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Reviews Articles

# Migrants to rural areas as a social movement: insights from Italy

GIORGIO OSTI

University of Trieste, Italy

Date of submission: 2017 8th, September; accepted 2017 10<sup>th</sup>, December

**Abstract.** Migrants in Italy often form the majority of the labour force in the primary sector; their residential and work conditions are generally of low quality, and their entrepreneurship is limited. How are the presence and action of migrants in Italian rural areas to be interpreted? The question is tackled with a framework based on the social movements literature. The mobilisation of migrants is seen as a way to enter the political arena when traditional channels are closed. Even heterodox participation is considered a sign of integration in a country. Cases of mobilisation are presented in order to show the robustness of the research perspective. The results are that migrants 'collective action' is rare and weak, especially in the primary sector because of gang-master action, temporary and dispersed jobs, obtuseness of employers. Moreover, the advocacy coalition supporting migrants is unable to overcome the logic of emergency. The paper ends by wondering whether the sporadic mobilisation of migrants will lead to a moral economy of the agrifood value chain.

**Keywords.** Migrants, agriculture, workforce, Italy, social movement.

**JEL codes.** B55, E26, F22, J43, R23.

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*Ormai tra l'agricoltura e i lavoratori immigrati si è creato un legame inscindibile  
22° Rapporto Statistico sull'immigrazione*

## 1. Introduction

Surveys show that there are numerous migrants: sometimes they are the majority of the labour force working in the primary sector; their residential and work conditions are generally of low quality; their entrepreneurship is very limited, differently from other sectors like construction and commerce (Cicerchia and Pallara, 2009; Bock *et al.* 2016; Colloca and Corrado, 2013). The paper address these questions: how can the presence and action of

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\*Corresponding author: GIORGIO.OSTI@dispes.units.it

migrants in Italian rural and agricultural areas be interpreted? Is the over-representation of foreigners working in the primary sector a sign of economic marginality or dynamism?

The proposed framework is based on the social movements literature. This choice is justified by the assumption that the full integration of foreigners happens when they participate in the political sphere (Osti, 2006). Mobilisation is a way to enter the political arena when traditional channels are closed. The choice of this interpretative frame entails neglect of some aspects, like entrepreneurship and skills training.

The hypothesis is that the mobilisation of migrants in Italy has not happened in general, and in the primary sector/rural areas in particular, except in rare cases and despite the presence in Italy of a robust advocacy coalition. Collective action is too costly for migrants, far from the clan mentality, and useless for people who consider their presence in Italy and in agriculture to be temporary. Subsidiary interpretations concern the role of intermediaries like the migrants themselves, unions, third sector organisations and local authorities that are generally unable to overcome the logic of emergency and operate outside their specific mission.

Cases of mobilisation and integration are discussed in order to show how robust the hypothesis is, and how deviations from theoretical patterns shed light on further aspects of the rural life of migrants in Italy. The paper ends by wondering whether manual work, now mostly provided by foreigners, will disappear from Italian agriculture, and whether the weak and sporadic mobilisation of migrants will include important common values and a sort of moral economy of the agrifood *filiera*.

## 2. Farm migrants between spatial fixity and social mobility

The paper will adopt a sociological approach: *the theory of social movements*, which is indeed quite unusual for migration studies. Otherwise, how can one interpret the impressive demonstration<sup>1</sup> of May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017 when about 100,000 people – Italians and foreigners – rallied and marched in the streets of Milan?

Using this approach means highlighting not only the movements of migrants from rural to urban areas (and *vice versa*), but also socio-political actions, especially strategies to acquire power, prestige or rewards (social mobility). The emphasis on spatial and social movement entails changes of perspective: one change is to look at the integration between inhabiting and working and attention to internal or residential mobility of migrants after the long journey to arrive in Italy. In other words, how migrants combine fixity and mobility tendencies (Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014). The other change of perspective is to consider migrants as a political movement, more or less intertwined with movements around the world. It is hard to conceive migrants as a movement for changing the political equilibrium of an intricate country like Italy. Generally, their aspiration is to live in peace alongside local people. A common aspiration of all migrants is to achieve some material benefits and give a future to their children. However, migrants can rapidly change their time-horizons; thus, we cannot exclude in the future their political mobilisation in order to gain better and fuller integration in Italy. Moreover, they may be engaged by autochthonous political organisations for instrumental pur-

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ilgiorno.it/milano/cronaca/foto/corteo-pro-migranti-1.3132029>, accessed 21 May 2017.

poses (e.g. voting in primary elections). This gives momentum to the social movement approach.

In order to justify the approach, there is also an intellectual homology between *movement in society* (generally up and down a scale of job prestige) and *movement in space* typical of migrants. Integration of the spatial and social dimensions of mobility can be fruitful for rural studies as well. Rural spaces become a valuable research topic because migrants often show an attachment to public places stronger than that of local people (Rishbeth and Powell, 2012), or new temporary ghettos emerge in remote areas (Eason, 2017). At the same time, situated micro-relationships assume a special value in rural areas. In those situations, families, friendship networks and religious groups find an easier placement. We frequently frame foreigners according to national citizenship or ethnic borders, neglecting smaller memberships and agency (de Haas, 2010). According to this combination of places and relationships, we distinguish two polar types and an intermediate one:

- Seasonal work – non-accompanying family members, highly mobile
- Animal breeding work – very stable, with family and fixity to the place (Azzeruoli, 2017)
- Farming, forestry and grazing – intermediate case in terms of mobility and family presence, living in the mountains (Membretti, 2015; Nori, 2015).

Foreigners working in the agro-industry are excluded from this classification. They may be part of an enlarged primary sector when employed in the big worker cooperatives of the Po River valley that include most of the food *filiera*, like dairy herding, butchering, milling and storage (Povoledo, 2011).

For the year 2017 the Italian Government ‘Decreto Flussi’ fixed no more than 17,000 non-EC foreign seasonal workers for agriculture and tourism. That number shows the authorities’ under-evaluation of the need for foreign labour. In fact, the number of seasonal employees is much larger. Estimates of some years ago put the number of temporary workers without Italian citizenship at about 320,000<sup>2</sup>. Of course, these are rough estimates; the number of people without documents or with documents but working irregularly, respectively identifying the black and grey labour markets, is unknown but presumably higher.

In single localities of intense agriculture production, the numbers are in the order of tens of thousands of units. At the top of the table is the province of Foggia, where about 20,000 seasonal migrants work; the second province is South Tyrol (Alto Adige) with about 18,000 foreigners; then the province of Verona (17,000). The provinces of Trento, Latina and Ragusa follow with about 13,000 temporary workers each. Most of them are young males coming, in numerical order, from Romania (117,000), India (28,000), Morocco (26,000) and Albania (24,500)<sup>3</sup>. In recent years, data on nationality have changed in favour of people from Sub-Saharan countries, while in the past, after the inclusion of East European countries in the EU, the opposite happened against people of Maghreb origin.

The statistics for people employed in agriculture, an official indicator based on sample interviews, state that there are 843,000 units, of whom 405,000 are foreigners.<sup>4</sup> In

<sup>2</sup> Source Coldiretti for 2013. <http://www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/articoli/ContentItem-c50f89ea-ee16-443f-ba01-54ef410b72c6.html>, accessed 5 June 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> Year 2015; source: Crea, (2017: p. 165). This is a figure from Crea, which has recently integrated ISTAT sample

**Table 1.** Work contracts activated according to economic sector and workers' citizenship. Absolute values and percentage of variation. Year: 2014 (Direzione Generale Immigrazione e Politiche di Integrazione 2015: p. 66)

Economic Sector	Absolute Values					Var. % 2014/2013				
	Italians	Foreigners (a)			Total	Italians	Foreigners (a)			Total
		of which:					of which :			
		Total	EU	non EU			Total	EU	non EU	
Agriculture	927.744	505.181	280.572	224.609	<b>1.432.925</b>	0,0	7,2	5,3	9,7	<b>2,4</b>
Industry	622.039	164.487	40.074	124.413	<b>786.526</b>	9,5	5,9	0,9	7,6	<b>8,7</b>
Constructions	429.885	138.709	55.634	83.075	<b>568.594</b>	3,1	-3,6	-6,0	-2,0	<b>1,4</b>
Services	5.498.474	1.003.282	367.680	635.602	<b>6.501.756</b>	3,4	-3,8	-3,5	-4,0	<b>2,2</b>
Commerce	583.094	84.740	25.457	59.283	<b>667.834</b>	4,4	7,7	3,9	9,4	<b>4,8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>8.061.236</b>	<b>1.896.399</b>	<b>769.417</b>	<b>1.126.982</b>	<b>9.957.635</b>	<b>3,5</b>	<b>0,2</b>	<b>-0,2</b>	<b>0,5</b>	<b>2,9</b>

(a) Employees born abroad without Italian citizenship

relative terms the latter are clearly over-represented in the primary sector. For the Italian labour market as a whole foreigners represent just over 10% of employees (2,360,000 on 22,465,000 plus 3 million unemployed). We can conclude by saying that there is a dramatic concentration of migrants in the agriculture sector (Table 1). Putting together different sources of information, roughly half of the labour force of the primary sector comes from abroad. However, this happens in single localities for two types of activities: permanent jobs in areas specialised in dairy and livestock activities; temporary jobs in a wide range of fruit and horticulture localities from north to south Italy, as seen above. In each place, the work and residential conditions are highly variable, even if reports generally state that the situation is better in the north (Zanuttig and Pozzi, 2014). However, the dualism is more evident by sector than by region: migrants working in the pruning of trees and livestock rearing have better job conditions than those gathering fruits and vegetables both in the north and south of Italy.

In any case, geographically the phenomenon is fragmented; in that sense less visible and more difficult to deal with. Visibility and critical mass are crucial aspects in political mobilisation. Low visibility and territorial dispersion is even higher for a third category of foreigners, those working as shepherds and woodcutters. They are presumably very few and neglected, but relatively numerous in comparison to Italians operating in the same sector.

According to data from Infocamere, entrepreneurs born abroad employed in agriculture in 2012 amounted to slightly more than 17,000; they represented 2.9% of the total of

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data with its own information (Crea, 2015: p. 163). The difference between the two sources is striking because the Crea figure is almost three times the Istat one: 405,000 versus 133,000 foreigners employed. The question is therefore how many people are employed in agricultural sector? The answer varies according to the source: Inps, the Italian institute for social security, counts about 900,000 farmers and workers paying pension contributions (Crea, 2017: p. 158). According to Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione (2015), the non-EU migrants for whom a farm pays pension contributions amounted to 146,394 in 2014. Statistics using the number of farms reach 1,470,000 units (Crea, 2017: p. 41).

foreign entrepreneurs (source: Benvenuti and Cordini, 2013: p. 16). Their contribution to Total Added Value was even lower: 1.6% compared to 13.8% in construction and 10.1% in commerce (Ibid.: p. 7). Noteworthy is the large presence of women, almost 50%, which is unusual among Italian farmers (probably there are fiscal reasons). Finally, the regional distribution is curious: In Tuscany non-Italian farm entrepreneurs are at the top both as percentage of foreign employers of all economic sectors (13.8%) and as percentage of all figures working within the agriculture sector (4.5%)(Ibid.: p. 17). Puglia – one of the most agricultural regions in Italy – is in the opposite situation; but the usual Italian centre-north vs south divide does not fit very well. The unexpected classification is explained by the country of origin of farmers in Tuscany; most of them come from rich European countries, like Switzerland and Germany. Thus, Tuscany emerges as a place of large foreign investments rather than of incoming small farmers; nevertheless, in the same region there are important minorities engaged in cattle herding. This is a typical segmentation of poor and rich migrants in regions with high levels of tourism (see Osti and Ventura, 2012). The exception is Romania, from which 5% of farmers arrive. People from this country are the first nationality among foreigners and present good levels of integration in many economic sectors.

For some classifications, miners and quarries belong to the primary sector; in any case such activities are developed in rural areas and share the exhausting and humble image of agro-forestry jobs, discarded by Italians. The difference is, however, that they are concentrated and taken by foreigners. In the Piedmont Alps there is a quarry whose workers are almost all of Chinese origin (Pignatta, 2013). The spatial concentration is sometimes combined with rapid ‘succession’ – replacement of one ethnic group with another – according to an old pattern elaborated by the Chicago ecological school for urban areas in the 1920s. Ecological succession is registered also for some temporary activities in agriculture.

Rough quantification allows a first conclusion to be drawn: the numbers are not high, there is no social alarm, as happens in urban neighbourhoods. Rural autochthonous people do not show great concern, except in two situations: when migrants do not respect local rules of power/reward distribution, which has sporadically occurred in some places of southern Italy, and when local primary school classrooms have a majority of foreign pupils. Episodes of parental protest or school change have occurred in some localities of the Po Valley, where both intensive horticulture and livestock activity are developed. Besides social reactions, the work and residential conditions of many foreigners both communitarian and not are objectively dramatic. This situation has been *weakly* mobilising national public opinion and *strongly* mobilising many non-profit organisations. Again, it is a matter of visibility and political agency. The question is what role migrants play in the situations we have summarily illustrated. It is important to frame the issue in these terms – the *agency* of migrants in agriculture – because most models of analysis insist on structural processes or attitudes of indigenous people and politicians (Semprebón, 2017).

### 3. A social movement framework

The analytics of social movement can be schematically listed:

- Unusual action repertoires, practices at the margin of orthodoxy (Kröger, 2013);
- The determination to promote or defend values in the public sphere (protest, claim,

campaigning), symbolically called the *piazza* (public events) in opposition to *palazzo* (public institutions: Rootes, 1997);

- Such values have a material as well as a symbolic value<sup>5</sup>;
- Intense network of relationships<sup>6</sup> which can become a purpose itself and a source of wide and unexpected alliances called *advocacy coalitions* (Ambrosini, 2005: the expression was first used by Giovanna Zincone).

The dynamics of social movements:

- Relationships trigger mobilisation; the search for them is used to explain volunteers' practices as well (McAdam and Paulsen, 1993);
- Self organisation of resources; the resources are indeed many, material and immaterial; communication campaigns and fund raising are important. In this approach, competition among organizations is used as well, according to ecology of population dynamics (Minkoff, 1997);
- Framing capacity: social construction of an ideal issue like justice, rights, health, commons. This is a cognitive approach (Eder, 1996): mobilisation is seen as the capacity to design an issue and easily communicate it to the public. For example, the environmental issue was presented as a new systemic way to interpret the world. Migration as well can be considered an epochal phenomenon;
- Structure of opportunity: that is, all the situations favourable to the raising of protest; for example, the sympathy of public opinion for an ethnic group, the facilitated access to social media, the absence of autochthonous leaders on a topical argument (e.g. job creation).

Indicators are the number of protests reported in the press, public sit-ins, case studies, rule changes after mobilisation, presence of migrants in trade unions and local associations. In the absence of systemic research on the mobilisation of migrants in Italy, single case studies will be used.

#### 4. The mobilization of migrants in Italy

The public protest, the 'piazza' situation, quite rarely takes the form of a strike<sup>7</sup>. Abstention from work and demonstration in a public space have a general significance either because they concern many professional categories or because they are spatially pervasive. This kind of strike is called a 'sciopero generale' in Italian. The cases monitored are national but not widespread throughout the country; they correspond to a network or

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<sup>5</sup> "the motivation for new social movement mobilisation cannot be reduced simply to material gain, but may concern the achievement of symbolic goals or the defence of symbolic resources" (Woods, 2003: p. 315). Offe (1985) talked of paradigm change that is much more stronger than a symbolic stake.

<sup>6</sup> According to some authors, like Diani (1992), this is the main feature of social movements; other authors underline the value of resource mobilization capacity, including organizational capacity, the presence of a charismatic leader, fund raising and communication campaigning (Woods, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> The press reported a first case in 2010, March 1st: Arriva il primo "sciopero" degli immigrati. "Un giorno senza di noi e l'Italia si ferma" (Vladimiro Polch, La Repubblica 26 February 2010); noteworthy is the critical comment on national unions "i grandi sindacati a livello nazionale non ci hanno supportato, eppure nessuno ha mai pensato di indire uno sciopero etnico", which shows the suspicion of the 'generalist' Italian trade unions towards single issue protests.

*punctuated logic*<sup>8</sup>. The foreign workers demonstrations of March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010 were organized only in a few selected towns and the event was connected with a similar initiative in several European countries. In the end, the repertoire of action is more similar to a happening or a rally than to a traditional mass abstention from work causing a severe damage to the national economy. The special event has been organized in subsequent years, becoming a regular European 'day' of foreigner workers.

Such occurrences are very different from those organized after a bloody event. These mobilizations arise as spontaneous responses to cases of violence or abuse against foreigner workers. The protest action can be violent as well, involving clashes with the police and the destruction of street furniture. The first main demonstration occurred after the killing of Jerry Essan Masslo in 1989. Soon after his tragic death, the first antiracist demonstration ever organized in Italy was held in Rome, with the participation of more than 200,000 persons, Italians and foreigners. Masslo was killed in Villa Literno (Campania), where he was harvesting tomatoes without any legal protection. His application for recognition as a refugee had been rejected.

The second protest of foreigner workers able to reach national echo was the demonstration held after the slaughter of Castel Volturno in 2008 (again in Campania, but almost 20 years later). Six African people sitting in a pub were killed by a Camorra's (mafia local name) command. They were precariously employed in the area, most of them in temporary jobs in agriculture. After the massacre a spontaneous demonstration occurred, with roadblocks, cars damages, and severe vandalism of street furniture. The violent demonstration did not receive any support from the local population; on the contrary, cases of retaliation by inhabitants were reported. Their reaction was a signal of an isolated foreign community coupled with a weak capacity to organize a peaceful demonstration. In any case the criminal episode raised wider awareness in national authorities and public opinion.

We lack statistics on minor events of migrants protest. Looking at the press articles, rare, local, low participated episodes pointed towards local authority and claiming for better control on seasonal work and living conditions of foreigners emerge. Such demonstrations are supported by *Centri Sociali* (antagonistic communities, Ruggiero, 2000), Unions and other non profit organizations. Their philosophy of action is still within the frame of protest and claim, what we call an advocacy movement, whose main focus is the respect for rights and the defence from oppressing actions of employers and the same authorities.

Some changes in this framework came at the beginning of 2011 when a group of small farmers, activists and migrant farm workers in the Piana of Gioia Tauro launched the 'SOS Rosarno' campaign with the support of social economy organisations and the involvement of a variety of antiracism bodies (Olivieri, 2016). That represented a novelty because the mobilisation was focused on the modes of production, and there was a specific ideology supporting the action: the *conditions of production and reproduction* - in Marxist terminology life conditions, housing and welfare services - must be united. Small farmers joined forces with 'braccianti' to gain compliance with some basic rules of

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<sup>8</sup> See for example the protest by the Agro Pontino farm workers (Sironi, 2016). The punctuated logic of this mobilization caused a middle level gravity and visibility. Other information on the Latina province is provided by Omizzolo (2013), who uses the categories of *transnationalism* and *transurbanism* for Sikh people working there.



employment and - very important - to get better prices for citrus fruits. The novelty is precisely a new focus on market exchanges. The *deux-ex-machina* – the device solving the problem - becomes commercial links with rich markets of northern Italy, in which many consumers are aware of uneven conditions for farmers and temporary workers of the South and are willing to pay more for citrus fruit production respecting some virtuous parameters. SOS Rosarno applied a sort of Fair Trade pattern.

When the workers were almost all foreigners a specific ideology was developed. They are considered a *reserve army of labour*, precisely as defined by Marx<sup>9</sup>: a mass of unemployed people to be used by employers for pressing their employees to accept further wage cuts. Migrants, especially if they have a weak status (without documents or needing a job to keep the residence permit) are used to blackmail the workers and generate further profits for the entrepreneur. Such an analysis provides a strong motivation to local activists for mobilising. In fact, being without contractual force and with precarious accommodation put foreigners in the hands of unscrupulous entrepreneurs and mediators. This is felt to be deeply unfair and trigger protest.

Mediators require special treatment. They are called ‘caporali’ (gangmasters in English). Most of them are foreigners, of the same nationality as the workers that they hire. They are traditional figures in Italy countryside (Perrotta, 2014; Avallone, 2017) able to achieve great power between absent landowners and poor rural proletarians. They are crucial for maintaining the labour force’s expropriation. Besides relational abilities and strong personalities, they are generally accepted by migrants because they are ‘one of us’ and they often do the same manual work but with the role of coordinator (Olivieri, 2016: p. 73).

The more powerful and accepted the gangmaster is, the less probable is the formation of a sharp contraposition between seasonal workers and the employer. To be noted is that the latter is often a small farmer, who can work on the land alongside the foreigners. All these factors reduce the *social distance* and the chances of a classic labour/capital conflict arising. *Caporalato* is widespread in southern Italy, but there are frequent cases in the North as well (Marzorati *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, in northern Italy gangmasters have grown in sectors different from agriculture, especially in logistics and transportation sectors. The difference with respect to seasonal work in horticulture is that permanent work in those sectors requires gangmasters to adopt a more formal approach. Thus, they create ‘fronting’ cooperatives with which they sign regular contracts of labour provision, so they are able to conceal abuses against formal coop members, all of them being foreign weak manual labourers.

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<sup>9</sup> “The one classical Marxist theorist who made useful additions to Marx’s reserve army analysis with respect to imperialism was Rosa Luxemburg. In *The Accumulation of Capital* she argued that in order for accumulation to proceed “capital must be able to mobilise world labour power without restriction.” According to Luxemburg, Marx had been too “influenced by English conditions involving a high level of capitalist development.” Although he had addressed the latent reserve in agriculture, he had not dealt with the drawing of surplus labor from non-capitalist modes of production (e.g., the peasantry) in his description of the reserve army. However, it was mainly here that the surplus labor for global accumulation was to be found. It was true, Luxemburg acknowledged, that Marx discussed the expropriation of the peasantry in his treatment of “so-called primitive accumulation,” in the chapter of *Capital* immediately following his discussion of the general law. But that argument was concerned primarily with the “genesis of capital” and not with its contemporary forms. Hence, the reserve army analysis had to be extended in a global context to take into account the enormous “social reservoir” of non-capitalist labor” (Foster *et al.*, 2011).

Work cooperatives dominated by a gangmaster are growing also in agriculture, especially in those localities where controls by the authorities on *black* and *grey* jobs are more frequent. Cooperation, a juridical formula in which members are both owners and employees, is another way to decrease the chances of worker mobilization. A social movement needs an enemy. Generally, this is the owner of the means of production; if the worker and the owner coincide, a strong motivation for enmity disappears. Thus, cooperatives can be seen as an astute means for controlling class conflict in the countryside.

On these aspects the theory of social movements can provide further insights. Mobilisation can either be calmed structuring the deprived farm workers in fronting cooperatives or it can explode in collective uncontrolled anger of migrants. The former is a *rationalization* of unequal relationships; the latter is a growth of *irrationality*. Seasonal workers in agriculture are therefore caught in a trap. The mobilization for changing the unequal distribution of rewards is emptied transforming the labour force in co-workers or vanished because of explosion of rage, which alienates the sympathy of public opinion. Besides this interpretation two other approaches to mobilisation are fruitful.

One is based on the Indian literature concerning reactions of poor people to extreme abuses. Francesco Caruso thinks it is possible to use their conflict action repertoire to interpret the different outcomes of the Rosarno and Castel Volturno migrant rebellions. In the former case, he considers the demonstration by foreign workers (*braccianti*) to be an extreme and desperate attempt to defend their *nude life*<sup>10</sup>; this demonstration did not bring any material benefit to the migrants, but at least *they testified they were alive*. In the latter case the protest was violent as well, but more cleverly organized by a group of migrants from Ghana. They channelled the protest march toward the City Hall, where they met authorities; the result was a special residence permit for 2,000 seasonal workers. Caruso (2016: p. 68) explains the different results: in Castel Volturno the permanent and deep-rooted presence of migrants had allowed the maturation of self-organised initiatives. Self-organisation varies in even very similar contexts, both dominated by mafia and *subordinate agriculture*<sup>11</sup>.

The category of self-organisation introduces the second alternative approach to mobilisation. Self-organization is widely mentioned in the literature on social movements, especially in the theory of 'resources mobilisation' (Donati, 1995). It is frequent also in the description of farm workers in Italy both in the South and the North. The surplus of organizational capacities for dispersed workers derives from:

- cultural and political motivations of the migrants themselves. Religion is very important, especially when there is an explicit proselytizing programme (see Omizzolo, 2013);
- non-profit organizations, whose members are mainly Italians, are of three types: charities helping migrants to find basic accommodation; advocacy groups helping with job

<sup>10</sup> "In Rosarno the uprising is configured as a self-defense tool and as nude life affirmation: those who are accustomed to 'bending their heads', undergoing obscene and silent abuses, living in an extreme state of exploitation and subjugation, arise and rebel when the biopolitics assumes the features of the thanatopolitics" (Caruso 2016: p. 67).

<sup>11</sup> In the paper this food regime is called 'Californian', based on extreme exploitation of seasonal workers, low prices of products and high rewards for mediators of labor and crops/means of production (agribusiness); see also Corrado (2017).

rights and residence permits; social cooperatives providing alternative and fair jobs (see Ambrosini, 2005);

- trade unions; since the beginning of modern migration they have sought to play their role with varying strategies and results (see Allievi, 1997);
- local authorities: in Italy it is common opinion that they generally work for the good inclusion of migrants provided that the help measures have low visibility. This would protect mayors and council members from adverse public opinion (Marzorati *et al.*, 2017).

Self-organization, therefore, is never absolute; it does not mean *self-sufficiency* of a group, but it is the product of an assemblage of initiatives and actors. In Italy there is a variably combined coalition in favour of migrants able to deal with the most extreme situations of residential degradation. Many groups intervene in the emergency providing food and lodging. ‘Coalition’ is a term denoting not only political convergence in defence of migrants’ rights, but also collaboration in practical assistance. It is frequent to find catholic church volunteers working together with members of antagonist groups and civil servants of municipality.

Farmers’ and workers’ unions are involved in the migrants issue, even if in principle they have opposite interests. Agriculture employers’ organizations realize that it is unsound to defend their members’ activities without assuring minimal living conditions for their employees, whether temporary or permanent. Trade unions are institutionally engaged in the protection of workers. In both cases there are ambivalences as well. Farmers’ organizations cannot insist too much on compliance with the rules because their members make abundant use of black and grey labour. Nonetheless, inclusion in local pro-migrant *agreements* induces farmers’ associations to be more attentive to human values. A second inducement is market reputation that helps as much as food consumers are concerned and take responsibility of regular work demand in agriculture (i.e. a fair trade pattern).

Trade Unions are deeply involved in the protection of foreigner migrants against any abuse. However, researchers talk of *insufficient action*: “trade unions have not managed to aggregate them” (Semperebon *et al.*, 2017: p. 10). “The trade unions, often committed to imposing regular hiring on employers, do not have a sufficient number of members to have a decisive impact” (Scotto, 2016: p. 86), “Indeed, [in southern Italy, trade unions] have been accused of contributing to the development of patron-client practices, carrying out their mediation task as it was a distribution of charitable resources” (Ibid.). In northern Italy workers’ unions attend all the public committees in which the seasonal work issue is dealt with; but that action can be very formal and far from the real involvement of foreigners (Cnel, 2002: p. 153).

The causes of insufficient capacity of trade-union engagements are several: dispersion of places, low cooperation by migrants themselves, hostility of farmers, trade unions’ almost exclusive reliance on controls by the public authorities. Evidently, the unions’ resources are limited; moreover, their exclusive confidence on the advocacy role creates some problems with seasonal workers themselves. Migrants absolutely want to get a job as soon as possible without paying much attention to rules; strong claiming for respect of rules can be an obstacle to this urgent goal. In this sense, organizations that offer alternative jobs are more successful than trade unions, at least when the latter comply too closely with their ‘advocacy role’. Indeed, in the past metalworker trade unions promoted the

creation of worker cooperatives to which the entrepreneur outsourced simpler tasks. This organisational choice increased the power of unions with, however, some trade-offs: paternalist attitudes during personnel hiring, accusations of collusion with the company, mismanagement<sup>12</sup>.

The weak strategy of farm worker unions shows that *multifunctional third-sector organizations* – those more equipped for providing advocacy, assistance and jobs – are more successful. These tasks are indeed united in the most flexible non-profit organizations. Multitasking is adopted by the public bodies, too. Local and national authorities have understood that ‘work’ is a key factor in the control of migration flows. Accordingly, they have created together with unions, farmer associations and charities several employment opportunities for example in green care or green spaces maintenance. This emerges in the most dynamic rural areas of south and north Italy.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

“Indeed” – as stated in the 22° Statistical Report on Immigration (Caritas and Migrantes, 2012: p. 260) – “the link between agriculture and migrant workers is indissoluble. The tendency is positive and data demonstrate that farms employing migrant workers have benefited also in terms of productivity”. This statement, used for the paper inscription, is quite optimistic: it claims a solid and productive relationship between agriculture and migrants.

Indeed, the Italian situation is geographically variable and socially segmented: quantitative analysis shows that the bulk of the issue concerns foreign employees, most of them seasonal workers. This represents a marked difference with mainstream Italian agriculture, made of small self-employers (*coltivatori diretti*). The employment and residential conditions of migrants are still dramatic in rural areas. Mountain areas are an exception because foreigners working in the primary sector and accompanied by their families are seen as means to repopulate deserted and remote villages. The situation is improving but in a point-like way according to the implementation of single temporary projects. The two main policy instruments – migration admission quotas and random controls on farms – are both insufficient. Thus, virtuous initiatives are in the hands of local bodies, when fortunately a good public/non-profit partnership is established. This confirms a ‘molecular’ mode of migrant integration applicable to every economic sector and area of the country (Ostanel and Fioretti, 2017).

High segmentation means that different migrant situations co-exist in the same area. The case of Tuscany - foreigners buying farms in ‘Chiantishire’ beside shepherds living in poor conditions in the hills - is emblematic. Thus, we have two combinations operating in the Italian context:

- weak economy and low education areas attracting low skilled migrants and vice versa; they give rise to a *spatial division of labour*, with a concentration of best educated foreigners in the cities of northern and central Italy, and

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<sup>12</sup> “Social cooperatives, born as movement organisations against the exploitation of farm workers and proletariats in the Po Valley at the beginning of last century, have dramatically changed similarly to the decline suffered by workers’ parties and trade unions” (Michelino, 2015), my translation.

- strong economy and high education areas attracting low skilled migrants occupying low-level jobs like food and assistance services; they give rise to a *social division of labour*. Migrants will become a social class, if not an underclass (extreme poor people living near more luxury urban zones).

The two trends are replicated in Italian agriculture: some areas – sorts of agriculture district (Perrotta, 2017) - will further develop in terms of mechanisation and digitalisation, attracting foreigners for a wide range of tasks, from simplest ones to those requiring high skills. Other areas will attract almost exclusively blackmailed low waged workers for very simple tasks like manual crop harvesting. This dualism can affect also agro-tourism and green care services, in which the physical and relational aspects of work are crucial. If the spatial division of labour trend prevails, we may expect new waves of migrants, maybe with further ecological succession of ethnic groups. If the social division of labour is more likely, the flow of migrants into the Italian countryside will become more selective. If we look at tendencies abroad in very specialised districts (e.g. *California*), the combination of low and high skilled employees appears the most likely. Some works, especially crop and food manipulation, will be done by poor workers. Of course, we must not lapse into a sort of *technological determinism*, as if the fortune of migrants in the countryside was linked to mechanisation (or to agriculture 4.0). The paper challenge is based on the high importance of relational factors, specifically the political capacity of farm/rural migrants to self-organise their life and work.

We have seen that migrant mobilisation is limited in Italy; its strength depends on a combination of three factors: 1) long term permanence in the rural area or regular return each year, i.e. a special form of place attachment; 2) religious or national diasporas, called also *transnationalism* and understood as a project of return to the motherland cemented by an ideology and a praxis; 3) capacity to press authorities at national level for residence permits or refugee status recognition. This reduces the capacity to blackmail foreigners both employed and unemployed.

However, advancements in legal status, arriving for example to allow voting in elections for long term resident foreigners, can change the farm workers' marginality very little. Their upgrading social mobility greatly depends on external factors and precisely on a farmers' (saint) alliance with consumers for higher prices in exchange for organic/low input products. *Filiere* mediators (large scale retailing) should attend the alliance, too. This means that such a pact cannot be based on strict computation of rewards of each *filiere* member but on values of justice and commons protection.

In this scenario foreign farm workers have a more balanced and realistic image: if they do not actively share such values of justice and environmental sustainability they remain within the trap of pure and rough economic stance with a very low bargaining power. Norms protecting worker rights and official on-site inspections are not enough for assuring their contractual position. Then, the most profitable path is that migrants themselves participate as much as possible to projects in a new moral economy. In Italy there are many projects promoted by farmers, supported by public bodies and disseminated by eccentric rural-urban networks (<http://barikama.altervista.org/>; <http://www.funkytomato.it/>). They often include foreign workers. Such projects must be replicated everywhere. This is a chance of development for Italian agriculture as well.

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