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Societies Without Citizens: The Anomic Impacts of Labor Market Restructuring and the Erosion of Social Rights in Europe

Abstract: This article studies the chronic and acute anomic social impacts of the development of market societies in Europe over past decades. Focusing on the firm but linking micro and macro levels, it argues that the passage from the Welfare State to disembedded markets and neoliberal governance has generated individual and collective anomie by depriving social actors of agency and voice while caging them in the disciplinary constraints of an ideal competition society. Promoted by public and private governors animated by visions of managerial omnipotence, this reconfiguration has hollowed out the cluster of rights that founded democratic and social citizenship in Europe. The article discusses the manifestations of anomie, stressing the violence flowing from the radical uncertainty to which atomized employees and more broadly citizens are confronted in the face of the reification of collective goals, which have been reduced to participation in market society. Drawing on the classical literature (Durkheim, Parsons, Merton) but expanding upon it, the paper examines exit solutions, at individual and collective levels, involving violence against the self (suicide) and others (mobbing, xenophobia, fascism), and concludes that Europe seems to be heading towards a protracted period of danger laden chronic and acute anomie.

Keywords: Anomie, Atomization, Welfare, Citizenship, Suicide.

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This article aims to shed theoretical and empirical light on the chronic and acute anomic social impacts of disciplinary liberalism in Europe, generated by the initially gradual but currently time-compressed and hence violent passage from the economic and social regulatory systems of the Keynesian era to the neoliberal system of disembedded markets and patrimonial growth regimes (Aglietta, 1998; Aglietta and Rebérioux, 2004). As officials of the International Labor Organization (ILO) emphasized in late 2013, the 'erosion of worker protection' in recent years constitutes the 'most significant change' in the European labor landscape since World War II (Porter, 2013). New forms of domination have been and are being coercively institutionalized, one of the core features of which is a mode of government and governing at distance that transfers responsibility to citizens and employees to bring about a new market society undermining and indeed negating the cluster of rights founding democratic citizenship (Somers, 2008). At society level as well as at firm level, neoliberal governmentality has opened the way for the arbitrary rule and rules of the new managerialism. The argument developed here is that this fundamental reconfiguration, which has been promoted by public and private governors animated by visions of managerial omnipotence and who mobilize technologies of power to impose a new market utopia, has generated chronic and acute anomic effects at individual and collective levels by depriving social actors of agency and voice while submitting them to the imperative of actively participating in the construction of an ideal competition society. Developing within atomized societies where collective meanings have been distorted by incremental or sudden change, anomie threatens people with the prospect of annihilation, leading to individual and collective reactions of defense.

Anomie was diffusing long before the 2007-2008 financial crisis and was brought about by the gradual deterioration of living and working conditions, downward social mobility, embittered competition and fading solidarity, mass unemployment and widespread precariousness, and new forms of work organization notably in service sector industries. It had multiple expressions: social contempt and the denial of recognition (Honneth, 2007), fear of loss of social position, the brutalization of interpersonal relationships at work, the increase of psychological and somatic troubles and burnouts, as well as the rises in mortality rates, suicides and work-related suicides (WHO, 2006; Stuckler and Basu, 2013; Burgi, 2012). All the latter have been exacerbated by the implementation since 2010 of severe continent-wide austerity programs, especially in the so-called 'periphery'. Imposed by transnational and national rule-makers oblivious to the lived experiences of the governed, 'internal devaluations' have led to abrupt declines in living standards, severe cutbacks in essential social services and public goods (health, education, unemployment benefits and pensions), surging unemployment and rising poverty. Acutely felt in southern Europe and countries such as Ireland, this sharp social regression has generated widespread disorientation as people struggle to grasp the suddenness of change and find themselves facing the complete indifference of governors to their problems and their suffering. Loss of meaning is compounded by the denial of recognition of one of the pillars of democratic citizenship: the right to public voice. Mass protests are not heard, even when they involve significant parts of the population. People are not only being deprived of the material means by which to live a decent life but also of the foundational right to be recognized, respected and heard as an equal member of a community of destiny. One toxic but predictable reaction to acute anomie has been the emergence and/or consolidation of illiberal political parties and xenophobic movements, some of which are life-threatening such as the neo-Nazi 'Golden Dawn' party in Greece (Burgi, 2014). This broad sociopolitical trend cannot be simply dismissed as 'populism', as a good deal of superficial comments suggests. The rising support garnered by xenophobic and fascist forces reflects the need of the social subject to belong to a meaningful

community protecting against the destructive forces of the market and to re-appropriate agency in the face of impersonal governance at distance (Polanyi, 1972).

This paper cuts across different levels of analysis – society, firm, individual –, each of which cannot be studied in depth here. It links these levels, focusing on the mechanisms of domination at firm level that were imported into government procedures and techniques of governance, and which allow an exercise of power generating ever greater constraints on supposedly autonomous agents. The firm is thus seen as the microcosm of a general transformation generating work malfunctions and leading to anomie. The argument is unfolded in three parts. The article first examines the theoretical background of the concept of anomie and its relevance to current social realities and its import for social theory today. The second step involves a synthetic analysis of the system of domination mentioned above. The third part discusses the concrete manifestations of anomie drawn mainly from sociological observation of service sector firms. The conclusion mobilizes and applies insights from Polanyi's *Great Transformation* on the way in which late-nineteenth and early twentieth century economic liberalism, by making market mechanisms the ultimate regulator of society, generated acute anomie and paved the way for mass violence and authoritarian/totalitarian 'solutions' to the atrophy of social life resulting from commodification and atomization.

Revisiting anomie

Contrary to what the etymology of the concept suggests, anomie should not be defined simply as normlessness or necessarily a lack of norms. In the former case we would find ourselves in the case of a state of nature characterized by the war of all against all, a chemically pure hypothesis that Hobbes and other social contract theorists considered an imaginary postulate of human interactions prior to society. In the latter case, as Durkheim (1951, 1997) himself emphasized, while the lack of norms can indeed be at the source of anomic situations, the overabundance of norms and regulations (the 'forced division of labor') can just as well lead to imperfect forms of solidarity or indeed its dissolution that lead to anomie. The problem in this case is not the quantity of norms but their success or failure in maintaining the cohesiveness of society.

Anomie is best defined as a loss of legitimacy of norms that determine both the material conditions and the webs of inter-subjective meanings giving coherence to life in society. This loss of legitimacy, which is a source of social suffering, indicates that a given set of norms no longer provide social actors the 'deep-seated need for a relative stability of the expectations to which action is oriented' (Parsons, 1954: 125) and no longer allow them to 'communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life' (Geertz, 1973). Social relations are thus 'overdetermined' by insecurity (Parsons, 1954) and uncertainty: 'The limits are unknown between the possible and the impossible, what is just and what is unjust, legitimate claims and hopes and those which are immoderate' (Durkheim, 1951: 253).

One can thus affirm that anomie combines three essential factors: a loss of legitimacy of norms, situations of uncertainty and insecurity, and social suffering. These three components draw attention to the lived experience of social subjects and underscore the fact that society and the individual are mutually constituted. They also invite us to carefully distinguish between causes and consequences. Insofar as anomie implies an insecurity and social suffering, it can at individual level provoke physical and/or mental pathologies. However, the causes of anomie are not psychological: anomie is a 'property of a social system, not a state of mind of an individual within the system' (Rose, 1966). If the causes of anomie must thus be searched for in the social system, it remains to be determined under which specific historic social and political conditions it becomes a property of the system.

While classical sociology offers important insights and tools of analysis it only partly grapples with this question. Merton (1968) highlights the discrepancy between valued collective ends in society (in particular the idea of success and the American Dream) and the means made available to social actors to attain them, which may be insufficient for reasons linked to social inequality. This discrepancy provokes anomic situations and reactions that are judged to be deviant with regard to the instituted social order. But his analysis remains confined to the choices and strategies of actors without critically questioning the social system itself. Durkheim and Parsons, for their part, are carefully attentive to the properties of the social system and associate manifestations of anomie to social change. Writing at the end of the Nineteenth Century, when it was still possible to think the world in evolutionary terms, Durkheim (1997) argues that anomie results from an evolutionary process governing historical change. In his reading, anomie reflects an adaptation crisis to the deepening of the division of labor and the individualization of social relations due to industrial society, taking either a chronic form when change is gradual or an acute form in the clash between labor and capital. At the same time, in his work on *Suicide*, he situates anomie more broadly as the breakdown of social bonds in various social contexts.

Parsons, writing after the Second World War, rightly emphasizes that anomie is more or less intense according to changing circumstances. It becomes acute or generalized where and when sudden social upheavals occur, when the collisions between haves and have-nots are the sharpest, when economic crises strike most violently as in Germany in the 1920s and the 1930s (Parsons, 1954: 104-41). However, in his analysis of the of the German pre-Nazi social structure and of 'some sociological aspects of the fascist movements', Parsons (1954: 104-41) considers that the acute anomie that led to the rise of Nazism in Germany was caused by the maladaptation or the resistance to change of a culturally and structurally highly conservative society that would otherwise have followed 'the main line of evolution of Western society, the progressive approach to the realization of 'liberal-democratic' patterns and values' (*ibid*: 116). Durkheim and Parsons both stress that in crisis situations where people are confronted to a loss of meaning they become attracted to nationalism or other forms of identity movements which provide a 'goal' and a source of group integration (Durkheim, 1951). Parsons, with historical hindsight, goes further when noting the search for 'membership in a group with a vigorous *esprit de corps* with submission to some strong authority and rigid system of belief' that provides a 'measure of escape from painful perplexities or from a situation of anomie' (Parsons, 1954: 128-9).

These are important conceptual frameworks to grasp the problem of anomie but their functionalist and evolutionist assumptions weaken their general applicability by eliding the question of power and thus blurring causality. Change, incremental or sudden, is not fate. It does not occur in a vacuum outside of historically defined power relations, institutions, structures and policies that shape and determine its pathways. Nazism can be accounted for quite differently than as a maladaptation of German social structures and German culture (predisposition to 'romanticism') to 'modernity', incarnated in the Anglo-American liberal idealtype. Polanyi (1972) provides an altogether more powerful explanatory account when he argues that the origins of fascism, as a general phenomenon, 'lay in the utopian endeavor or economic liberalism to set up a self-regulating market system. Such a thesis seems to invest that system with almost mythical powers; it implies no less than that the balance of power, the gold standard, and the liberal state, those fundamentals of the civilization of the nineteenth century, were in the last resort, all shaped by one common matrix, the self-regulating market'. Polanyi's historic sociology is doubly relevant today in helping to understand the role of political power in bringing about the new utopia of market fundamentalism. In much the same way that the 'road to the free market (in the nineteenth century) was opened and kept open by an enormous increase in continuous, centrally organized and controlled interventionism', the

road to current market fundamentalism has been opened and enforced by national and transnational authorities whose massive and continuous intervention imposed a new hegemonic rationality/ideology on society that bent the latter to their preferences.

The system of domination

Social transformations in Europe (and elsewhere) since the 1970s have been shaped by a voluntarist project and a doctrine of market primacy that advocates the subordination of all social life and the public sphere, the state included, to the market. Its implementation constantly widens the discrepancy between means and ends that generates the disorientation and loss of meaning of social subjects, leading to anomie. Public policies were thus incrementally reconfigured, simultaneously promoting and adapting to the post-Keynesian restructuring of capitalism. A new set of hegemonic values and norms became instituted, aiming to govern *for* the market and to organize and accompany a thoroughgoing social transformation in which competitive mechanisms 'act as the regulator (of society) at each instant and at every point of the social fabric' (Foucault, 2004). This implied the dismantlement of the schemes of solidarity, which were never comprehensive,[1] that founded the post-1945 social contract in Europe and other industrialised states — the dismantlement of the cluster of rights that give substance to democracy and citizenship.

The 'new programming' of liberalism instituted a system of domination with two predominant features that help account for the production of anomie: a disciplinary project coupled to an ideal of perfect governance. The latter is founded on the rule-makers' utopian belief in the possibility of a total mastery of people and things. By people I am referring to a very broad spectrum of subordinates: the laboring (and potentially dangerous) classes, 'generic labor' (Castells, 2000) which is no longer limited to the most vulnerable — youth, women, (un)documented immigrants — but extends to any (un)employed person the crafts, talents, professional hopes and/or experience of whom are no longer considered useful and legitimate for the purposes of the market, as well as secondary and tertiary managers. As discussed below, this utopia aims for total control of the behaviors and the *subjectivity* of this chain of subordinates who are expected and commanded to conform to proliferating, arbitrary and contradictory top-down rules and instructions. The mastery of things refers here to the equally utopian aim of 'total quality' prescribed for produced services or commodities. The disciplinary project refers to the conservative neoliberal 'exercise… in state building', advocated by Hayek (1973, 1976, 1979) and today by conservatives such as Lawrence Mead (1986) designed to restructure the state and redefine its intervention objectives in such a way as to fully and finally empower the markets, while dismantling the institutional arrangements and cluster of rights guaranteed by the institutions of the post-1945 social state.

The change of paradigm from liberal democratic regimes in which the state governed the market – embedded liberalism (Ruggie, 1982) – to disciplinary liberalism or authoritarian liberalism entailed 'separating economic policies from broad political accountability in order to make governments more responsive to the discipline of market forces, and correspondingly less responsive to popular-democratic forces and processes' (Gill, 2001: 47). This governing at a distance has become the core feature of European public policies in which non-elected supranational institutions (European Commission, European Central Bank, European Court of Justice), working with and alongside governments, set and impose budgetary, monetary and competition regimes that cage member states in a straightjacket of disciplinary rules and systems of control (Fitoussi, 2002). Since 2010, the disciplinary powers of these non-elected bodies have been considerably reinforced thanks to a rigorous system of institutionalized monitoring and quasi-automatic sanctions. Through an array of instruments (the Fiscal Compact, the European Stability Mechanism, the Memoranda of understanding among

others), they now can and do direct in detail the policies of Welfare State retrenchment, control their application and punish 'assisted' countries (Greece, Portugal, Ireland) as well as those under 'surveillance' (the majority of EU states confronted to 'sovereign debt' problems). Public policy choices that reflect interests and power relations are presented as the inevitable and necessary response to historical constraints independent of politics and human will (globalization). Policy thus becomes simply a matter of management and adaptation.

The effective power of European Union (EU) governance institutions should not however obscure the equally active role played by national states the elites of which have converged, to a greater or lesser degree according to national configurations, around the hegemonic project. Indeed, the most powerful states in the Union, notably Germany, have been at the forefront of the downsizing of the Welfare State (the Hartz IV legislation) and the bringing into being of the new market society. The system of domination runs through a chain linking transnational, national, and local levels, public and private actors. The current European system of (un)social governance corresponds neatly to frameworks of management of the poor in the United States:

> A common logic defines each link in the chain from national lawmakers to state officials to local boards to contracted providers to senior managers to frontline case managers to welfare clients. At each step, actors below control information needed by actors above and hold discretion over how to pursue preset goals. Actors above seek to discipline this discretion by setting benchmarks, controlling resources, monitoring performance, promoting particular discourses and frames, and deploying rewards and penalties. In this sense, the contemporary system is guided by a coherent governing logic that applies to public officials as much as to the poor themselves. Neoliberal governance prioritizes freedom of choice for lower-level actors, yet it works through a panoply of tools to maximize the chances that these actors will 'freely choose' courses preferred by agenda-setting actors above (Soss et al. 2011: 11).

Social policies are thus constrained by overriding frameworks that subordinate them to rigid 'conditioning conditions' (Foucault, 2004). Public policies designed to normalize people and put their behaviors in line with market imperatives reduce citizenship to self-care conditional upon meeting one's needs through the market (Brown, 2006). At the same time participation in the public sphere has been discouraged or, as Paul Hirst writes, efforts have been directed to 'maximizing minimum participation' (Faucher-King and Le Galès, 2010: 8). Social movements (strikes, mass demonstrations, alternative movements such as *Occupy*) are met with apparent indifference or repression. In Europe, the rule-makers demand that voters reconsider their choices when electoral results do not conform to their desires. Potential opposition is also silenced in other ways. An ever wider set of controls and sanctions have been set up directed against vulnerable people and dissenters: the recent invention of an 'offense of solidarity' criminalizing those who would help undocumented migrants, the criminalization of poverty (Evangelista, 2013), and the use of anti-terrorist laws against domestic political dissenters.

All of these illiberal exercises of power have been made fully apparent in the properly despotic management of countries under 'assistance'. In the case of Greece, which has been made into a laboratory and can be considered an ideal-type rather than an exception, the contempt of citizens (who have been reduced to experimental subjects) is strikingly illustrated by the authoritarian transnational and national management of the 'crisis' (Burgi, 2014). The governors are acting as if there were literally 'no such thing as society' (Thatcher, 1987). The country has been subjected to an avalanche of measures that are liquidating the right to have rights (Arendt, 1979; Somers, 2008) and institutionalizing a totally arbitrary normative order. Laws are constantly been changed to adapt society to the unreason of austerity. The law has

been openly transmuted into an 'instrument of inequity and injustice' (Somers, 2008). As my ongoing research in Greece confirms, people are confronted to present filled with injustice and have no way of knowing what tomorrow will bring.

The system of domination and technologies of power deployed in the EU owe much to the new managerialism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999) that set precedents in the reconfiguration of rules and norms in the workplace. Like government at a distance, the new corporate governance instituted an impersonal chain of command that forces upon employees radical uncertainty over the way to resolve contradictory obligations with reduced and insufficient means. In the service sector, which has grown considerably in recent decades and encompasses a vast array of public institutions (education, health, social welfare, culture, police, etc.) and private actors (distribution, banks and insurance companies, telecommunications, tourism, catering, transport, etc.), they have faced uninterrupted restructurings and reorganizations. This has generated intense stress due to the synchronous and paradoxical demand of *standardization* of relations and process (offering a regular service in time and space for a mass *clientèle*) and *personalization* of service (adapting the service to singular users or customers). To resolve this contradiction, employees are summoned to develop their 'initiative' and to demonstrate their 'autonomy' and their 'responsibility'.

This is an aporetic injunction since employees are not given the means to master the purposes or the objectives they are being asked to realize. Three points need to be emphasized here. First, the prescribed work (which is formally demanded, organized and controlled), and the prescription of subjectivity (the injunction of autonomy and responsibility in the execution of prescribed tasks) are defined and programmed following a classic bureaucratic logic by highly specialized experts working in separate domains. Their prescriptions constitute a 'cosmos of abstract rules' (Weber, 1978) disconnected from real work situations. Second, the prescriptions are defined with reference to an *ideal* (Dujarier, 2006) of 'ever more and better', a relentless quest for mastery of people and things, for 'total quality' and 'performance'. Objectives are fixed and conceived *in abstracto* to reach ever-higher levels of 'excellence', a limitless goal. Third and most importantly, this 'management through excellence' is characterized by its denial of the difficulties, the limits and the contradictions that can and do appear in real work situations – what people really do and how they really invest themselves in work (Aubert and Gaulejac, 1991).

While it is possible to transfer responsibility of reconciling organizational ideals and the concrete exigencies of service from one hierarchical level to another, employees at the bottom of the hierarchy who are confronted to real issues and real people are obliged to respond to whatever prescriptions come down from on high through concrete acts. Even if they judge them impossible to fulfill, they cannot delegate to others the difficulties and contradictions that have not been resolved. They have to manage, immediately and most often alone, the tension between ideal prescriptions, on the one hand, and limited means and real work conditions on the other. If they complain, they will typically be told (at best): 'I want results!'. Or: 'There's noting I can do about it. It's an order from on high'. 'The "burden of decision" is enormously great' (Parsons, 1954: 128).

As the critical literature shows, contrary to the widespread belief that the new forms of employee autonomy constitute an improvement on the slavish repetitiveness of taylorism, in reality they are a new form of servitude. Today's worker is required to be everything: autonomous, responsible, ready to mobilize all personal resources, capacities and initiatives to best complete her/his functions. But she/he has no rights. Certainly not the right to protest or to contribute to the definition, refinement and improvement of operational procedures. The autonomy supposedly conceded is in fact an obligation to achieve contradictory results under the threat of penalties. Thus, for instance, nurses under worsening time and resource

constraints, may be forced to choose who among their patients will be best served and are held accountable for their potential mistakes (like medication distribution errors) (Dujarier, 2006). They are left face to face with the damage inflicted on their personal and professional values by productivist pressures. For most employees, as well as many mid-level managers, resistance to productivism and its contradictions implies the very real risk of individual sanctions. Collective action is warded off through the threat of relocation or mass layoffs. The autonomy of executors and the transfer of responsibility to them for the consequences of decisions over which they have no control is nothing less than a technology of power that reinforces domination from on top.

The system of domination erected over past decades is more than the unfolding of a historical process of rationalization (Weber, 1946), the 'dream of reason' (Alexander, 2013) built on the faith of perfection that inevitably separates the rulers from the ruled. Disciplinary liberalism is closer to Goya's *dream/sleep (sueño) of reason* that *produces monsters*. Through it we are entering the 'polar night of icy darkness and hardness' that mechanically petrifies life (Weber, 1946). The current system is causing a general disruption of activity that is generating situations of chronic or acute anomie having toxic consequences.

Anomie, Violence and Negative Solidarity

At macro and micro levels, a new normative order has thus come into being which is arbitrary at its core and which places social subjects in situations of existential uncertainty. It constitutes a radical social change provoking what Merton considered to be the source of anomie, the dissociation between normative social goals and the institutionalized means available to achieve them. It should be stressed that there is more than a simple difference of degree, however, between the context studied by Merton and the one prevailing today. Merton was questioning the discrepancy between insufficient means available to individuals due to their social positions and the goals of a society of abundance valuing success and the American Dream. Today, collective aims are limited to the society of competition that profits only a very thin caste of hyper-privileged. For all the rest, cutbacks of socialized public goods imply a severe loss of autonomy, just as declining protection from employer arbitrariness implies stark vulnerability. Market society thus puts into question the right to have rights in European societies.

This picture raises the question of the legitimacy of the new normative order and the puzzling lack of sustained forceful resistance. The answer, elaborated below, is that despite the internalization by some people of the competition regime and its ideational contents (Block and Somers, 2005), the new normative order has proved dysfunctional. Anomie, it should be stressed, does not simultaneously and uniformly affect people. A significant fraction of the population, including vulnerable individuals, still vote for the parties and figures responsible for the economic and social policies that disfavor them. Likewise, part of the personnel adheres to the normative order in firms. Nonetheless, the effect of current corporate governance has been to disrupt activity and to put the entire social fabric of firms in tension due to widespread unpremeditated discord over right and wrong conducts (Huez, 2008). I will illustrate this through a synthetic discussion of the loss of meaning at work, the violence of arbitrary conducts, and the development of strategies of substitution to the positive solidarity of previous work collectives.

Under the current regime, employees (as well as the unemployed or precarious people [Burgi, 2006]) are systematically denied the experience of meaningful work. To turn around Geertz's famous formulation, social subjects are suspended in incomprehensible webs of significance spun by others. Productivist pressures daily confront them to tasks that are

impossible to accomplish while respecting deontological criteria and the rules of work well done. A job well done and even simply useful work (Dejours, 1993) that give meaning are 'impeded' (Clot, 2010). As Philippe Davezies (2004) notes:

> When *we* speak of quality we are thinking of good quality, referring to criteria of technical efficiency, justice and authenticity. But for the manager, it's something else. Quality is quality for the market and in market time… excellence is what is just enough. To do more than is required to sell is to waste collective resources. Whoever aims to do more in the name of personal ethical conceptions and work norms is not working for the collective. He's doing it to satisfy personal needs for his own enjoyment. He's manifesting an individualist attitude.

Employees are asked to defend the competitiveness of their firms or their service while working poorly, without having the time or the means to offer a product or service that they consider of quality.

The workplace is characterized by arbitrariness. The chain of command and human resources were not devised to recognize and deal with the difficulties employees face when implementing contradictory instructions. Line managers do not want to be bothered and to risk problems with their superiors. Managers, workers, service providers, production units are all put in competition with each other and both their individual and collective performances are evaluated on the basis of abstract predetermined criteria. Some team managers are given quotas in advance specifying the proportions of good, bad and medium future individual evaluation scores. Arbitrary acts and mistreatment at work are generalized: threats, insults, humiliations, wrongful disciplinary sanctions, excessive work overloads, unpaid overtime, disciplinary tactics (controls of phone communications, of the number and length of breaks, of conversations with colleagues, unwarranted supervision of work procedures, recordings, etc.), paradoxical requirements (typically setting unrealistic targets without giving the qualitative and quantitative means to achieve them), isolation tactics, and so on. This type of work organization and the deterioration of work conditions resulting from it is widespread worldwide (Molinier and Flottes, 2006; Aucouturier, 2006). Its underlying philosophy, as Albert J Dunlap, a big name in industry restructuring, once said, is the following: 'If you want to be liked, get a dog. In business, get respect!' (Greenhouse, 2008). In the words of an other interviewee cited in the same book:

> There are only two ways of getting employees to work hard: you either reward them… (or) punish them. And since your budget is tight and you need to control costs, you punish them. Heap on the pressure, brutalise, intimidate, humiliate, harass, push them to the limits and do not hesitate to break the law (*ibid)*.

This general situation results from the dissolution of the principles and rules that were/are the basis of *decent* work: opportunities for productive work that delivers a fair income, institutionalized social protections, freedom for people to express their concerns, to organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives, collective rules of bargaining and legally binding means of individual and collective defense of rights. To mobilize employees and get them to adopt corporate culture employers emphasize the personal interest of the employee, use collective entertainment events that call upon infantile features of personality, organize 'challenges' in telephone platforms, offer laughable gifts (key-chains

with corporate logos, lottery tickets…) rewarding sales, and communicate within the firm through games, seminars, debates and other substitutes for rules, principles and rights.

These strategies do not promote teamwork and do not provide the cement for cohesion in the atomized firm. At best they trivialize the 'need' for change. But employees are not fooled. 'Internal communication is falsified. I don't trust it', they say. 'What the management is looking for is an improvement of the form not the substance: people don't know any longer where they live' (Burgi et al., 2008). Obliged to respond to prescription coming down from on high, they act 'as if' the impossible were possible (Dujarier, 2006). This has serious consequences. Repetitive acting 'as if', whether done through obligation or impotence to do otherwise, constitutes self-denying behavior in the face of constant contempt and lack of recognition. They play a game that is 'overdetermined' by insecurity (Parsons, 1954) to protect themselves from arbitrariness and the threat of social death, a game that reorients behaviors towards goals that are foreign to useful work.

The loss of legitimacy of norms in the workplace also expresses itself in other ways such as apparent apathy, a defense mechanism (Dejours, 1993) designed to protect oneself and avoid sanctions. Interviewees say: 'We have to keep quiet'. Surveys indicate a rise of absenteeism, work-related accidents, depressions, burnouts and other psycho-somatic manifestations. Conversely, middle managers typically seek protection by trying to raise their social profiles. They 'play solo' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999). Social know-how (Courpasson, 2000) replaces professional competencies. :

> We all tell ourselves: 'I'm me'. I need to be seen as a personality in the firm' (A team manager) (Burgi et al., 2008).
>
> We don't manage on objectives but… to be well regarded and avoid slipping on banana peels (A corporate executive) (Burgi et al., 2008).

Counting on social know-how is a win/lose bet. Reputations can be taken hostage (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999: 147). It is betting on the shortcut of seduction, disloyal ruses, or lies. It reflects the coercive need to obtain recognition from the most powerful figures in the hierarchy and the public, rather than from peers who cannot be so easily fooled about the reality and the quality of work (Guiho-Bailly, 1998). It is a risky bet:

> There is the prince phenomenon: a boss can be thrown out from one day to the next… Today, people are either kicked out or praised to high heaven (Burgi et al., 2008).

Impersonal managerial domination 'uses fear and mistrust, and fabricates indifference to the misfortune of others'. It 'makes opponents bend to impose a "consensus" which is then held up as voluntary' (Lhuilier, 2002). The result is 'negative solidarity': a 'solidarity proper to things' that does not demand cooperation among people (Durkheim, 1997). Employees are today treated like things, as elementary particles of an overarching competitive machine. As such, they are cornered or caged in a system leading to a loss of meaning and to wounded identity. When chronic anomie becomes absolutely unbearable for social subjects, it manifests itself in acute form, leading to individual or collective searches for exit. Exit can indeed offer a positive way out if the subject has choices. However, when such choices are lacking, the attempt to resolve acute anomie through exit also leads to life-threatening violence directed against oneself (suicide) or against others (mobbing or psychological terror in the workplace).

> Psychical terror or mobbing in working life means hostile and unethical communication which is directed in a systematic way by one or a number of persons mainly toward one individual. There are also cases where such mobbing is mutual until one of the participants becomes the underdog. These actions take place often (almost every day) and over a long period (at least for six months) and, because of this frequency and duration, result in considerable psychic, psychosomatic and social misery. This definition eliminates temporary conflicts and focuses on the transition zone where the psychosocial situation starts to result in psychiatric and/or psychosomatic pathological states. It is remarkable how central is the feeling of violation of rights in all the cases which have been examined (Leymann, 1990: 119-26).

What has just been said applies equally to the macro level, the wider socio-political environment of society in which xenophobia and violence against others is an increasingly disturbing phenomenon. Xenophobia permeates political discourse, primarily on the right and far right of the political spectrum but also increasingly in parts of the center-left[2], and has become institutionalized in recent decades in exclusionary and increasingly militarized European migratory and asylum policies. 'Undocumented migrants…are cutoff from rights and benefits and mostly live and work in clandestine ways…the negotiation between insider and outsider status has become tense and almost warlike' (Benhabib, 2005: 675; 2004). Borders have become militarized and member states of the EU had set up 420 detention centers (in 2011), in which undocumented migrants are concentrated in conditions violating basic principles of dignity. The EU has also been encouraging and/or financing detention centers and surveillance systems in third countries situated around and sometimes quite far from the EU as part of its externalization of border control policies (Migreurop, 2010). Greece, where anti-immigrant violence has been particularly acute due to the rise of neo-Nazism and de facto government encouragement of xenophobia, has recently announced the creation of fifty detention centers. Reinforced border controls in the EU as well as in other 'western' countries has revealed the gradual militarization of the global immigration question. Meanwhile, the much larger mass of undocumented migrants that pass through these control systems are used as a vast pool of subaltern 'illegalized and deportable labor' subject to the constant threat of official repression or daily informal violence (Bernardot, 2012: 25). The persistence and indeed the growth of overtly xenophobic and fascist political forces in Europe, as well as elsewhere, is an expression of the worsening anomic conditions of society.

Concluding remarks

The anomic social configuration within the firm thus mirrors the general condition of social life in European societies where the cluster of rights that found citizenship have been eroded or indeed, in some cases such as Greece, nearly erased. It is that general condition – the social structure of the present – that lies at the root of rising suicide rates as well as the hateful collective movements or parties that have installed themselves in the continental political landscape. The demand made on people to commit themselves, identify themselves and give themselves entirely to the firm, or to making their belonging to society conditional on exclusive adhesion to market principles, constitutes an injunction denying subjects multidimensionality to their identity and threatening their being. 'If one is nothing but a Spartan, a capitalist, a proletarian, a Buddhist, one is very near to being nothing at all, and therefore to not being' (Devereux, 1972).

People are being reduced to bare life or 'life exposed to death' (Agamben, 1998). Contemporary state and corporate governance for the market has generated a pervasive threat of social death and a not unfounded fear of annihilation. Atomization, the primary social fact of market society that exposes people to bare life, is the common denominator of all the types of suicide identified by Durkheim, whose analysis has application beyond the firm and the workplace. It is the condition of the person who is in the prey of 'intense altruism', whose person has so little value that attacks upon him are weakly restrained, and who is so little protected that 'society does not hesitate, for whatever reason, to ask him to end a life that it holds to be so insignificant' (Durkheim, 1951: 221).[3] Atomization is the source of the vulnerability leading to fatalist suicides that result from 'excessive regulation' of people whose 'futures are pitilessly blocked and whose passions are violently chocked by oppressive discipline' (Durkheim, 1959: 276). The relevance of this remark to the current rise of work-related suicides and suicides provoked by European austerity policies (Stuckler and Basu, 2013) cannot be overstressed. In like manner, the mobilization of social egoisms characteristic of the atomized society of competition can, in extreme cases, lead to self-annihilation, since 'the individual alone is not a sufficient end for his activity…When, therefore, we have no other object than ourselves we cannot avoid the thought that our efforts will finally end in nothingness, since we ourselves disappear' (Durkheim, 1959: 213). The ever growing ranks of the vulnerable – the unemployed, the precarious, undocumented migrants, etc. – are stuck in a goalless present:

> … one does not advance when one walks towards no goal, or—which is the same thing—when [one's] goal is at infinite distance. Since the distance is always the same, whatever road taken, it is as if one had stayed sterilely agitated at the same spot… To pursue a goal that by definition is unattainable is to condemn oneself to a state of perpetual discontent (Durkheim, 1959: 248).

At collective level, the authoritarian and brutally swift deconstruction of social rights, hence of substantive citizenship, in an environment of intense insecurity is generating counter-systemic movements of positive and negative solidarity offering radically different exit solutions to acute anomie. In the paradigmatic Greek case, positive solidarity outside of official institutions can be seen in the development of networks of solidarity such as alternative hospitals and pharmacies set up to compensate in part for the collapse of the public health system, food distribution associations, barter arrangements, and so on. Yet the dominant trend in Europe seems to be negative solidarity, with dangerous forces rising that feed on generalized anxiety and apparently give voice, agency, and belonging to people deprived of stability, dignity, livelihoods and futures – people reduced to bare life.

Polanyi (1972) has much to say that is acutely relevant to this central dimension of the current European experience. Fascism, in his reading, was a transnational phenomenon that constituted a 'solution to the impasse reached by liberal capitalism' and the impossibility of the utopia of a market society, achieved at the 'price of the extirpation of all democratic institutions, both in the industrial and the political realm'. If fascism was a response to 'an objective situation and not the result of fortuitous causes', it was made possible by the 'stubbornness with which economic liberals…in the service of deflationary policies supported authoritarian interventionism (resulting in) a decisive weakening of the democratic forces which might otherwise have averted the fascist catastrophe' (Polanyi, 1972). The reference to Polanyi here is not meant to imply that Europe is presently engaged in a general movement towards fascism or that we would be witnessing a repeat of the inter-war years. Yet, as the Greek and some other southern European cases show, Europe's past has not fully passed

(Burgi 2014) and democratization may not be as irreversible as was widely thought (Kitschelt, 1995; Hainsworth, 2008). Today, like yesterday, revolt – the effort to exit anomie – can take on plural forms, some of which are death driving (*Thanatos*).

Given the unbending commitment of the rule-makers to their current hegemonic course, the more likely though not necessarily much better outcome than a return to interwar type conditions is a temporally indeterminate situation of chronic social anomie, with differentiated expressions depending on specific social fields, moments and loci. Some fields will exhibit upsurges of acute anomie, others forms of constructive resistance. Overall, the current configuration is not favorable however to the formation of positive solidarities with systemically transformative effects.

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[1] The Keynesian welfare state and the notion of citizenship considered as the right to have rights are used here as an ideal-type. As T.H. Marshall (1950: 28) writes: "Citizenship is an ideal against which achievement can be measured and towards which aspiration can be directed".

[2] In the case of France, see for example the French daily *Libération* (2013).

[3] This and following quotes of Durkheim are my translations.