

**To be unemployed is not to be dependent. The
politics of narratives surrounding unemployment**



Mathias Andersen

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Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen

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Preface

This thesis is about unemployment. It is a topic I hope to examine from new angles, through a research that focused on the moral role of the job-seeker. I did nearly six months of fieldwork in London, UK, from February to July 2012. This was a time when there was much worry about unemployment in Britain, as the national economy was in a recession. At the same time, the Government Coalition was proposing several changes in the national welfare policy; to reduce the costs of the welfare budget, and to get more people into employment through different incentives. It was perhaps the right time to study unemployment in Britain, for at this point issues revolving around unemployment became intensely debated in the media by politicians, employers, welfare agencies, and by a group of activists, some of whom became my informants. That spring, many of the latter joined in a campaign against the Government's austerity measures, and a part of that campaign focused on several workfare programmes. Workfare is the most commonly used term used for a number of work experience programs set up by the Government to place people on jobseekers allowance in workplaces, where they have to work to continue to receive their benefits. This was the main focus of a series of protests that rallied many activists, and included those on the extreme-left, anarchists, trade unionists, students and other members of the public. In the following chapters I will get back to the details about the activists and what they were protesting about.

I will in this thesis focus on the political role of the unemployed individual, and explore some of the categorization that surrounds unemployment, and how some people respond to this by trying to publicise an alternative discourse. I want to contribute to an understanding of unemployment in anthropology from an angle that tries to discern and examine how the "political" can arise as a part of an underlying narrative. The fieldwork was conducted only a few months after the riots that occurred in London and other major cities in Britain. This was one of the reasons I decided on London as my field, as I wanted to understand learn more about the possible relation between unemployment and radical political activity. This was partly based on a wish to explore how people's beliefs surrounding unemployment could be socially situated and how the values attached to those beliefs could be both political and moral in their nature. Unemployment has often in the literature been linked to shame, dependence and other social situations associated with negative connotations. In the field I noticed many contrasting definitions of what it means to be unemployed as well as contrasting structural explanations. I see those definitions as linked to moral discourses that shape how people view

and judge unemployment both as a category as well as the individuals who are unemployed. The essence of my argument is that unemployment is a socially constructed category that is perceived differently according to certain moral narratives that gain particular force at certain historical points in time. The economic crisis coupled with neo-liberal features of government welfare policy were crucial in providing the context within which moral narratives were deployed. Work is undoubtedly an important part of our modern society, but there are different conceptions of how and whether it is meaningful for the individual. Moreover, a specific kind of meaningfulness has assumed certain urgency within economic and moral discourses that were prominent at the time of my fieldwork.

This fieldwork needs to be located in the socio-economic context of the financial crisis of 2008, and subsequent recession in the UK. Some statistics will help to introduce this matter. Unemployment figures were rising from 4.8 per cent of the working age population in 2004 to nearly 8 per cent in 2012 (Office for National Statistics 2013a). The rate for young people was higher; about 20 per cent for 18-24 year olds in 2011-12 (Office for National Statistics 2013b). The unemployment figure in London was estimated to be 10.1 % for the period January-March 2012. This was however an estimate, and not the actual number claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), which was lower (about 6%). There are varying accounts of how many people are actually unemployed in the U.K, since many who are self-employed might actually be in a situation akin to unemployment. There is also no accurate figure of how many who are unemployed do not claim JSA. What is termed economic inactivity applies to people who are not in work, but who are not seeking work either, which separates them statistically from the unemployed. Economically inactive people can include disabled people or housewives. If included, the resulting rate would be much higher than the official unemployment rate. In 2012; the national unemployment rate in 2012 was 7.8 per cent of the working population, while the economic inactivity rate was at 22.6 per cent (Office for National Statistics 2013a). More women have become economically active since the 1970s, while more men have become economically inactive.

In August 2011 riots broke out in several of the major cities in England. Between 6 and 10 August 2011 there was a sense of anarchy about, police and rioters clashed in the streets, while there was widespread looting of local businesses in the high streets of London, Manchester, and Birmingham as well as other cities. It is estimated by the Riots Communities and Victims panel report (2012: 17) that between 13000 and 15000 participated in these riots and more than 5000 crimes were committed. The report argued that the riots had roots in high

levels of unemployment, poverty and loss of hope in some communities (2012)¹. 83 per cent of those interviewed saw youth unemployment as a problem for the local community. The unemployment figure in London is higher than in most other parts of the country, only the North-East has a higher unemployment rate (Greater London Authority 2012a). According to the report cited above, young adults are twice as likely to be unemployed as other parts of the working age population. I focus on this age group in my thesis; most of my informants were in their twenties or early thirties.

In the first chapter I will first give a short introduction to my fieldwork and its setting before I introduce some of my main informants. To respect their anonymity, all names are fictionalised except for public individuals referred to by the informants such as politicians. I will then describe the resistance groups, which I refer to as the activists, and their on-going conflict with the government. The second and third chapters will focus on the activists in more detail, where I will detail their protests and world view. The fourth chapter will start with an exploration of unemployment in relation to welfare. Welfare reform is the heart of the matter in my thesis, as it was the target of the activists' resistance. It was an on-going political controversy while I was in London. The current government won the election in 2010 promising to cut expenses in the welfare bill. This government gave new urgency to implementing conditional forms of welfare that it saw as meant to deal abuses of welfare, often termed "welfare culture". The dominant narrative was that the jobseekers should attempt to improve themselves, not only in terms of skills but also in theirs of motivation and willingness to work. A new "contractualist doctrine" has become part of modern western societies for some time now, and it has at its core a belief in the individual's ability to choose his or her fate (Yeatman 1998: 227). This has served to make the individuals more responsible for their own welfare. The role of the state becomes that of helping the individual to choose what is best for him and her, intervening in subject's lives to help them help themselves. In the context I am describing, the unemployed are constructed as having lost the will and motivation to work and so this requires coercive corrective state interventions such as temporary and sometimes mandatory placements in the labour market. Increased policing and sanctions through using the allocation and withdrawal of monetary allowances or benefits are examples of such management. The last section of the fourth chapter will present some

¹ The Riots, Communities and Victims Panel was appointed by the Government to look into the causes behind the riots. Their report was published in March 2012, seven months after the riots. The panel had conducted widespread interviews with those involved and affected by the Riots, as well as the rioters themselves.

personal stories from my informants, and I will end the chapter with a discussion of the term reciprocity in relation to unemployment. In the fifth chapter, I will discuss some core concepts in this thesis: resistance, morality and individuality. These are terms that were continually used throughout my fieldwork, and they will be used to discuss unemployment as a social situation from several viewpoints.

Chapter one - Introduction to the field

The setting

London is more than just the capital city of Britain and the largest city in north-west Europe. Once it was the heart of the British Empire, and had in the beginning of the 20th century the highest population of any city in the world. In a country that has had to come to terms with the fact that it is no longer the colonial superpower it once was, London still retains some of that imperial pride with a financial market that keeps the economy going and a tourism economy that attracts millions of tourists each year. It is an ethnically diverse city, ever-expanding as migrants flock from the continent and beyond to seek work opportunities. Home to more than 8 million people, the city has many different aspects to it. To most Londoners it does not suffice to say that you are simply from London, you have to state which part of the city you come from or live in, as the different boroughs have their own specific social environments, relations and history. What is now called London was an area consisting of different villages that merged in time with the growing city. Regional differences still exist between different boroughs, both in dialect and in demography.

I moved to East-London, often referred to as the East-End. This was once, and still is to some degree, a traditional working class area. London has always been a city both for the very wealthy and for the very poor. Since the Second World War it has become one of the more ethnically diverse parts of London as immigrants, many from Commonwealth countries, have moved into the housing estates built in the post-war years. I lived in the borough of Newham, located in the old industrial docklands, and also spent a lot of time in the neighbouring borough of Hackney. Both boroughs have undergone much transformation as the 2012 Olympics were held in this area. Newham is a borough with great ethnic diversity; in a 2011 census it was found that 24 % of households in Newham did not have any members who spoke English as their main language (Greater London Authority 2012b). When people spoke of Newham it was with the expression that it was not the first choice for residence, but it was not the worst, it was for many a commuters' borough; relatively cheap and not far from the city. Due to its Olympic setting, the borough had been "cleaned up", as an informant expressed it. To make the area more attractive to business, new buildings and facilities were created, such as the massive Westfield Shopping Centre adjacent to the Olympic Park. It was hoped by many that the changes that the Olympics had brought to the borough would continue also in the next years.

A high population density is reflected in the size of the housing. Both boroughs are characterised by that typical English urban environment that is long streets consisting of terraced houses or so-called “semis” (semi-detached houses) as well as larger estates that dominate the skyline. Families of four or five are often crammed into apartments which are small in size. Something that I have been told is unique with London is how each area is a kind of village with its own “centre”, which is the high street with its accompanying banks, retail markets, mobile phone shops, pubs, bookmakers and kebab houses. The high streets were the typical setting for the activists when they held demonstrations in the boroughs, as they were the public spaces frequented by most people. However, many other demonstrations also took place in Central London around political landmarks such as outside Parliament and different Ministries in the Westminster district. My fieldwork was not situational, in the sense that I was not tied to one particular setting or neighbourhood but rather located my field in the use of the public spaces traversed by the activists. It was therefore less geographically sited than socially sited in the public spaces and squares, where the activists sought to broadcast their own discourses, ideas and political positions. To a large extent, the urban setting provided the context that shaped this political space. I see the fieldwork setting as multi-sited in the sense that it contained different “spaces” and locations. Keeping in mind Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson’s critical examination of what constitutes the “field”, I have been trying to avoid the construction of the field as “elsewhere” and not “here” as well as trying to view the field not as geographical space but as a result of social relations, including relations of power (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 35). It does not have to do with physical locations, but can also mean cyberspace. This will be elaborated further in the third chapter where I will discuss the use of the political spaces by the activists.

The East-End is an area that has a longstanding history of working class culture. It is often associated with the cultural stereotype of the Cockney. This term also refers to a distinctive way of speaking that has become iconic of the classic working class English dialect and personality, jocular and down to earth. It is emblematic of a certain sort of working class person and a culture identified with the local neighbourhood. Class is here portrayed as a style; it assumes an aesthetic sense that has been seen to be a distinctive presentation of the self. There is partly a certain nostalgia in this, as if the “real” working class culture is now gone. Today there is a greater ethnic diversity and cockney is no longer a feature that is exclusively based on white working class culture. It is not any longer associated

with the colour of a person's skin. Many migrants have internalised this dialect and culture, and by doing so perhaps feel they create a better sense of national belonging.

The East End has always been diverse, inasmuch as Britain's working class has never been a homogenous group. London has long been multicultural because of its imperial past. In the East-end there is a history of migration; the Irish and Jewish people from Poland and Germany were among those who moved there in the 19th century. Before that, French Huguenots settled in the same area. Different to other working class areas, diversity has been part of the appeal of this area's national image as a working class symbol (Lammers 2005). The East-end has long figured in national imagination as a special kind of working class community. In films and in television shows, the East End has often been portrayed as the home of authentic British working class culture². This area is close to the wealth of the city, yet also very distant from both wealth and power, an apt scenario for capturing class tensions in television and film. Like other international cities, London has long been a city that has sharp contrasts with both great wealth and poverty. This inequality of wealth was a recurring theme at the activists' protests and part of their narrative about a "class war" waged by the rich on the poor.

East-London is also an area where you see the old and the new, existing next to each other. There is a large influx of younger people that has moved here because of the relatively cheap housing. A large student population is residing there, in addition to a large segment of young professionals. It is interesting to note how this youth centred "gentrification" is mixed with other cultural groups, such as in Brick Lane, a street famous for its curry houses and Bangladeshi shops but also for its "trendy" bars and cafes. Alongside this youth-centred culture you still find the older working class culture meeting places of the workman's café and pubs, often further down the same street.

Living in the shadow of an economic crisis

This urban fieldwork touches on some "modernity issues", such as economic cycles, globalization, shifting labour markets and immigration. As the labour market has changed it is clear that this has had an impact on the working population. A more unstable work environment is evident, one that is characterised by more part time and casual work, as well as by a heightened sense of job-insecurity and unemployment. As in many other western post-

² There are many examples: The long running BBC show East-Enders and nostalgic drama series Call the Midwife are both fictionally located in the East-London boroughs.

industrialized societies, the old forms of labour such as factories and the docks have been replaced with a job market that increasingly is based on the service sector, typically in retail, commerce, health sector and various forms of office work. Many jobs in the service sector demand not just professional skills such as various computer skills, accounting, but also “soft skills” such as teamwork and communication³. The typical working class person now works in a call centre or as a shop-assistant in Tesco, a British retailer and supermarket chain. These have become the “new factories”, as I was told once by a campaigner for workers’ rights. His campaign was aiming to unionize the workers in the service sector. Historically this sector has not been unionised to the same extent as traditional labour movement strongholds, such as the factories and mines. But while he said they were the “new factories”, he did not mean it in a positive way, as he claimed they lacked the job security of the “old factories”, and workers were often only given temporary work. Often a job description calls for a worker that is flexible, meaning that the working hours will be less fixed, implying evening, night, as well as weekend and holiday shifts. I will later in this thesis argue that this is connected to what can be termed “employability”; and that the restructured labour market requires a different sort of employable citizens. Employability could mean a range of skills and expertise, but is most of all about having the will to work. This will to work was seen to be lost among many of the unemployed in Britain.

Although the competition for jobs could be hard, some people I spoke to also emphasised the opportunities in this city. London is a multimillion city and a place that attracts individuals, both from Britain and overseas, looking for employment. The diversity of opportunities confirms the idea for many that it is most of all a question of will, resilience and perseverance if one wants to find work. There is an influx of people, mostly young, who come from different EU countries looking for work. I have spoken to several that came from countries such as Romania, Poland, Italy and Spain. For them, London was a potential place of opportunity. Interestingly, many jobs in service-based and low-skilled occupations such as waiters and baristas were increasingly given to recent migrants who have come to London to seek work. They are seen by some employers as having a stronger work ethic than English

³ University of Lancaster research group The Work Foundation found that among young people not in education, training or employment (NEETs) it was increasingly important to have “soft skills” that were adapted to a changing labour market. “For those young people with less developed soft skills, accessing the labour market is likely to have become more difficult as a result of these shifts.” (Sissons and Jones 2012: 21).

youth, who are depicted as lacking proper motivation⁴. The main requirements that foreign workers might be more willing to accept is being able to work long hours, odd hours, weekend and holidays, and lastly: for low wages.

The activists saw the unstable economy as a win-win situation for the employers: with a highly competitive job market and a large reserve of unemployed, the employers could more easily fire their workers, because they could always find someone else to replace them. In their eyes, the balance of power between the employer and employees had shifted in favour of the former. It was depicted as a situation where employees had to work harder to keep their jobs. This improved their productivity but their wages remained low.

First contact with informants

Let me first document where I came to live and how I became familiar with informants. Through an ad on the internet, I found a room in a semi-detached house that I was to share with two other people. Along with my focus on the activists, I wanted to talk to unemployed people who did not share the political views of the activists. Through the people I lived with I came in contact with the first person I could consider as an informant. When I first moved to London, I had no network so it was great help for me to have help from my flatmates. They had a friend, George, whom I spent a lot of time with, and we talked a lot about his day to day life of being out of work. His story will be summarised in the following section. I will return to his story in the fourth chapter. Born in Nigeria, he moved to London when he was eight years old and had later become a British Citizen. He later got an education in sales management, and was approaching 30 when I met him. In the course of the last couple of years he had been in and out of work. His previous employment had been to sell and advertise sports equipment to different mid-level grossers across London. Later he supplied credit card terminals to smaller shops and kiosks. This had been problematic because the company he worked for had made sure that he was personally responsible for these terminals once he had sold them to the clients. This meant that he received calls at all hours from former clients who had problems with their card terminals. So he quit this job, partly because of the low pay compared to the amount of work he was required to contribute. His subsequent problems in finding work were compounded by the recession. Because of his education, he was only able to get jobs that gave him a low salary sufficient just to live on. Now, without this steady income, he had to apply for jobs that were both insecure and below the income levels he

⁴ see for example Dunn (2012a)

earlier had. Once he told me, that he thought that a specific employer did not want to hire him because he did have both education and experience, which meant that he would be too expensive in terms of wages. So he said that he felt underemployed, and at the same time overqualified.

The impression that I received from George and his friends was that certain stereotypes informed the choices made by both employers when hiring people as well as the employees in applying for jobs. The importance of informal networks was also evident. George believed that knowing people in the business meant more than having the right skills. He spent much time on trying to find contacts, such as calling people he had met at conventions and events. Through George I got to know some of the Nigerian community where I was living. If you belonged to a certain ethnic group, this could open the door to certain types of employment through personal contacts and family networks. Two of George's friends had worked as security guards, jobs that they had gotten through their network. The job entailed night shifts in a bank, and both had quit because of the strain the work imposed on them. One of them, Sean, told me that he had problems with sleeping after having done this kind of work for a long time. His sleeping patterns had changed, and he later struggled with insomnia, which he attributed to that job. Now he was self-employed, "working in the music business". As an agent he tried to get musical acts, mostly Hip Hop and R'n'B, from Nigeria to move to London so they could break into a wider audience. It was not something he got much out of in terms of money. He was continuously broke, but refused to go the Job Centre Plus⁵ to sign up as unemployed, as this meant that he would "give up his freedom". He was one of many that struck me as living on the border between self-employed and unemployed, economically inactive according to statistics.

My remaining informants were mostly in the network of activists. I found the activists through the internet for they used it to organize their demonstrations and promote their worldview. I used these demonstrations to get to know the activists, which I will describe in the next chapter. Many of the activists were post-graduates who had a substantial debt after having finished university and no means to repay it. The broken illusion of upward social mobility was now confronted with low income, low pay, and no work after finished university. This was perceived as injustice, and it was enough for many students to turn

⁵ Job Centre Plus is a government agency run by Department of Work and Pensions that is dealing with citizens signing up as unemployed. It provides services to those who sign up as unemployed. The job-seeker has to go there in person to claim benefits.

politically active. As many working class children have become university students, there was a supply off good-skilled workers in the UK but not a demand. This has led to increasing competition between graduates in the labour market. One must at all times try to increase one's qualifications in order to "keep up" (MacDonald 2011: 434). Even competition for unpaid internships was hard. One informant told me how he had applied for a 3-month internship in an organization working with social surveys and statistics. There had been 150 applicants for 15 positions. Such internships were usually based on the interns only getting a small symbolic fee, such as travel expenses or getting their lunch money covered. In a market with such a high degree of competition, unpaid internships were highly sought, as a "foot in the door" in the job market. The fourth chapter will include a more detailed analysis of how volunteering and internships was a way of "increasing" employability for young unemployed in London.

Welfare to work – "The facts" as they were presented

The anti-austerity protests I am writing about have to be contextualised by understanding the political climate in Britain at the time. The 2010 election was won by a coalition of Conservative and Liberal Democrats which promised to restore prosperity to Britain by reducing governmental debt. The Government claimed that the country could no longer afford the welfare expenses, and therefore the whole nation would have to go through a period of austerity measures. The debts could not be tackled without a reform of welfare spending which took up a third of all government spending (Osborne 2010). The task was framed as a collective effort for the whole nation, as the Chancellor George Osborne declared in a speech: "A new welfare system where it always pays to work. Tough but fair. Because we are all in this together" (Osborne 2010). This involved introducing austerity measures that reduced the governmental expenditure on welfare as well as education⁶. In all, government spending was forecast to be down £81bn by 2015, and 400 000 public sector jobs were to be lost in the same period. According to the government policy, the private sector would take on the people that ended up unemployed because of this downsizing.

As I briefly outlined in the introduction, the activists' main political target during my fieldwork was the campaign to boycott what they termed "Workfare" in addition to more general protests against government's austerity policies. The new programmes varied in content, length and ambition. The Coalition Government put forward the Work Programme as

⁶ See for example BBC (2010) and Conservatives (n.d.)

their “flagship”, introduced to supposedly simplify the welfare system and help people into to work (DWP 2012a). This and other similar schemes such as the Mandatory Work Activity and Work Experience schemes were run by different organisations for Job Centre Plus⁷. These programs were contracted out to private, public and voluntary sector organisations. The Work Programme requires participation for those who has been unemployed for more than 9 months (age 18-24) or a year (aged 24+). It was launched June 2011. The participants do not receive salaries from the workplaces under which they are placed, but continue to receive their benefits.

Workfare has been understood by some scholars as a feature of contractual governance, a form of welfare where the obligations and duties of the citizen are emphasised alongside his or her rights. Contractualism has been favoured by governments as policy in Britain since the 1980s (King 1999; King and Freedland 2003). The job-seeker and the public authority are meant to enter a contractual arrangement. Ideally, it gives the citizen more rights as it is based on freedom of choice and individual autonomy. According to the Department of Work and Pensions the idea behind this programme was to move the unemployed into work temporarily to give them experience and so as to push them towards wanting to work in the future (DWP 2012a). It is supposed to remove barriers that keep people from searching for and staying in work, making them more employable. It has to do with installing conventional work norms among people on welfare, and forge a relation where the state can require adults to help themselves (Mead 1989). Yet it has also been paired with illiberal practices because it leads to situations where the unemployed individual is seen to be coerced into work, and subject to sanctions (Dean 2002; King 1999; Jayasuriya 2002). Interestingly, the initiatives launched by the Coalition government itself was in many ways a continuation of the New Labour stance towards welfare, which also built upon welfare to work programmes. Indeed, it was also labelled “tough but fair”, this time by the employment minister at the time, Andrew Smith (King 1999: 251).

The activists were claiming that the government’s welfare plans included some “illiberal” features. They based their claims on the fact that mandatory programs could dock the benefits of those participants who did not follow the rules, although this was contested by spokespeople from the Government. In the Work Programme, a mandation can be used to make the participants undertake activity. “Mandation is a tool to be used to encourage

⁷ See adviceguide.org.uk for more information.

participation in the work programme with sanctionable consequences for non-participation” (DWP 2013: 1). In addition, sanctioning, known as DMA, could be applied to jobseekers if it is deemed that they have not “looked hard enough for a job”, or as a consequence of a “refusal of employment”. This sanction means that they lose their Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), but they can apply for a hardship allowance, usually half the amount of JSA. It would seem that the previous use of such sanctions had been irregular, but after the widespread attention to “Workfare” and the initial protests, the Government claimed that it was no longer threatening sanctions for those who left the scheme, making it completely voluntary (Köksal 2012). This was celebrated as a step in the right direction by the activist. According to them, the sanction against a person’s JSA was a way of punishing unemployed people for being unemployed and was unjustifiable even if a jobseeker failed to comply with the requirements of the programme they were part of. The workplaces receiving unemployed people have been some of the biggest corporations in Britain. Some pulled out or made it clear that they were intending to pull out when the activists managed to get publicity about the threat of sanctions and the non-voluntary nature of the programme. The protest against the workfare schemes highlighted that it is a technique by the government to reduce official unemployment figures without actually removing the problem of unemployment. Instead it individualises the problem of unemployment. They argued that it was a classic “neoliberal project” of outsourcing the responsibility of the state to the private sector; increasing profit for private corporations who get cheap labour paid for by government benefits.

When I asked activists why they were protesting against these programs since they could actually benefit the jobseeker by giving them experience, the responses often centred on the useless labour that workfare produced. For them it is important that there is “meaningful work”. Those supporting such welfare to work programs argue that all work experience is good experience, and that it is giving people a chance to prove that they can work. This assumes that what deter people from working is not barriers such as lack of skill or no available jobs but a lack of a motivation for work (Mead 1989: 164-165). This chance to prove what one is good for, and to display the will to work is supposedly what people are lacking in Britain nowadays. Since its implementation, the Work programme has been expanded on a large scale throughout the country. According to government statistics there have been 693,000 attachments to the Work Programme until April 2012 (Department of Work and Pensions 2012b). I cannot be the judge of its effectiveness in this thesis, but will rather look at how its structural ambiguity leads to different perspectives on whether it is well

meant or not. It is a way to understand some of the moral narratives that are deployed and I will analyse this further in the following section.

Moral narratives

The acts of resistance by people who lack belief in what they often called the “system” or “establishment” are examples of an alternative discourse to the status quo. Discourse can be understood as a way of thinking about a subject, and this happens through the usage of different words that express this meaning in one way or another. These ways of thinking are often accepted as the truth, e.g. for the activists, the truth was imbued with a political belief in resistance to the austerity. My informants among the activists were students, unemployed and the working poor, people who experienced that there were many reasons to be pessimistic about the future if the policies of the government were to continue. They sought to secure the future and cope with unemployment through acting politically and in this I use “political” in its broadest possible terms to encompass their everyday life experiences that they go through. The activist’s resistance was in the open; they often used every available space to spread their message. But I was also interested in getting to know those who were less explicit about their political expectation and opinions. Focusing only on public acts of political resistance will leave out a significant section of everyday life that also has its own moral narratives regarding unemployment. These moral narratives deal with both welfare, and rights to receive benefits in addition to issues that deal with youth, immigration and ethnic diversity. There are different and contested notions of being “British” that compete for authentic belonging to the state and the benefits that this “belonging” grants. Some ethnic and social groups (such as single mothers) are more easily targeted as being scroungers than others. These ethnic stereotypes were influenced by the fact that unemployment rates were higher among particular groups (see below).

My fieldwork has engaged different groups, and I want to use this as an advantage and see how working class solidarity can take different forms. Unemployment is a situation that cuts across many social boundaries, even though some groups have higher levels of unemployment, e.g. in 2011 Black Londoners had a unemployment rate of 20% while White Londoners had a rate of 7% (Greater London Authority 2012a: 5). The activists were radical groupings that recruited from different social groups; workers, unemployed, students and other welfare recipients. Many had families with a working class background but had personally experienced a slight rise in social mobility especially through acquiring higher

education. Now, this had become a burden, with no available relevant work and a large debt, they wondered whether this education was worth it at all. In a sense, they were not prepared to be pushed down the social ladder they had climbed. Simultaneously politicians and other media figures argued that these young educated jobless expected too much. “Young people in Britain today have too much of a sense of entitlement, they don’t want jobs that are below them”. This was said by a user in a discussion group online about unemployment in the UK. The user continued: “Went to a construction site, plenty of eastern European workers there, the foreman said he would love to employ British people if they were willing”. This comment is telling of how unemployment is viewed by many in Britain today, as it was lamented that British jobs no longer goes to British workers (Slack 2012). This view was based on the assumption that it is not the availability of work that is the main problem, but the “will to work”.

I view the activists as part of competing narratives regarding the welfare state and benefits. These narratives concern what constitutes a morally “right” welfare system, who has the right to be benefit recipients. This has to do with what a citizenship entails, and a demand for citizens to present themselves as ready to work, based on a narrow set of criteria. Many of these narratives are driven by moral outrage against welfare cheats and this authorizes increased sanctions and policing of jobseekers. There was a constant monitoring of the job seeking efforts of individuals. This can be interpreted as a way of judging and/or measuring their moral being, and whether they have the “right” to be helped or considered whether they are a worthy active citizen. Parallel to this, it was claimed that not only individuals, but also local Job Centres are under this surveillance, leading them to compete against each other so as to have the lowest number of claimants. According to the activists, Job Centre staff were under pressure to look for reasons to withdraw benefits from claimants, such as if they were ten minutes late for an appointment and so on. The claim is that there is a neoliberal business mentality applied to social services; this is reflected in language and in praxis. Using market economy mentality, individuals were urged to promote themselves, and enhance their employability skills while at the same time the Job Centres were going through structural changes to conform to a market model. This is the backdrop that I am writing against. In the following section I will outline some academic research on the themes I explore in this thesis.

Theoretical Perspectives

There is a considerable amount of work in anthropology that has focused on unemployed young men, and this includes Britain. Young men form a demographic group that is often studied when anthropologists study unemployment. It can include post-graduates who have finished university (Jeffrey 2010) or boys who have left school and are “doing nothing” (Willis 1993). Unemployed young men have often been seen as a problematic group, which might have contributed to the number of studies. The idle young male, seen as loitering, has long been a concern for the parent generation, portrayed in the media and by state authorities as a cause for moral panic (Cohen 2002). Youth is a category situated between childhood and adulthood, and linked to a progress between these states. Unemployment can be seen as disturbing this progress from child to adult (Mains 2007). In between these states, youth often become understood from an adult perspective as a trajectory (Hall 2006:160). By instead looking at youth as identity, some scholars have understood youthful culture as something highlights the marginality that comes from being in-between (Hebdige 1979). To be adult male and still dependent can be seen as compromised masculinity. As such, male unemployment is viewed as a bigger problem. Women are often instead associated with the invisible unpaid work of housekeeping which means that even if they are unemployed there are contributions to the family which become part of their identity. This does not apply to men in the same way.

Many studies focus on how young men deal with the free time they have on their hands (e.g. Willis 1993; Jeffrey 2010; Mains 2007). Recurrent themes include the alternative forms of social capital that these men produce, and inter-group solidarity among them. Being separated from paid work might be interpreted as threatening for their masculinity, and some writers argue that solidarity among the unemployed men produces a reinforcement of their masculinity. Social acts such as passing time, or hanging out, is seen as way for men to “retake” public spaces, defying the notion of failure, and instead “displaying” their unemployment proudly as a form of independence from the rule and control of others (Jeffrey 2010: 473). Philippe Bourgois’ study of Puerto Ricans in East-Harlem can serve as example. He focused on a group of men that were structurally marginalised who engaged in underground economy as well as sexually predatory acts and interpersonal violence to rebuild their masculine dignity (Bourgois 1996: 414). Bourgois frames it as a sort of masculine resistance to the conditions the men are in. This could be interpreted in the language of James C. Scott as a form of everyday resistance. Scott writes that acts such as open resistance and

revolt rarely leads to any social reform, and stresses the small acts of “offstage” everyday resistance (1990: 18, 1985: xvii). He uses examples of non-compliance, foot-dragging and poaching among peasants, but also of folk tales and stories that subordinate groups tell each other when not in the presence of the rulers. Resistance that is secret, and/or so minuscule that the rulers do not bother to intervene. In his classic work on subculture and style from late 1970s England, Dick Hebdige saw youth subculture as a form of resistance to hegemony, by both appropriating dominant definitions of themselves and at the same time contesting these definitions (1979). This study and other studies from the Birmingham school focused on the creative agency of youth culture. They create their own networks of cultural and social capital, often in resistance to hegemonic values, establishing authority based on what they see as legitimate or not. An example of this is Paul Willis’ work on working class youth who resist and differentiate themselves from middle class values in the school system (1993). These youths embody an anti-school behaviour that values the subversive effects of certain kinds of humour and rudeness that opposes the teachers. This focus on counter culture has influenced how young unemployed men have been understood in anthropology (Jeffrey 2010). In the fifth chapter, I will discuss different conceptions of resistance, linked to the activists who are very explicit in their resistance to government, the media and certain mainstream caricatures.

In this thesis I use Michel Foucault’s works on power and subjectivity as a theoretical framework. His notions of government rationality and control are important to my understanding of how the state builds institutions and techniques of power around the citizens so as to form them in a particular way. Contemporary forms of state power takes both an individualizing and totalizing form and he sees it as derived from what he terms “Pastoral Power” (Foucault 1982: 782). It is centred on the image of the priest or clergy as a shepherd who takes moral care of his flock, and Foucault traces its roots in Judaism and how it was adopted by Christian rulers. This form of power is about looking after the individual and not just the community as a whole. The modern state is a:

“, (...) very sophisticated structure, in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form and submitted to a set of very specific patterns. In a way, we can see the state as a modern matrix of individualization or a new form of pastoral power.” (Foucault 1982:783)

Pastoral power was in its initial form about spiritual care for the individual, which today comes in the form partly of a welfare state. It is a difficult form of power to realise or

implement for the citizens in a modern welfare state have legal and political rights that guarantee them as free individuals (Dean 2003: 76). They are thus often a challenging “flock” to manage for the pastor, social welfare worker or government official. A solution can be presented in the way that the modern individual is given the responsibility for him or herself through “technologies of the self”. Foucault describes these technologies as operations that individuals undertake on themselves in order to achieve a level of perfection, purity, wisdom etc. (Foucault 2003: 146). What is important is how modern governance relies on individuals to govern themselves, requiring certain kinds of behavior from them.

For Foucault modern government rationality is a result of the encounter between technologies of domination and technologies of the self. Government is a “conduct of conduct”, and this refers to how human behaviour is directed and controlled through increasingly non-violent techniques (Foucault 1982; Foucault 1993; Dean 2003:10). The pastoral power of the government can be a form of domination that requires the subjects of a state to improve themselves, through directing their conduct. Increasing the will to work among the unemployed becomes such a “conduct”. The “salvation” that the Christian pastor was aiming for is in the modern form substituted with worldly aims, and the technologies that they have to work upon are self-esteem and motivation, values that resembles what I have termed *employability*. As a form of government rationality, neo-liberalism is not only directed at opening up spaces for the subject to act as “*Homo Economicus*”, for it is also about managing how subjects invest in their own consumption and happiness (Foucault 2008). Here the logic of investment is not just in economic sphere, but is applied to other social arenas, such as marriage, education, hobbies and indeed all actions can be viewed as investing in your own human capital⁸. Everything in the social and human can be analysed in economic terms, in terms of investment (Foucault 2008: 244). The key component to a state is not territory but the population as subjects to be improved and developed, the *human capital*. And the growth of the state is linked to the development of its citizens. Through their freedom as consumers, as entrepreneurs, the subjects regulate themselves; produce a particular version of themselves through certain technologies of the self. In other words: citizens are given greater responsibility for their own lives, it might entail greater freedom but it also comes at a risk (Rose 1996a: 57-58). Citizens are now responsible for managing their own economic

⁸ He references Chicago-School economics like Gary Becker who applied their economic thinking on human capital to spheres outside of the economic.

governance actively (Rose 1996b: 339). I will describe below how risk of unemployment can be dealt with by seemingly liberal policies such as workfare.

Mitchell Dean build upon Foucault work in his own analysis of Liberal government's use of stricter welfare regimes in Australia. Liberal government is capable of authoritarian means when it deals with populations that are deemed to be at "high risk" such as "welfare dependents" (2002: 47). While the liberal government is supposed to "govern through freedom"; such populations can be subject to surveillance and workfare programs, because they must first be "freed" from their own dependency (ibid). Those who are needed to be placed under welfare supervision are seen as "outside" normal society, comparable to Dean's term "high risk" and must therefore be re-socialized into rational economic actors (2002: 47). This welfare policy focuses on the individual's employability, making it the main criterion that decides/determines whether he or she will be successful in obtaining a job. This freeing of individuals from their supposedly desire to be dependent is what Dean refers to as "technologies of agency". Such measures are supposed to empower individuals, increase their self-esteem, skills and motivation to work, in effect making them into entrepreneurs of the self (2003:168). Employability became such a measure in the U.K, focusing on individuals enhancing their own agency as job-seekers. They had to continually prove their agency. Here employability referred not so much to skills or craftsmanship but had to do with the individual's motivation for work and his or her skills in communicating this. As such it is suited to an age where most work is not found in manual occupations but in the service industry.

Free work programs such as the Work Programme and Mandatory Work Activity are ways of measuring and increasing work motivation, based on the explicit ideology of creating a work ethic. This is the duty that is expected of citizens in return for the benefits that they receive, and a feature of contractual welfare. The existence of such programs suggests that they target populations whose habits and subjectivity are seen as not conforming to the standards set by the state. The state then seeks to manage and improve the subjectivity and morality of these individuals through training schemes. Employability becomes an index of whether an unemployed individual is able to improve the attitudes and values that the state seeks in its subjects so that they can become agents in the labour market. The moral narrative of benefit cheats influences the subjects not only externally through public discourse, media and policy, but is also internalised by some people, for they can also reproduce these moral narratives. A poll in December 2012 undertaken by research firm YouGov for the Trade

Union TUC found that the respondents on average thought that 27 % of the welfare budget was claimed by fraud, while the real estimate was approximately 0,7% . Furthermore the same poll showed that while the respondents on average thought that 41% of the welfare budget went to unemployment benefits, the real figure was 3 % (Trades Union Congress 2013). This is indicative of the extent that notions of scroungers are rooted in public discourse.

Work has a longstanding relation to moral value. Through an analysis of how time was measured through labour, historian E.P Thompson shows how the industrial capitalism introduced a new way of comprehending “work”. He argues that work patterns differed in the time before the industrial capitalism, for time was not measured in the same linear progressive way but more according to the cycle of agriculture and the seasons. Time was also task-oriented (Thompson 1967: 60). With the first generations of factory workers, a new conception of time and work became dominant. “They had learned their lesson, that time is money, only too well” (Thompson 1967:86). There was propaganda towards the working class that time must be put to use, marketed. There is in our society now a clear divide between “work” and “life”, and it stems from this rigorous change that industrial capitalism brought on. Puritanism, in par with industrial capitalism was the force that taught the new valuations of time and work (1967:93). This mirrors Max Weber’s influential analysis of the economic rationalism and work ethic developed among Protestants. It was the ethos of puritanism and especially Calvinism that according to Weber brought about the changes in society in Northern Europe known as the industrial revolution (1993). For this ethos was grounded in a belief in hard work, work was a value in itself, and leisure or time-wasting became a sin. It was an asceticism where the only way to be a good Christian was to follow the calling and work as a way of glorifying God; “Unwillingness to work is symptomatic of the lack of grace” (Weber 1993: 159). In his study of unemployment in a fishing village in Newfoundland, anthropologist Cato Wadel found that the moral imperative of work was important to the employed and unemployed alike. Backbreaking work such as logging often came at a cost to the workers but it was praiseworthy precisely because it was something one *should* do despite the costs (Wadel 1973: 109). It was through earning a living that a man could claim reciprocity in the local community. The American sociologist Richard Sennett writes that a long tradition of liberal thinkers have influenced the idea that dependence demeans the individual. Sennett mentions Locke and Kant and their idea of rational behaviour, as well the Protestant Work Ethic as reasons for the negative way dependence often is depicted in contemporary society. Sennett maintains that this coupling of dependence

and shame is culturally specific; there are cultures where dependence is normal among adults (2003: 114-115).

Methodical considerations

The principal method for gathering data in social anthropology is participant observation, through fieldwork. The fieldworker is expected to participate in the everyday activities of his or her informants. We take part in people's lives and they influence our lives. It is no longer believed that our presence does not affect our informants; in fact, one could say that they observe us as well, making their own observations and judgements. In recent times, fieldwork has been expected to rely more on participation while it was more based around observation in the early days of anthropology. I tried in my fieldwork to balance these two roles, as participator and observer. There was no use maintaining a detached analytical distance and just observe if I wanted to participate in the protests and earn the respect of the other protesters. So I went along with them, although a bit more in the background than out in the front of the protest. Protesting is a highly social act; you stand around, waiting or marching, passing the time talking to the others. This informal chatting gave as much insight and understanding as formal interviewing could have done. Most of the information I have gathered is the result of informal conversations with my informants, where I let them decide the conversational topic, although at times I acted more as an interviewer. Often, the topic of the discussions was not prompted by me but by my informants. I found that it was the easiest way to do conversation. Especially the activists were keen on talking away about their subjects of interest. Most discussions and interviews were one-to-one, which made it easier for my informant to express themselves more confidentially. I am also incorporating public statements and speeches made at protests into my analysis. I treat these as discourse and as articulating key symbols that condense and convey important meanings and messages. It is important to note that much of what was being said by the activists did not reflect all of them. They were a fragmentary group, and utilised different ways of communicating their message, as I will document in the second and third chapter.

This thesis contains many references and examples from the British press. The principal reason is that in Britain the media has a very strong role in forming and articulating public opinion, Britons are avid readers of newspapers. Newspapers mattered to my informants who saw themselves as responding back to the media, as trying to capture and modify it. The media's role in informing people about the news was seen as shaping their opinions about

political issues. Many of my informants were responding back to papers such as The Sun and Daily Mail where the moral narratives of “scroungers” was created, or at least widely broadcast. Most activists mistrusted the mainstream media, feeling that they were covering issues unfairly, but also tried to get coverage in the mainstream media with their protests.

This thesis explores the different beliefs surrounding unemployment in Britain at a particular historical point in time. There are many different views, beliefs and opinions about the theme that I am writing about, and this thesis is not exhaustive, there are many voices to be heard in this matter, many I have not had the chance to include. I chose this fieldwork project because I had some assumptions and ideas that were rooted in a political perspective. Through the fieldwork, as I became engaged in the activists struggle I also heard many of their beliefs. Though this political belief has informed how I chose to do this fieldwork this does not mean that I have only tried to present one side of the current debate. I tried as best I could to talk to people with beliefs that were opposed to the activists, to understand their arguments as well. Furthermore, this thesis includes articles from the media and public statements to exemplify the discourse the activists were opposing. I tried to locate the context of these statements. Exposing how this subjectivity was formed in my work is a way towards objectivity, although I am aware that it cannot be fully objective. Subjectivity is situational and is historically positioned, and I hope to make these structures of subjectivity as clear as possible.

Unemployment can be an intimate and a personal issue for many, for reasons I have already discussed. Because of this it was not always easy to get people to talk about except in a general sense. While some unemployed can adopt a sense of humour or irony about their situation, others become more depressed and distressed. I found many people were often more inclined to talk about other people’s unemployment than their own. Some of the activists who were unemployed were more open about it, and used their own unemployment as a narrative to explain the wider problems of unemployment, while others preferred to talk about how unemployment was a problem for all workers today. The following chapter will outline how the activists and their organisations, and describe their acts of protest.

Chapter two – Protest against austerity

This chapter will focus on the activists. It will describe a couple of selected protests in detail. The focus will be on the imagery and rhetoric of these protests, whose meaning is also found in personal statements made by activists. I will also include statements and reactions from the wider public who act as the audience to the protests I describe.

Saying no to austerity

I first caught note of the activist groups when they launched a counter-narrative to the government-introduced Work programme in late February through a campaign that eventually caught the attention of the national media. They were entering several high-street outlets of workfare providers and loudly protesting the use of work placement, and questioning who actually gained from this programme. A couple of protesters decided to lie down on the shop floor and refused to let the staff move them in a Tesco near Westminster. Protesting like this, with the threat of being arrested for their actions and manhandled by security staff, convinced me that they were passionate about gaining attention to their cause. While they had been protesting against workfare for a while, it was in February 2012 that they captured the attention of the national media through such theatrical actions as those described above. I was to attend many such protests in the coming months.

I should first clarify that when I talk about the activist there are actually several different groupings that I am referring to. The activists were a coalition of different groups, working for increasing rights for disabled people and benefit claimants. The activists that I first saw protesting in various shops were part of an initiative launched to counter the Workfare programme and it was known simply as Boycott Workfare. They shared an agenda with a range of other activist groups. This agenda was to stop the welfare cuts that the government was about to implement at the time of my fieldwork, and to counter the widespread notion that benefit claimants were fraudsters. These groups were grouped together loosely under the banner of the Coalition of Resistance, as a response to the newly elected Coalition Government. They did not share one ideology or specific political agenda but rather several different political issues made them come together to fight the welfare cuts. These cuts in public welfare were seen as a war on the poor, and counter-effective as they would reduce

economic growth and produce more unemployment. A main target for some on the left is to produce systemic change in power by overturning the class structure in British Society. There was an attempt to institute non-hierarchical organisation that was supposed to be open and fluid in their membership base, and with no clear leadership. Personal ties and unofficial networks were used to assemble people, as well as internet networks. An informant stated that “Open meetings, where anyone can have their say is the democratic way to do it.” There could be many objections to such an idea, utopian as it might seem, but it was something that many were enthusiastic about. In relation to current forms of activism, some analysts have written and theorised about what is termed the “networked individual” (see for example Mason 2012 and Hancox 2011). They are able to participate in different protests, but this individual is perceived to have “weak ties” to any structural organisation. He or she is an independent activist, forming “collaborative productions” with other like-minded activists, before dismantling them again. I would argue that this was true among the activists I knew as well. Some did not want to have ties to any particular group but rather chose to attend protests that mattered to them, without feeling that they were tied to any particular group, political party or organization.

While many of the activists were politically active before the election of the Coalition Government, the policies that were introduced reinvigorated their actions and increased recruitment to their protests. Some activist groups were formed in the aftermath of the 2010 election, with young people especially seeing the austerity measures as directed at them, and hitting them harder than other groups in society. One speaker at a protest compared the austerity measures to medieval medicine, saying that curing a sick patient via bloodletting only made it worse. They saw the Conservative and Liberal Democrats as their opponent in a political struggle, but this did not mean that they identified with Labour, the main opposition party. Labour was in fact seen by many as part of the same “establishment”. Many had not forgotten how the previous Labour government had targeted “welfare culture” and sought to distance itself from its working class roots. The governmental policy of welfare to work programmes was seen as a continuation of the New Deal programme that was launched in 1997 by Labour. Because they maintained that there was no difference between the main political parties, the activists often presented themselves as a “real alternative” not compromised by the powerful interests of the City. “City” is used as a term for the financial sector in London. The activists often said that through measures such as market deregulation

and privatisation, Labour was trying to get on the “good side” of City during its thirteen years in power, 1997-2010.

Ideology and beliefs

There were some ideological differences between activist groups, yet they were mostly to the left of centre, and often self-proclaimed socialists or Marxists. Some were members of the Socialist Workers Party, and thus were tied to a political party, although a minuscule one in terms of members and influence. There was some suspicion that they used protests to strengthen their small party base. Many preferred to have a certain independence from party organisations. To be associated with a political party made them easier targets for criticism. It was therefore an aim to present protest movement as spontaneous alliances not grounded in party structures. Established political parties were criticized for containing and appropriating dissent. Thus many of the activists said that they shunned party politics. Though many activists groups were critical of each other, what united them was their mutual opposition against the austerity measures which they saw as threat to working class aspirations, living standards and rights. They saw the attack on welfare benefits as part of a class war, for they believed that the state should provide adequate welfare for its citizens without the threat of sanctions. Moreover, welfare was seen as a right for anyone who needed it. Welfare for them meant not just dole payments, but access to education, hospitals, housing, and help for disabled people. For them such state support contributed to increased equality in society.

It angered many that the state was seen to attempt to use welfare as a means to sanction the unemployed and to suppress protest against government policies. The activists disagreed with the government where the blame was to be for the crisis in government resources and funding. For them, the financial crisis and budget deficits has been used as excuses by the Conservatives to remodel the welfare state, indeed to “dismantle it”. It was in their eyes the wealthy, i.e. the banks and financial speculators, who caused this current crisis in employment and government deficit, but that it is the poor, the unemployed – the working class, who had to pay the price, while the banks were bailed out by tax-payers funds in 2008. Furthermore, it was widely believed among the activists that the government was using no-pay jobs to reduce official numbers of unemployed while keeping people working below minimum wage, as unemployment benefits was below this level. It was said at a protest that: “It’s a trick. They have skewed every statistic they can and believe they have gotten away with it. Now people should realise what’s going on.” It was confirmed Department of Work and Pensions that

jobseekers that were part of welfare to work schemes were not counted as unemployed by International Labour Organisation (ILO). They were however counted in statistics as claimants of Job Seekers Allowance⁹.

The protesters did not only offer a general critique of government policies, but also criticised specific ministers in the government; branding them as liars. As individuals representing the state, they were the outward face of government. This personalisation of the conflict was partly about tarnishing the reputation of these individuals, but also about finding a peg to hook their criticism on. Instead of just protesting against institutions and abstractions such as the “state” or “conservatives”, the focus on individual ministers was a tactic that made the conflict more comprehensible to outsiders. Individual ministers, who became the main target of some demonstrations, were often mocked through songs, slogans, placards, visual caricature and theatrical performance. For example, the Secretary of State at The Department of Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith was often the target of demonstrations because his department was responsible for the Work Programme. Chris Grayling, a Minister at the same Department, was on several occasions dubbed the “minister of Workfare”. Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg was also unpopular among the activists, to the point where there was a demonstration outside his family home in Putney, South-west London. He was seen as one of the “architects of austerity”, a very negatively term in the eyes of the activists. This protest was perhaps one of the most controversial that I witnessed, and it was successful in getting press coverage. Before turning more closely to this issue, I want to give a detailed account of some of the protests.

Boycott Workfare

This organisation arranged most of the demonstrations, almost on a weekly basis. One such demonstration on a cold morning in early March was located outside the city hall in Tottenham where Secretary of State Iain Duncan Smith was in a meeting. Demonstrators chanted “Duncan Smith; do us a favour, cut the slave labour” and “Workfare is slave labour, unemployed should be independent jobseekers”. Seen from a distance, they looked a bit like a rag-tag group holding up the homemade signs and placards made of cardboard tied to a long wooden stick. Some wore the Palestinian scarf known as Keffiyeh which I recognised from

⁹ See the response by the Department of Work and Pensions to a Freedom of Information request made by Consent.me.uk (n.d.) regarding whether those participating in welfare to work schemes were counted as unemployed in statistics.

left-wing activists in Norway. Many wore jackets that were covered with different pins and badges. These badges had messages tailored for this protests, such as “No to Workfare” or carried more general statements, like “Anti-capitalist” or “We are the 99 %”.

The placards they were carrying had some different slogans; “No cuts”, “Tory out” and “We want jobs”. The same messages were also part of their chants, which included variations of these slogans. While one group were standing with placards outside the entrance of the city hall other walked around and tried to catch the attention of people so as to engage them in conversation and hand out leaflets. This was how I met Marcus, standing with a backpack full of leaflets. He had worked as an actor and was currently unemployed. He was also a veteran activist in his late forties and political activity of this kind had been part of his life for more than 25 years. Eager to tell me about their protest, he was the first of many that wanted to explain to me what was wrong with Workfare:

“The state is creating a new underclass, using workfare and companies like Tesco to keep people down, keep them shelf stacking, it gives them minimal opportunity for own thoughts, the best at following orders and most productive workers become managers. They supervise the rest”

Referring to Tesco, he was talking about jobs in a retail corporation that employs more than half a million people in the UK; perhaps the most well-known workfare provider at this time. He meant that I had come at the right time, they had been protesting workfare for over a year but it was in the last few weeks that they had gotten nationwide attention. This was probably because of the Westminster Tesco protest, he said. He saw Workfare as an example of how neoliberal business values were becoming entrenched in people’s minds. It was a class tool, forcing the lower classes to supervise themselves through promoting some of them to managers. This was seen as a divide and rule kind of tactic, fragmenting working class solidarity, which he suggested was “our greatest weapon against the rich”. Furthermore, he saw the Olympics as a way to introduce new security measures and increase the power of the “fascist regime” (in his mind both the previous Labour and Conservative governments were fascist regimes). He quoted Secretary of State Duncan Smith saying “work sets you free” and asked me where I have heard that slogan before. I replied that it reminded me of the entrance to Auschwitz, the concentration camp of Nazi-Germany. He said “exactly!” proving the point of his analogy between this government and fascism. While the comparison between workfare and a concentration camp of course was an overstatement, which he admitted, the notion of forced imprisoned labour remained. He explained why he meant that *slave fare* was a better name for Workfare: “If you work and don’t get paid for it, I call that slavery”. He also had an

interesting take on the consequence of unemployment. It makes creativity go up. People have more time to think, to act. He has a friend that is a film-maker; apparently, he is much more productive these days in terms of creativity, for when pressed into a corner, you come up with more inventive solutions. He also said that the Job Centre Plus staff wouldn't understand that. They would just tell you to do the first menial job that's available. The negative incentives were not needed to make people look for work. According to him, people should be able to choose their own jobs. People should be able to make a living in this country, and not just be at the bidding of the government. Real jobs are needed, he maintained.

There were only about 20 protesters present, but the activists nonetheless managed to harass the Secretary at his arrival, which was counted as somewhat of a success. The Secretary of State hastily entered the town hall after having praised the Work Programme in front of the protesters, ignoring their claims that Workfare is unjust and that it would not help the problems of unemployment. I would later find out that both Duncan Smith and other members of the government referred to these activists with words such as “disgrace” and “militants”¹⁰. Both Duncan Smith and his staff refused to engage the activists directly in conversation on the way in and out of the town hall, and instead addressed the cameras that were present when he spoke briefly.

Linking work for your benefits programmes to slave labour is a way to delegitimise it, focusing on the coerciveness of how it is implemented as well as the fact that people are not actually paid for the work they do. The protest relates to how the activists view the work that is provided. It is viewed as mindless and thought-numbing. Terms that implied a kind of labour that was seen as demeaning and repetitive, even meaningless. Here “shelf stacking” is often used as the perfect example of this kind of labour, as Marcus exemplified above. He said that what the state needs to do is to create jobs, and that these jobs have to be productive. Shop assistants and shelf-stackers are not the kind of jobs that people need, yet that are the jobs that they get. People needed jobs that gave them a sense of self-worth and pride. Marcus had to leave the protest after he talked to me. The other protesters stayed a while longer; we were outside city hall for almost 4 hours in total. This shows the engagement of these people, as they would sacrifice so much of both their time and efforts to spread the word about the injustices that they perceived in the system.

¹⁰See BBC (2012) and Walters and Owen (2012)

The activists often targeted the providers of Workfare in the local area with their protests. Now and then, the local groupings would organise a protest outside major Retail stores such as Tesco, Poundland and Sainsburys. These stores were targeted because they were employing people on the minimum wage. Outside a Sainsburys I found Peter, who was holding a microphone along with a couple of other protesters. They were shouting some accusations to the management.

“You are even worse than Tesco. You pay 50p less per hour than Tesco, and everybody hates Tesco!”

“Shame on you!” (repeated)

“6 pound, 21p per hour! Have you tried to live on this per hour?”

“We’re not only here because Sainsbury is greedy. We are here because something is wrong with the economy. Workers are earning 37% less than in 1977.”

Another argument that was used against welfare to work programmes such as the Work Programme was that they undermined the labour market. Instead of hiring new employees, companies could now get them “for free” through these schemes. So said Peter:

“If I wanted these jobs which are promoted through Job Centre Plus I should apply for them myself. The idea of choosing freely is completely gone from this scheme. But why would they hire me and pay me a wage when they get rewarded by DWP¹¹ for taking me on for free”.

Just like Marcus, he was worried about where this welfare policy was heading. He was employed in an antiques shop but only worked on weekends, which meant that he wasn’t able to receive JSA. Caught on a low wage, but not unemployed, he told me that the rest of his week was based on two activities: job seeking and activism. We talked for a while about how things were for jobseekers nowadays, and what would be a fair treatment of jobseekers.

“I have several friends who have been mistreated by this system. They work for nothing for several months for Primark, Tesco, or whatever. And they are told to leave after the placement is over. These voluntary placements give them nothing. No wage, no future. There are so many examples of employers abusing their staff because they have all the power. The staff can quit but then they are even worse off”

I asked him what should be done about this system. He replied that everyone should get a decent wage, and be treated with respect in their jobs. I asked him for a specific example of this kind of abuse and he told me about the younger brother of a friend with no previous employment history, who had signed on the Work Experience programme as an 18 year old.

¹¹ Department of Work and Pensions

As I understood it, he had been sent to a low-price retailer to learn how to work in a store, with a chance of a job in the end. He had worked there for 12 weeks, only receiving his Job Seekers Allowance, and he was then told there was no place for him after the placement was done. In the subsequent evaluation he had been told by the Job Centre advisor that he had not worked hard enough on the job. It was not the work experience that he was contesting but what he called “abuse and utter bullshit” coming from both the Job Centre and the retailer. He argued that such false claims were just a strategy for the company to enlist more benefits claimants for free. Just like other activists I have met, he was eager to impress upon me that the unfairness of Workfare was real and happening. It was important for them to make claims that countered the narratives of government officials and spokespeople that presented the workfare schemes as fair. Telling stories of unfair treatment and bullying and harassment in the workplaces were his way of persuading me, and others that were willing to listen, that they were protesting *for a reason*.

Outside the ministry for Work and Pensions

The following event was also organised by Boycott Workfare. This time the ministry responsible for administering welfare and benefits was the target of the protest. As usual the protest started early. The reason for this was to get the attention of people heading to work, both passers-by and people entering the ministry. Also, it was a chance to get in the news. The number of protesters was the same as the last demonstration, but this time there were also a couple of people from a group known as Disabled People Against the Cuts (DPAC). The planned closure of a Remploy manufacturing plant, a workplace for people with disabilities, was a specific concern. Many of the same placards and chants that were used at the last protest were re-used at this protest. “Cuts, Job Losses, Money for the Bosses” was chanted, it was not the first time I heard that chant. Two banners were used, one said “What the government can do, the streets can undo”. The other banner had an image of a chessboard where all the pawns were lined up on one side, vastly outnumbering the set up on the other side of the board where there were only kings, queens and bishops etc. The title underneath the image said “Revolution”. Someone shouted that we should burn a bonfire with the Tories and Lib Dems¹². This was representative of the colourful language present at most demonstrations.

¹² Tories and Lib Dems refer to the Government Coalition.

There were speeches by members from Boycott Workfare and the DPAC that highlighted the unfairness of Workfare and how disabled people were being treated by the current government. The last speech was made by an unemployed postgraduate who had finished university in 2008, the year that recession hit Britain. Through using her own personal story, she highlighted the difficulty in getting a job today. Struggling with a huge debt, she was an example; “(...) of middle class children who having finished university, are failing to see why they started studying at all”. In her meeting with the job centre staff, they had wanted to focus on work experience instead of her university education. Without any proper work experience, she was offered to partake in experience-building programs that had nothing to do with her education in that they did not provide help to find jobs relevant to her education. She ended the speech with saying: “There are more and more of us”, meaning unemployed postgraduates. They were a group that “would not lie down and take it, but fight back”. As she said, at any given day in the UK, there were six times as many jobseekers as there are available jobs. The economic crisis has hit the middle classes and in the process radicalised some of them, making them question how the government handles growing unemployment. Statistics tell it plainly that unemployment is not simply going to disappear, because there are simply not enough jobs.

After the last speech I talked to a middle-aged activist, Tim. He turned out to be selling newspapers made by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Another veteran of the protest movement; he was trying to find time to go to as many protests as possible. He saw protests as a place to recruit new members to the SWP. Finding out that I was a student, and a student of anthropology at that, made him laugh. “What’s the use of that?” he asked me. He himself was a carpenter “I’m lucky to be working”, and said that young people today would have to act, and fight back before it was too late. Being a student was all thinking and no action. His generation had profited on capitalism, but mine would not. “You won’t be able to afford a house, like I did”. He told me about how difficult it was to specialise in something like carpentry today. While he 20 years ago would get money from the state in the form of EMA (Educational Maintenance Allowance) to get training as a novice, today you had to rely on having saved up money or come from a rich family. This excluded a lot of working class people, he said. The EMA was cut (or “scrapped” as Tim said) as part of the austerity package first introduced in 2010. He also told me that his daughter had the same problem as the last speaker. After finishing university studying law, she was now unemployed and had a 25. 000 pound debt. “There are so many reasons for young people today to start a revolution, yet most

people do nothing. We need to see more unemployed people out in the streets so that people understand how bad things are, like in Spain or Greece”. At this protest and at other protest it was often highlighted that mass unemployment was happening all over Europe, and the activists called for solidarity with Spain, Italy and Greece. The underlying structural reasons and economic problems is a way of understanding and making sense of one’s own unemployment. It helps the activists cause by turning around and invalidating the argument that the unemployed choose to be unemployed.

Craig was another activist who participated in many protests. Aged 23, he had been unemployed for a long time, he said he had not held a steady job since he left school. He held a negative view about how jobseekers were treated. The system worked against the unemployed, he said: “Government put pressure on the centres to get benefit figures down, if you come late, if you miss a date they cut you off”. He said that it was common knowledge that workers at job centres were told to find any excuse to cut a benefit recipient off his or her allowances. The jobs he had looked at often were with minimum wage. As he put it: “the minimum wage is not a living wage, but if you say that, they say you’re not looking for work, you make yourself unemployed. But unfortunately they don’t employ me anyway, not even on a minimum wage.” I wondered whether his version of how the job centres was not a bit too bleak, but he disagreed: “I get no help from the job centres. If they wanna prove that you don’t look hard enough, it’s almost unfalsifiable”. This led him to talk about Workfare: “It’s an insult actually, they say: we can’t afford to give you a proper job. You must pretend to be working, doing the work for nothing “. I learned that his unemployment had been a factor that led him to join the activists. He told me that meeting the bureaucracy as a job-seeker angered him to the point that he had to do something. He found Boycott Workfare online and he got in touch. He was an articulate person, had a lot on his mind, and seemed to me like a person that was able to do many different tasks, and therefore could obtain a job if he really wanted to. He said he did not want to give in to the system and just take the menial shelf-stacker jobs that were offered. His problem as a job-seeker was that he did not know where to apply the skills he had. Right now, activism was a way for him to use these skills. It consumed energy and time, which he said are things that one has in plenty if one is unemployed. Again, we see how the notion of work as something meaningful becomes something part of the activists’ narrative.

“If the Eton boys want class war they’ve got it”

I will in the following describe another demonstration that took place a couple of weeks after the demonstration mentioned above. This time it was budget day, the day the annual budget is presented by the Government. The coalition of resistance had assembled several different groups to launch a protest outside Downing Street, home to the Prime Minister. This was to be a good example of how they used performance as a way of protest. They had created a long line of people, meant to resemble a dole queue, in the act also reshaping a famous image used by the conservatives in the 1979 election that bore the title “Labour isn’t working” (see Figure 1 and 2). This image is well known in Britain, and shows a queue outside the unemployment office, indicating that the then Labour Government were responsible for the high unemployment rates. The new take on this image was called “Austerity isn’t working”, an accusation that the austerity measures of the Government were augmenting, and not decreasing the number of unemployed people in the U.K. The performance aspect was to recreate the dole queue from the famous historical image, with two people up front bearing a banner with the words “unemployment office”. There were perhaps as many as 200 people standing in this long queue. The point was to take a well-known image associated with the conservatives and to turn it against them. The protest then moved on, to a grass area outside the Parliament where several other groups were present as well. All in all, they numbered about 400, a larger amount than most protests.



Figure 1: Unemployment Office banner being held



Figure 2: The original Labour Isn't Working Image.

Taking turns to make speeches the activists used the open-microphone system, where anyone could hold the microphone and have their say. This kind of democratic logic was seen as important in order to avoid a dangerous pitfall that can happen to public demonstrations: where one person speaks while the others listen which would make it just a one-person show. It was also a way to make it harder for the police to identify leaders, arrest them and break up the protest. The police have more people to deal with, not just one or two obvious leaders. In fact, the police did try to move us away, saying that this spot was supposed to be used by the BBC. One woman in a wheelchair ridiculed the police that were standing nearby “if they have a wheelchair accessible car, they can come and get me!” Another protesters response was “Let’s occupy! It’s a nice day, make ‘em come here! They can’t hide, lets rat out George!” He was here referring to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, who was in the House of Commons presenting the budget at the time, not far from where we stood. He was the main target of the day; an activist had even brought a painting picturing a naked Osborne pulling out carrots from a magician’s (or a banker’s) hat (see Figure 3). It represented him pulling out empty promises from thin air. He was portrayed as standing on the briefcase that a chancellor brings with him or her when presenting the budget for parliament. The speaker said: “Pinpointing the individual actors is important. Politicians have betrayed their public functions. They no longer serve the public. What they serve is the corporate interest.” The Chancellor was viewed as being in the pockets of the financial elite of the City. The personalisation used in calling the Chancellor “George” is a way to break down his authority as a statesman, taking away the institutional legitimacy of his position. In the painting, his nakedness can serve as a symbol for him being “laid bare”, or exposed. Indeed the activists

were claiming at this protest that his lies had been exposed. Pulling out carrots from a magician's hat also conjures the image of the "trickster", who is creating illusions. For the activists, austerity was the biggest lie.



Figure 3: A satiric painting of Chancellor George Osborne

Another aspect of protest performance was the use of costumes and impersonations. A couple of people had dressed themselves up as bankers, and some dressed up as Robin Hood. Chanting out "cut the crap" and "shame on you, George", one of them bore a placard reading "If the Eton boys want class war, they got it". They said that the government was doing the opposite of the Robin Hood folk legend; it was stealing from the poor and giving it to the rich. The Eton boys referred to were the Government. Several ministers including the Chancellor and the Prime minister have been educated at Eton, a public school and a famous symbol of privilege and upper-class power in Britain. The fact that the government was abolishing a top-rate tax in the current budget was seen as further proof that they were more concerned with the wealthy than with the common people. The message of the protests was that they, the activists, were "the people", and they had rights, right to protest and the right to welfare. This was also put forward in the following call and response chant that was repeated throughout the demonstration, led by a speaker with a microphone:

- Whose money? Our money!
- Whose Welfare state? Our Welfare state!
- Whose benefits? Our benefits!

- Whose NHS? Our NHS!
- Whose housing? Our housing!

This call and response highlighted the message of the activists. The welfare state belonged to them, not to the politicians. That is why they argued that the austerity measures were a “theft”; it was the politicians robbing them of their rights. One of the Robin Hood-clad protesters told me that a “grassroots mobilisation” through strikes and demonstrations like this one was the only way to bring about political change in Britain. The main opposition party, Labour, did not represent the workers, and was too occupied with “consensus building” to actually do something useful. Actual political change has to happen through action rather than words. A term used more and more that spring was “99 per cent”, meaning the ordinary people. This was borrowed from the Occupy movement (some Occupy members were also involved in this protest) and indicates the emergence of a new a rhetoric used against institutions and centres of power. Those speaking on the behalf of the 99 per cent, or “the people” also saw themselves as struggling to get the general public to realise that this was a struggle between them and the powerful elite. There was a left-wing consciousness raising aspect to much of the protests.

In addition to the police, a ministerial aide also came out to tell us to move from the lawn outside Parliament. His words were not heeded and instead his motives were questioned when he was asked if he didn’t want the protest to get any media coverage. After a long argument with a protester, he left us there. We stayed for a while longer without any interference from the police. While threatening to remove us, they generally kept a distance at this protest, and did not move in at any time. Perhaps it was realised that attempting to get us away from the lawn would draw too much attention, due to the fact that we had a large crowd of people assembled there. As this protest was about capturing the attention of the media, the attempt to control and move the protest elsewhere was an attempt by the police and the aide to control it entering into the mass media. The two different sides were struggling for a physical location (the lawn) that also became a symbolically contested site. For the protesters, it was about the right to protest, their personal freedom and grassroots democracy, above all to have an arena to where they could be heard. Close to the symbolic centre of power, Westminster, the whole protest can be viewed as an attempt to undermine the Government’s authority and legitimacy. The next chapter will also focus on the activists, exploring the way they create their alternative discourse

Chapter three – The activists

In the previous chapter I detailed three protests against austerity. This chapter serves as a continuation of this theme, in which I will try to explain some of the cultural logic of the protests by focusing on how performance and art were used in the protests to create meaning and draw attention to the cause of the activists. By using examples from different protests, I will supplement the empirical data from the previous chapter. Together these two chapters will provide an insight into how the activists were protesting, but also why they were protesting. The second section of this chapter will be about how the activists behaved towards the police and vice versa. I choose to write about this because it sheds some light on how the activists view the state, and the current government. It is also an attempt by me to make the protests more “alive” for the reader by explaining more of the background. I believe that the police and their presence were integral to structuring much of the activist’s’ behaviour and protests. This chapter will end with some observations on the use of social media in activism. The use of internet platforms such as Facebook and Twitter was becoming widespread in global activism in the years 2011-2012, and not only in developed Western nations but also in the Third World and Middle East. Indeed, many protesters noted how it was used during the “Arab spring” of 2011, to organise and to escape hierarchical media structures. It was embraced by activists in the UK as an alternative way to broadcast their message.

Performance and creativity

Protests can be seen as a form of art in the creative cultural expressions that the activists used. It is an activity that opens up a symbolic space where acts that are normally considered inappropriate in public can be “allowed”. It is also a space where creative initiatives, what can be termed performance have a license to be staged. By performance at protests, I refer to ways of capturing the attention of the wider public and the media. They can be performative in the sense that a protest can function as a kind of theatrical stage, with the onlookers and passers-by functioning as audience. Sometimes, creativity was combined with a more traditional way of organising protest as confrontational demonstrations. Broadly speaking, there was an age gap in the way people were protesting. The older protesters often used placards and speakers, as well as handed out leaflets and newspapers. Their main goal was to spread information, and they usually tried to engage and confront the passers-by in conversation. In contrast, the younger protesters engaged more frequently in what I will call performance, which was the

use of theatrical tactics that were designed to get more attention. Sometimes this could be energetic and physical, such as climbing landmarks or running into shops or banks and lying down on the floor, or chaining themselves to an entrance of a public building. Such activities were usually performed by a few people, while the others stood and watched, and gave their approval of these performances often shouting and urging them on. There was also the accompanying use of comedy, parody and satire to frame these gestures as not dangerous or harmful. Singing helped establish this as playful though also serious occupation of spaces of power and wealth. At some of the demonstrations, an orator would speak selections of prose and poetry. Often the orator would throw in references to popular culture as well as current events, sometimes placing politicians in the tradition of historical villains.

Art was used as an alternative domain of truth juxtaposed to the dominating truth of rational calculation, seen to be embodying the finance system and government austerity policies. Poetry and prose added to the sense of the demonstrations as a sort of theatrical arena that could be used to lambast the politicians with wordplays and mockery. At a demonstration outside of Westminster, a speaker who called himself “Pete the Temp” mocked the imagery and rhetoric of capitalism.

“The problem with a rat race
is that even if you win
you’re still a rat”

This affirmed that he and many fellow protesters were not part of this rat-race that sought after money and privileges. It was the competitive individualism of contemporary capitalism that was mocked in the image of rats competing to transcend their position but really still being entrapped. The speaker used a sound system and played a speech made by the actor Charlie Chaplin in the movie *The Great Dictator*. This speech is famous for its message which is that you must free yourself from the shackles of fascism. “This is inspirational to us all”, he proclaimed before playing this excerpt:

“Soldiers! Don’t give yourselves to brutes, men who despise you and enslave you; who regiment your lives, tell you what to do, what to think and what to feel! Who drill you, diet you, treat you like cattle, use you as cannon fodder!

Don’t give yourselves to these unnatural men—machine men with machine minds and machine hearts! You are not machines! You are not cattle! You are men! You have a love of humanity in your hearts! You don’t hate!” (Chaplin 1941: 36)

The speaker also indicated to the policemen during this part of the speech that they were the soldiers that Chaplin's character the Jewish Barber spoke of¹³. The message of this speech touched many of us who were there; making the words written in 1940 meaningful in 2012. It was effective, but also controversial; comparing the political elite to fascists, and not the first time I encountered such comparisons (see the previous chapter). For the orator; the protest was about "taking your body, taking your agenda, to the doorsteps of injustice". Through performances such as this, the act of protest takes another form. While it may still carry the same message, it commands an image that is presumably less "serious" than the traditional banner-waving and political speeches. Perhaps it is by engaging with onlookers/audience in another fashion that the protesters also undercut negative portrayals of themselves as potential rioters and looters, or as humourless hard-left militants. Many of their opponents used one of these kinds of imagery about the protesters. The construction of the protest into a sort of "play", where normal everyday rules do not apply or are temporarily suspended, provides a license that some protests push as far as they can. They might ridicule the police or act carefree in front of them. They test the limits of the state's control over itself and appeal to the people inside the uniforms, as we shall see in the next subchapter.

The protesters playfulness also involved transgressing physical boundaries by occupying major landmarks or hurling themselves onto the floor in a Tesco shop. Performance can be a key attraction, but also a key to having a good time while protesting. Even though they take their political message and intent serious, this does not mean that the protests have to be serious in form. There is certain elegance in being able to deliver a serious message with inventiveness and irony. Ridicule is also an effective way to degrade your opponent, if done correctly and this involves a way that mocks the subject of the satire, and presents him or her as laughable but also human. The chancellor's nakedness is an example of this sort; it is highly personal but at the same time uses a universalistic notion of shame, with the chancellor hiding his body parts. This was a play on the fact that he was seen to be trying to hide his political agenda, which the activists were claiming that they had exposed.

¹³ The movie, from 1940, is a parody of Nazi-Germany where Chaplin portrays two roles: The Dictator, a character based on Adolf Hitler, as well as a character known as Jewish Barber. Through a series of events, the Jewish barber is mistakenly thought to be the Dictator, as he looks identically the same. In what is supposed to be a victory speech after an invasion of the neighbouring country, the Barber in the guise of the Dictator urges democracy and freedom, as well as for people to free themselves from fascism.

It was customary to use costumes and play out certain roles. Some would dress up to symbolise the rich, the politicians, and the bankers who were portrayed as the villains. In these costumes the activists were mocking them by portraying them as stupid, greedy and selfish. This is often men dressed up in a suit with a top hat, typical symbols of capitalism and carrying signs like “we are all in this together” – a statement made by the Chancellor in relation to the austerity measures, and often ridiculed. For them, there was irony in this statement. Because they saw it different: they were not all in this this together. Osborne and his friends in big business would continue to receive high salaries, portrayed as “all in this together” in the sense of “being together” in planning a conspiracy or a crime. At another protest, someone wearing a banker’s attire was carrying an empty flower pot, symbolising lack of growth. Different masks were used to shield identity as well as a way to transform the image of the mask-bearer. The most famous by far is the Guy Fawkes mask which is now often associated with the internet “hactivist” group known as Anonymous¹⁴. This mask has many different meanings. It has an historical meaning referring to the figure who tried to blow up the Parliament in 1605, imbued with an explosive meaning of discontent. It denotes a vigilante, a figure that stands up to the system. There is a certain paradox in the individualism at play here. The symbolism evokes the individual that is “alone” against the establishment, big brother etc. However, it also evokes a group feeling, especially when one sees several protesters next to each other wearing the same mask – it now becomes a uniform. This mask could therefore be termed both an individualising symbol, as well as a group-signifier. The mocking grin that is characteristic indicates a certain condescension that many of the activists had toward the police, and the establishment. The mask has a sort of cynical, patronising smile; it seems that the mask-bearer is signalling a sort of irony, that they find a situation both amusing and stupid. Dressing up, wearing masks, also allows you to become another in the sense that it adds something to your identity temporarily.

¹⁴ Hactivist is a term used about activists who utilise the internet as a space to operate in. This can take many forms, such as hacking into the databases or leaking classified information.



Figure 4: Protester wearing a Guy Fawkes mask

The wearing of any mask is itself a sign of intent. The bearer is (to a degree) anonymous, and free to transcend some boundaries set by society and no longer recognisable on CCTV. As such, it is similar to the hoods and scarves that many wore in the Riots in 2011 in order to stop being identified. Some of the activists were suspicious of the methods of surveillance that were used by police. Police surveillance was said to have become stricter as the summer Olympics were closing in. It is interesting to note that the new electronic methods of surveillance were also taken up by the activists themselves. With modern technology, such as mobile phones with cameras, any injustice by the authorities could be documented and posted online as it happens. This is especially the case with video-streams show footage as it is recorded live. The low cost of phones, cameras and internet connections has democratised who can bring forth objectified forms of truth. The internet offers a new arena where meanings can be interpreted and conveyed. It provides alternative methods for releasing information that is not subject to the same controls and editorial policies as the mainstream press. I suggest that this could be described as a kind of democratisation of the techniques of surveillance as well as of the distribution of information.

The Occupy London movement that arose in the autumn of 2011 came with a creative surge that influenced other activists as well. This movement succeeded in creating attention, and had a certain kind of mass appeal in its initial phase, although its mass appeal seemed to wear off during my fieldwork. Occupy London share a political platform with the anti-

austerity campaigners, but have a more global-oriented message and encompass a wider membership. As have been noted elsewhere, Occupy came with a sense of rupture, of novelty. Indeed it came with scepticism of what had been before, and tried to distance itself from existing political alternatives (Nugent 2012). This movement had few ties to other political movements and to social structures at all, yet Occupy would often support the actions of the Boycott Workfare grouping. One of the leading figures in the Occupy movement held a speech at an anti-cuts rally where he said why Occupy were supporting these protests:

“All the things that are built up over generations are being unravelled now. Money are not trickling down but trickling up. Getting involved in politics is more than joining a party. It is feeling that you can be involved in running your community.”

This quote summarises the nature of Occupy as a political force that transcends traditional political structures. My impression was that the Occupy activists were skilled in using performance and theatrics, many of whom had a background in art and creative professions. They would use maps of London that had the names of different bank buildings crossed out like the x-mark on a treasure map. These were then used to plan and mobilised a protest with ingenuity and creativity. Groups were sent out to surround these buildings simultaneously and to approach from different directions at the same time so as to confuse the police. The administrators used Twitter¹⁵ as a way of reaching all who were involved. By sending the name of the account “*occupymay*” to Twitter with my phone, I was following all that was submitted by this account. In this way coordination was made easier, with messages and updates being continually sent to those who followed this Twitter account. While the Occupy London camp was not able to use its initial protest site outside the St-Pauls church in central London, the movement continued its presence in the city in other locations and occupations and through the internet.

When staging performances, the activists were aware of the fine line they had to navigate between presenting a serious political message and using such humoristic elements such as parody and sarcasm. One had to avoid becoming the foolish clown. This required skilful representation. There are long traditions of Public speaking in Britain which celebrate the use of wit, deadpan humour and irony. One such example is the tradition of Speakers

¹⁵ Twitter is a social networking site where the users can post messages through computers or portable devices such as smartphones, which are available to all who are “following” this user. To follow a specific user means to subscribe to this users activity on the website. It is a quick way of communicating a short message to a large audience.

Corner, which is found in Hyde Park, but have also been situated in other parks around London. The speaker has to deal with an audience that are active participants in the speech, making it into a debate full of sarcastic remarks, heckling and parodies. I saw this in modern form when exchanges between activists and passers-by took a tone that can be best described as wistful or ironic. People could be quite sarcastic. Or as the activist Tim expressed it talking about the crowd and reactions: “they usually take the piss, that’s bound to happen when you expose yourself like that”. The taunting of the police by protesters often used these elements as well; the behaviour of the activists towards the police bordered on being playful, which I will describe below.

Relations to the police

At most demonstrations there were police present. They were not popular among the activists, representing the oppression of the state. They were not seen as upholding law and order, but as preventing the right to protest. Often the police were ridiculed by protesters, sometimes provokingly. If a protest was operating within what is considered lawful the police merely supervised and did not intervene. However, most of the protests and demonstrations were meant to be obtrusive and offensive in some manner. This was part of the performance, but also part of the very act of protest, to not conform. It therefore collided with the behaviour that the police demanded of the protesters, which lead to the police using their physical presence, and sometimes force, to contain the protests. This was done by removing protesters from the physical space they were occupying, sometimes threatening them with arrests. Stories about abuse from the police circulated among the activists, contributing to the police’s negative image. I heard many reports of police brutality without having seen any real brutality myself. I saw them being heavy-handed with protesters on some occasions.



Figure 5: Police and activists outside Westminster

One episode that could be telling in this matter occurred after a march against austerity through the financial district when about a dozen protesters sat down and occupied the entrance to the Royal Exchange. This was a march called for by Occupy, but there were members of the Boycott Workfare and the Coalition of resistance there as well. In total we were more than a hundred around the entrance area, which was a sort of plateau that included a fountain and a Tube exit. This time the police decided to strike hard. They first entered the crowd and gave warnings about arrests if we did not leave the location. The reason was that the Chief Inspector believed that there would be serious disorder, so he imposed the Public order act, section 14. This states that the police can impose conditions and restrictions on public assemblies to prevent unlawful behaviour and rioting (Ministry of Justice 2012). The police had repeated threats of arrests for about an hour. First they removed us by pushing us away from the plateau, and then the riot police were called in; clad in protective suits and helmets. The riot police officers formed a sort of human chain, each person holding the next in line, while they then tried to drag and haul the protesters who would not move. These protesters had formed their own sort of human chain, holding on to each other and resisting when the riot police tried to haul them away from the scene. Each time the police managed to get a protester loose they would withdraw their human chain as they took the protester with them into waiting police vans. Then they went back again and repeated this actions several times until they had hauled everyone occupying the entrance away.

This scene caused some tension in the crowd. The crowd of demonstrators were calling out “shame on you” to the police officers. While this was going on, one of the protesters from Occupy turned on a Sound system that played out heavy electronic music, and several other protesters started to dance. The police turned it off, but he somehow managed to turn it on

again several times. This cat and mouse game around the sound system went on during the time the riot police were slowly managing to untangle the human crowd. The rest of us were told by liaison officers to step away from the scene as we were obstructing a road, and we had to let through traffic. As we were separated from the ones who were being dragged away, it was hard to see what was actually going on. According to some of the others around me, the police had punched one of the occupiers, but I did not see this. One protester told a liaison officer where I was standing that they (the police) should join us in protest, not help the high and mighty. The liaison officer replied that we should be in a pub by now, not standing outside a bank on a Saturday evening. He was then cut off when another protester, obviously annoyed, asked whether he could get closer if he showed him his Job Centre plus card, to show him he had the right to protest, being unemployed. The officer replied “I know there’s a recession but you have to keep looking for jobs”, and then tried to reason with us and explain why they were coming down hard on the ones who were being dragged away:

“I’ve been to a lot of these protests. Some people come to every protest available, some even to contradictory causes. They just want to cause trouble, it’s because of them we are cautious. I don’t know you guys, but these guys mentioned are the ones destroying for the rest of you”.

His reasoning was not bought by the crowd, and he was heckled and booed at but we were gradually being pushed further and further from the scene. At the end, we could not see what was going on. The riot police had been able to move all the occupiers away, but it took almost an hour for them to do so. While there were those who would push the limits of what was accepted further than others, I did not perceive it as “causing trouble” for its own sake, but rather as a form of protesting. Episodes like this can be formative of the protesters’ view of the police, lowering their respect for police authority. After the protest had been removed completely, the man who had made the Job Centre remark gave me a short summary of his views: “we should take their uniforms off, underneath they are people. The uniforms are what make them fascists”.

Although the police’s response seemed to come from the protesters’ trespassing on private property, the symbolism of police defending the financial district against intruders was not lost on any of us. For the protesters, the situation gave more credence to their notion of a banking sector, seen as the root of the recession, which was hand in hand with the state, symbolised by the police. The whole scene was in upheaval. Some were starting to get drunk and shouted abuse at the police officers. But most of us were calm and doing nothing offensive. Alcohol-consumption was a gateway to problems between police and protesters. It

led to lower tolerance towards the crowd among the police. It also agitated those who were drinking, more likely to make a dramatic scene or fight with the police. It was also clear that it was frowned upon by some within the group of activists as well. Many wished to make an effort to be taken seriously, which the drinking undermined. There was always a balance between the more loosely organised and the serious fractions. As I stated above, this same balance was there when it came to the use of play and humour in contrast to the serious political campaigning that many wanted the activism to be. For the most part, the differences coexisted peacefully, but now and then, tensions would become apparent.

I talked to some police officers at other occasions, some of whom were routinely dealing with the same protesters. Most of them did not have problems with most of the protests, but had problems with some activists who took it too far. In fact, many of the protesters and policemen knew each other. The police sometimes joked about how few the activists were, and that they should get some more people to join them next time. I overheard one laughing and saying that: “there’s few of them, they have no leaders, I’m not impressed”, about the activists. Some relations were tense and antagonistic, while others were friendly, for example when activists and policemen were saying to each other “how are you?” and “haven’t seen you in a while” upon meeting each other. At demonstrations, one was often standing around the same spot for several hours. It was therefore natural that people talked to each other, and talking to police as well, as they were standing nearby seemingly doing nothing except watching the demonstrators.

Branded as extremists and militants, the use of non-violent protest techniques was important to these activists. Once you resort to violence, you lose all legitimacy in such a situation. One of my informants saw it as extremely important that protest were peaceful.

“They, whoever they are – the state, the police, the one per cent, want the violence. So they can implement more laws that are more stringent. That’s what happens. New laws then become normal, just as they are doing with the Olympics. Dispersal orders are easier to use against us now.”

Dancing, music, and other ways of acting can play upon the notions that surround them, and confuse those who seek to brand them as aggressive or hard-core militant. Taunting the police is a tactic that seeks to undermine the police officers authority by making them lose their temper or behave aggressively. There was always a fine line between apparently innocent humorous remarks and more serious behaviour in these interchanges. Suddenly a scene that appeared to be uneventful or peaceful could turn into a more serious encounter if the policemen felt they had enough of the taunts, or if the activist overstepped the physical

boundaries given to them. In all, the protests were meant to go far in their provocation of police, but not far enough to get arrested.

Capitalism realism

The amount of students at these protests was a clear indication that the rise in tuition fees had sparked unrest among the student population and had radicalised many. The rise in tuition fees was part of the same government “package” as the welfare cuts. This contributed to the number of students at some of the protests. Both among the student and non-student activists there were many that came from middle class background, distorting a view of this as just a working class phenomenon. When they then campaigned for the rights of working class, as they did often, it was partly a matter of speaking on the behalf of others. Solidarity was how it was termed by my informants, and this solidarity was in my observation evidently the glue that keeps the activist together. Class is a difficult subject to handle, especially in Britain. Still, when your informants themselves speak in terms of class, it becomes hard to ignore. While I do not want to reduce the motivations for political activism to just class-basis, I nevertheless will maintain in this thesis that class informs people’s way of thinking about political subjects such as unemployment and austerity. In Britain, class has to do with where you come from, and where you come from determines how your outlook on the world is formed. Feeling that your community is being unjustly treated by the state is definitely a reason for many people to become engaged, as it was put by some of my informants.

The popularity of the demonstrations varied depending on the day of the week and the location of the protest, as well as the theme and target of the protest itself. At most there were perhaps 400 people at a demonstration, yet most of the time less than fifty people were present. What seemed like a mystery to many of the activists was why most of the working class in Britain did not react to the injustices they were experiencing. It was often discussed within the group how to reach out to a larger audience. Why was there not more protests against cutbacks and rising unemployment in the UK? A simple answer could be that the unemployed is not a unified group, but fragmented by race, ethnicity, neighbourhoods, gender and age. People are not unified for the experience of unemployment is often perceived individually. When personal misfortune was understood in such terms, this diminished the factors that could assemble a collective mobilization. Unemployment is unevenly distributed between socio-cultural groups, and the experience of unemployment can also be shaped by these groups. Even though many are aware of the structural causes that are responsible for

them being out of work, they might nevertheless subscribe to moral narratives that blame the failings of individuals or particular groups for their unemployment. As I will explain the following chapter, the notions of welfare fraud was very dominant not just in the press and in the rhetoric of politicians but also within those groups that were vulnerable to unemployment and downward social mobility. Such moral anger could be seen as serving to legitimise current cuts in welfare spending. The ideology of the market is embraced, seen as the most successful way out of unemployment, indeed also as a strategy for welfare management. The domination of this ideology within the working class was exactly the thing the activists were struggling to debunk. What I am interested in is the power of this discourse, and how different groups come to articulate it. It was not just articulated from “above”, such as from politicians, government officials and media, but individualistic explanations of unemployment were also articulated by the unemployed themselves.

According to the writer Paul Mason there is a so-called “capitalist realism” which is the idea that there is no alternative to the current system. This has underpinned a certain cynicism that has characterised Britain since the 1980s, and it produces a belief by many that protest does not really matter, it is futile and will not change anything. Mason argues that this cynicism has been challenged in the UK since the financial crisis in 2008, and protests have been increasing since the 2010 election (Mason 2012). The student demonstrations in late 2010 were especially important in this respect, and considered a watershed by some of the activists I know. Many became radicalised and angered by what they felt was unjust treatment by the police in these demonstrations. This treatment included so called “kettling”, which is a police tactic that seeks to lock up a targeted group to a specific spot for a period of time, not giving them the chance to move. In this case, some of the students were “kettled” on the Westminster Bridge for several hours in the November cold. The cynicism was perhaps being challenged by a more politically conscious and opinionated public, but there was still long way to go before the protests were at the point that the activists wanted.

A culture of protest

While the protests could appear random to an outsider, they were coordinated and strategized. It was something that took time to organise and plan. If you want to have a successful protest, you have to come prepared. The making of placards, leaflets, boards and signs is time-consuming work. Assembling pieces, cutting out cardboard, printing pictures and leaflets and making costumes was just some of the things activists were doing to prepare

for a protest. Coming to a demonstration unprepared works against the whole collaborative approach to activism that is shared by the ones who do this every day. Time consuming, these protests were also money consuming for the participants. Not just material and costumes, but also transport. The increased cost of public transport in London worked to discourage many people away from showing up. If you lived in Zone 3 like I did, which was about 25 minutes with public transport from central London; it would be cost than 5 pounds for a trip to the City to attend a protest. And if you lived further from central London, as many did, the price was even higher. For an unemployed person, this was a day's budget for food. One could interpret all these efforts by the activists, especially the unemployed ones, as an attempt to substitute activism for paid employment. Activism gave them something to do and a sense of purpose in everyday life that unemployed life did not normally offer. But in order for activism to be a real alternative to employment it should be able to give you a salary as well. A well versed criticism against these activists was that they should be spending their time and energy on looking for jobs instead of making placards. A man said the following to me and another activist when he witnessed a demonstration: "You're just too lazy to work, that's why you're doing this". Minister for Employment Chris Grayling stated that Boycott Workfare was just an internet campaign carried out by idle youths not applying themselves in real life but on activism. At protest, people who walked by sometimes yelled out "Get a job" to activists. Such criticisms assumed that the activists could not do both, and is resonant with other kinds of criticisms of jobseekers, which assumes that a jobseeker is only supposed to look for jobs, any other activity is not allowed and a distraction from getting a job. There was an attempt to make unemployed people feel guilty for not fulfilling the obligation that is job seeking (see Howe 1989). These kinds of everyday critiques have a logic of moral individualism that so often touches upon unemployment.

The different symbols that are used, the signs and performance could be seen as a way of bridging the diversity of the different protesters. These symbols and signs often contained messages and meanings that all, or nearly all, who were present could subscribe to. A placard that says "we are the 99 per cent" is less controversial than one that states "socialism is the only way forward". By not focusing on the doctrinal, they avoided ideological conflict. The theatrics, the spectacular, also focused on the common "enemy" of the protesters. "If we want to become like a mass movement, we have to engage people without compromising our message" an informant told me explaining the fragmented nature of the different groups. This

class solidarity was also extended to the anti-austerity protests that were taking place in other European countries.

In the contemporary period, the global flow of communication means that the activists not only follow the anti-austerity protests abroad, but also participate in them through the internet. Often the protesters talk about how whole squares are filled up with thousands of protesters in different European countries, while in Britain the responses are not only smaller but also more controlled and composed. The recession was worse in Greece or Spain, with higher unemployment. The protesters knew this, but they also believed that UK was heading down the same road as these countries. The passivity in Britain broke in 2010 they said, but they were at the same time waiting for something to turn the public in their favour. Protesters often talked about the masses that were assembled in the squares of Spain and Greece with a certain longing and admiration, wishing that they could assemble the same amount of people at protests. But this was not just recognition of the rise of political protest and mass movements across the continent; it was also a belief that this was all part of a global movement that could change the world. Indeed, the protest outside parliament described earlier was visited by a couple of protest “veterans” from the Spanish *Indignados* movement. This movement arose in Spain in May 2011 and shares strong similarities with the movements I describe in terms of rhetoric and political platform, and is also being credited with influencing the Occupy movement. International activist bonding such as this was occurring frequently, especially as the social media made protests in other countries more visible to the protesters in London. Photos of large crowds in countries where there similar protests, such as Spain or Canada, occupying a main square were often shared on the internet through social media. The potential of mass protests was there, and could contribute to the confidence of the activists, and their belief that they could manage to amass the same kind of mobilisation in the UK. This kind of global outlook was common among the protesters. Symbols such as “we are the 99 per cent” and the Guy Fawkes mask are global in that their usage transcends national borders.

London was in 2012 host to two large events. The Diamond Jubilee for Queen Elizabeth II celebrated 60 years since her coronation. Not long after, the summer Olympics was to be another source of national pride. The activists claimed these events were smokescreens. Instead, they wanted another Winter of Discontent. The term refers historically to the 1978 winter when the unions went on mass strikes, but it is now used to refer to 2010 and the student uprisings. These events were both part of the activists own narrative, to give meaning

to the present through the past, to give a genealogy to contemporary protests by giving them the depth of the past. Some historical events are often referred to, or spoken of in longing terms, as examples of protest that worked, or as examples of protest that drew large crowds, and agitated the masses. Britain has a long history of protest and political unrest. Workers protested for their rights to vote in 1866, suffragettes for women's rights in the early 1900s. The Vietnam War protests of the 1960s and the miners' strike in the 1980s, all are examples of protests that the activist drew upon to give meaning and legitimacy to their protests. They built a continuum from previous protests, and placed themselves in this tradition and in doing so they normalised themselves in a situation where many had tried to dismiss them as eccentric radicals. The student protests movement was often drawn upon to create a sense of belonging to a cultural tradition of freedom of independence (Trilling 2011). One such famous protest was the 1936 Jarrow March. This was a march from the town of Jarrow in North England to London, a 480 kilometres long stretch, which was organised to raise awareness about the high unemployment at that time.



Figure 6: Top: The original 1936 march
Figure 7: Bottom: The 2011 march.

In late 2011, on the 75th anniversary of the original march, another march was organised, this time to highlight the large youth unemployment rate in the present. It was called “March For Jobs 2011”. The march took the same route, from Jarrow to London and got some coverage in the national media. In the left-wing circles it was widely hailed as a good example of how the activists should get attention to youth unemployment. About a dozen or so protesters walked the whole march, joined by local activists at the places they walked through. In London the attendance was said to be nearer three thousand as they neared their goal. Such tactics draw on the symbolism of neighbourhood and the local, Jarrow being small dot on the map compared to London but becoming a large symbol nevertheless. If a protest manages to inscribe itself within certain dominant symbolic cultural resources it has the potential to become broader in its scope, and thus more effective. To place a protest as a continuation of a historical event is a hopeful attempt to inscribe it with a historic significance comparable to the original event, making it part of “British History”.

Using social media in protest

Social media has in the last years assumed an increased importance in the everyday life of many people. It is interesting to note that the uses of social media also extend to activist purposes. With a device such as a smartphone or Ipad in hand a person can easily spread information to a large number of people at once. Through the micro-blogging website Twitter one can post the location of a protest or load up pictures that will be available to a large number of people instantly. Similarly, live streams gave the possibility for the activist to broadcast actions as they were happening. It was often perceived among the protesters that the mainstream media was biased and did not represent “real people”. Outside the control of traditional media, Twitter gave the possibility for expression to anyone with access the internet. People used their online networks to mobilise and arrange events. Paul Mason describes the typical internet-activist as young, fluid in managing information and adaptable towards change (2012: 77). Such as description points to how control of information was important to the activists. Through media such as Twitter, blogs or Facebook, they published statistics, comments and figures that align with their arguments, thus supporting it with what they considered proof. The newspaper *The Guardian* published a review that concluded that only 3.5 per cent of those who had been referred to the Work Programme had found a job within six months (Ramesh 2012). This was widely shared by the activists on blogs and in social media and can serve as an example of how stories circulated among the activists. It was

felt by many that, in general, the media did not represent the concerns of unemployed people and others who would feel the impact of the cuts. Instead, the media was seen to be copying and propagating the government's narrative of austerity. The existence of a vast amount of blogs and websites run by activists and sympathisers was testament to their eager attempts to correct what they saw as the wrongdoings of the mainstream media.

The broadcasting of personal stories was another way to raise awareness about injustice in the workplace or in the Job Centre. Therefore it was encouraged that people sent in their stories so they can be published online through blogs and social media as examples. One of the groups affiliated with Boycott Workfare called Youth Fight for Jobs publish these stories on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Boycott Workfare also had a section on their website with personal statements that detailed the unfairness of Workfare. Stories include one by a job-seeker who states that he was not believed by the staff when he described his job seeking efforts, and got his benefits suspended. Another example can be the pub-worker working on minimum wage that was not paid overtime and had to work six hours before having a lunch break. Personal stories and statements of unjust treatment complemented by statistics that back up their claims are the main "rhetorical weapons" used by the activists online. They have the effect of transforming the claims into facts, even if they are perhaps only seen as facts by the activists and their sympathisers.

Facts and figures might be read in different ways, and there are usually different claims to what is the "truth" in a political debate. For the activists, the posting of such figures mostly just came across as a re-affirming of what they already knew. It might be summed up by the term "preaching to the choir", referring to the act of reinforcing the bonds with those in the group that are already part of the group, while not attracting new members. While they are not "echo chambers"- places where there is no discussion, disagreement or dissent, there is seemingly mutual agreement on many things in the activist group, meaning that other viewpoints are left out of internal debates and discussions. The problem with this, as is the problem for them in general is that they only reach out to a smaller audience, that is; those who are already involved or actively searching for these kinds of blogs/websites.

Through campaigning on the internet as well as using demonstrations as their foremost tool the activists did manage to cause a stir. Every private company that pulled out from the Work Programme was celebrated as a victory, so was the removal of the threat of sanctions from the same programme. I asked an informant what he was hoping to achieve in the long run. He responded that he could not say that the political alternatives (Conservative, Labour

and Liberal Democrats) were much different. In fact, he said it was: “Tory, Tory light and Tory wannabe, it’s no real choice”. What they as activists could do was to create awareness, make people understand that this is a “class war” waged by the rich on the poor. “It is a cliché, but nothing is more dangerous than the truth, and they don’t want people to know the truth”. The next chapter will deal with some of these “truths” that were contested, about welfare and about notions of dependency.

Chapter four – Welfare and employability

This chapter will firstly focus on the aspect of unemployment that has to do with welfare and dependency which has become defined as a moral national problem. I will explore in more detail some of the different narratives that I outlined in the first chapter. The second part of this chapter will then outline the quest for employment among some of my informants. I will conclude the chapter with some thoughts on what is being demanded of an unemployed person and the reciprocity of welfare.

Focusing on some characteristics and stereotypes that often are employed when people are thinking about the dependency can be insightful, as they can serve as indicators to how people interpret a subject such as unemployment. I will argue that many people see a theme such as dependency through the symbolic language of “chavs” and “scroungers”, while the activists on the other hand use their own counter-symbols which would be the greedy banker or corrupt politician. It is identity that is being contested and problematised. The category of Dependents is set up as the antithesis of the desired behaviour of the citizens in the welfare state. A jobseeker has to meet certain requirements and behave in certain patterns. This echoes the individualising power of the state elaborated by Foucault. In his historical account of neo-liberalism he stresses that it is a way of governing that presupposes that the subjects behave in a certain way, to be rational and calculating and therefore “eminently governable”, because he can be left to himself and the government does not have to intervene (Foucault 2008: 270). As we have seen, the activists objected the state to impose any sort of requirement on how they acted out their lives. They opposed this through their actions and through words. They rigorously refused to accept the introduction of technologies of the self which required them to improve their “will to work”. When identity becomes a political issue, the impact of mass media also plays its part. I will use some examples from the media that illustrates the particular narratives that articulate a certain demonization of welfare recipient that I argue is happening through the economic language and rhetoric of austerity.

Welfare state

At the time of my fieldwork it appeared to me that there was a deep rooted notion among many in Britain that the welfare system was in a crisis. It was this notion that the activists in tried to counter with their own discourse about the legitimacy of welfare. For the social activists and many unemployed people, the welfare state was providing a security net, protecting the poor from hitting rock bottom. It was a citizen’s right that did not warrant any

obligations, or attached with any stigma. But not all saw it this way. Those who argued for a more conditional welfare state see a system that is too lenient, that promotes dependence. It was framed as if staying on benefits was more attractive than finding a job. I will in the following try to shed some light on this discourse. A framing such as the one above can serve as an exaggerated example of the reasoning that many find worrying; the reasoning that a certain kind of individual would choose not to work because they do not have to. Dependency becomes a trap, as it was put by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Osborne 2009). Of course, these discourses are not just polemic – either in favour for or opposed contractual and conditional welfare system, and I will try to expand on the ambiguities that exists in these narratives.

The US government carried out welfare to work programmes, which can be viewed as precursors to its British counterpart. British policymakers and politicians were in the 1980s looking to the US for new directions in the welfare policy (Digby 1989: 100). The American welfare to work programme was devised under Ronald Reagan's presidency. It was intended to deal with the "underclass" problem¹⁶. Just like in the UK, there was much attention given to "scrounger" stereotypes in the U.S. especially the "welfare mother", a stereotype from the 1980s that also took on racial connotations as it denoted young black mothers in particular (Katz 1989). This program was meant to counter the culture of "dependency" and produce self-sufficient citizens, based on the premise that work builds character. According to the American sociologist Frances Fox Piven, the assumptions of these work programmes were focused on the morality of the dependants as the cause of their unemployment, instead of how the labour market was structured (2001). These programmes were supposed to be a punitive incentive, a "tough love" from the state in order to get the "dependents" into work. Political theorist Desmond King has argued that the British welfare policy started to move towards this kind of thinking in the 1980s, but that it really took hold after the Labour government took office in 1997(see 1999: 234-235, 251). The Third Way associated with sociologist Anthony Giddens promised "no rights without responsibilities" (Giddens 1998). This statement is representative of conditional thinking.

¹⁶ According to historian Michael Katz, the results were ambiguous: a study that based itself only on new welfare recipients, and excluding women with children below the age of 6, found that workfare showed promising, although not large and dramatic effect (1989). Furthermore, most people participating in these programs still depended on money from the state for most of their annual income

There are different views on where the state's responsibility for its citizens lies, and who are deemed to be deserving of this welfare. The elderly, the sick, the disabled, students and unemployed are among the groups that traditionally have been the main recipients of state help. The unemployed are often targeted as being less deserving than the other main categories of recipients. The elderly's pensions are seen as a fair and deserving compensation after a long life of work and paying taxes. State help to students is often taking the form of loans that are being defined as investments that are expected to be returned with profit when the students are employed later in life. Sickness and disability are more unclear to define, especially in the last years as more and more people are unable to work. Training and therapy given to the sick and disabled can also be seen as an investment that will return the individual back into the workforce. The talk of scroungers is sometimes applied to those who struggle with disabilities and sickness, as there have been stories of unemployed people being accused of manipulating the welfare system to falsely claim sickness or disability to claim benefits. The matter of these benefits, like the unemployment benefit for those are seen as "able-bodied", is controversial. In this thesis I will focus on the benefits that the unemployed receive.

Chavs

I have already mentioned the "scrounger" and "lazy unemployed" stereotypes. In Britain in the last ten years or so, the "chav" caricature has become a new addition to this gallery of perceived "deviants". While "Cockney" is a working class stereotype/caricature carries a certain affection and nostalgia, Chav shares its roots in working class but little else. It was originally an acronym for Council Housed and Violent. It refers to Communal estates that are places associated with poverty as well as dependency. The term "Chav" usually invokes a white working class individual, unemployed, feeding off the state and standing outside what is considered "normal society" (Jones 2011). It plays on stereotypical antisocial caricatures such as young men wearing tracksuits and wearing cheap jewellery, drinking heavily, taking drugs. The term has also been used to brand welfare dependents, chavs have often been portrayed as the product of a welfare regime.

As an example, the character Vicky Pollard from the television show *Little Britain* is mentioned by Owen Jones in his book on Chavs (2011). She is portrayed as having several illegitimate children, low intelligence and aggressive behaviour. She is wearing a tracksuit, often called the "chavsuit" (see Figure 8). Tracksuit is often used as an example of low-class

clothing, associated with lack of interest in dressing properly and a “no care” attitude. Such stereotypes have in common a construction of benefit dependency, into a form of moral panic. Chavs has become a cultural symbol, often portrayed as “what is wrong with Britain today” by commentators in the media, but also by people who are worried about the economy. It is a daily conversation topic for many, not least because of its prominence in different Media. It is the work ethic, moral character and motivations that are seen as in deep decline, forming a sort of moral panic in the media and among politicians. There is reinvention of these kinds of moral panic and their stereotypes which stand in contrast to other stereotypes that has been around for a while such as “welfare mothers”. It is interesting to note that this caricature of Chavs is also very much evident among the working class themselves. The pride in work and social justice is perceived as threatened by parasitic forms of welfare. When such notions are subscribed to be the unemployed as well, it becomes similar to Gramsci’s conceptions of hegemony. This was indeed pointed out by some of the activists, who stressed that the ideas and norms of the working class are reproducing the conditions of their own domination. That is, those who are demonised and caricatured are also appropriating and using the same stereotype and language that demonised and caricatured them.



Figure 8: The character Vicky Pollard, portrayed by actor Matt Lucas

I find this similar to how unemployed men in Leo Howe’s study from Belfast appropriate folk devils but at the same time distance themselves from them. They demonise the “scrounger” amongst them, because they themselves are just “unlucky”. The benefit they receive has to be justified in the eyes of themselves, their friends, family and other members

of the public. They use a form of impression management to show that they are not ‘scroungers’ which is a popular stereotype, but ‘unfortunate’ (Howe 1998). The ‘welfare cheats’ or ‘dole scroungers’ are well-known ‘folk devils’, a category usually based on negative stereotypes, a sort of public scapegoat (Cohen 2002: xvii). Such stereotypes have existed in Britain since the Victorian age. According to historian Anne Digby: “(...) the pauperised labourer, encouraged by welfare to prefer dependent breeding to independent labour” was a portrayal that existed prior to the New Poor Law of 1834 (1989: 30). Along with forms of identity management, unemployment also entails a sort of resistance, argues Howe (1998). As a subordinate group in society, they resist the notions of themselves as scroungers, but in a fashion also reproduce these notions as they point to other unemployed being scroungers while they themselves are not. I saw this happen with the “chav” caricature in London. People call each other “chav” teasingly, and use it as an insult, it is a part of the everyday language. But I also got the feeling that some knew that they were branded as “chavs” by others as well. There was an appropriation of the word in the daily usage of people in working class environments.

Like other categories of dependents and deviants that exist in the popular imagination chavs are seen as a category that needs to be reformed and re-socialised. Chavs are feared, because they are the other, as the poor always are when discussed by academics, politician and the like (Katz 1989). But what is special here is that while the poor might be condoned or sympathised, the chavs are despised and feared. Seen as products of the council estates, in the end they are also seen as the product of government welfare. The morality of the state can be seen as having been misused to create a class of dependents as Charles Murray have argued (1990). The welfare was portrayed as a good deed that was doing more harm than good.

One of the promoters of the term chav is the website “*chavtowns.co.uk*”. It is meant as a guide to places one should avoid in the UK, designating some areas in a negative and often abusive language. This is how an area close to where I lived is described:

“The place abounds with shambling losers, wastes, the aged and the dumb – and broken-english speaking refugees and dodgers of every race, colour and creed. A hovel and a ghetto at the same time. Failure hangs over the place so heavily you can taste it” (Chavtowns.co.uk n.d.)

This language is typical of how chavs are portrayed; as aggressive, irresponsible and dumb, often accompanied by a statement like “this country is going to the dogs” signalling that chavs are a symptom of how bad the state of things are. Future pessimism signals how the chavs are viewed as a societal problem because of their unemployment but also because they

are seen as internally destined to social and cultural failure. In a language of productivity, the chavs are defined as individuals that fail to produce and are thus an embodiment of moral and cultural failure. This is linked to a discourse of human capital as a resource to the nation and to the economy.

Chav is not a unique caricature. It is possible to see similarities with other historical moral panics around young delinquents or deviants, such as the Punks with their seemingly anarchic behaviour and style in the late 1970s (Jones 2011). While “working-class jobs” such as hooligans and muggers have been an enduring annoyance for many in society, they did not have a distinctive style that marked them special enough to warrant moral panic (Cohen 2002: viii). Chav’s style, or rather lack of style, has constructed them as a distinct group in the same vein as for example Punks. It is important to state that chav does not necessarily denote economic poverty, but rather a lack of social and cultural capital. A lot of the ridiculing of chavs was based on the way they dressed, and their lack of manners and taste. The negative aesthetic is very much part of the symbolism that surrounds notions about chavs. In fact, the term chav was being based on the lifestyle of some men in the area where I lived, the way they dressed and their drinking in public spaces, typical of behaviour considered “outside of society”. The very act of consumption in public spaces was seen to be demeaning. It was cheaper to drink bottled or canned alcohol than to drink in a pub, denoting a behaviour that is cheap and marginalised as opposed to British pub culture. I was repeatedly surprised with the hateful language that was employed when the term chav was used. Terms such as “vicious” and “feral” were also used, linking them to animal behaviour. It was claimed that they could be spotted from across the street, because of the slump in their walk and tracksuit clothes. I did encounter types that could be branded as chavs in my local area. The local pub was one such place, situated next to a supermarket. I usually went there to watch football or talk to some of the guys who hanged around there. They said that the real chavs didn’t go the pub, but stood outside the bookmaker next to it, drinking cheap cider or beer. A saying that went around was that the chavs wouldn’t work there “proper”, the supermarket that is, but they would “work” there, which meant placing bets at William Hill, a bookmaker next door. “That’s chav work - betting the entire dole on a racehorse, a shame” George said to me one day when we were talking about the bookmakers that you find everywhere in London. Betting was portrayed as an unrespectable working class activity, not falling within a more rational and calculated behaviour associated with the respectable working and middle classes. I know that George, being Muslim and non-drinker, was unimpressed by the drinking of alcohol as

well as the betting. He wanted to be disassociated with “this kind of people” and saw himself as respectable compared to them. Branding people chavs was something that was done by both working and middle class informants. Some kinds of behaviour associated with working class takes on a negative morality while other aspects are held up as positive. What is interesting is how negative examples of morality such as “chavs” are being both internalised and distanced by people at the same time, leading to an ambiguous situation. The examples of betting and drinking in public can be understood as acting in irrational manner and immoral manner. They are both linked to “doing nothing”, wasteful and non-productive behaviour. As such they can be seen to reinforce the unproductive image of unemployment.

Another example of popular discourse concerning the stigma surrounding unemployment is “beat the cheat”. This was a campaign set up by the newspaper *The Sun* where the readers were invited to send in pictures or information about people who were scamming the welfare system¹⁷. Neighbours and friends were encouraged to report suspicious behaviour among people that they knew or suspected as being on benefits; there were even rewards if they did so. This is a good example of the worry about benefit fraud that has been dominant in much of the national media in Britain. In fact, it was put forward by *The Sun* as a “patriotic duty” to help uncover such fraud. Dominating the pages in the popular newspapers, individual cases of fraud became the topic of conversation for people, and informed opinions about the welfare system, exemplary of why the activists mistrusted the mainstream media. One such opinion came from a man I met when he paused to watch a protest I was participating in. He didn’t mind us protesting, he said, but we were not protesting about the right “stuff”:

“Well, I think that the government is right in cutting the costs of welfare. The system is too lenient. We need a sharp edged system. Today, if you don’t wanna work, you don’t have to, and that’s wrong. There’s a lot of people who should start working but won’t because they don’t take the jobs that are offered them. People just can’t go round and spend at will with our money”.

This quote illustrates a certain dominant thinking that calls for a tightening of welfare spending. It was a position I encountered often. I got the impression that abuse of benefits was a matter that was troubled people I talked to, if asked. It was because it was the taxpayer’s money, “our money” as it was expressed, that was being given to these “lazy people”. My impression was that the media was instrumental in creating this feeling of outrage that taxes

¹⁷ See for example Dunn (2012b) and Dunn and Clothier (2012).

were being spent on fraud. An informant told me how the newspapers were always full of stories of “people who fake a disability to claim benefits and remain unemployed, while they are running marathons during their free time”. She meant that these exceptional stories became how most people interpreted people on benefits because it was the sensational and exceptional scrounger stories that stuck with people.

The fear of dependency

This discourse about welfare scroungers might also have been influenced by academic research describing what was termed “culture of poverty”. The American anthropologist Oscar Lewis’ book on the culture of the poor in Puerto Rico influenced social policy in the U.S from the mid-sixties. It gave rise to ideas and notions of the poor being trapped in poverty precisely because of their own cultural practices, norms and values. Lewis wanted to focus on poverty as a subculture, passed down from generation to generation, characterised by dependence, helplessness and marginality (Lewis 1966). He made a connection between behaviour and the persistence of poverty. The term “culture of poverty”, has since been used by welfare reformers and politicians promoting the winding back of the welfare system and governments trying to change the values of the poor (Goode and Maskovsky 2001: 10-12). Notions such as underclass and benefit culture were taken up by social policy researcher Charles Murray, who has written several books on the underclass both in the U.S and the UK. He linked social welfare to the creation of a new underclass living outside mainstream society. This underclass was either living off the state or living on crime (Murray 1990: 5). He claimed that Welfare had a negative effect, to trap people in dependency and create bad behaviour (King 1999: 227, 270). In a similar argument, political scientist Lawrence M. Mead claims that the most important policy for the unemployed should be to restore work norms, and teach those that Murray calls the underclass to be self-sufficient and responsible for themselves (Mead 1989: 162).

Murray saw a British underclass was emerging and pointed to the rise of youth unemployment, illegitimate children and crime in the UK. Family breakdown was portrayed as a direct reason because some children were not socialised to the same set of norms and behaviour (Murray and Phillips 2001: 35). This explanation relied on the same rhetoric of failing families that the politicians in Britain, both on the Left and on the Right, utilised when “disadvantaged” youth was discussed. This was particularly the case after the 2011 riots, which brought an upsurge of talk about “Broken Britain” as a troubled nation that needed to

restore its moral values (Travis and Stratton 2011;Cameron 2011). The metaphor of Broken Britain is one of many that displayed a fear concerning the well-being of the nation state if the behaviour of some problematic individuals is not changed, especially the idle workless youth. Such fears provided recruiting ground for nationalism and anti-immigration groups, such as the right wing English Defence League and the political party UKIP which has been gaining more and more support.

Unemployment is viewed as a problem for many, because it is an economic burden on the state/the taxpayer. This is seen to be destroying the greatness of Britain, her economic dominance but also the moral and cultural basis of that greatness. The prevailing discourse of the importance of *work* that dominates British society is shot through with moral and nationalist meanings. This is perhaps a feature of the Protestant Work Ethic that has been consolidated by the industrial revolution. But to attribute it solely to Protestantism and puritanism would not suffice for modern day London, for it seems to be of a more secular form, of self-sufficiency. The religious morality is today secularised and articulated in the form of pastoral powers that seek to get people to help themselves. It is taken for granted that every able person should be working. Economic self-sufficiency has become a measure of moral self-sufficiency. Therefore, unemployment is viewed as an anomaly, indeed sometimes linked to moral disorder and pathology. Work is a defining characteristic in a person's identity in modern society. Often when you meet a person for the first time, one of the first questions that is asked is "what sort of work do you do?"

Time Management

A recurrent theme among some who are unemployed is time-management. The waste of time has long been associated with sin, and unemployment has often been compared to wasting time (Weber 1993; Thompson 1967). For those who are working, time can broadly be divided into work and leisure, two separate stages. Leisure is something you have afforded, through working hard. But being unemployed causes this distinction to blur, because many feel they do not deserve the leisure-aspect. Thus, the free-time becomes a burden. Some might pass hours in public spaces, such as libraries simply because they cannot stand being home all day. Being unemployed means that you usually don't have anywhere to go in the daytime, when other people are at work or school. Spending too much time in the home can not only be dull and uneventful, but is also a sort of confirmation of the unemployment, with nowhere to go. Going to libraries and other public places means that one at least tries to engage oneself

and feel more active. This could involve reading self-help books that are supposed to help build your confidence/self-esteem, or guides to writing a good CV. Because passivity is a state that is easy to fall into, ending up at home “doing nothing” is not good, as it has been suggested by several of my informants. Those who say this tend to be the ones who have previous work experience, perhaps as they feel the state of joblessness as more acute, having too much free time. This free time could be seen as causing them to feel guilty. As they are on their own, any free time can be seen as neglecting the “duty” of the unemployed, namely job seeking. They thus constantly have to juggle the roles assigned to them by the social categorisation that accompanies unemployment.

Increasingly, the voluntary sector has become a place where job-seekers go to in order to enhance their “employability” by appearing to be self-motivated. If you cannot put any paid work on your CV, the next best thing might be to have some volunteering experience. One way to view the activism is to see it as a way of giving you something to do, although it could be said that it does not enhance career opportunities in the same way as volunteering might. The feeling of doing something rather than doing nothing was indeed often given as a reason for why an informant chose to be an activist, as I documented in previous chapters.

George characterised some days as full of nervous suspense, following a job interview. Always, the phone would be by his side, the first week or weeks might entail a sense of nervous expectation if the interview had gone well. This then receded into realisation that this opportunity had passed if the employer never rang. While some might see the availability of work as the main cause of their unemployment, others was clear on the fact that if they were going to work it was to be a kind of work that they wanted to do. George had in mind that some jobs were beneath him, but he stated that: “I’m not picky, just want to get a decent wage. Got to have a car, right?” His friend Sean said that he was not going to be drawing on benefits, for he wanted to be independent. “I could sign up, but that won’t feel right”. Being self-employed meant that he was his own boss. This role was crucial to him. I struggled to see it as different to being unemployed as did not work during the six months I was there, but for him it meant that he did not have to go to the Job Centre Plus.

My informants among the activists shared George’s belief of doing work that was meaningful to them. While I found that the activists also viewed work as character-building and important in determining a person’s self-worth, they disagreed on the value of the work that Workfare provided. This has to do with forms of esteem, self-respect and independence that are values with a complex history that has been reworked by the industrial revolution.

Work was supposed to be something to be proud of. The low skill level as well as the temporary nature of many of the jobs meant that these jobs were de-valuing the importance of what many viewed as worthwhile “work”, understood as work that morally defined and created valuable forms of personhood. When they chanted “we want real jobs now” they meant jobs of a different sort, the kind that gave you a sense of self-respect. What was evident here was a belief that everyone should be able to reach a certain potential with their lives through “meaningful” work. Demeaning yourself through governmental schemes that serve none but the businesses that temporarily hire you and dispose of you afterwards was therefore morally wrong in their eyes. What the government presented as job-training and as motivational excesses were seen as “micky-mouse” forms of training, as scams that took taxpayers funds while providing nothing worthwhile. It is interesting to note the activist’s opposition to the government partly on its own ideological terms: the value of taxpayer funds and the moral value of work.

Being Employable

The language and rhetoric of the Government concerning the problem of unemployment often focused on improving the employability of job-seekers. When signing up as a jobseeker at Job centre plus, the individual is provided with several self-help courses, interview training and mentoring workshops. The stated intention of the Government’s welfare to work programs was to provide experience as well to motivate and inspire the unemployed, engaging in a project of self-realisation and self-presentation.

I interviewed Jane Morgan, a manager/organiser in a London-based organisation called London Youth that was helping young people in the age group 18-24 with this kind of employability-training. What the kids they were taking on needed supposedly most of all was a confidence boost. Facing let downs again and again in the job market; they had to develop “resilience” and to think towards a future career. The training was based on two weekend long courses based in a country house outside the city and then five meetings, with what they called “Action Learning Sets”. The courses were focused on teamwork, communication and interview techniques through role-play and peer mentoring. This whole project was about building careers, and not just finding the first job available, according to Morgan. The selection of approximately 100 participants was chosen from the network of the organisation as well as through the local Job centre plus. It was therefore taking on both benefit claimants and self-professed unemployed who were not drawing benefits, living at home with their

parents or surviving through other means. Morgan said that this approach was unique in combining both categories. This organisation was just one of a multitude of organisations that were delivering employability training to unemployed people in London. One of the unemployed activists, Craig, had been sent to a similar course by his Job Centre advisor, but dismissed it as a place where you were told how to behave and not to behave at an interview. The course had assumed that he was “utterly stupid”; indeed he called it useless, indicative of his lack of enthusiasm when it came to Job Centre Plus. Morgan from London Youth saw the necessity in programs like these however;

“There will always be a certain number who are out of work in society, but what is special about right now - with the recession, is that a lot of people that would normally be employed are now unemployed against their will. That is why we need to motivate them and make them understand that they will find a job if they can find their own abilities, and their motivation.”

The reasoning was that most of the unemployed would be able to get a job, if they got the necessary push. This pragmatism was a value that the unemployed needed to learn, but Morgan expressed it more as a motivation, or self-belief. I believe that unemployment can become a domain of pastoral power, an arena where the subjectivity of the unemployed is worked on in order for them to discover or rediscover the moral will to work in themselves. There was a sense that employability was something that could be de-learned. Some of the welfare to work programmes targeted people with previous employment history as being in need of rebuilding their will to work. This illustrated that work experience was not the only thing that mattered to the government, but also the will to work. This focus on employability is tied to how modern welfare states are increasingly relying on the individuals to regulate and supervise themselves, through technologies of agency. According to political scientist Barbara Cruikshank, the individual goal of improving oneself becomes linked with the societal goal of progress, it is seen as the “right thing” to do in modern society (1996: 234).

As I mentioned above, participating in such programs was not the only way to improve your employability. Upon entering the local library, one would be guaranteed to see at least one or two people reading self-help books or browsing the web for available jobs. I spent time in my local library as well, writing field notes and reading theory, and it did not take me long to understand that these places were well suited and increasingly geared for someone who wants to improve his or her own chances of success in attaining a job. Most libraries had a shelf filled with these kind of books prominently placed near the study section. Titles include “Power Interviews: How to achieve success”, “Find your inner motivation – realize yourself”

and “The Interview Rehearsal Book”, even “Job interviews for dummies”. A highly competitive job market can place job-seekers under a strain, and was seen to require therapeutic work upon the self. Such books are examples of a growing culture of self-improvement therapy. When ambition and aspiration is high, falling short of these can be damaging for a person’s self-worth. Countering rejection frequently as some jobseekers experience can also be a strain on that person’s psyche. In the words of Craig:

“That familiar feeling that you are not good enough is sneaking up on you after another rejection. People say: have you tried this or that? Yes of course I have. They automatically think that you haven’t tried everything you can to find a job”.

For him, the participation in the anti-austerity protests was a way to counter that feeling; he disliked getting up in the morning every day without something to go to. Activism was a project that took both time and effort if you involved. He stated that: “When you do that, you don’t feel so useless. You’re part of a movement then, and knowing that at the bottom of it, it’s not my fault.” This quote highlights how the activism for some can be useful and resourceful way to deal with the negative effects of unemployment such as loneliness and feelings of guilt. It gives the belief that the fault is not personal, but that there are economic and political reasons to blame. Through socialising and talking with other people that are unemployed Craig felt that it became more understandable to the individual. Focusing on the social and political nature of unemployment means that an individualistic understanding of unemployment is undermined. Individual language was perceived as a blame game by the activists. Craig said that he understood such individualistic language because he often thought like that himself. However, he also maintained that it was more important to think about the “real problem”, of structural inequalities and lack of “real jobs”. His explanation illustrated the fact that different reasonings were not mutual exclusive. George also emphasised different reasons for his own unemployment, sometimes he was talking as if it was the systems fault, and sometimes he “took the blame” himself.

Volunteering

Another way of improving one’s CV is to engage in volunteer work, as I noted above. This will be exemplified by Diane’s case. She was 21, had been unemployed for several months, and was doing voluntary work cleaning the parks and green areas before the Olympics in Newham. I met her at the local community centre, where the local library was also situated. She spent some time there browsing through ads for available jobs on her laptop: “I’ve got enough time for that”. She said the reason for her volunteering was that it

indicated that you had great character, and it was nice to have something to do. I wanted her to expand on this, but what she meant by that comment was that volunteering was a way to get ahead of her peers – those who were unemployed in a similar socio-economic position. Volunteering is seen as a good duty, a pro bono offering of your labour which would indicate to employers that you were not afraid to work and not someone who just sought to take and get as much as they could. While she used a vague notion of the “the economy” and “recession” as the reason behind her unemployment, but she saw it as her own responsibility to improve her own situation, saying “I wouldn’t want to hire myself, with no experience and that. If I perhaps just managed to present myself better and (...) get experience, I’d be closer to a good job”. She had worked in a café for a while after she had gotten her GCSE¹⁸ but could not get enough hours to make a “decent living”, so she was still living at home. She got just as much money from the benefits as she did working in the café. I asked her about going to university as an option but she said she was not ready for that. I got the impression that there were several factors that kept her from studying. The loans she had to take up to pay the tuition fees, the effort it would cost, and perhaps lastly not having good enough grades to study what and where she wanted. At the moment she was on benefits; and the volunteer work was suggested by her adviser at Job Centre Plus through a volunteering portal on the internet. She had heard of the Work Programme but she preferred to find her work on her own as she had not been long enough on benefits to make it mandatory. She was expected to go a certain amounts of interviews, and send a list to her Job Centre adviser once a month with the contact information of the places she went for a job interview. As I understood it, volunteering was common thing to do among young people that were without employment. Diane maintained that although there were idealistic reasons for doing this, she most of all did it because she wanted something to keep her busy, if only a couple of days a week. I once attended a Red Cross volunteering meeting, where they emphasised that one could learn a lot of employability skills through volunteer work, teamwork, communication skills and so on. The meeting was full (about 30 people), and all of them looked to be under 25. With no real job alternative, it was clear that this was perceived as an escape from perceived “dependence”, as well as doing something “meaningful” as the Red Cross staff expressed it. We again encounter the use of the term “meaningful” as related to some form of work. If work has a

¹⁸ GCSE stands for General Certificate for Secondary Education. It is the exam level for secondary school, when the pupils are 14-16 years. It is the last mandatory education. After this they can continue to study for their A-levels depending on their grades.

moral value in itself, I would argue that no form of work has a more positive moral value than volunteering. It is a noble deed, something “meaningful” and provides a source of symbolic capital that perhaps at some stage can be transformed into economic capital. In the act of job seeking one needs to engage in an act of self-presentation; at job-interviews, the writing of CVs and applications letters. Part of this self-presentation is to show that you have a good character, and the volunteering experience reconfirms this, as Diane explained.

I went to speak with Diane a week after our first meeting, and she had brought along a friend, Janey, who was also unemployed at that time. She had just been to an interview for a position as secretary in an office and was feeling pretty good about it. This conversation could be a good example of how the topic of job seeking was discussed – with a certain humour.

J – I think I can get the job.

D – Is it worth it? I mean what are your assignments, you know, tasks?

J – Easy tasks, like alphabetising catalogues and the like. And photocopying....
(pause) Me in a room all day photocopying.

D – Dunno. What do you say when people ask what you do? Do you contribute something to society by photocopying?

J – it’s not fun....

D – what’s the pay? Usually secretaries get paid quite well.

J – Yeah, it’s pretty good. Like ten pounds.

D – I guess you should go for it. Jobs aren’t much fun anyways. I wish I could get paid having fun... I’d like to work with kittens.

J –ha-ha, yeah. The pay wouldn’t be good.

Janey had quit university after 6 months and was now looking for work. She had studied Marketing at the University of East-London, but had not continued the course. She said it wasn’t for her. I got the impression that both Janey and Diane had optimism about the future. I told them about the activists and the efforts to reduce conditional welfare and increase workers’ rights. Janey thought that: “I think they are making too much of a bother about this, we are all going to get jobs, eventually. Most of us, I mean”. I think that what separated them from the activists I knew was that they did not have the same feeling of injustice. They did not seem like especially privileged to me. But they had a belief that you have to work for what you get. Diane stated: “Benefits are nice, but it’s only for a while, then we’ll grow up” She

meant this I think in the sense that they would get employed full time and live life like adults. I think that such an attitude is exclusive to those who are still young. When losing one's job later in life, the same optimism might be harder to find. When I asked them what they thought about the free time they had, Janey answered. "In the beginning, I didn't mind the free time. I've got other friends who are unemployed too, so I got on with my time. But now, I've got too much time on my hands. I am looking forward to working. Never thought I'd hear myself say that."

Self-improvement

I will now return to George and his daily life as unemployed. He said that there were several obstacles that blocked him from finding work. First of all, he was having a hard time finding work that suited him. His previous employment history was in the independent sales business, where he worked on his own, acquiring contracts with grossers. Several times he thought he was close to securing a contract without getting it, as I documented in the first chapter. Right before I was to leave for home he said he had secured a contract, and was promised a certain fee. About the same time he was called up by another employer that he had approached earlier, to this employer he had to say no because of the aforementioned contract. However, the day I left he told me that the employer that had first given him a green light could not take him on after all, because of unsatisfactory references. This meant that he not only lost the first job, but also lost the second job that called him when he thought he had secured the first job. It was all in all, many cases of bad luck over a short period.

He was often talking about moving abroad, first considering a move to Canada, and then Hungary. "Things have changed in this country" he said. In his mind, the recession caused a lot of business opportunities to go away. Canada was an option because he had friends who had gone there, and apparently it was not that hard to get a Visa. He contemplated Hungary because he knew it was far cheaper than the UK. I said that if he found work there the pay would probably not be as good as in London, but it did not deter him. "I could find business contacts online before I go, you know" he stated. As I mentioned above, he saw the recession as the reason for his current unemployment, but without stating it in any political way. He was, in my impression, experiencing the unemployment through the lens of individual blame although he also talked about the recession as an underlying cause. He had a belief in personal responsibility that meant that he was not interested in state help. The rejections he got from previous employers wore him down at times, gave him lack of faith in himself. The main

problem was that he was repeatedly given ambiguous answers by companies that he approached. “They just keep postponing it” was his explanation. The work he did to secure contracts was substantial. He spent many hours a day in front of his computer, writing to people or searching for jobs. Sometimes he was doing this until late at night. For him, work was tied to self-esteem. It also had to do with being a provider, as he had a daughter living in Manchester with her mother that he needed money to provide for. This was often the theme when he talked about why he needed a job. It also had to do with more material gains, as it would be for everyone. He often dreamed of the money he could make if he secured a contract that he knew was within his reach. He said he needed a new car. The old one was falling apart, and needed to be pushed in order to get the engine running. I don’t know how many times he said things such as: “If I earned 600 a week, then I’ll get the car”. In my impression, he was not unrealistic in having such a belief. He had previous experience, and was a resourceful person; he was an employable person, he believed.

George was a person who liked to be active and have something to do. There were a couple of strategies he used to cope with all the free time he had. The act of job seeking became a “job” in the effort he put in. He could sit writing applications browse through websites that posted vacancies several hours each day. He was also spending much time doing physical activity, working out and jogging. A goal was to become fit, perhaps a way for him to become more self-disciplined as well. An interesting part of his job search was to increase his self-belief through so-called self-help and motivation videos. The ones I saw were mostly posted on the online streaming channel YouTube. They were often based on an agitated motivator, or coach, that repeats things like “think outside the box!”, “nothing is impossible!” and “use blue-sky thinking” while he explains the success-stories of some of those who have utilised this kind of thinking. The favourite motivator was a man named Art Williams who always preached the catchphrase “do it!” This catchphrase was often used after he named a problem e.g.: “how do I make money? You just do it!” or “you don’t have the money? Just do it”. “What do winners do? They do it. And do it, and do it, until the job’s done”. The underlying theme in the videos seemed to be that if you believe in yourself enough and went out and acted, the reward will eventually come to you. Often in George’s apartment these videos were played in the background when he was searching the web for jobs, or when he was pumping iron. Motivational videos were a way of getting into the right mode as a salesman, he said. It was a profession that demanded a self-esteem and awareness about how to present oneself. I had to confront my own assumptions around these videos. I did not find

such motivational talk really helpful. In fact, my own assumptions about the videos were perhaps influenced by a lecture set up by some of the activists where the speaker was criticising this language as “neo-liberal corporate language” and “aspirational bullshit”. George disagreed, and maintained that it helped him believe in himself. To keep beliefs and aspirations alive you have to fight, even when everything is going against you. This was a good example of having resilience in a tough job market. This made me realise how much he had to struggle, every day, in order to keep on looking for work. These videos and self-help exercises are good examples of how George was working upon his own motivation and self-esteem as if they were skills that needed to be learned.

Two of George’s friends that I knew were also unemployed at the same time. I mentioned Sean in the first chapter, the other I shall call Stanley. He had moved to Newham recently from Manchester, and knew George because he was the younger brother of the husband of George’s sister. These men were all in their twenties or early thirties and had known each other for a long time. They spent a lot of time with each other, doing things like working out, cooking food, watching TV, talking about sports events such as football and boxing. For them, to be social and not just sit around doing nothing all day was important. Stanley showed me a form he was filling out for Job Centre Plus one day, with different columns detailing where and when he had applied for a job. It was mostly jobs as a security guard, and also as a personal assistant at a nearby gym. Just like George, Stanley was spending his free time on physical fitness. Each morning at 6.am he went for a run. In his case it was about staying fit for the jobs he applied for, as they required a certain physique. But he also said he liked to get up early every day, because it made him feel that the day did not go to waste. “You got to be positive about things” he said, when he handed me the form with the various jobs he had applied for. “Many don’t reply to you, so you have to go around and look for any job that’s available.” He then took out a book from his backpack called “Guide to positive thinking”. It seemed similar to the self-help material I have witnessed in libraries and in the hands of other job-seekers. To me, it seemed that there has developed a self-help culture around unemployment that was very much evident in Britain. It is perhaps a sort of response to the “dependency” category, as people try to show that they are improving and working with themselves to be employed. I use “employability” as a sort of umbrella term in this thesis to cover these attempts to become better, to discipline oneself. It coincides with “technologies of the self” because these, like employability, demands of the individual that he

or she needs to improve his or her self-esteem, motivation and rational behaviour to become an economically active subject that is ready to enter the job market.

I have tried to show that the reality of unemployment can be ambiguous. While understood differently by different people, individual understandings can often be part of a political field within which competing bodies of knowledge are articulated. Emphasis could be on economic and structural reasons for unemployment, or on individual failings. For some, it could seem that their self-worth is tied to a meaningful job. George was such a person; work had an undeniable value to him. While the financial strain that perhaps was the worst consequence of unemployment for him as for most people, he felt the lack of a motivating work to be a strain on his daily life. He did not sign on to unemployment benefits while I was there, but had done so before. The assistance he would receive from the Job Centre Plus would not be helpful, as the attractive jobs in the independent sales business were given through network of contacts. He therefore went to events and courses, where the act of acquiring business contacts, known as networking, was a crucial activity. I think that he had at least 4 or 5 different business cards that stated an expertise, often dating back to his previous jobs, such as “George Akibayo – Marketing Consultant; Expertise in Sports Equipment”. This laborious approach to job seeking was something of an opposite to how George’s friend Sean went about things. Sean was a man that had some ambitious ideas, but never carried them out. He was also hindered by being completely broke. His laptop, which was his workstation, was in disrepair, and he rarely had credit to make the long distance calls he needed to make to get in touch with his contacts overseas. His likeable manner and many friends was his saving grace, it seemed to me. But borrowing money and equipment was not enough. Towards the end of the fieldwork he was talking about going to Job Centre plus and signing on benefits, but I never got to know whether he actually did it. I am not sure he would have told me if he did. In the way he was talking about Job Centre Plus, it struck me that he would only go there if no other option was available. At that time, he had little other options, but still managed to stay away. The place, the physical location of the Job Centre, reminded him of failure and giving up. It was interesting to note that he would rather borrow from friends than go there. Sometimes, he would make it very clear that applying for benefits was not necessary for him, because he already had a job even though it was clear that this job was not going very well. It was always a manner of presenting himself as self-employed rather than unemployed. The discourse of failure that to some extent surround welfare recipients and the new rules that apply for job-seekers might also have contributed to discouraging some from applying for

benefits. Engaging in small business activities, as Sean did, was a resource that maintained a sense of independence. It was also an individualisation of the unemployment, making it understandable in an individual way. His responsibility was to himself, and no one else. It also gave him autonomy and dignity to engage in something, even if it was not giving him returns in the form of money.

Reciprocity

As the cases above illustrate, individuals have many ways to deal with being unemployed. Despite a discourse generated by some parts of the media and by some politicians that often demonises the “scrounger”, many did not see it this way. The unemployed themselves might view their own situation as a case of bad luck, or recognize that they have to work harder to become employable. The recession became a reality for many that could not be overcome but has to be negotiated with. The problematic issue was often moral imperative of work, as well as the stigma of benefits. In a tight economy, it seems the worry about benefit fraud has gotten a hold of the imagination of many people, perhaps placing the meaning of unemployed within the same meaning as work-shy. The imaginary reciprocal relation to the state and to the nation as a community is fractured when the unemployed does not contribute as it is perceived they should. The activists protests against the welfare to work programs were criticised as a neglect of their “duty” as unemployed people, namely to improve their own chances of attaining a job. It confirmed the negative assumptions about them, such as when people yelled out “get a job” or that they “had nothing better to do”. The implication being that in being unemployed, they were using activism as an excuse to not have a job. At the demonstration where the dole queue outside Westminster was staged, a man that was walking by made an obscene hand gesture and said “this is what I think of you” to the activists. The only response he got was laughter. For them, the whole protest was a way to renegotiate this reciprocal relation to the state in which the citizens’ rights were held higher than the duties.

In modern society, it can be argued that what you do to some extent defines who you are. If you do not contribute in the form of work you will have to cope with being morally judged by those who do. They pay for you indirectly through their taxes, in this sense you are dependent on them, and it is their money that you are taking (see also Wadel 1973: 38, 108). Receiving benefits from the state puts people in a subordinate position in relation to other people who are working and therefore understood to be contributing to society. One way to

view this is to think of reciprocity, and it evokes associations to the classical anthropological subject of gift-exchange, but not between individuals but between individual and society¹⁹. Welfare benefits are morally problematised as transactions that are not reciprocal if the receiver of benefits does not contribute something in return (White 2000). The divide between the activists I write about and the policy that they were demonstrating against is about precisely this; what rights do the citizens have in a welfare state. Is it only fair to partake in welfare to work programme to keep your benefits or is that equated with forced labour, as it was put by some in Boycott Workfare? Trying to remove this image of reciprocity from the popular conception of welfare is not an easy task, for it is an image that could seem to be ingrained in many people's minds. The moral outrage concerning unfairness of dependency and non-reciprocal relations are part of all this.

I have tried to view the experience of unemployment through showing the significance of work as a feature of modernity that has both social and cultural value for individuals. Being unemployed is not just economic for it gives moral significance to a person according to the level of significance work is seen to have. It is not only about being able to survive on the money you earn, but about living with a certain standard of consumption, such as having material goods and the ability to choose. George saw the kind of money you make as a defining characteristic of a person's well-being. Being out of job caused him to feel depressed and caused him to stay indoors most of the time, and do very little. Most activities that were happening outside the home costs money, transport in London was expensive. Socialising might entail sharing of food and drink where it would be embarrassing not to pay for one's share. Being dependent on others is often considered shameful. For many, material goods and consumption are linked to their self-image, and lacking such things can become problematic. Needy adults incur shame; and the self-sufficient person arouses respect, being able to act according to their own wishes (Sennett 2003). This is summarised by Leo Howe as "individualism", which he characterises as prevalent in Western thinking, citing several studies on unemployment that see a sharp individualistic thinking amongst the unemployed, blaming their situation on themselves and the choices they have made (1990: 10-11). Furthermore, employment can itself be seen as a way of delineating youth from adult, in the sense that employment is what makes an individual an adult who can pay his or her own rent, or mortgage, look after their family and provide for his or own consumption. Diane was living

¹⁹ Although it might also be understood as between individuals from the vantage point that welfare is paid for by individuals.

at home with her parents, not an ideal situation, the benefits given to those under 25 means that they cannot support themselves and have to rely on others. Youth is an age where employment is the very thing that defines you as adult, and not as a child, because adulthood is associated with financial responsibility and self-sustenance.

Viewing welfare in terms of reciprocity is a contractualist way of thinking that has emerged in different social situations, not just welfare (Yeatman 1998). In what Stuart White terms “welfare contractualism” the beneficiary of the state have obligations and conditions that he or she has to meet to respect the reciprocity (White 2000). This is a set of ideas that propose welfare to work programs such as workfare. He states: “Welfare contractualism typically involves making eligibility for welfare benefits conditional on some form of behaviour, such as work related activity” (2000: 512). This kind of conditional welfare influenced not only right wing conservative parties and politicians but also those on the centre-left. Welfare to work programmes are presented as the solution to the un-reciprocal nature of welfare benefits. It confirms that there is no such thing as a free gift. According to Mead, workfare is a device that will create more equality, because it will help the poor help themselves, making them value work (1989: 164). Conditionality was influential in Labour's welfare policy after the 1997 election. Both the current and the previous government have been utilising a conditional notion of welfare. White does not see welfare contractualism as incompatible with social rights; instead it is justified by its commitment to reciprocity and distributive justice (White 2000: 512). Other readings are more critical, such as King and Freedland who argues that White is overly optimistic about welfare contractualism. They claim that he does not see how contractualism is open to exploitation, and that the whole process could end up being infused with institutional distrust towards people on benefits (2003: 471). Contractualism is an example of technologies of agency, and of the self, where individuals are required to regulate themselves (Yeatman 1998; Dean 2003). Anna Yeatman argues that this new contractualism is based on individuals making their own choices, as opposed to a paternalistic principles and policy where people were thought to be incapable of protecting themselves (1998: 229). She concedes that much of the critique against the new contractualism is valid, such as the neo-Foucauldian notions that “choice” is a self-regulatory mechanism invoked by liberal governments (see section about Foucault and technologies of the self in the first chapter). On the other hand she also maintains that contemporary contractualism can contribute to the value of equality and redefine citizenship, and not undermine it, and that criticisms often confuse new contractualism with its liberal version

(Yeatman 1998: 236). So there is an apparent paradox at work. The new welfare contractualism gives the subjects a wider choice and releases them from paternalistic policies, and treats them as consumers. But at the same time, they have to choose a contract with the state that implies a reciprocal relation, where obligations are required.

Leo Howe noted that the predominance of the notions of scroungers apparently influences those on benefits so that they have to prove that they are not scroungers. In my findings, the unemployed often find that they do have to “excuse themselves from the label” of scroungers, but that in the current recession, the shame of unemployment is lessened, if you will, by the fact that there are so many others in the same situation. Howe wrote about the unemployed that they acted out a kind of “impression management” in negotiating how they act around other people, to play the part of dutiful jobseeker, and to avoid being branded as “undeserving” (1990). But he also noted that in areas with high unemployment, it was more common for the unemployed to be seen as “deserving” – that is unemployed against their will, and keen to resume work if they had the chance (Howe 1990). His study was based on working class men, often family providers, and a group that was expected to be employed. My informants had ambiguous relations to this; my initial assumption was that they did not belong to groups where the expectations of employment were not so great that it was a shame for them to be unemployed. The awareness of the high unemployment level and financial crisis also meant for many that unemployment was to be expected, and to an extent accepted. I thought that even though George was providing for a daughter, he had friends who were unemployed, and knew that this was a common thing among young men in Britain today. Indeed, I got the impression that it was not looked down upon within his circle of friends to be unemployed; there were many of them that were living on unstable economic terms. I was perhaps influenced by the views of the activists who did not feel shame about their unemployment. Indeed, they were trying to make the government, the politicians and the corporate elite feel shameful.

Just like the activists, George and his friends did not use the language of individual blame concerning unemployment. None of them were really interested in talking about scrounging or cheating on benefits to me. When I asked them about whether they felt a burden in claiming benefits however, it became clear that living on benefits indeed could be a troublesome situation. George refrained from signing on JSA for a time, perhaps because he thought he would be able to sustain himself without, but it also eased the reciprocal burden. Like that he did not owe anything to anyone, as he claimed: “Living on benefits is actually a

constraint for me; I am trying as hard as possible to be independent”. This independence came at a cost of having very little money, as I have explained above. He was therefore seeing the benefits as a problem for his own independence, which I did not understand initially. By focusing hard on his job seeking and self-improvement he was, in a way, all the time emphasising the fact that *he was not* an unemployed scrounger. While his friends might not make a fuss if he was living on benefits, it mattered to him that he was “independent”. Indeed, I understood that he resented the very idea of being dependent on the state. This fear of being seen as dependent was also part of Sean’s efforts to prove that he was not living on benefits.

Chapter Five – A conclusive discussion of some core concepts

This last chapter will explore some of the main themes of this thesis. It is split into three sections where I discuss three core concepts that have been prominent in my analysis. These relate to how unemployment is understood and lived by British men and women in the contemporary historical context. I will first discuss the resistance of the activists, and examine how their resistance can be understood in terms of failure and success. I will then tie this up to the concept of morality which I think is a useful term when trying to understand the discourses at work in this thesis. I will argue that morality is inseparable from an understanding of current unemployment in the U.K. Lastly, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of individuality as understood in relation to unemployment. I chose to end my thesis with this focus because individuality, like morality, was a theme that was constantly invoked in the press and in people's everyday narratives. Individuality was placed at the centre of the understanding of what unemployment is for many people.

Resistance

Resistance is a key word in my thesis. While it is plain to see that the activists are engaging in resistance in some form or another, I would like to clarify some different conceptions of resistance as well as try to understand the meaning of their resistance. I believe it is important to understand the context of a particular form of resistance, but also the ideas and values that rationalises it as a meaningful activity. How does it work, and how does it become meaningful? James C. Scott's interpretation of resistance has become widely influential in anthropology. According to him, resistance does not need to be in the open, but can involve hidden, small-scale and seemingly trivial practices. He uses the term "Hidden transcripts" to describe critique that is expressed outside the gaze of the dominant elites (Scott 1990: 18). Inspired by this perspective, unemployment can itself be viewed as form of resistance. It became a resistance to a work ethic that makes not just work but the moral imperative for work a form of domination over the worker. This domination could take the form of a pastoral power that supervises the ability of a person to become an employable person. An opposite reading might view unemployment as a voluntary choice but also, in a sense, resistance in that it slowly eats away at the welfare budget to which they themselves are contributing. This perceived resistance is what has troubled politicians and policymakers alike, and a widening of contractual welfare has been the solution on both sides of the Atlantic. For the activists, there were a few individuals that chose to be unemployed in the

UK, but this was seen as a popular myth that has gained widespread acceptance through the press. The few who chose to be unemployed were only a drop in the ocean that served to legitimise the popular myth of welfare cheats and widespread idleness. The activists saw unemployment as something inflicted upon people rather than something they choose. Being sent to work programs, employability training and being told what to do by the staff at the job centres is viewed as acceptance of your own personal failings as a jobseeker. Activists position themselves against the perceived passivity of those who submitted to government requirements. They contrasted this with them being active, and choosing to protest against and not comply with the regulations set by the job centres, which is what they would call resistance. The word “activism” comes from the adjective “active”, which is opposed to “passive”, and it was indeed by being active in not accepting the rules set out for them that united these groups of people, who came from diverse backgrounds. The understanding of the government, and its policy was to move the unemployed from passivity to activity. Yet such a transition itself presupposed passivity inherent in the unemployed, a passivity involving domination according to the activists. As an opposition to this passivity, to this production of compliant citizens, people should instead seek jobs they wanted and not follow the directions of the establishment. Resistance is not just the act of protesting, but also thinking and acting according to your own logic and belief, it can be the mere act of being critical.

Leo Howe, in his work on unemployment in Belfast, responded to Scott’s work on resistance and argued that subordinate groups might not always resist the representations generated by the powerful, but sometimes internalise them and use these representations themselves (1998). In his reading, the resistance of the unemployed was not directed upward in society, but rather directed at other unemployed. Unemployed men might resist being labelled as a scrounger by others, but still use this label to categorise other unemployed men to delineate themselves from the stereotype. Howe based his criticism of Scott on the perception that Scott saw struggle as between groups in mutual opposition and neglected division among the subordinates (Howe 1998: 532-533). Howe, on the other hand focused on this internal competition. In my case, I would argue that the domination that was resisted was seen as a hierarchical struggle by the activists, which is why my focus differs from Howe. In Howe’s case the unemployed internalised the dominant discourse of scroungers without actually resisting the discourse itself. In my case, I have been trying to see how this discourse has itself been resisted, by the activists. The activist’s belief was that the domination of scrounger stereotypes was the result of a campaign brought on by the politicians and their

allies in the press. For the activists, only when the unemployed reject the stereotype altogether will they be able to reject their own subordination by this discourse of scroungers and welfare cheats. It is clear is that there are differing versions and understandings of resistance at work here, built on different conceptions of power, activity and compliance. But both cases reside on the notion of a hegemonic discourse, of welfare cheats. I believe that the resistance I am writing about is important because it can be conceptualised as a reaction to a use or misuse of concepts and power of definition by official authority i.e. the state. In a Marxist understanding, one that I argue the activists were informed by, resistance should therefore be directed upwards to where the real was located, i.e. politicians and the financial elite.

A telling example of such forms of resistance was how the activists interpreted the 2011 riots. Instead of seeing it as an example of moral decay among people who had too much time on their hands, they saw it as part of the struggle of the downtrodden. Like Martin Luther King once said; riots is the language of the oppressed and the voices of the unheard. An activist, Adam, from Tottenham said this in a speech to an enthusiastic audience:

“Media says it can’t be a protests since there is looting. But to be honest what does looting represent? Inequality! There is always looting in mass uprisings. It’s not surprising that people took things they were exposed to daily. People kept saying to me that it’s about time.”

He lived in the area where the riots started. Therefore he viewed first-hand how inequality and injustice was built in the system. The portrayal he and many others gave points to a fundamental dichotomy, a deep structural inequality between those that have and those who have not. Events were interpreted in the language of resistance and struggle, and stratification of power. In the wake of the riots, many politicians and commentators spoke of the looting and vandalism that happened as a result of family breakdown and lacking morals among those who participated. Adam regarded this as just propaganda that hid the fact that these people had nothing, but were exposed to material wealth all around them.

“Consumerisation” and market mentality was something that penetrated “every inch of society” and the rioter’s actions should be understood in light of this. Pointing to what they see as a legitimate reason for protest, rioting was a political act. It was becoming evident that an increasing segment of the population would not achieve the social mobility they had hoped for and would have to settle for low paid jobs or unemployment and mandatory job placements. Dreams of “self-realisation” and possibilities of social mobility through higher education were made difficult for many with a working class a background as tuition fees were tripled while the job vacancies plummeted in local neighbourhoods and communities. I

remember someone telling me that the financial crisis had shattered the “neo-liberal illusions” that had been allowed to go unchallenged for a long time; people should understand that a strong welfare state was now needed as never before. Many of the activists hoped that people would become angry and disillusioned over failed promises and welfare cutbacks and this would provide an ideal “recruiting ground” for those willing to make a change to the social order. Whilst they focused on cases that were local in scale, such as campaigns against particular welfare programmes, many saw these local resistances as part of a global struggle between the haves and have not’s. The riots had given the young people a sense of control. Just like the students felt when they demonstrated in 2010. I sensed a feeling amongst these people that there was a surge coming, a mass movement of protest. It resonated with other sayings I had heard. “Once people realise what they are doing to us, they will have to come around and join our struggle” an activists told me. He was optimistically speaking about the public leaning about what he said was the “betrayal of the government”. Their interpretations of current events such as the riots often enforced their own belief of this coming shift in people’s perception.

I will in the following outline some problems in the activist’s agenda of resistance. Some of the points I make here might be interpreted as underlying causes as to why activism failed to gain popular support, a theme I also explore in the third chapter. First of all, the activists were struggling to be taken as a serious political force, due to their marginal standing. The activists were predominantly small groups preaching on behalf of the majority. Claims to speak on behalf of the 99 per cent were not based on any real estimates, but rather their way of talking on behalf of the general public. The activists were often perceived by outsiders as a small group speaking on behalf of something as elusive as the “working class” or “ordinary people”. These fragmentary resistance groups were often unified in the rhetoric and representation, as when claims were made about the “working class”. While such claims might be common in political rhetoric, positing a dichotomy between one the one hand an elite group of politicians, bankers, and the wealthy and on the other hand the “people” is problematic, especially if it is only a minority that speaks on behalf of this imagined people. In reality, there are so many different socio-cultural groups in London that one could not hope to speak on behalf of the working or middle class, unemployed or working poor, there are also ethnic and racial divides. The rhetoric of the activists also implied and articulated a vision of the activists as “enlightened”; in contrast to those they spoke on behalf. Many activists talked about the general public as without proper knowledge about “what was going on in society”.

These kinds of statements are dangerous because they elevated the activists to be above the general public in an intellectual sense. And this kind of positioning harmed their image outward, because it represented them as self-appointed experts, but little else.

For many unemployed, these protests did not resonate with their concerns because they were staged by a small minority of people, many of whom had higher education. Both the forms of protest and the content were marked by a specific culture that belonged to certain groups of people – a politicised working class and a disenfranchised middle class. Some protests had indeed certain middle-class associations, not least because there were many graduates involved whose educational background was distinct from those who had no other education than secondary school. The student movement brought with it an academic and “intellectualised” way of doing things, and also bore the marks of being “newly radicalised”, not having the same ties to the established protest movement. Some might leave the movement as quickly as they had joined in. Students as well as former students were seen as having lifestyle and concerns that was not shared with those who did not have higher education. They were perceived not to be suffering too much for they had often more resources and greater opportunity in the job market than those without tertiary education. Their authority and leadership was partly undercut when they were perceived as a group of middle-class youth that were going through a radical phase.

Alongside this, the activists’ public image also suffered from a sense that they were people who were already committed to political radicalism, living in what one could term “echo chambers” where they interpreted everything in society as a class struggle. They reinforced each other’s belief whilst at the same time ignoring outside opinions. In chapter 3, I argued that there was some truth in this public image, even though I would like to add that most of the activists were not fanatics, but on the contrary open minded people who believed in a cause. Finally, their public image also suffered from notions of them being lazy and workshy, not helped by how they often were represented by the media. They did not manage to escape the image of a group of people that simply *did not want to work*. This led to what I think was one of the biggest failures of the campaign against austerity which was that it did not attract a large section of people from working class backgrounds. Reaching out to those who were most threatened by the government’s austerity measures, the people in low skill, low-pay jobs – the working poor and the many unemployed people out there - was the main ambition of many of the campaigners. This did not succeed in my impression. It was recognised as well, and many talked about how the working class movements were supposed

to be rebuilt. Creating awareness about the injustice was the primary activity, and there was continual discussion about ways of organising against the austerity measures. Debate and discussion around this theme signalled an awareness of the problem of the popularity of their political agenda. Many highlighted that it was problematic that there was too much talk and too little action. A popular saying states that action speaks louder than words. In the end, we will have to see how these protests will fare in the future, and how they will come to be understood, to understand the full scope and success or lack of success that they will have.

I will now turn to look at how the activists counted their resistance as successful. There could be several ways of counting a protest as a success or failure. One way is to count how many have attended a demonstration or how many supporters a campaign has. This thinking assumes that the popularity of a particular discourse or belief makes it more influential and capable of transforming policy. Being aware of media is able to influence popular opinion, many activists preferred strategies that focused on getting the attention of the media. Even if it is true that a large turnout at a demonstration can be one way of doing just that, it is not the only way. I have mentioned several tactics designed to get media attention in chapter 2. Shaming their opponents was one such way, spreading out on shop floors as a protest was another. It is my impression that they succeeded in disseminating alternative discourses on several occasions. The workfare programs became a liability for the government when several organisations pulled out, and much of the media attention to these cases came through the tireless work of the activists. They managed to successfully harass the government into a defensive position on workfare, with the Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith repeatedly having to prove how these programmes were fair and not forcing people to do unpaid labour. Both on the internet and on the street, their campaigning was giving results when they created attention to the welfare cuts. It was clear that many people were not aware of the extent of the Government's austerity plans, and the activists managed to spread some awareness about it.

Foucault writes that power can be understood through analysing the forms of resistance that they generate. These forms can be a starting point for an understanding of the "economy of power relations" (1982: 780). For Foucault the government of men requires a certain form of rationality and that those who resist or rebel against a form of power cannot merely criticize the institutions at hand but has to question the form of rationality that governs men (Foucault 1998: 84). There is power in this rationality, if it is a dominant discourse. The activists were challenging the power structures that they perceived to be monopolising the

information about governmental policies. In specific, the activists launched their own counter-narratives of what constitutes the contract between the individual and the state. Their resistance sought to publicise a new critical way of looking at the how things work in society. By viewing their resistance to this dominant discourse as a form of power struggle, I understand their resistance as most of an attempt at challenging power/knowledge in a Foucauldian sense. However, they often articulated understandings of power in a Marxist sense, that is; power was most of all to be found in the hands of the 1 %. Still, through their own articulation of a resistance to domination they had their own power, which should not be understated.

Morality

I have tried to show that morality underlies perceptions of injustice, as well as perceptions of dependency. Both activists and those who denounced scroungers based their claims on a perceived moral superiority. As noted by Howe, moral superiority is claimed by individuals or groups by denigrating categories of other groups (1990: 190). The activists viewed themselves as having a moral superiority vis-à-vis the political and economic elite, seen as self-interested. On the other hand, unemployed people served as scapegoats and indeed as examples of economic and moral failure in the eyes of others. Such moral categorising is a way of not only delegitimising a person, but is also an act that individualises and marginalises at the same time. Both the activists' efforts of targeting individual members of the government, and the notorious cheats that were exposed in the media in the UK daily were attempts at a personalising and individuating rhetoric that served to uncover an underlying truer "reality". The stories in the media do not just discuss welfare cheats in a general everyday manner, such stories are often fantastic or absurd, involving extreme cases of theft, cheating and consumption. For example there was the story in tabloid press about the "dole queen" who "(...) despite living on handouts, she was still able to treat her current partner to flying lessons and even owns a horse and a £1,000 parrot called Jake" (Clarke and Miller 2013). Such stories highlight the flawed individual character of those that cheat on benefits, who become moral exemplars of an entire "class" of scroungers, whose lifestyle is based on milking the welfare system. It was pointed out by many of the activists that this "class" of undeserving welfare was often confused with the working class, or a section of the working class known as the underclass, some might call them chavs. In the policy of the Government, dependence is presented as the antithesis of economic agency, and the latter is

seen as the proper moral conduct (Jayasuriya 2002). I believe that through different narratives and personal stories both activists and those that they counted as their adversaries were trying to make their version of reality become the reality that is accepted by most people. It is, in a sense, a struggle to make the “masses”, the “people”, take part and share these narratives.

A lot of my data concerns the moral issues that unemployment seems to generate. The social policy promoting welfare to work schemes is promoting a vision of unemployment that views it as dangerous to the individual. Unemployment, the free time and the waste of time leads to stagnancy. As I documented in the previous chapter, strong notions of reciprocity inform public opinion on welfare. In moral terms, unemployment can be perceived to be wrong because it is not reciprocal; the unemployed do not contribute to society in economic terms, sometimes they might even be seen as a parasitic group feeding off the labour of others. This moral norm is informed by the religious asceticism noted by Weber. Indeed, sloth was constructed as a sin even in the ancient biblical texts (Sennett 2003: 109).

Work, and employment, is desirable, perhaps even more so than before, as the national economy is in a recession. For many, unemployment means that they have to prove their own self-worth. It is about what they “should be” doing with their lives. Repeatedly, the aspiration of being better, and more employable, is being questioned. The Job Centre policy states that you should be looking for a job, and as they pay you your benefits, you comply. But this is not the whole story. Proving your own self-worth can be as much about proving it to yourself as it is about proving it to others. It is a continuing “interplay” between how others perceive your unemployment and how you perceive it. Unemployment might be individually understood, for it seems how one person understands it can be different from the next person, even though different narratives play a part in organising such understandings. For individuals, their understanding of unemployment can also be different with time. In the beginning, it might feel like a transitional phase, something that will pass, “in between jobs” as one might say hopefully. This optimistic understanding might change over time if the unemployment persists, as one realises that this situation is not temporary as one might hope. It is here that people might need to engage in strategies to reconstitute their self-worth. In this thesis I have several examples of such activity, the activism was such an example, but also the confidence building that so many partake in when they are working on ways to improve themselves.

For some, work is strongly tied to a feeling of independence and self-importance, and that being out of work can damage ideals of self-worth. I argue that the agenda of the activists

is not just to counter what I termed the “moral narratives” of unemployment as scrounging, but to contribute to a new understanding of what unemployment is, and how it is understood by most people. Far from normalising it, they were trying to construct it as shaped by external forces that by and large are outside the grasp and control of the individual. But there is morality in their claims as well. Indeed they portray themselves as moral heroes, fighting injustice and greed associated with an alliance of government and corporate power. They portray the government, and politicians, as the ones who are immoral, as an elite group out of touch with the ordinary people. Furthermore, the activists often targeted individual cabinet members as personally responsible for the policies being implemented; they were also targets of their campaigns about the examples of misuse of power and the welfare system. One protest actually took place outside the house of Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg of the Liberal Democrats, who they said had broken some of the promises he made before the 2010 elections after his party became part of the government coalition. He had promised not to increase tuition fees if his party came to power. The language and rhetoric of the activists at this protest and other occasions were grounded in moral terms such as “liar” and “deal breaker”. The moral integrity of the individual politicians was both highlighted and problematised. Given the fact that Government policies claimed to be morally based, such moral language used by the activists was a way to retake the correct “moral” and inverting the morality of these politicians.

Is it possible to talk about unemployment without bringing up the moral side; is it not first and foremost an economic and material situation? Indeed, unemployment was for many first and foremost about having little money. While work could be defined as a desirable object in itself, the economic importance of a steady good wage was what mattered most. What I think is important is how a situation such as unemployment is perceived as an economic failure, which leads it to become a moral failure as well. Precisely because the economic and moral are more closely connected than one might think. As I have tried to show, an economical successful individual is the model citizen of the neo-liberal state (Foucault 2008, Dean 2002), the *Homo Economicus*. The protestant work ethic, which Max Weber identified as contributing to the growth of capitalism, also contributed to the rise of work as an absolute moral activity. Since the 19th century, capitalists and socialists alike have believed that work is the most important source of mutual respect and self-respect (Sennett 2003: 109). There is so much importance placed on the individual being able to improve his or her self that failing to do is ascribed to moral failure as well as economic failure. When

people are taught to become more employable there is a moral incentive to do so, as well as economic. It is what they “ought” to do, a moral imperative. Being dependent is then the very antithesis of values of self-enrichment and improvement because of the moral failure that has become interconnected with dependency.

In this thesis I have often been discussing archetypes, stereotypes and public imagery. It is important to note that these, as examples of moral narratives, are not substitutes for reality in people’s understanding, nor that they are understood similarly. There are many different understandings of what a “scrounger” entails, for example. If not, it would have to mean that all beliefs based on one moral narrative about something such as unemployment would be more uniform than they are. People’s personal opinions are sometimes more and sometimes less influenced by such moral narratives. I think that people understand social situations differently according to their own life situation; and that of their family and friends, as well and many other aspects of life that play a part in their life. It is whenever narratives correlate with the real life experiences that exist on the idea level that they become meaningful, important to the individual. For example, an unemployed man that experiences what he perceives as injustice in the system and sees that this is also happening to his friends and relatives who are in the same situation, he might be more willing to “buy into” a belief that it is the system’s fault, not his own. This is perhaps stating the obvious, but it is the point I am trying to make. A social situation that is as fraught by moral terms as unemployment could therefore more easily be understood in the language of the moral narratives.

Homo Economicus

I will end this chapter by discussing individuality as a concept to be understood and reclaimed by the unemployed against other forms of individuation. Unemployment is often understood as a highly individual situation to be in. This was expressed by the majority of the unemployed people I talked to during my fieldwork. It is also a claim that is supported by other studies on unemployment such as Howe (1989) and Wadel (1973). Throughout my fieldwork I continually saw examples of people exploring this sense of individuality. Individuality and autonomy is a key part of contractual welfare, but this is a particular form of individuality. It takes a “private” form, which focuses on the individual’s economic freedom (Jayasuriya 2002: 309). Rejecting what they saw as a form of subjection by the state, the activists were celebrating themselves as free individuals. As unemployed, they wanted their rights to be protected so they could be free from the corporations and big business, who were

seen as a totalising power similar to that of the state. On the other hand, there are those that view unemployment as a danger to the individual because it is related to dependency, which decreases your freedom and thus represents a danger to your economic autonomy. George and Sean for example, wanted their individuality to be free from being on benefits, which was seen as a constraint. Similarly, Diane saw it as a problem to be unemployed because it meant that she relied on her parents, as well as on the state. She expressed that she could not be independent the way things were. These are examples of how unemployment is seen to limit your independence, and ability to realise ambitions that many people have. The activists' belief however, was that there was no freedom guaranteed by the current socio-economic regime, and that the freedom promised by capitalism was a hoax. The silent majority, that is most people, were seen as giving up their freedom if they were not actively standing up to Prime Minister David Cameron and the other politicians in the government. As I have shown, dependency is seen as the very antithesis to individual freedom which is precisely why it is so feared. The activist argued that it was by playing on this fear that policy makers and politicians were able to constrain individual freedom, through policies such as workfare.

The idea behind welfare to work schemes is to move people into a state of employment, to give them more of a personal responsibility. No one would argue that there is anything wrong with people becoming employed, nor giving people experience. What upset so many people was how these schemes were being used to make profit for private companies, how sanctions were being used to force people and how they undermined real work. In short, they minimised the jobseeker's options, and his or her ability to choose a road to employment, and instead placed him or her in a provisional job-placement. What most unemployed people want is to find a job. But it means a job that they wanted to have, that they applied for, and which has some sort of meaning to them. This was the controversy surrounding workfare. Instead of making a person a responsible citizen, these schemes were in fact decreasing the responsibility of the individual and indeed limiting their ability and right to find work. The paradox of illiberal practices legitimised by liberal thought of economic freedom has been explored by several authors (Dean 2002; Jayasuriya 2002; King 1999). Seemingly, nothing have changed since the 1990s: contractualist discourse is still intertwined with neo-liberal social policy in the U.K, now promoting austerity cuts and workfare programmes under a guise of increasing the individual's liberty, even while it actually decreased it for many. However the activists were subscribing to a different understanding of freedom, as something more than just economic; what Jayasuriya might term "political participation" (2002: 313). As long as they

continue, policies such as workfare will not go unchallenged in Britain, but whether their voices will be heard is another matter.

The question that remains is what the role of the state is in the lives of its citizens. What does it mean to be a citizen in a welfare state, what sort of entitlement is there, and how are rights and responsibilities understood? As I have exemplified in the above chapters, there has been a playing out of individualism when it comes to unemployment. This individualism has been coupled with a welfare state that to varying degrees has been a provider for those who are unemployed. These issues are raised explicitly by the activists in their on-going campaign to defend the welfare state. But it is important to note two things. Firstly, the individualism that the activists saw as a danger to the welfare state and the unemployed is not a new phenomenon. The unemployed have always had to prove their worth as deserving. Work has such a moral value as well as an economic value in society that unemployment is inevitably considered a devalued state of existence. Secondly, it is important to note that people see their individuality as unemployed in relation to the state differently. While the state can compromise your individuality by demanding certain behaviour from those who are on benefits, it can at the same time be seen to guarantee your individual freedom by supporting you, even as it makes demands. This, I believe, can be understood as an example of the dual individualising and totalising power of the state (Foucault 1982: 783), where the individual's freedom is both guaranteed but at the same time set as subject to certain criteria. It is a new contract between the subject and the state that has been redrawn, an example of the welfare contractualism that is becoming more and more salient in western welfare states (Yeatman 1998). The debate that I am taking up in this thesis is about whether this new contractualism will result in empowering the citizen, or trapping him or her in their own responsibility. I argue that such policies might entail empowerment to people, but not to all people. Those deemed "high risk" (Dean 2002: 46) would have no choice, such as unemployed with little experience who were required to participate in some programmes such as Mandatory Work activity. Yeatman argues that contractualism as a policy choice can be used to increase the citizen's freedom because it opens up room for a person to choose the solution to his or her problems rather than have them imposed (1998). But for this to happen, the ethos of the contractualism must respect the free will of the individuals, which she argues that liberal contractualism does not, as we also have seen in Britain. I would argue that recognition of the importance of work in modern society should be accompanied with recognition that this work should be meaningful work to those who undertake it. Meaningful work would have to spring

out from the jobseekers ability to choose his or her employment. Welfare to work schemes were undermining this, and in the process devaluing the meaning of work. This is ironic considering that these schemes were set up with the very intention of increasing the importance of work among the unemployed.

The moral division between dependency in one end of the scale, and individual responsibility at the other end is not a natural given. But in a society like in the U.K, this is seen by both lawmakers and many in the general public as a legitimate divide between those who are “hard working” and those who are not. It is the model of Homo Economicus that sets the criteria of how a person should act, behave and think. Actors are thought of in economic terms and in a language of productivity where unemployment becomes an adversary and unproductive position to be in. A feature of this thinking is a dichotomy between those who contribute and those who do not contribute. While this is hardly new to anybody, what is crucial is how this language and rhetoric are applied to their very individuality, as human beings. What I mean by this is that individuals work upon their problematised selves using this language of unproductivity. The unemployed becomes individuals that have to improve their own human capital and this means people’s motives, their will, skills and gestures of politeness and deference. We return here to employability. The liberal subjects of the state are put into categories based on their ability to be autonomous and self-governing (Dean 2002). The welfare dependents are in the words of Mitchell Dean a “high risk” group, and subject to “technologies of agency”, intended to transform them into active citizens (2003: 168-169). Becoming entrepreneurs of the self, unemployed are supposed to improve on their own work morale. But along the way, are the individuals also losing their own agency? I believe that this focus on employability could be an inversion of the individual’s agency. What is thought of as increased freedom is in fact increased demands made of the individual; to be employable. The individual thus loses agency when he or she has to improve his or her self, because of the “high risk” status of unemployment. While technologies of agency are measures that can be good-willed, help people in finding work, they also carry an aspect of the authoritarianism that can exist in a liberal state, as explained above (Dean 2002).

Concluding remarks

Whether people believe in the personal responsibility of unemployment or not, it has become the overarching and “mainstream” way it is being understood in a general public discourse. But the different understandings make it unclear what it actually means. My aim in

this thesis has been to show how people manage their subjectivity differently according to their own social situation. The activists have been trying to negotiate and reclaim their subjectivity as free individuals from “moralist” claims of dependency. It has been a campaign to create a different signification to unemployment whereby the individual is no longer responsible for his or her welfare. “It depends on what you make of it” an informant told me, speaking of the everyday life of unemployment. The actions, demonstrations and the protests were all signs that they were refusing to take the demonization of jobseekers and other people on benefits lying down, he said. He suggested that many probably found that activism appealing because it gave you a way to think about unemployment in a way that it mattered to the individual. I believe he had a point. Those who are discontent and ready to do something about it are claiming a political role; they have a sense of mission – to tell people the truth. Unemployment was then understood as not just about being without work, it was a symptom of what was wrong with society. What is clear from my material is that unemployment is a space where individuality is problematised, in many different ways.

In this thesis a much discussed topic has been competing narratives that have been used to different ends, by different viewpoints on what a fair welfare state should be, and could be. One must not forget that this thesis is also a narrative, written with the intention of establishing a certain understanding about unemployment. It is a narrative that provides an alternative discourse to the “mainstream” impression that many have about unemployed people. In ways it runs parallel to the narratives of the activists I have been participating with, but I have also tried to expand on this narrative, to make it a “narrative about narratives”. I have been exploring the ambiguity of unemployment, in individual as well as structural terms. Social understandings of unemployment are using certain narratives that have a moral form. However, these narratives are all the time subject to on-going interpretations, modifications and critique, and I have been using the resistance of the activists to illustrate this point.

This last chapter has served as a conclusion for this thesis, where I have tried to address the many themes that were brought up during my fieldwork in London. In my use of theoretical and philosophical discussions about citizens and their rights to welfare, I have always worked on not losing sight of what really matters: real people. When writing this thesis, I always had in the back of my mind the people I spent time with and talked to during my fieldwork, who offered me their view of the world and on current events. I have the greatest respect for how my informants have struggled in their daily battles, living through unemployment, day by day. In the end, this thesis is about a struggle. A struggle for work,

struggling to get by, a struggle for the right morals and a struggle for a better understanding of unemployment, all these came together in this thesis. I hope that it came together in a coherent way, and that the reader will understand the points that I have been trying to make.

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Figures

All figures are by Mathias Andersen except the following:

Figure 2: Picture of the original Labour Isn't Working Image from the Daily Mail: http://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2010/03/25/article-0-01D535C90000044D-15_468x256.jpg

Figure 6: Picture of the 1936 march from the Daily Mirror: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/kevin-maguire-on-the-jarrow-march-this-is-our-real-1519168>

Figure 7: Picture of the 2011 march from the Jarrow March 2011 blog: <http://jarrow2london2011.wordpress.com/>

Figure 8: Picture of the character Vicky Pollard from the blog Single Mother Ahoy: <http://singlemotherahoy.blogspot.no/2012/11/single-mothers-scourge-of-society.html>

No informants are portrayed in any figures.

