*Los Parados: Cómo viven, qué piensan, por qué no protestan*, Enric Sanchis (2016).

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Serious literature, which gives voice to the experiences of the unemployed, is surprisingly rare given the persistence of unemployment in contemporary society. In this respect Enric Sanchis’ book is very welcome, particularly given its Spanish context with unemployment still hovering around 20% seven years after the start of the economic crisis. The author is well qualified to make this contribution, building on research and several previous publications on the unemployed and the informal economy.

Organized thematically, the central section of the book consists of five chapters analysing the results of 88 in-depth interviews. These were carried out in 2012/13 in a dozen Spanish towns with interviewees stratified by gender and age. The first chapter on the daily life of the unemployed addresses the significance of work for the interviewees, the process of job search in which they have been engaged, their perception of the informal economy and the impact of unemployment on family life and relations with relatives. Subsequent chapters address health and psychological well-being, political attitudes, attitudes towards immigration, and views on protest. The dangers of generalizing about the experience of unemployment rapidly become clear as a variety of situations emerge.

Each of these central chapters goes much further than reporting the views of interviewees. At the beginning of the chapter, the scene is set by the author with a review of the academic literature pertinent to the theme of the chapter. Reference back is made to this academic framework in the presentation and interpretation of the data.

The first main chapter of the book provides an invaluable overview of sociological literature on unemployment which provides the reader with a useful framework of analysis with which to evaluate the data later presented. A particular contribution of this chapter is the use made of French and Italian literature with which the Anglo Saxon reader may be less familiar. The chapter addresses some of the most debated issues in literature on unemployment such as definitions of unemployment, how it should be measured, the search for employment, and societal images of the unemployed.

The book provides evidence in relation to two of the most persistent questions raised in Spain in relation to unemployment. Firstly, how can unemployment be so high if there is such a significant informal economy and, secondly, if unemployment is so high, why do the unemployed not become more involved in political protest?

In relation to the first question, the first chapter convincingly makes the case that official statistics far from overestimating the current level of unemployment in Spain actually underestimate it because of their failure to take into account, particularly, workers who have despaired of the system and dropped out and workers who are under-employed. In the view of the respondents, although working in the informal economy is relatively frequent, it is not very significant in terms of income and in no sense is it viewed as a substitute for a ‘proper job.’ The limited degree of collective protest by the unemployed has to be related to their lack of a common social identity, more evident now than in the 1930s because of their greater diversity, and their lack of resources to organize. Their response to their problem tends to be an individual one. The few examples of collective protest tend to be seen as expressions of discontent rather than a means of achieving practical results.

In the final chapter the author puts forward proposals to alleviate the problems articulated by the interviewees, above all the need to recognize the limited investment in public services (and hence public employment in Spain). The trade unions, viewed on the whole positively in the interviews, are seen as the key agents of change but, if they are to play this role, they need to be far more vocal and active in the organization of the unemployed. In this respect it would have been interesting to test the views of trade union representatives on their role in this area. Other areas which might also have merited attention in this chapter were the role of (in) active employment policies including occupational training.

There are areas where the presentation of the book could have been improved. Although there is an extensive list of bibliography, there is no thematic index at the end. However, it would not be fair to be too harsh in this criticism: In this writer’s experience the lack of an index is a part of Spanish academic publishing culture. It would also have been interesting to give more variety to the presentation of interview data via a more extended use of the type of figure on page 281 in which a variety of responses are juxtaposed. Including the interview schedule and an example of an interview transcript would have increased the reader’s appreciation of the methodology of the research. Finally, it would have been interesting to build on the data and put forward a typology of the unemployed encountered in the interviews for the reader to consider.