The globalized countryside: Migrant farmworkers in the Italian agriculture between exploitation and struggles for justice

Gennaro Avallone
(Università di Salerno - gavallone@unisa.it)
Main objectives

1. To show the context of Italian agriculture

2. To show how Italian institutions and media system have discovered migrant farmworkers several times, avoiding to change exploitation relations and housing problems (Logic of Emergency)

3. To highlight both the increasing structural centrality assumed by migrant labor power and the contemporary absence of its political and societal recognition (Logic of Marginalization)

4. To show as although their subaltern political and material conditions, migrant farmworkers have been able to organize themselves over time (Subjectivation and heretical movements)

5. To recognize as migrant farmworkers are constituting a new international proletariat, active in a globalized agriculture structured around exploitation relations (Conceptual issue)
1. The context: The Italian agriculture

An heterogeneous context: characterized by differentiated processes of production, that combine different levels of technology, different levels of add-value, and several social and legal regulation frameworks.

with a **rigid** economic and **hierarchical** power structure: that favours some economic actors against others in the too long **supply chains**. For instance, in the case of oranges, “the price increases considerably **from the field to the counter**” (Mangano, 2015, 31).

Italian and migrant farmworkers pay for this hierarcical structure, (even though migrants are generally more penalized), because, for ex., if the cost of a kilo of oranges in a Rome supermarket goes up to **2.10 euro**, “just **0.03/0.06 euro** goes to the agricultural worker” (Mangano, 2015, 38).
The supply chain

Farms (of different size) – (in many case) informal intermediaries (Caporali) - Farmworkers

Produce and Sell to

Traders, that buy (fruits, vegetables, other products from Farms)

and sell through Transport companies to Fruits and vegetables markets

That sell to Large-scale distribution

Or Logistic platforms

Or Processing industries

Oranges case

0.10/0.20 euro

1.70/2.10 euro
The absence of work and workers

Farmworkers produce goods and value, but they are not recognized, they are (almost) invisible.

Agriculture is Made in Italy, quality, excellency, entrepreneurship, fresh and safe crops, high technologies,...

But work and workers are absent: a case of commodity fetihsim (a social relation between people - capitalists and laborers) assumes "the fantastic form of a relation between things" (Marx)

Where is the work, the living work?

In an agricultural context characterized by a rate of undeclared work that was 21.9% in 2012, according to National Institute of Statistics (Istat, 2015).
2. THE LOGIC OF EMERGENCY
1989: Italy discovers immigration

On 25\textsuperscript{th} August, 1989 Jerry Masslo, a young South-African refugee was killed by a gang to defend his little money. He lived in Villa Literno (the countryside around Naples), where he was working as a seasonal worker in the tomato fields.

After 6 months, the first organic law on migration (Martelli Law, February, 28\textsuperscript{th} 1990, n° 39) will be approved
On 7th October 1989 the first antiracist national demonstration was organized in Rome

Corti di bianchi e di neri hanno raggiunto la capitale da ogni parte d'Italia «Dobbiamo camminare fianco a fianco per costruire una società multietnica»

Marcia della civiltà
A Roma 200.000 contro il razzismo
LA TRATTA DEGLI SCHIAVI
FIRMATA DALLA CAMORRA

VILLA LITERNO La cosa più orrenda è quel maledetto gioco in cui ci usano

AL 'MERCATO DEGLI SCHIAVI'
DOVE LA CAMORRA VENDE LAVORO

NAPOLI La camorra sta reclutando centinaia di extracomunitari. I primi
contatti per l' ingaggio cominciano d' estate, a Villa Literno, quando tutte le

The Slave Trade
signed by the Camorra

To the 'slave market'
Where The Camorra sells labour
On 27 August, 1989, two days after Masslo's death, Repubblica, an important Italian newspaper, publishes an article titled “There are Thousands of Clandestines in Tavoliere Area”. in a section titled “Armed Racism”.

“Today they pick tomatoes, the red gold, they will pick uva in the next month. Undeclared work is normal. (...) In a few hours, an hundred of North-African immigrants has resulted as clandestines, and a forced repatriation procedure began. (...) The aim of police is also another: to identify the intermediaries, who both move this columns of immigrants and sustain the phenomena.”
AlmaMegretta

Cold Hot Sun Rain or Wind
Caserta Naples I do not complain
I bite the Bullet to do not feel
the strain inside me
raising falling forwards backwards
And the day slowly ends
realizing the wage is almost done
so I can save money and send them to my parents

(...) 

and as I'm just awake
the controller shouts “you are arrived”
water, mud, what happened?
Brothers shout they are desperate
The wind brings only an answer
on a winter's night
the ghetto burns in Villa Literno
In the ghetto in the ghetto in Villa Literno
Villa Literno Migrant Camp (1990)
Sep., 17th 1994 After the burning dawn of Villa Literno migrant camp
ANCIPOLIS

1994 - CASERTA - VILLA LITERO - INCIDENTE IN Ghetto extracittadino.
Alcuni immigrati fotografati oggi mentre osservano il loro campo sosta di diaspora, totalmente distrutto questa notte da un incendio.

Ciro Fusco/ANSA
Amnesties for undocumented migrants –
Number of regularized migrants

2012: Until now: about 23,000 on 134,576 requests
2009: 250,000
2002: 650,000
1998: 215,000
1995: 246,000
1990: 222,000 (Martelli Law, after Masslo's death)
1986: 105,000

Source: http://www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it and several Ministry of Interior's Decrees.
After 2015 **10 deaths** in the Italian countrysides during the last summer, some reform proposals have been elaborated by the Government. They are oriented toward the struggle against the caporalato.

Until now, Minister of Agriculture has spoken about both an increasing number of labor inspections and a reform of some laws to strongly penalize farms that use caporali.
The logic of emergency

Since the early 1990s, the insertion of migrants in the Italian farm labour market has been managed by a mix between normal and exceptional norms and tools.

On the one hand, State has produced one or more flow-decrees every year, guarantying a legal employment for a part of migrant workforce in agriculture and other low-paid jobs.

On the other hand, State has approved several exceptional laws to regularize undocumented migrants or part of them, governing the administratively irregular workforce mixing tolerance and repression.

The outputs of this articulated policy has been: the subordination of migrant movement towards Italy to labour market needs; the production of a weakened and super flexible labour force.
3. THE LOGIC OF MARGINALIZATION
(of a central subject)
Immigrants occupied in the Italian agriculture

Source: Elaboration on Inea's data
### Total and not-UE employed workers in agriculture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total employed workers</th>
<th>Not EU employed workers</th>
<th>%Not EU/Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1,437,135</td>
<td>51,865</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1,017,125</td>
<td>102,809</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>796,061</td>
<td>151,201</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>692,448</td>
<td>182,017</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main trends in the relationship between production, market, and farmwork

Since the early 1980s, migrant labour force has matched the changes of the agriculture production and organization and its need for a cheap and flexible manpower. **The main changes/trends** have been three:

- Increasing conversion of the Italian agriculture production into export-oriented crops, through differentiation of crops

- Increasing **differentiation of the agriculture productivity**: it has grown in some sectors (for ex., ready-to-eat crops or livestock sector), through both the deseasonalization of production and strong technological investments to change techniques of production; but it has not grown for other crops (especially, fruit and vegetables produced in the open field).

- Partial but increasing **substitution** of the local labour force with foreign labour force.
Internationalization of both agricultural production markets and farmworkers

Major Exporters of Food and Agricultural Products

Source: UNCTAD
Main nationalities occupied in agriculture by Regions

Mainly from: Albania, Morocco, India, Pakistan, and several Sub-Saharan African areas (especially in the South).
Racial-based and nationality-based borders

Nationality of migrant laborers is often linked to a sort of “ethnicization of jobs”: for ex., Moroccans, Pakistanis, and Indians are demanded by livestock companies and farms of Turin and Cuneo areas (...); Macedonians and Albanians very often find work in the grape harvest activities in the Langhe and Monferrato, and as fruit picker in Saluzzo area” (Inea, 2012, 10).

Other examples are the ethnicized niche work of the Indian Punjab bergamini in the Pianura Padana observed by Vanessa Azzeruoli (2014), and the exclusive employment of negro workers in tomato harvesting.

Differentiation by administrative status: above all, between UE and non-UE Workers (because both their different skins and different administrative status), between documented migrants and undocumented migrants, and between documented migrants and refugees or asylum-seekers.
Migrants have become increasingly central in the Italian agriculture but.....

In a book published for Fondazione Ismu about housing policies and migration, Alfredo Agustoni (2011, 97) concluded that: “poor and irregular housing seems to interest above all the rural areas, where a large number of strangers live in inadequate shelters, in an informal way (over 40% of undeclared rents and 10% of squatters).

Only 2010 Rosarno riots have proposed again the migrant farmworkers question, 20 years after the Masslo's death.
2010: The rediscovery of migrant farmworkers

2010 Rosarno riots

Migrant workers lived in factories such as in the picture and suffered attacks by white youths of Rosarno.
“Immigrants wait to be transferred after clashes with locals in some of the worst episodes of racial unrest in years” (The Guardian)
Rural and agricultural ghettos in Italy. 2009-2015
Grand Ghetto (FG)
Piana del Sele

Saluzzo (CN)
Canelli (Piedmont)
Taurianova (RC)
Boreano (Basilicata)
The Logic of Marginalization (of a central subject)

According to Perrotta and Sacchetto (2014, 78), the workers who live in these areas “do not technically lack the right to spatial liberty as they are not prevented from moving away from the ghettos or farmhouses, but effectively they are “trapped”.

Marginalization is increased by status, race, nationality, and gender based hierarchies within the labour force, that increase competition among the workers.

Hierarchies highlight that labor market is not a democratic, flat, and apolitical space, but it is a really multilayer space, defined by power relations.
4. SUBJECTIVATION
AND HERETICAL MOVEMENTS
Migrants as political actors constitute an heresy

“The national heretics and some immigrant heretics of immigrant conditions constitute as heresiarches both of a new order on immigration and, consequently, of a new national order” (Sayad, 1984). They claim the right for migrants to exist in the same way of the nationals, questioning the political difference between nationals and non-nationals (Sayad, 2004).

2010 Rosarno riots; 2011 Nardò strike; The organization of an Italian-migrant network named Campagne in lotta (Countrysides in the Struggle) in 2012; Radio ghetto started in 2012; yogurt Barikamà, Funky tomato and Sfruttazero productions started between 2011 and 2015; 2015 Foggia strike and rally; 2015 Bari regional demonstration: an array of events that shows an ongoing process of both class conflict and self-organization of farmworkers.
Your Made in Italy has a stain: our blood
2011 Nardò Postcolonial Strike
The first self-organized strike of migrant farmworkers in Italy

Employ me against undeclared work
Against a large part of images emerged from social researches and media system, **migrant farmworkers are workers not slaves.** ‘We are workers like the others.’ (Ivan Sagnet, one of the leaders of 2011 Nardò strike)

“To those who ask you to come back to work at any (...) you must answer that (...) you are human beings (...) that the time of slavery is over. That you want a true contract, as other workers have all over the world. Because all those who work [with a regular and fair contract] are not slaves’ (Perrotta and Sacchetto, 2012).
“We want true employment contracts, we want a decent wage, we want that the big boxes (cassoni) price is proportional to both yield and our effort. We do not want to negotiate with caporali. We want more inspections in the fields. We want to be respected as both human beings and laborers. For all these reasons, we want that our claims are both listened and discussed with us as soon as possible. We are determined to continue the struggle until some changes. We want thanks everyone has sustained us, especially Brigate Solidarietà Attiva and Association Finis Terrae. Thanks a lot.” (Claims of 2011 Nardò strkers)
Demonstration in Bari, October 2015
A farmworkers rally in Foggia, September 2015
Radio Ghetto in the Grand Ghetto (Foggia)

A fragment of its communication:

For Italy, You are listening Radio Ghetto, we transmit from the Gran Ghetto in Foggia, Puglia, The black city, where centinaia of African braccianti live and work in the tomatoes harvest. We live in the brande. This radio is organized to speak about our problems and to try to solve them.

It's the moment to sing: one, two, three, brother Diaby, brother Diaby, Diaby, we want to dedicate this song to you and demonstrate all our love. We know that he cannot see us but we are sure he will listen us. Diaby was travolto on his bike in Rosarno.

http://campagneinlotta.org/?p=684
Funky Tomato

Founded in 2014 by a group of farmers, researchers, and activists. It currently employs ten people, including four migrants – who work harvesting the tomatoes and producing the sauce.
5. CONCLUSIONS – CONCEPTUAL ISSUES
Each rediscovery of migrant farmworkers has been linked to movements and struggles or deaths.

Exploitation is a central concept to understand the social relations observed. The category of proletariat confirm its historically actuality.

Local populations have developed a functional attitude towards immigrants, sustaining a social and political regulation that put first rights and interests of native inhabitants.

New experiences of struggle and self-organization has been produced.

Both the conflictual relationship between the migrant workers and local farms and migrants and local populations in some areas highlight the crisis of this way of regulation.