrased otherwise, the recognition of interdependence is the *condition* of an authentic personal autonomy (Dean, 2004). The autonomy contained in the notion of flexicurity, therefore, refers to a different cognitive framework based on interdependence, and may highlight vulnerabilities, rather than translate into a strengthening of the individual agency.

The reference to solidarity (collective responsibility) as a means of legitimizing public action is being displaced by an increased emphasis upon the individual's responsibility. This emergent call towards self-responsibility legitimates the coercive nature acquired by active programmes in the majority of cases. Its justification is backed by the moral principle derived from the duties each individual (citizen) incurs with the state. It (coactively) calls upon workers' responsibility, whilst allowing employers to demonstrate their moral responsibility "voluntarily" (note how popular "corporate social responsibility" has become). This contrast between the consolidation of coercive elements to regulate workers' will, and the increasing legitimacy of the call upon the good will of the business sector, is not perceived, however, as contradictory, since they stem from two different arguments.

The dissemination of this intervention model involves a regulatory review of the principles that have underlined previous intervention models. A representation of unemployment, or rather the lack of employability ('un-employability') is put forward as an

individual problem, which means that individuals carry the greater burden of responsibility for managing risk (of losing their job, for example), which is considered increasingly unavoidable. This proposed framework for understanding the social question, leads us to conceive of citizenship as a status that an individual has to earn, rather than as an inviolable right. Citizenship is constructed predominantly in individual rather than social terms, and is thus determined by individual behaviour (individual choices and attitudes). With this in mind, the function of the welfare state becomes one of combating dependence. The essence of the social question is no longer workers' dependent relationship with the market, and the issue of dependence upon the welfare state is increasingly viewed as problematic.

Activation policies, and the flexicurity framework, take part in a psychologisation process of employment, through which political and economic fragility transform into personal vulnerability, and the individual becomes the object of political intervention. Consequently, the depoliticization of employment goes hand in hand with the politicization of subjectivity.

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About the authors:

Amparo Serrano Pascual is lecturer at the Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology. Main topics of research : Comparative social policy. Activation policies and flexicurity. Work and subjectivity. The European social model. Some of her last publications: Serrano, A. (with Koistinen and, L. Mosésdottir) (eds) (2009) *Emerging systems of work and wel-*

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Eduardo Crespo Suárez, Professor of Social Psychology at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid. He is interested in the psychosociology of knowledge and the significance of work in the current context of both financial and social citizenship crisis. Some of his publications include *Introducción a la psicología social* [Introduction to social psychology] (1995, Universitas) and *La constitución social de la subjetividad* (edited with C. Soldevilla) [The social constitution of subjectivity] (2001, La Catarata).