



Department of Political Science

Chair of Sociology

The truth behind the Great Italian Food:
*how the agricultural system is worn out by exploitation and
slavery*

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*Alla mia famiglia, che mi segue
imperterrita ad ogni mio passo.*

*A tutti i lavoratori e a tutte le
lavoratrici della terra, nella
speranza che ogni essere umano
possa veder garantiti rispetto e
libertà.*

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INTRODUCTION

My interest in labour exploitation practices in the Italian agri-food system has born from a raising awareness of what surrounds us. As the years pass, I am increasingly aware that every action we make impacts the overall ecosystem. In the mid-1800s, Feuerbach, a German philosopher, claimed that ‘Man is what he eats’; he was convinced that if one wants to improve the spiritual conditions, before there should be an improvement of their material conditions. According to the philosopher, since an inseparable unity between psyche and body exists, it follows that to think better, we must feed ourselves better. I think that to choose good food we must be aware if it is produced without causing pain to other human beings, minimising the impact on the surroundings. I am profoundly convinced that there should be more awareness of knowing how the products we usually consume are produced. By deciding how to live and how to eat, we decide which impact we have on the whole world.

This thesis focuses on the labour exploitation in the Italian agricultural system; my goal is to unveil the cruel aspects behind what people eat daily. Every person can make a difference; the first step to undertake is realizing a complete awareness of what we eat: where fruits and vegetables are produced, and the conditions that workers are forced to bear to have a job. We must ask ourselves whether the food we buy has not been produced by exploiting someone or some fields. Towards a complete awareness, analysis of the phenomenon is needed.

Caporalato in the agricultural system is becoming one of the most discussed arguments of the Italian political scene, especially after the pandemic crisis. This labour recruitment system implemented, especially in Southern Italy, is responsible for a huge amount of exploitation by caporals. According to the fifth report, “*Agromafie e caporalato*” published by the Placido Rizzotto Flai Cgil Observatory, about 200.000 people are considered “vulnerable” in agriculture, treated as “slaves” in the hands of intermediaries and entrepreneurs. To understand the gravity of the situation, it is sufficient to look at the increase of the “vulnerable” category; they were 140.000 in 2017 versus 160.000 in 2018. The current 200.000 are the sum of 136.400 completely illegally employed people and about 60.000 workers who, although registered by INPS, the main entity of the Italian public retirement system, appear to have an informal contract and a lower salary required by current regulations. This occurs both in Northern and Southern Italy.¹

My study aims to unveil what is behind the “Great Italian Food” considered one of the best in the world. Unfortunately, most of the national community, do not consider the pain that workers must suffer to deliver

¹ Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto Flai – Cgil (2020), *Agromafie e Caporalato Quinto Rapporto*

food to the rest of the population. I will observe how the agricultural system is worn out by exploitation and slavery.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter gives an overview of three essential concepts to understand the current food system: capitalism, globalization, and exploitation. I begin the analysis from the consideration that capitalism was not born in industries or factories but in the countryside. This should be the first alarm of something destined to worsen. The second one examines the Italian *caporalato* case in the agrarian system, analysing the main actors of the phenomenon, the supply chain from the workers “recruitment to the products” consumption; furthermore, I consider a case study, the exploited Indian Sikh community in the Agro pontino. The last part of the second chapter will be concentrated on the description of the Law n.199/2016 issued to fight *caporalato* and its effects and to the overview of the Security Decree issued in 2018, which instead of giving security as the title suggests it only spreads the insecurity for thousands of workers which could not get a residence permit. In this analysis, in addition to the above topics cited, the final chapter aims to give an overview of the European scenario concerning this problem, providing two cases of Southern Europe that share similar characteristics with the Italian scenario: Greece and Spain. Then, I will focus on the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union, highlighting what should be changed. The second part of the third chapter will focus on the Netherlands case, a country with a system of hi-tech agricultural devices but where workers’ rights are violated. The last part will observe the tools that should be used to contrast labour exploitation in the agricultural system and the radical reforms that should be implemented to change pace and give back the rights that every human being on the earth should deserve.

CHAPTER 1

The three pillars of the agrarian system: capitalism, globalization and exploitation

1.1 The roots of Capitalism: from countryside to factories

According to the Hunger Map of 2019 published by the World Food Programme, 821 million people suffer from hunger.² In another report of the same year, WFP claimed that one-third of food produced for human consumption is wasted globally; the total amount of wasted and lost food is about 1.3 billion tonnes per year.³ The economic value of world waste is estimated at one trillion dollars per year, distributed as follows: 68% in industrialized countries and 32% in developing countries. This is \$680 million for 36% of the food lost and wasted by countries developed against 320 million dollars for the loss of 26% of food production by developing countries. Undoubtedly, a more considerable amount is wasted in developed countries, but also in developing countries a lot of resources food could be recovered. Based on these data, one wonders how there may be this massive amount of food waste, whereas there are people who struggle daily to find food to survive. This is just one of the many questions behind the complicated food system.⁴

To understand our current food system, it is preferable to start from its roots. I believe that the issues concerning exploitation, which will be later analysed in detail, are strictly connected to the phenomenon of capitalism. Despite its pervasiveness and the massive popularity, it has garnered over the years, the analysis on its origins deserves a true deepening.

Searching on the web, online words linked to “capitalism”, concepts as socialism, imperialism, communism, colonialism, alienation, industrialization, conservatism, or figures as Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, or Alan Friedman immediately jump out. Incredibly, however, words such as agriculture, enclosures, or farming are not mentioned.

Ellen Meiksins Wood, who covered for many years the role of Professor of Political Science at York University and who has marked for her interest and knowledge about Marxist theories, bequeathed us a fortune of works concerning the origins of capitalism. At the beginning of Chapter 5 of “*The Origins of Capitalism*”, one of her

² World Food Programme (2019) *Hunger Map*

³ World Food Programme (2019), *The state of food and agriculture*

⁴ World Food Programme, La FAO e i suoi partner esortano a un maggior impegno nel ridurre le perdite alimentari e lo spreco di cibo, available on <http://www.fao.org/news/story/it/item/147427/icode/>

masterpieces, she explains that people, and even researchers and academics, commonly mistake thinking that capitalism developed in factories or industries during the advent of coal's combustion. Wood shows us how the foundations of capitalism are not rooted in the cities but the countryside: in a specific place and a specific period.⁵

1.1.1 The birth of the enclosures

An analysis of the origin of capitalism has to focus the attention upon the British Isles and the new system which characterized the agrarian organization. Even before the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, England encompassed a vast transformation, with the consolidation of a new legal process with small merged landholdings into larger farms: the enclosures. Not by chance, the politics of the enclosures and the rear rise of big industry are strictly connected. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the arable land was half divided in England into a very high number of small and unfenced plots, organized according to the ancient system of "open fields", worked as an indivisible whole. Over the century, the English countryside gradually changed its face: continuous hedge enclosed the open fields, the communal lands were also divided, becoming closed properties. The largest landowners embarked on a new privatization process to enhance their lands both by introducing new cultivation methods and by converting large areas into grazing land for sheep. To achieve this, there were no other means than to suppress the system of open fields, abolish common pastures and definitively privatize the land. To overcome the strenuous resistance of the small owners, which were hostile to such innovations, the necessary acts to legitimize the fences, known as "*enclosures act*", were requested to the Parliament. Consequently, the small owners sold their lands to the most fortunate and the wealthiest big farmers because of their inability to withstand the burden of this change and fear of competition from large agricultural enterprises, which started to conduct activities with completely innovative systems. Soon large farms replaced traditional peasant communities, ending up to be inevitably disintegrated. Most of these new kinds of farms were entrusted to entrepreneur tenants, who increased production excessively through the maniacal application of new methods. Not all the old owners left without their fields found work as laborers in agricultural companies of a capitalist type: most were forced to abandon the countryside and retire to industrial cities, where many found employment in the nascent factories, passing, however, from the condition of "free workers" to that of hired, and most of the time exploited, workers. However, of all the displaced peasantry, not everyone decided to go to the cities.⁶

⁵ Wood E. M. (1999) "The Agrarian Origin of Capitalism" in *The Origin of Capitalism, a longer view*

⁶ Wood E. M. (1999) "The Agrarian Origin of Capitalism" in *The Origin of Capitalism, a longer view*

1.1.2 High farming

A new type of production began to be established by tenant farmers or labourers of the large commercial farms: the British “high farming”. This was a set of new farming techniques which gave the possibility to boost production. It was introduced in the 19th century and predominantly relied on imported guano for fertilization. In his analysis of high farming, Perry (1981) suggests that to define the topic, more accuracy is needed. Indeed, it is a notably vague concept. Therefore, presumably, it can be misinterpreted; perhaps, because - even if it was a widespread phenomenon, especially from about 1840 to 1880 - there is little knowledge about this argument. This period is known as the Golden Age of British farming, characterized by increasing productivity and commensurate high profits and better living standards for progressive farmers, who used concentrated fertilization inputs to increment output. Not surprisingly, during the first years of the 20th-century, agriculture became one of the country’s major economic sectors. Unfortunately, research has tended to focus on new industrial and urban society rather than on high farming and agricultural matters in general.⁷

One of the few contributions was brought by E.J.T. Collins (1969), who explained how hand tools, not machines, enabled the grain harvest; high farming allowed people to gather products speedily, since the migrant labour force diminished. One of the main effects of this new practice was the drop of the farm products’ farm, facilitating large economies of scale. Consequently, more peasant farmers were pushed out of agriculture, thanks to the upward shove of the crop, leading to the consolidation of land ownership in increasingly larger holdings.⁸

Once large-scale farmers started dominating the food production, they ensured fruitful profits by passing the Corn Laws of 1815, one of the regulations governing the import and export of grain. These Laws caused an increase in the prices of corn and, therefore, also prices of barley, wheat, and all other grains were boosted. This new legislation was designed to protect English farmers from inexpensive imports of grain. Thanks to this British blockade towards continental Europe, they registered an increase in the profits for their homeland's farms, and therefore, farmers aspired to keep this system. If, on the one hand, these laws benefited the landowners, making them wealthier, on the other one, they lowered, even more, the income of the British rural people and limited total economic growth. The working class could not afford anything other than their food,

⁷ Perry P.J. (1981), *High Farming in Victorian Britain: Prospect and Retrospect*, Agricultural History Vol. 55 No. 2 pp. 156 - 166

⁸ Collins E. J. T. (1969), *Harvest technology and labour supply in Britain 1790 – 1870*, Economic History Review

forcing them to stop buying manufactured goods. Thus, despite the clear evidence that the Corn Laws hurt the working class, the wealthy elite benefited and was reluctant to the thinking of giving up this privilege.⁹

Parliamentarians did not mind about the tough conditions in which the working class had to live for a long time; in fact, these restrictions were held for so long before Britain adopted a freer trade policy like they have today. Further analysis shows that these sufferings drove to riots and rampage, even if it took time for an entire organization to address the issue legally. In 1832, the right to vote was extended to a sizable portion of the merchant class, leading to the conclusion of the Laws. Indeed, although Corn Laws favoured large landholders, the emerging industrialists were not favourable about this matter. Their claim was not an act of altruism; instead, there was the rule that “the labourer would get wages enough to buy his crust and no more”. In a nutshell, the price of bread determined how much they would have to pay their workers. As expected, these laws brought a widespread hunger in 1845, which led to their repeal. The annulment of the Corn Laws caused a reopening of the imported grain to England and the growing importance of the industrial sector’s power over agriculture. This drop in prices did not help the peasant farmers, who found it even more challenging to get through the month. As the years passed, agricultural land continued to concentrate in fewer and fewer hands as food production was steadily drawn into international markets.¹⁰

1.1.3 Agrarian capitalism

Because of these new techniques of the land, the high farming, and its division method, the enclosures, England became the world’s first society in which profit-maximization and capital accumulation drove the whole economy. This new conception of land brought some consequences: England ceased to be self-sufficient in food production. This period meant new imperialism in which the British government adopted an imperial strategy, which later will become a common practice in Western countries. Britain conquered other territories to extract raw materials and take advantage of fertile lands, exploiting broad areas and people to its mercantile project. This led to enforcement of its favourable terms of trade, subsidizing exports, keeping wages low, and prohibiting colonies from industrializing, forcing them to buy the empire’s own manufactured products. As David Harley (2004) stated in his work, this practice of “accumulation by dispossession” characterizes even our current society in the expropriation of lands and resources; it is a common practice where almost always the Global North exploits the Global South under neoliberal regimes.¹¹

⁹ Williamson J. G. (1990), *The impact of the Corn Laws just prior to repeal*, Explorations in Economic History. 27 (2)

¹⁰ Holt-Giménez E. (2017), “A Foodie’s Guide to Capitalism”

¹¹ Harley D. (2004) *New Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession*

The role of food was thus central to colonial capital accumulation in which wealth, technology, social organization, and political power were steadily built in the centres of the empire.

To summarize, the evidence from this study suggests that even before the Industrial Revolution, the agrarian sector was already the forerunner of capitalist practices. Poor peasants were replaced by two distinct agrarian classes: more prosperous capitalist tenants, and landless labourers. Not surprisingly, Karl Marx defined, in one of his masterpieces “*Capital: A Critique of political economy*”, enclosures as “the prelude to the revolution that laid the foundation of the capitalist mode of production”.¹² The distinctive British situation testifies a revolution in social property relations. Compared with France, whereas the French country remained a land of peasant proprietors, England’s territories were concentrated in far fewer lands, and the property-less mass was proliferating.

A new relationship with the market was born; people, both tenants and wage labourers and farmers, were affected by these competitive pressures that characterize the market-dependence relations. Those dynamics people usually associate with industrial capitalism were already in place in English agriculture before the proletarianization of the workforce. For these reasons, we can consider Britain the homeland of agrarian capitalism. The consequences of England’s agrarian capitalism for subsequent economic development brought the birth of industrial capitalism. Without English agriculture capitalism, there would have been no dispossessed mass obliged to sell its labour-power for a wage. Without that dispossessed non-agrarian workforce, there would have been no mass consumer market for the cheap everyday goods that drove the process of industrialization in England. Finally, without English capitalism, there would probably have been no capitalist system of any kind: it was competitive pressures emanating from England, especially an industrialized England, that, in the first instance, compelled other countries to promote their economic development in capitalist directions.¹³

The study’s findings support the idea that the main difference between all pre-capitalist societies and capitalism is the property relations between producers and appropriators, both in industry and agriculture; the place’s production, in urban or rural areas, does not matter.

Karl Polanyi advanced the idea that market society was a response to specific technological development in a commercial society; the conclusion we can draw from the exploration of the history of agrarian capitalism is that the capitalist dynamic existed well before the industrialization.¹⁴

¹² Marx, K. (1867) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, p. 718

¹³ Wood E. M. (1999) “Agrarian Capitalism and Beyond” in *The Origin of Capitalism, a longer view*

¹⁴ Cangiani, M. (2011), *Karl Polanyi's Institutional Theory: Market Society and Its “Disembedded” Economy*, Journal of Economics Issues

It is crucial to figure out better capitalism's roots to understand better the processes that characterize our current food system. Capitalism has a substantial responsibility in having developed a system characterized by competition and by a continuous race to have a more significant profit at the expense of workers.

1.2 Globalization

It is crucial for this analysis the understanding of globalization, especially concerning the agricultural system. In fact, because of globalization, the world food system has experienced significant transformations since the 1980s. With the coming of globalization and the growth of supermarket chains, and the technical possibilities of industrialised agriculture, the pressure for intensified production and profitability has been strongly accelerated. To explain better the relationship between globalization and agriculture, I will first cover the overall meaning of the general phenomenon.

No recent economic, social, cultural phenomenon has received more attention than globalization. Not surprisingly, *The Economist* has defined globalization as the most abused word of the 21st century. Perhaps its peculiarity stands in the fact that a single event brought various changes in different areas.¹⁵

Several definitions of globalization can be found. The generally accepted use refers to the intensification and expansion of the social interactions and transcontinental flows of goods, capital, people, military forces, information, cultural models, pollutants, pathogens and other social and cultural phenomena. We do not have to confuse the term with a cultural homogenization of the world, or a convergence of the economic and social policies of the various countries, which instead is a result of globalization, or with the achievement of a stable and permanent balance of international peace, economic prosperity and political democracy.¹⁶

The main cause of globalization is the growing importance of international trade; the latter has increasingly become decisive, and this is visible observing the huge increase of imports and exports of goods and services, growth in the activities of multinational companies, a growing exponential number of international migrants, an evident growth of international tourism, and – finally – an increase of global carbon dioxide emissions.

There are two main schools of thought concerning globalization: on the one hand, researchers think that it has caused the exploitation of people in developing countries as, for example, Stiglitz (2002) who refers to “the devastating effect that globalization can have on developing countries”; on the other hand, others consider globalization as the phenomenon which helped to move on developing countries, reducing poverty and

¹⁵ Sorinel C. (2012), *Globalization and Mondialisation – A Conceptual Analysis*, Economic Sciences Series vol.0 (2), pp. 27-30

¹⁶ Andreatta F., Clementi M., Colombo A., Koenig-Archibugi M. and Parsi V. E. (2012) “Globalizzazione economica e sociale” in *Relazioni Internazionali*, Mulino

embracing economic integration with the world economy; what happened, for instance, in China and India.¹⁷ Bhagwati (2005), one of the greatest advocates of free trade and globalization, claims that this phenomenon can benefit both developed and developing countries.¹⁸

However, both supporters and critics would agree: the pace of globalization has been unequal across the world, and its outcomes are different from country to country.

1.2.1 The relation between agriculture and globalization

As we have seen in the previous paragraph, despite the significant transformation of European agriculture, which was able to increase productivity with new technologies and methods, at a certain point, the dependence of the import of agricultural commodities began to be seen. After the birth of the enclosures and the subsequent unfolding of the industrial revolution, the population grew significantly; therefore, a large part of the labour force took advantage of work opportunities in the industry. Many countries became dependent on overseas trade of food supplies; several world areas became agriculturally, food-dependent and commercially connected.

With the advent of globalization in the second half of the 21st century, this process was highly accelerated. The relationship between the agri-food system is shown: the international trade of food increase and the traded agricultural inputs expand across countries; the science, knowledge, and information content of the agri-food system become increasingly internationalised; there are growing similarities across nations and global regions concerning consumers' tastes, and the companies attending to them; the social policies related to hunger and poverty reduction become global.

This innovation has brought relevant changes in a variety of aspects. Firstly, the size and composition of the food market have reached extremely high numbers. Since the earlier centuries, long-distance trade of spices, sugar, and salt has occurred; today globalization of the agri-food system has a very different nature: it is more pervasive and more profound, less driven by raw materials. It is also more service and technology-intensive and more integrated with economic and societal changes. Focusing on the aggregate perspective of the current global agri-food system, it is possible to observe a meticulous chain in which food retailers serve consumers; the food processors and traders supply the retail sector while procuring from the farm sector, which in turn is supplied by agriculture input industries. Each step of this chain is characterised by transactions and trade globally, with big players in each industry.

¹⁷ E. Stiglitz E. J. (2002), *Globalization and Its Discontents*

¹⁸ Bhagwati, J. (2005) *In Defense of Globalization*, International Journal (Toronto, Ont.)

Secondly, the world has witnessed an evolution of agricultural trade. Using the ratios of trade to agricultural production for all agricultural products from 1961 to 2002 for different developing countries, the agricultural integration in the world market appears to have increased for some regions and periods. However, the process has not been consistent across all the countries; in some cases, there is a clear manifestation of international integration, but not others (e.g., some Sub-Saharan countries).

Finally, the level of capital flows has increased significantly in the past decade, suggesting a greater integration in financial markets. Especially industrialised countries experienced the most considerable increase in their gross private capital flows to gross domestic product, from approximately 11% in 1990 to almost 26% in 2003.

So, since globalization's development in the 1980s, the world food system has experienced a significant metamorphosis. Above all, agricultural research and development (R&D) were speed up due to the advancement of innovation and the involvement of the private sector and civil society. Moreover, small farmers are being immersed in more commercialized agricultural systems nationally and globally. Markets and retail industries are displaying essential changes in trade and are defining the emergence and evolution of a global agri-food chain. Finally, consumers in industrialized and developing countries are becoming a driving force for changes in the global food system beyond their domestic markets.¹⁹

1.2.2 Globalization's impact on earth

Focusing on the impact of globalization on agriculture and food security, negative aspects are visible. Globalization offers both risks and opportunities; if we look through the optics of environmental stability, the growing number of pollutants released into the air during the necessary transport of goods contributes to the disruption of ecosystems and the climate around the world. The long-term effects can be disruptive; more frequent climatic fluctuations and extreme weather events, such as droughts, floods, or torrential rainfall, consequently, cause arable land to be washed away. Therefore, crop failure can harm GDP, especially in agrarian countries, and access to food. Secondly, changes in the structure of economies favour production with higher labour productivity and a smaller share of agriculture, forcing countries to import food.

The responsible approach of society to the sector is fundamental to maintain human security in the food field. It should not be necessary to transport products that a country can produce by itself. The agrarian policy must satisfy the need of the population to have access to enough quality foodstuffs, consider regional differences,

¹⁹ Von Braun J and Diaz-Bonilla E. (2008), *Globalization of food and agriculture and the poor*

and promote the principles of socially responsible business in human rights, labour standards, and the environment. Inappropriate measures may result in social unrest and economic and ecological migration.²⁰

1.3 Exploitation

As we have previously analysed in the first paragraph, the capitalist process was visible in the countryside even before the Industrial Revolution, in factories and industries. There is capitalist exploitation at the core of the capitalist dynamic; without exploitation, there would not be the surplus needed to earn a profit.

There are several explanations of labour exploitation; the most famous is Karl Marx's surplus-value theory. Labour exploitation or surplus-value extraction is a structural feature of the capitalist mode of production where capital accumulation depends on the exploitation of labour-power. An interesting point worthy of exploration is Marx's idea of "primitive accumulation": it was fundamental to deprive laborers of both of their lands to drive them to work within the profitable capitalist forms. In this mechanism, two elements must be present: the sanction of laws, especially those which demarcated private property, as the enclosures act, but also market norms, and the appropriation of land by several actors.²¹

The second kind of explanation is provided by the neoclassical school, which considers exploitation as the inequality between the marginal productivity of labour - i.e., the productivity of an additional worker - and wage. Thus, the salary is below the value of the marginal product of labour.²² Interesting is the consideration of the neoclassical scholar, Arthur Pigou, who stated that labour exploitation is present whenever employers pay their workers less than their workers' services are worth for them.²³

The third and final explanation was provided by John Roemer, American economist and political scientist, who considered the theory of exploitation as a theory of distributive injustice where exploitation is based upon the unequal distribution of property rights, which can be ownership of human property – skills and non-human property, and of production and land, in all modes of production, feudal, capitalist and socialist.²⁴

²⁰ Polackova H. (2020), *Socio-economic Consequences of Globalization in Agriculture in Relation to Social Responsibility*, SHS Web of Conferences

²¹ Zawojcka A. (2016), *Exploitation of migrant labour in the EU agriculture*

²² Persky J. and Tsang H. (1974), *Pigouvian Exploitation of Labor*, *The Review of Economics and Statistics* Vol. 56, No. 1

²³ Coldwell, D. (1990) *Pure Neoclassical Exploitation and the Level of Wages*, *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* Vol. 49, No. 1

²⁴ Petersen, T. (1984), *Class and Exploitation: Description and Ethics. Notes on John Roemer's A General Theory of Exploitation and Class*, *Acta Sociologica* Vol. 27 No. 4

1.3.1 The meaning of labour exploitation

Generally speaking, exploitation refers to the asymmetrical exchange that occurs within the productive process. The exploiter obtains a more significant economic value than the exploited, and that it is obtained at the latter's cost. We have to remember the existence of several forms of exploitation, not just one in terms of capital. Even before the capitalist production's birth, the accumulation of wealth by some subjects at the expense of others has existed.

However, there are some features of capitalist exploitation intrinsic to all forms of exploitation, others not. One crucial characteristic that distinguishes capital exploitation from the others is the unremunerated knowledge of the exploited; the workers give their energies to the production process. In turn, they receive a compensation unequal compared to the energies and time involved. Basically, the exploiters have the aim of making producing commodities and obtaining an economic profit from the sale of these commodities.

Essentially, exploitation often takes the form of unjust economic exchange. One person takes advantage of another to gain a profit.

1.3.2 The relationship between agriculture and exploitation

The dependence between agriculture and exploitation lies in the fact that landowners or entrepreneurs typically require large numbers of cheap, flexible, seasonal workers due to the cost pressure imposed on farm producers by the retail food industry. For these characteristics, foreign workers, especially the new ones, are the most vulnerable and are seen as harder workers; primarily, they lack other alternatives, and deem more reliable and loyal than their domestic counterparts and are prepared to work longer hours.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights conducted social research from 01/2013 to 09/2014, in which it was confirmed that in 21 European nations, agriculture, forestry, and fishing - together, AF&F - is one of the most affected sectors by the high-risk level of exploitation, especially for foreign workers. In some European countries, it is even in the top three of the most affected sectors. However, some countries are entirely exempt from workplace inspections in the agricultural labour carried out on private property; consequently, it is difficult to detect cases of labour exploitation. For example, in Poland, the National Labour Inspectorate has no power to control employees' work conditions at sites of private agricultural holdings. Some countries, such as Cyprus, the Czech Republic, and Italy, are riskier than others. In the island nation in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, AF&F is the first top economic sector in which workers risk labour exploitation. Foreign migrants came mainly from the South and South-East of Asia and are always subjected to continuous threats and withholding pay and documents. The Czech Republic shows the same situation, with

the exception that people came especially from Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Mongolia, the Philippines, Russia, and Vietnam.²⁵

According to an article published by Taylor and Sturdy from BBC (2013), in the United Kingdom, Eastern Europeans, especially from Latvian and Lithuania, employed in the Fens to pick leeks, were trapped in a widespread exploitation network. First, they had to pay 236 GBP to be trafficked from Lithuania on the promise of a job but once they arrived; they found just a vast amount of cruelty. They were forced to pay fellow countrymen bribes to get an extra few days' work in the field – and some were paid less than 1 GBP a week. Many were trapped in debt after being fined up to 1,000 GBP for failing to turn up for work.²⁶

Media report that these forms of exploitation, especially of foreign migrants, are more likely in multiple dependencies on the agricultural employer; when the foreigner depends on the farmer not only for his job but also for other necessities, such as housing, food, or transportation. According to *The local.es* (2016), this is the case in Spain, five Romanians have been arrested for exploiting their fellow countrymen after luring them to work in the fruit and vegetable harvest in Seville and then not paying them for their work. The workers were also squeezed into often abandoned houses in deplorable sanitary conditions where they were threatened and which they could not leave except to work in the fields.²⁷

In Italy, this kind of media's complaints are several, even conducted by foreign journalists; for example, the Guardian (2015) published an article concerning illegal gang masters, known as *caporali*, who were taking the social contributions of the workers and gave them, in turn, less than 3€ an hour over a 10-12 hour working day.²⁸

Over the past 30 years, the agricultural sector has developed new forms of production and increased its productivity, but it is still heavily dependent on the workforce at a low cost. It is a condition present in all those countries where the demand for agricultural work is typically seasonal and is based on the displacement of workers from one farm to another. In these contexts, the economic exploitation of workers, which produces food low-cost for retail, flourishes and is rampant. A situation that repeats itself in several countries of Europe, where agriculture is one of the sectors most affected by the burden of undeclared work and exploitation. In Italy, the systematic denial of the labour rights of women and men, especially migrants from Europe and

²⁵ The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014), *Annual Report 2014, Fundamental rights: challenges and achievements in 2014*

²⁶ Taylor J. and Sturdy J. (2013), *Fens migrant workers 'exploited'*, BBC, available on <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-24108665>

²⁷ The Local es (2016), *Five arrested over exploiting Romanian workers in Spain*, available on <https://www.thelocal.es/20160116/five-arrested-in-spain-over-exploiting-romanian-farm-workers/>

²⁸ Butler S. (2015), UK shops urged to look at Italian tomato sourcing over exploitation concerns, The Guardian, available on <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/dec/10/uk-shops-italian-tinned-tomato-sourcing-workers-exploitation-concerns>

Africa, is a structural phenomenon of seasonal fruit and vegetable production. This reality will be further discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

The Italian Caporalato case in the agrarian system: are we facing a new form of slavery?

Capitalism, globalization, and exploitation are three phenomena that characterize the Italian agricultural system. This chapter will observe how they are laid out in the Italian agri-food chain by providing several examples. Then, I will analyse in detail which are the “criminal actions” carried out in the Italian agri-food chain. Firstly, I will start by explaining the concept of *Agromafia* in Italy and the main actors involved in the process: workers, intermediaries, and agricultural entrepreneurs. In this context, I will deepen the steps that characterize the criminal mechanism: from the workers’ recruitment to the packaging of the products, giving a brief overview of the supermarkets’ responsibilities. Secondly, I will take into consideration a case study: the Indian Sikh community in the Pontine area studied by the sociologist Marco Omizzolo. Thirdly, I will explain the Law n. 199/2016 issued to fight gang mastering in the Italian agricultural system, the effects of it and the “Security Decree” issued in 2018 which caused an increase of the irregular migrants’ mass in Italy. Finally, I will shortly evaluate a strategy issued in 2020 by the former Italian government led by Giuseppe Conte to counter labour exploitation in the Italian agri-food system.

2.1 *Agromafia’s activities in Italy*

Most of the products’ outcome of Italian agriculture depends exclusively on the “new slaves” labouring, without housing or rights. The phenomenon of labour exploitation has been going in Italy for many years, but the numbers of labourers are increasing over time.

The term *agromafia* has been, for several years, the hat to which all those activities of the mafia clans that affect the entire agri-food chain are traced. *Agromafia* is a social system characterized by different levels of power relations: from the agricultural entrepreneurs to the mafia clans, passing through the help of the intermediaries, called *caporali*. [10]

The relationship between the land and criminal activities is a very old one in Italian history. It is worth remembering the large estate’s struggles of farmers, the so-called *braccianti*, against the prevarications of landowners and mafia, after World War II in Sicily. The peasant movement in Sicily has been a remarkable element of change; peasants started to occupy unproductive large estates of large landowners. It was an

organized and peaceful movement, with a clear and precise objective: reaching the possibility to work the uncultivated lands. Umberto Santino, historian, and sociologist described this movement as one the most mass effective movements that contrasted mafia; it is remembered for its sense of modernity, democracy, and social justice. Considering that the peasant movement was becoming increasingly more organized and structured, landowners started an alliance with the mafia to maintain a controlling force that could eradicate the threat of peasants claiming the land. The peasant movement was seen as a source of significant instability. This alliance changed soon to murderous actions against farmers. Peasants had to wait until 1950 for an agrarian reform that gave ownership rights, even if it was limited to only two hundred hectares. The individual owners were required to make improvements, reclamations, and transformations to the funds. It was a dreadful blow to large landowners and the mafia power. It should have caused Sicilian agriculture progress capable of modifying an old structure, aimed at ultimately cancelling those relationships of intermediations; unfortunately, this was not the case.²⁹~~[OBJ]~~

The mafia process in agricultural matters is ever-changing; it has started to assume international ramifications, diversifications of criminal investments, and a robust financial structure, for years. The relationship between agriculture, land, and criminal activities not only has resisted but was even strengthened throughout these last years.

The primary sector represents vast investments and a possibility to keep control over the territory through its economy. These are the reasons behind the great growth of exploitation, *caporalato*, and other forms of criminal activities even in Italian regions considered immune to these practices, for instance, the Northside of the peninsula. The geographic boundaries of this ill agriculture have been extended to the whole national territory.

During an interview, Gian Carlo Caselli, Magistrate and Chairman of the Scientific Committee of the Foundation “Observatory on Crime in Agriculture and the Agri-Food System”, described this phenomenon using the term “*mafia liquida*”; a phenomenon which can be compared to the water because it tends to perpetuate everywhere, even in sectors which were considered immune of risks of perpetration of illegal presence, the agri-food supply chain. Furthermore, Caselli marked the fact that this sector’s attractiveness and profitability of two factors: the label of the made in Italy elsewhere and the fact that even in conditions of

²⁹ Montalbano, G. (2012), *La repressione del movimento contadino in Sicilia (1944-1950)*, Diacronie Studi di Storia Contemporanea

crisis, the agri-food sector must continue to produce to give food to the population. These two elements explain why criminal organizations are highly interested in this sector.³⁰

The sector of *agromafia* covers all the agri-food supply chain: from production to transformation and distribution of products. In these last two phases, the “made in Italy” factor risks being profoundly compromised. One weak element is linked to the fragility of the products’ labelling: criminal organizations exploit the deficiencies of the norms concerning labelling – which refers to all information relating to the content of a given packaged food, such as the list of ingredients, the name of the product’s company or the expiry date – and sell products which are falsely considered “made in Italy”.

Agromafia consists of all criminal organizations’ interests in all agri-food chain, from what it is harvested in the fields, usually polluted, to transports of products to the management of restaurants in big cities, the fruit and vegetable markets, and so on. Thus, the areas in which organized crime and mafia have found a business in the agri-food sector are many. We should consider that this is one of the essential sectors of “made in Italy” products in which in 2014 it was encountered +840% of scams and offences for a total of 4.3 milliards of euros. We can think of the crime of illicit intermediation and exploitation of work as a matryoshka that hides within it a set of work-related offenses such as tax evasion, social security, and violation of the rules on safety at work.

Even if all the agri-food chain is fascinating in terms of research and insights, on this occasion, I will mainly focus the attention on the exploitation of thousands of workers. I will now deepen this production system based on segregation and slavery, done by intermediaries on behalf of Italian entrepreneurs, facilitated by traffickers, mafia bosses, and entrepreneurs of great distribution. They are all united to earn profits from these vulnerable people.

To get an idea of the *agromafia*’s phenomenon in Italy, the fourth Report of the Observatory Placido Rizzotto illustrates the situation very well. Annually, 450.000 agricultural workers in Italy’s agricultural sector are protagonists of a complex process of exploitation. Their fundamental rights are trampled, and 132.000 of them are forced to work and live in similar slavery conditions. In Italy, the non-observed economy is estimated at approximately 208 billion euros, the irregular job is approximately 77 billion, while the business of the *caporalato* in agriculture is equal to 4,8 billion euros. According to the sixth report *Agromafia*, elaborated by

³⁰ Caselli, G. C. (2016) ‘*Agromafie e caporalato: due piaghe italiane.*’ Siamo noi, TV2000, available on [tps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ojd6j8At-fk&t=2479s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ojd6j8At-fk&t=2479s)

Eurispes and the Observatory on Crime in Agriculture and on the Agri-Food System, the total annual profit of *agromafia* of 2018 reached 24.5 billion euros.³¹

These numbers prove that the big issue of exploitation and *agromafia* is systematic; there are not anymore episodic, exceptional, and marginal forms of exploitation that concern only some territories. We are now facing a new labour market where these practices are a daily occurrence.

2.1.1 The main actors in the process of exploitation in a ‘rural world’

This process of exploitation is characterized by many actors, some more visible and known as the exploited, the workers, and the exploiters, the so-called “*caporali*” and some less perceived which contribute and are the base of this chain, as the owners of the farms or the criminal organizations who control the great distribution. Even if everyone deserves a proper deepening, here, I will focus the attention on three actors involved in this process: the workers, the intermediaries known in Italy as *caporali*, and finally, the agricultural entrepreneurs.

The workers are people in need who are recruited to work in conditions of high exploitation. They are consistently underpaid, deprived of periods of rest and tools to ensure security and good health conditions.³²

Most of them are migrant workers, considered the most vulnerable for their status of being without any other option; to survive they are forced to extreme working and living conditions. The agricultural sector in Italy is heavily reliant on migrant workers.³³

According to the statistic dossier of immigration made by Caritas and Migrantes, in 2010, regular migrants carried out a quarter of the days worked overall in this sector. The current real figure is probably significantly higher for two reasons: firstly, the phenomenon has far increased; secondly, these data do not cover all the irregular migrants.³⁴ Although official statistical sources represent important indicators of the main trends in agricultural work, they cannot provide a precise and comprehensive picture of the sector’s reality due to the high incidence of temporary and irregular work.

Many migrant workers are paid less than €25 for a day’s work and live in derelict buildings and makeshift shelters without running water, electricity, or heating. According to data provided by ISTAT, in the last years,

³¹ Omizzolo, M. (2020), *Sfruttamento lavorativo e caporalato in Italia: la profughizzazione del lavoro in agricoltura e il caso dei braccianti indiani nell’Agropontino*, Costituzionalismo.it

³² Di Marzio, F. (2017), *Agricoltura senza caporalato*, Donzelli Editore

³³ Amnesty International (2012), *Exploited Labour: Migrants workers in Italy’s agricultural sector*

³⁴ Caritas and Migrantes, (2011), *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2011*, IDOS Edizioni, p273

from 2007 and 2018, the number of foreign workers employed in agriculture is significantly increased. For what concerns women, they register a growth trend of 200%.³⁵

The irregular migrants, who originate mainly from Africa, are undoubtedly the largest part of people at risk of employment exploitation. Residing in Italy without a regular residence permit is an offence; migrants are precluded from being engaged regularly by the employer in this condition. Inevitably, people are forced to accept inhumane working and living conditions to survive. However, the reported cases of exploitations of these recent years in Italy demonstrate that having a regular residence permit does not guarantee compliance with the workers' rights. Even the "regular migrants" are often victims of serious exploitation. For example, this is the case of the increasing number of migrants coming from Romania and Bulgaria. Alternatively, even the case of asylum seekers and political refugees who are part of the national protection systems, but they are paid even less only because employers say that State pays them food and accommodation.

Both Italian and foreign women are mainly employed in the fruit and vegetable supply chains that require greater skill in handling delicate fruits such as grapes and strawberries or packaging. They are forced to 10-12 hours a day of work, curving or standing, at very heavy temperatures, being in contact with aggressive pesticides. Their vulnerability results from a series of structural factors of gender inequalities, including the need to support economically themselves and their children, which forces them to accept very harsh working conditions: reduced salaries, intimidation threats, physical and psychological violence. The available data and testimonials show that women are generally paid 20-30% less than men for the same type of work and are more likely to be blackmailed. To the harsh working conditions described above, nearly always they are forced to forms of abuse, violence, and sexual exploitation by employers.

During an interview conducted by Francesco Carchedi of the Observatory Placido Rizzotto, a female worker of Moroccan origin, employed in the harvest of onions in Calabria, claimed that women who work in agricultural sectors accept these kinds of harassments to not be fired or to not be forced in working in even worse places. Furthermore, she explained that one of the main elements that drive these women to accept is the necessity to obtain a residence permit.³⁶

The dual exploitation is systematic even for European female workers, such as women coming from Romania and Bulgaria. Daily intermediaries decide whether to allocate women to the harvests or to force them to sexual intercourse. A proof of this terrible fact was brought by a research of CREA-PB and ActionAid Italy: there were many voluntary interruptions of pregnancy. As reported ISTAT data of 2016, 2017, and 2018, many of

³⁵ Macrì, M.C. (2019), *Il contributo dei lavoratori stranieri all'agricoltura italiana*, Centro di ricerca Politiche e Bio-economia

³⁶ Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto (2021), *Agromafie e Caporalato: Quinto Rapporto*, Ediesse

the voluntary abortions of women of Romanian nationality in Puglia took place in the province of Foggia, one of the biggest centres of labour exploitation.³⁷

Moreover, sometimes women who work in greenhouses can bring with them their children and live with them. During an interview held by the observatory, a woman stated that working as a caregiver or cleaner in someone's home did not allow her to bring her daughter; instead, working as a farmer at least gives her this convenience, even if this involves making children living in conditions of segregation, deschooling and total invisibility. Often these children become a different instrument of blackmail. In some cases, kids, from 13 to 18 years old, are employed as workers for 9 hours a day, for a salary of about 10/15 € a day.

Workers are generally exploited by *caporali*, who are intermediaries acting as recruiters who organize the workers' schedule, collocating and controlling them in the agricultural enterprises. In other words, the *caporale* is a broker between the workers and the agricultural entrepreneurs.

Gang mastering, known in Italian as *caporalato*, is a structural phenomenon of agriculture, present also in the construction's sector; it is the illegal labour recruitment and organization system through which intermediaries, called *caporali*, "hire" workers on behalf of agricultural entrepreneurs. By doing this, they perceive a payoff. *Caporalato* is not a new phenomenon in Italy: it has been part of the country's seasonal labour market for decades. Since the second half of the 20th century, with the development of labour laws in 1950, the practice of *caporalato* has gradually emerged as an activity of organized crime aimed at the illegal and low-cost exploitation of agricultural labour. The historical evolution shows us organizations of intermediaries, disguised as labour agencies, but essential part of the mafia organisation.

However, we should remember that *caporalato* is not necessarily linked to mafia organizations and is not practiced exclusively in the *Mezzogiorno*; moreover, physical violence and enslavement are not the only used means to organize the teams of laborers.

Several scholars have shown how this labour recruitment system was born in several different contexts in relation to the transformation in the capitalist sense of agriculture. Figures as *caporali* were and still are necessary for the movement of large numbers of labourers and, therefore, for forming an agricultural labour market.

In recent years, a new type of *caporale* was born. They are not anymore just intermediaries between supply and demand working; today, they take control over all life of the labourers, managing the hiring and the "salary" and providing, for a high fee all other needs: food, a place where to live and transportation.

³⁷ Moschetti, G. and Valentino, G. (2019), *L'impiego delle straniere in agricoltura: i dati inps e i risultati di un'indagine diretta in puglia, nelle aree di Cerignola (FG) e Ginosa (TA)*, in CREA, *Il contributo dei lavoratori stranieri all'agricoltura italiana*, p.65

According to the third report of the Observatory Placido Rizzotto, in 2015, inspections carried out by FLAI CGIL, on 8,862 farms more than 80 production areas documented the presence of 6,158 irregular workers and 713 cases of *caporalato*. Thus, *caporali* guarantee the day of work in the fields, and the extra services and they earn a profit from these supplies and services. However, according to intermediaries' view, *caporalato* is an ordinary practice of intermediation working, where the *caporale* is the interface between the teams of workers and the entrepreneurs. This system flourishes and spreads in all those contexts in which there are the following characteristics: high demand for flexible and short-term labour force, especially during the seasons of the harvests; a highly fragmented and non-integrated production system; isolation and remoteness of collection fields, where it is almost impossible to be monitored by the State and where working conditions are terrible (ex. Greenhouses); structural inefficiency of producer organizations which do not represent and adequately protect the interests of small producers; the presence of criminal organizations and finally, the lack of official recruitment systems.³⁸

Yvan Sagnet, Cameroonian writer and activist famous for his efforts in human rights, wrote in an article of *L'Espresso* in 2016 that workers could pay even 5 euros for each day of work for each day *caporali* for the transports to the place of work. They are forced to buy also water and food with prices higher than the market price (for example, 1.50 € per a pint of water and 3.50€ for a sandwich). A quota of 10 euros – a quarter of the total day salary of the worker – could be illegally detained by the *caporale* for each worker.³⁹

In high season, hundreds of buses travel thousands of kilometres on damaged roads to bring workers from the cities to the greenhouses. *Caporali* collect labourers in the main squares of the villages very early in the morning, often before 3 AM. To reach the fields it takes two or three hours, but the round-trip travel is not counted, even in part, in the work timetable.

Over the past ten years, the increase in supply and demand of migrant workers in seasonal agriculture in Italy has increased the demand for foreign *caporali*, de-facto subordinated to the Italian intermediaries and able to facilitate their activities of labour recruitment. For many foreign labourers, especially those who do not have a regular residence permit, the *caporale* of their community represents the only point of reference for working and surviving: a condition which makes them, even more, subject to being blackmailed and vulnerable to any form of exploitation.

Although the intermediaries' system is built on an utterly male pyramid, the recruitment of women, especially Italian ones, is increasingly managed by *caporali* women. This clear trend is proved by the increasing

³⁸ Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto (2016), *Agromafie e caporalato: terzo rapporto*, Ediesse

³⁹ Sagnet, Y. (2016), *Yvan Sagnet: 'Il caporalato e le nuove forme di schiavitù'*, *L'Espresso*, available on <https://espresso.repubblica.it/attualita/2016/05/10/news/yvan-sagnet-il-caporalato-e-i-nuovi-schiavi-1.264704>

percentages of arrests of women accused of the crime of illegal hiring, and it is explainable because of the facility for women to convince others to accept certain conditions of work, abusing their trust and vulnerability.⁴⁰

Behind *caporali*, some agricultural entrepreneurs become increasingly richer at the expense of others. Indeed, agricultural entrepreneurs are not exempt from liability. A good example that perfectly explains these actors' accountability is a case that occurred in Foggia the last summer. The agricultural entrepreneur ended up under house arrest, along with his right-hand man. Its five farms, extended nearly two thousand hectares, were seized. He represented one of the largest and best-known farmers in Foggia. The accusation was of illicit brokering and aggravated labour exploitation, plus a whole range of violations in the training of workers in occupational health and safety risks related to the hygiene of work and use of personal protective equipment. In this investigation, conditions of extreme exploitation emerge. The workforce consisted of 222 workers from outside the Community of different nationalities, mainly African and Albanian, almost all recruited by the "ghettos" present in the province. There were also Communitarians and Italians exploited.

Workers were paid between 3.33€ and 5.71€ per hour in total violation of the provisions included in the national and territorial collective agreements signed by the trade unions. They were forced to work every day of the week, between 7 and 9 hours per day, without any day of rest and with a break of about 30 minutes for lunch, not always granted, in the absence of the prescribed periods of leave and sickness: this was organized exploitation aimed especially at hiding the blackwork and saving reliefs contributions. The police stressed the confused way created by the entrepreneur to ensure the abstract correspondence between what is indicated on the payroll and what is paid as remuneration. The "system" was based on several fraudulent methods, which differed if the labourer was Italian or immigrant. In the case of a worker who had an interest in having his working days worked recognized for contributory purposes, he was paid an allowance or a transfer which recognised the payment of hours worked following the statutory provisions that the recipient had to then return in cash for the part exceeding the agreements previously made on hourly pay. Moreover, this case concerned all Italian workers. In the case of immigrants, who do not know the right to have working days recognized, the payment was always in a traced manner, but according to the agreed remuneration in defiance of the industry regulations, and the company informed the INPS not the number of days done, but only those that were going to coincide with the sum given with the days that, theoretically, should have taken place to reach that sum. In addition, investigations have made it possible to ascertain the existence of false employment relationships, carried out through the "buying and selling of working days" under which the company informed the INPS of the hiring and employment of labourers who then did not present themselves at work, with the mutual

⁴⁰ Palmisano, L. (2017), *Il caporalato ora è femmina*, Corriera del Mezzogiorno, available on https://corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/bari/cronaca/17_giugno_22/caporalato-ora-femmina-4b110d74-5782-11e7-ab96-89044b88698d.shtml

advantage of increasing the percentage of “contribution allowance” in favour of the compliant company, and the recognition of benefits for the fictitious worker. Between January and July 2019, it was established that the companies attributable to the suspect have overall had a profit of just under €650,000 for partial wages, causing damage to the Treasury of over €280,000.⁴¹

The case of Foggia is emblematic to understand better the great machine that is behind workers and *caporali*.

2.1.2 The fruit and vegetable supply chain: from the workers’ recruitment to the products’ consumption

As we have previously mentioned, the criminal organization concerns the whole chain: from the recruitment of the workers to the final delivery of the products which are ready to be consumed.

At the base of the workers’ recruitment, there is the migration of these people. Migrations characterize the history of all societies: some of them have been lucky, some have not. Every migration shows painful characteristics in all the process steps: in the community of origin, during the “trip”, and in the society of arrival.

The result depends mainly on three elements: the level of economic, social, and political degradation of the origin’s country; the impossibility of migrating freely and regularly; the great difficulty of access to regularity in the country of arrival as the delivery of the residence permit.

This last point is a crucial matter cause if the process of inclusion needs a long period or –worse - it does not even occur, the migrant ends up carrying out criminal businesses or being exploited by illegal actors. Indeed, labour exploitation is a phenomenon increasingly diffused, facilitated by a condition of discomfort and vulnerability. For this reason, most of the workers employed in agricultural labour are migrants. Unfortunately, agriculture is not the only sector in which people are exploited: construction work, manufacturing, domestic work, fishing, and tourism are the categories in which several situations of immense labour exploitation are registered.⁴²

Suppose migration policy continues to prioritize repressive action rather than promoting immigration and regular integration. In that case, any hope of restoring the phenomenon can only be an illusion, and the risk of ending up in illegality can only remain.

⁴¹ Redazione Ansa (2020), Caporalato: arresto imprenditore, Ansa, available on https://www.ansa.it/puglia/notizie/2020/07/01/caporalato-arrestato-imprenditore_ebb09488-1e7f-4359-a799-fddb330ff30f.html

⁴² Osservatorio Placido Rizzo (2021), *Agromafie e caporalato: quinto rapporto*, Ediesse, p.115

Human trafficking is a phenomenon that continues to expand; for this reason, it is mandatory to change the common perception of the problem. It is usually underestimated being considered as a marginal crime and away from our typical reality. On the contrary, human trafficking, for labour exploitation, is increasingly expanding and is becoming significantly worrying. The interdependencies in a globalized world, the continuous push for an ever-higher profit, and the economic competition led to the need to reduce production costs; moreover, the world economy's current consumption and production practices have increased demand for cheap labour. This is even more evident in times of economic crisis. The current risk is that trafficking for exploitation becomes a structural component of certain productive sectors, with organized criminal groups increasingly aimed at exploiting the social vulnerability of workers, especially migrant workers.

According to the Trafficking in Persons Report of June 2020 – the US State Department Annual Report on World Trafficking – Italy is a country of origin, transit, and “new slaves” destination. The two main areas in which this horrible phenomenon takes shape are sexual and labour exploitation. Even if there has been an improvement from the Report of 2019 to 2020, such as identifying and assisting more victims, increasing funding for victim care and training for law enforcement, the government has not met minimum standards for eliminating trafficking yet. Italy remains without a national action plan, and it does not consistently implement its national victim identification and referral mechanism.⁴³

The geographical area from which most of the victims traditionally come is Eastern Europe; in recent years, there has been an increasing number of victims from Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many of the victims identified are men, although there are different proportions between the presence of men and women depending on the country of origin. The most represented age group, for both genders, tends to decrease more and more.

Once migrants arrive at their destinations, they are forced to suffer difficult living and working conditions which they cannot negotiate: they work all the day without breaks; they receive wages much lower than those agreed or established by law; they are paid irregularly or they are not even paid at all; if they are irregular, they are deceived about obtaining residence permits, for which they are forced to make different payments; they are forced to carry out heavy tasks, harmful or dangerous; they have to suffer xenophobic behaviour, gender discrimination or sexual harassments. These actions are carried out by agricultural entrepreneurs and by *caporali* without scruples who demand money from the migrants for the various offered services: daily employment, transport from the place of withdrawal to that of job and vice versa, rent of a place bed (often in inhuman logistical solutions and in disastrous hygienic-sanitary conditions) or sending money home.

⁴³ Department of United States of America (2020), *Trafficking in Persons Report*

Migrant work in agriculture is, in fact, in close contact with the so-called “ghettos”. Some are notably well known for the extreme precariousness of the survival conditions in which most agricultural workers live and the high population density that characterizes them individually (e.g., Bressanone, Rosarno).

According to the sixth report of Agromafia, ghettos are small, remote communities located on the edge of large agricultural centres. They are challenging to find, hidden in the countryside, far from the inhabited centres, often reachable only through gravel roads, impossible to discover without someone who already knows their position. Several are hidden by shrubs or hedges that delimit the perimeter and cover them from prying eyes. These ghettos can be made of tents, barracks, or even containers where people live in terrible sanitary and social conditions. Most of the time, there are no essential services like electricity, water, and sanitary facilities. The housing conditions are extremely more precarious for migrants who work in agriculture than for others who are employed in different sectors (construction work, manufacturing, domestic work); this occurs mainly for two reasons: firstly, in many cases, they have seasonable jobs, and consequently, they cannot settle down in one area because they frequently must change place of work. Secondly, intermediaries search for accommodations near the work’s area; these areas are often peripheral with no great availability of houses.⁴⁴

The continuous construction of these informal housing aggregations is associated with the absence of structural policies for the hospitality of workers, especially migrants, seasonal and not. This isolation and absence of transport services increase the dependence from intermediaries to access work, transport to fields, and supply primary goods. In these ghettos, there are frequent cases of sexual abuse, knifings, repeated violence and, the spread of diseases due to poor hygiene and lack of access to healthy food and drinking water.

In a nutshell, these places are open-air hells, where the labour exploitation is accompanied by the dehumanizing of social relations and living conditions.

Farmworkers who are victims of exploitation work between 8 and 12 hours a day, often seven days a week without any break, and are considerably underpaid. They can earn between 22 and 30 euros per day - 50% less than the legal minimum established. Many of them, however, are paid in respect of what they harvest; workers earn between 3-4 euros for every 300 kg of tomatoes harvested.⁴⁵

Non-payment of salaries, as well as partial or late payments, are widespread practices. As reported by the Third Report of FLAICGIL, in most envelopes workers’ pay - even those hired under a regular full-time contract - not all the working days are considered; many are arbitrarily deducted in the form of “taxes”. Abdul,

⁴⁴ Eurispes (2019), *Agromafie: sesto rapporto sui crimini agroalimentari in Italia*, edizioni Minerva

⁴⁵ Ciconte, F. and Liberti, S. (2016), *Spolpati: la crisi dell’industria del pomodoro tra sfruttamento e insostenibilità*, Terra

27 years old from Bangladesh, was interviewed and stated: *“In my paycheck, the declared wage was of 46€ a day. But I have never seen that money. They only gave me 28€ a day”*.

Abdul’s story unfortunately is repeated continuously. From an interview conducted by Oxfam, an international confederation of non-profit organisations dedicated to global poverty reduction through humanitarian aid and development projects, a worker from Mali of 24 years old working in Campania declared: *“We work from 6 in the morning to 6 in the evening, every day of the week, for 25 Euro per day. We can stop only 10 minutes to eat.”*

Again, from the report of FLAICGIL, an Italian worker, Giuseppe, claimed: *“They treat us like beasts. They check how many times we go to the bathroom; they say to return immediately to work. If we refuse to work on Sunday, they threaten not to call us anymore.”*⁴⁶

The system of exploitation does not stop to the harvest of products but also of their packaging. Anna, interviewed by the Italian newspaper *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, is a worker who is employed every year in the packaging of table grapes. Standing for more than 10 hours per day, she cuts, weighs, and sells thousands of boxes without ever being able to look up from what she does. Anna is one of the thousands of victims of the system that regulates the production chains of food sold in supermarkets.⁴⁷

Behind the whole chain, there are the big names of large-scale Italian distribution that must take responsibility for protecting human rights in their supply chains. Therefore, these retailers are asked to evaluate their procurement policies’ impact on human rights and, consequently, to adopt concrete measures to prevent, mitigate, and remedy any violation of human rights. I will better explain this request in the following paragraph.

2.1.3 The key responsibilities of the great distribution

Supermarket chains have a great responsibility in this regard. A report published by Oxfam in 2018 described the phenomenon perfectly. These actors dominate global markets, squeezing out every drop of the agri-food chain to maximise profit. Oxfam launched a new campaign to reveal the deep causes of the human suffering behind the food supply chain, starting from supermarkets’ role; this report aims to mobilize citizens – from

⁴⁶ Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto (2016), *Agromafie e caporalato: terzo rapporto*, Ediesse

⁴⁷ Gaita, L. (2020), *‘Frutta e verdura, la grande distribuzione impone i prezzi agli agricoltori: “A noi danno 30-40 centesimi. Poi vendono a 2,5 euro”*. Ecco la filiera che facilita illegalità e sfruttamento’, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, available on <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2020/05/14/frutta-e-verdura-la-grande-distribuzione-impone-i-prezzi-agli-agricoltori-a-noi-danno-30-40-centesimi-poi-vendono-a-25-euro-ecco-la-filiera-che-facilita-illegalita-e-sfruttamento/5801108/>

every part of the world - to act. To better understand the current mechanisms of this phenomenon before it is preferable to analyse its roots.

In this context, the main actor was, again, Britain. During the last quarter of the 19th century, Britain was the world's dominant commercial power and initiated the global agri-food system. For many reasons, both technological and institutional, large agricultural corporations with a global reach emerged during this period. As analysed in the first chapter, the first agrochemicals, able to boost production, were invented. Most of the farm work was mechanized; meanwhile, new technologies improved the preservation and storage of food. The tariff barriers were removed thanks to the free trade start, and markets overcame capital shortages by selling crops even before the ripening of fruits and vegetables. Until the 1950s in the USA, food retailing remained local and family-based; in Europe until the 1960s. After self-service supermarket chains came up, subsequently to this "revolution", with the rise of protectionism and the decline of trade, big firms in the USA and Europe became transnational corporations by investing in other countries, rather than just exporting their products there. Oligopolies emerged at various stages along the value chain. This process was accelerated by US-led reconstruction programmes in Europe after the Second World War and was reinforced by the emergence of new products: fast food, snacks, and drinks. The machinery and agrochemicals firms, along with the seed industry, paved the way for the industrialization of agriculture in Europe. This post-war economic growth and rising incomes led to a shift in diets and an expansion of food options.

Engel's Law is an economic law developed in the 19th century, which indicates that the proportion of a family's income devoted to food decreases as income increases. Even if it has been developed many years before this, it perfectly describes that reality. In response to this new trend, industries responded by launching new, more expensive products and intensifying their marketing. Supermarkets have replaced family grocers and giant retailers influenced by the agri-food chain, processors and farmers, and consumers.

The increasing demand for fresh products, like vegetables, fruit and fish, was caused by health and fitness concerns; the retailers controlled this. In the 1980s, the transnational crop companies increasingly became global players with interests around the world. In developing countries, liberalization removed tariff barriers and state supervisions over commodity markets; this led to a rapid expansion of global trade in food products. Developing countries started to be the producers of fresh products; they were controlled by big retailers, which began organizing new supply chains. Few global corporations now organize the world's agriculture and food-consumption patterns.

Since the 1980s, the face of the sector has changed; the impact of biotechnologies and the shift towards finance capital have led to a wave of mergers and acquisitions. In the last 20 years, Asia, especially China, has become the protagonist of much of the action. China has turned into the leading market for commodities. At the same time, biotechnology and the digital revolution are reformulating the sector; this results in an entry of new

external players. Multinational corporations, like Amazon or Microsoft, are becoming more attracted to farm production and food retailing.⁴⁸

Despite their all-embracing power, the food majors have so far paid little attention to the impact of their actions in the broader world. Oxfam's report highlighted the need to begin addressing climate change, hunger, sustainability, health, disease, and social justice. Other social movements, international conventions, and civil society organizations have also highlighted these concerns, which have increasingly pressed global corporations to make a radical route change in the production approaches, marketing methods, and purchasing practices. The concentration of market power in the agri-food sector has reached record percentages at all supply chain stages, including the retail trade. In most industrialized countries and increasingly in the developing ones, very few mass retailers dominate the food sales sector at the expense of local shops and markets.

According to Oxfam's report, the past and present trends generated human suffering for farm and plantation workers and workers employed in the processing industry. The main issue is that food production corporations have always relied on "cheap" land and "cheap" workers: they reduce costs on the quality of the products and the workers' conditions to gain more profit. As I have already shown, these trends lead to the following results: minimum wages are not met, overtime is not paid, workplace safety is neglected, workers are often paid by how much they harvest rather than by the number of hours of work, and unhealthy working conditions, e.g., many workers are often exposed to pesticides.⁴⁹

One of the deceptions of large food distributors concerns the labelling of the products: since consumers are increasingly interested in the conditions of the animals and nature's treatments and that workers earn a fair wage and enjoy good working conditions, special labelling on product packaging can mitigate consumers concerns. Traders and food processors, to overcome this issue, use some certificates to persuade potential buyers that the contents of a package are safe to consume, are produced sustainably, or support social development. Unfortunately, the label does not always reflect reality. They may reflect the firm's image strategy, but they do not ensure changes to the product, its effects on the environment, or the working conditions of the people who produced it. This form of label abuse is known as "greenwashing". One prevalent example is the label "fairtrade": it ensures stable farmers' incomes, but it does not care about working conditions on plantations. Moreover, its agreement sets the minimum wage properly, but this may be far below a living wage. It can often be found a considerable gap between the advertisements and reality. Another example concerns the Rainforest Alliance label: German supermarkets, such as the discounter Lidl,

⁴⁸ Heinrich Böll Foundation, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and Friends of the Earth Europe (2017), *Agrifood atlas: facts and figures about the corporations that control what we eat*

⁴⁹ Oxfam (2018), *Maturi per il cambiamento*

recommend their products, like bananas and pineapples, for being produced sustainably. However, surveys in Ecuador and Costa Rica have found that the working conditions on Rainforest Alliance-certified plantations are catastrophic.

Another cause of labour exploitation, present mainly in the tomato supply chain, is linked to improper practices perpetrated by a few subjects in the large-scale retail trade to push down the prices of processed products and the raw material itself. An example of this is shown by the mechanism of the online auction of the double decrease, a practice with which some large-scale retailers, months before the harvest season, set the purchase price of the product processed with the canning industry. The buyer collects a first proposal from the industrial counterparts competing to win the order, then calls a second downward auction starting from the lower price obtained in the first phase. Within minutes, participants must try to grab supplies worth hundreds of thousands of euros. This mechanism, akin to gambling, negatively affects the entire production chain, forcing industrialists on many occasions to sell below cost in order not to lose the order and therefore to transfer part of the production costs to the agricultural part, which, in turn, is forced to cut the cost of labour.⁵⁰

2.2 The case of the exploited Indian Sikh community in the Agro Pontino: a research by Marco Omizzolo

Marco Omizzolo, a sociologist and researcher, undertook a challenging path of research that lasted 12 years in the Agropontino, an area in the centre of Italy with a high level of *caporalato* practice leading to strict conditions of labour exploitation. He decided to dedicate his doctoral thesis to understand a theme that it had not yet fully exploited at the time: the phenomenon of migrations, particularly that of Indians Sikh; their origins, their work employment, their life's projects, and their family organization. At that moment, he did not know that we would have discovered such a terrible, huge, and complex system of exploitation. "*Sotto padrone*" is the synthesis of his research. He also described the social actions taken by him and the Indian community, which actively became the protagonists of these revolts. Omizzolo started his work by observing facts; one day, after an episode that change his mind, which I will soon explain, he began to use the method of participatory observation living for a year and a half with the Pontine Indian Community and working with those populations, for three months, from June to August 2010, as an infiltrator. Omizzolo made this decision because he understood that it was not enough just to observe, it was needed to live and relate every passage of that machine of terror.

His methodology was founded on the recommendations that Robert Park, a sociologist of the Chicago School, made to his students: to resume wandering on the street, to experience the social reality of belonging and

⁵⁰ Oxfam and Terra (2018), *Sfruttati. Povertà e disuguaglianza nelle filiere agricole in Italia*

investigation with an ever careful, critical questioning, and investigative gaze. The American sociologist questioned himself on marginal personalities starting from the analysis in their marginality, segregation, and exploitation. Marco Omizzolo, as Park recommends, bent his back in the Pontine countryside like his Indian workmates, sharing with them the pains of daily fatigue, anxieties, and frustrations for the daily humiliation felt to the advantage of the owner.

Omizzolo aimed to allow workers to be fully entitled to the rights that they have, becoming free from those abuses; he insisted on working towards the passage from a “class in itself” to a “class for itself”, theory elaborated by Karl Marx. According to Marx's theory, classes are homogeneous groupings of people, with the same level of education, the same level of consumption, the same social habits, the same values and the same beliefs, and the same conception of life and the world. They are potentially collective subjects who live and think similarly; people have social forces, historical actors capable in certain conditions of unitary action. According to Marx, classes were only potentially historical actors. Indeed, he distinguished between “class in itself” and “class for itself”. By “class in itself” he indicated a set of individuals in the same position concerning ownership of the means of production. Instead, he used the expression “class for itself” when they became aware of having common interests and belonging to the same class. This was the precise objective of Marco Omizzolo.

The episode that completely changed his view occurred one day when he saw a young worker closed with a padlock inside a gazebo 4 meters by 4, which was opened only by the owner when it was time to go to the fields. From that day, from the “mere” methodology of observation, he started to observe exploitation directly from his eyes and living it working in the fields, doing long interviews and having great dialogues with all the members of the chain: members of the community, *caporali*, traffickers, and Indian leaders. He worked as a farmworker in the countryside of *Latina: Sabaudia, Terracina, San Felice Circeo, and Latina*. He worked as a slave under many Italian masters. Every morning he had an appointment in the square of the country where he was; he left his car, dressed in used clothes and waited for the Indian workers with whom he went to the farms. He was recruited and selected via SMS and WhatsApp by the Indian caporale which indicated where to go working and the salary for the day. Often, they made even 20 or 30 kilometres before arriving at the fields, by bicycle at 3-4 AM.

The sociologist was interested not only in analysing the phenomenon, but also in finding a way to help people to be autonomous. He aimed to get as close as possible to the nature of these social processes and build a path for jamming that system. Omizzolo did not just observe the phenomenon in that area, but he wanted to understand the dynamics and the organizational procedures that characterize the Punjabi migratory flow to the Pontino area. The trip to India allowed him to analyse international trafficking for labour exploitation. It is a millionaire and criminal business, and it was closely observed, analysed, and finally denounced for the first

time. A recruitment system takes place through a relationship between laborers, Indian traffickers and Italian entrepreneurs. There is the commitment of some Indian guys in Punjab who recruit Indian boys and girls, convincing them to leave the country by paying between 10-15,000 euros to arrive in Italy. These future farmworkers are convinced of working in the countryside, obtaining working conditions suitable for a medium-high standard of living. Victims are boys and girls who want to see the world and live in a “western way”, allowing their families to have a brighter future. Indian and Italian criminals build their interests and profits on workers’ dreams, and in this overall empire, gang mastering is just of the many aspects.

Caporale is not seen necessarily as a criminal or one of the responsible of exploitation in the workers’ eyes; sometimes he is seen as a facilitator, a point of reference, one to whom to turn to find work and to thank afterward. Sometimes the intermediary is even a relative of the workers and does not always use a blackmailing and violent attitude.

During Omizzolo’s stay, Indian workers started to ask him for information about working conditions; they started talking about paid holidays and illnesses, free health care, accident prevention material that they had to be bought from the employer, about courses to follow to obtain the license necessary to spread pesticides and poisons in greenhouses, about social security contributions. These dialogues had a sensational revolutionary charge; they allowed a continuous exchange and updating of the data and of the hypotheses that he worked out every day on his research. Marco Omizzolo was the first Italian to investigate closely in such an intense way. He had broken the imbalance that the Indians, until then, had experienced in their daily relationship with the states. In his book, he explains that this was the secret of his methodology; he forged horizontal and non-conflictual relationships.

Omizzolo understood that intervening in this capitalistic, criminal, agromafious, and organized system was not enough to wait for norms and controls, like labour inspectors, of the *Asl* or of police, because the problem was the absence of more guarantees and economic resources. Norms and controls are part of the response to this phenomenon but cannot be the only ones. The sociologist was convinced that the aim was to start a battle, and needed the capacity and the force to obtain concrete results as soon as possible. He decided that it was necessary to start from the awareness of the Indian workers. He explains that when every worker understands the role of the boss and the set of rights he possesses, he becomes or can become a somewhat freer individual, no longer completely controllable by *agromafia*. According to him, the central element in the fight against Pontine *agromafia* was not the organization of the dispute, the investigation, and the denunciation, but the planning of qualified and innovative social paths that would lead the Pontine Indian community out of isolation, making individuals more autonomous. This turned into a project called “Bella Farnia” made by the association *In Migrazione*, of which he is part: they organized services helpful to intervene as antivirus against the system of marginalization and exploitation. They were convinced that through awareness and autonomy,

they would have also built the will to fight against exploitation, *caporalato*, mafia, exploiters, and traffickers. The project consisted of opening a multifunctional and information guidance centre; this was the first structure organized in a highly professional and innovative way, inside of one of the main residential places of the Indian community of the Pontine area, with free social and educational services. The centre organized courses of the Italian language, and orientation desk for access to social and personal services, the promulgation of correct information and assistance in the socio-legal field, and a research unit that documents the general social conditions of the Indian community. Furthermore, the lessons concerned the understanding of some central elements in the exploitation action. For example, they taught workers to read their paychecks; they translated employment contracts into Punjabi, allowing these men and women to recognize their rights. They explained what the role of law enforcement and trade unions was. They accompanied them to make the identity card paying only 12 euros, not 800 as they used to do with the *caporali*. They explained to them the concepts of a fair wage, the right to work, social justice, what it means to make a complaint, what the times of Italian justice were, how a lawyer could help them. Workers began to arrive from different areas of *Lazio*, from *Terracina*, *Latina*, *Fondi*, *Formia*, *Monte San Biagio*, *Priverno*, *Sabaudia*, *Pontina*, *San Felice Circeo*. People started to be aware that their “boss” should not be called by the name of “*padrone*”, but by that of “*datore di lavoro*”; they started to become aware of their rights. This social path, as Omizzolo describes it, which becomes a small revolution, led shortly to fill a square in *Latina* to protest those conditions of abuse.

It was April 18th, 2016, when almost 5,000 Indian laborers went down to *Piazza della Libertà*, in *Latina*, to ask for rights, justice, and an effective fight against illegal hiring, exploitation, and trafficking. It was the first and largest strike of this type in the *Agro Pontino* area, and it was also thanks to the work of the sociologist who, together with the local associations, began to train - and inform - the laborers, increasingly aware of suffering a situation of illegality.⁵¹

During an interview years later, he underlined that what is essential is that the workers have also begun to denounce *caporali*, bosses, and mafia members by becoming a civil party in the trials. The social actions have led to a flare-up of protest, and an awareness of one's condition, which has translated into claims in the appropriate forums. The organization of their path towards awareness brought, after the strike, over 500 complaints at the Procura against *caporali*, Italian employers, and traffickers. In fact, in recent years the number of arrests has increased, along with confiscations and trials against intermediaries and other persons responsible for forms of exploitation.

⁵¹ Omizzolo, M. (2019), *Sotto padrone. Uomini, donne e caporali nell'agromafia italiana*, Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli

Omizzolo reiterates that the complaints and participation in the trials, together with everything else, are significant because laborers play a social and cultural role for their community, which is not the Indian one, but the Italian one. When an Indian worker leads to the arrest of a *caporale*, he contributes to a collective battle for legality.

2.3 The Law n. 199/2016 to contrast Caporalato

In October 2016, the Italian Parliament approved law n.199/2016 to contrast “gang mastering”, in Italian the so-called *Caporalato*. The law, also known as “Martina law”, from the Minister who proposed it, has been the result of the many inspections conducted from January to September 2015: in particular, there were made 4.033 controls on agricultural enterprises. The debate had risen on the irregularities present in half of the farms controlled: in particular, out of 2,360 irregular employment relationships, 1,801 were found to be under the table.

Law no. 199/16 punishes those who, taking advantage of the workers' state of need, recruits people to assign them to work for third parties in conditions of exploitation; therefore, this is intended to incriminate intermediaries, the so-called *caporali*; but not necessarily, thus it condemns also the agricultural entrepreneurs that directly, without the employment of intermediaries, exploit workers. Furthermore, it is not necessary that the worker moonlights, as they can be regularly hired but always exploited. The law describes which are the exploitation indexes: the repeated payment of wages that are different from the provisions of the collective labor agreements or disproportionate to the quantity and quality of the work performed; the repeated violation of the legislation on working hours and holiday periods; violations of the rules on safety and health in the workplace; subjecting the worker to degrading working, housing or surveillance conditions. As regards the sanctioning regime, the law provides for imprisonment from one to six years and a fine from 500 to 1,000 euros for each worker recruited but, if the facts are committed with violence or threats, the envisaged imprisonment ranges from five to eight years, and a fine of between 1,000 and 2,000 euros for each worker recruited. The penalty is increased from one third to one half upon the occurrence of the following specific aggravating circumstances: when the number of workers recruited is greater than three; when at least one of the recruited workers is a minor of non-working age; when exploited workers are exposed to conditions of grave danger. However, a reduction of the sentence, from one third to two thirds, is foreseen for those who

collaborate with the authorities. The law has also introduced indirect sanctions such as judicial control of the company.⁵²

Considering that almost five years have passed since the approval of this law, it is helpful to review the achievements. Unfortunately, comparing the controls and the arrests of 2018 and 2019, even if the arrests are increased, irregularities always occur. During the first half of 2018, 80 people were reported for hiring and exploiting workers; during the same period of 2019, the number more than tripled: 263 found guilty, 59 of whom were arrested. This demonstrates that the regulatory framework works and is an effective tool to fight the phenomenon. However, from 2018 to 2019, the rate of irregularities increased by 3%, from 69% to 72%; the number of workers who were total “illegally” also increased by 14%, while the number of workers subject to forms of contracts and administration irregular has even doubled, from 5,161 to 10,454. The report of the I.N.L., National Labor Inspectorate, relating to the first half of 2019, pictures an alarming situation, aggravated by the fact that the number of inspections carried out in the company decreased by 9% compared to the same period in 2018. This means that an increase in irregularities accompanies the decrease in the inspection activity. Thus, if in the one hand, the normative tool has shown to be effective in terms of arrests, on the other hand, there is much to do in terms of inspections and prevention. There are enormous difficulties in coordination of inspection activities; in fact, the National Labor Inspectorate has marginal tasks and, to intervene in a company where labour exploitation is suspected, the mobile police team must link up with five other bodies: the A.S.L. for violations relating to health and safety at work; the I.N.L. for breaches of a contractual and social security nature; the inspectorate of the I.N.P.S. and of the I.N.A.I.L. for the matters of their respective competence; the *Carabinieri* of Labour. Under these conditions, it becomes difficult to proceed with an arrest in the act of seizing the alleged perpetrator in the immediacy of the crime.⁵³

2.3.1 The effects of the Security Decree

I think that the increase of the irregular migrants in Italy is due, in part, to the approval of the Security Decree, even known as “Salvini Decree”, for the name of the ex-Minister of the Interior who proposed it, Matteo Salvini. It has brought incredible effects on the enlargement of the mass people irregularly employed and exploited in the Italian fields. The decree, issued on the 4th of October 2018, claimed “*urgent dispositions concerning international protections and migrations, public security, and measures for the functionality of the Ministry*

⁵² Camera dei deputati, temi dell’attività parlamentare XVII, *Il contrasto al caporalato nella legge n. 199 del 2016*, available on https://temi.camera.it/leg17/post/OCD25-272.html?tema=temi/nuovi_reati_d

⁵³ Sartori, D. (2020), ‘*Il caporalato a tre anni dall’approvazione della legge n. 199/16: la repressione che funziona e la prevenzione che non c’è*’, *Filodiritto*, available on <https://www.filodiritto.com/il-caporalato-tre-anni-dallapprovazione-della-legge-n-19916-la-repressione-che-funziona-e-la-prevenzione-che-non-ce>

of the Interior and the organization and functionality of the National Agency for the administration and destination for the assets seized and confiscated from organized crime". Basically, it is a measure that merges the security decree, and the immigration decree initially separated.

The main part that concerns us and distinguished itself for criticisms and debates is the one related to the immigration theme because the new norms had been issued to make more unlikely the possibility for asylum seekers to remain in Italy. In detail, "Salvini decree" provides for the withdrawal of the status of international protection when crimes are committed; the list of crimes has been enlarged. If committed, there is cancellation of the application for political asylum, leading to the immediate exclusion from the country. Secondly, it shortens the duration of humanitarian residence permits, also known as humanitarian protection, from 2 to 1 year. Moreover, before the decree, the permits gave rights to access for work, social benefits, and social housing; with the new regulations, they permit only for the following reasons: social protection, health reasons, and natural disaster in the country of origin. The decree increases the maximum time foreigners can be "detained" in the detention centers for repatriation from 90 to 180 days. The function of these structures is to "detain" foreigners destined for expulsion, or rejection, pending the execution of this provision. Within these centers, the foreigner, therefore, suffers a deprivation of personal freedom without having violated the criminal law, for reasons directly related to the administration of migration policies.

Furthermore, to carry out repatriations more quickly, the decree also establishes a moderate increase in funds: 3.5 million euros over three years. Calculating that repatriation costs, according to estimates, between 4 and 10 thousand euros on average, this means that these additional resources will allow at most 875 more repatriations over three years. Another heavily criticized part of the decree is that it weakens the SPRAR system, the widespread reception (as it is often called) managed by the municipalities that serve to provide asylum seekers with language courses and other integration paths. The system will be limited to those who have seen their application for international protection granted, but those who are still applicants will no longer be able to take part.⁵⁴

The highly criticized point is the high risk that the decree had multiplied the number of foreigners who find themselves irregularly in our country and therefore cannot have a regular job or receive social benefits; for these reasons, they are encouraged to devote themselves to illegal activities.

From the report conducted by ActionAid and Openpolis, the effects of this decree on the overall management of immigration and security in our country are visible. This degree had the purpose of providing more security when it had only made the contrary. The suppression of humanitarian protection expands, even more, the spot of illegal migrants. As the report claims, there had been a decrease in the flow of immigrants: 8.000 migrants

⁵⁴ Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto (2021), *Agromafie e caporalato: quinto rapporto*, Ediesse, pg. 27 - 46

landed in 2019, reaching the minimum since 2010; 30.000 asylum applications in 2019, and they were about twice as high in 2018; 100.000 foreigners in reception, 30.000 less than in 2018. Meanwhile, there had been an explosion of irregular migrants: +40.000 the estimated irregular in 2019 because of suppression of humanitarian protection; 680.000 irregulars in Italy estimated by the end of 2019. Not to mention, the 30% the cutting of financing for smaller reception centers.⁵⁵

It was worth remembering this decree because we must be aware that there is a strict link between the residence permit and the employment contract; the last one legitimizes the stay of the migrant on the national territory. If there are fewer options to obtain a residence permit, there would be fewer options to obtain an employment contract. Consequently, if many people cannot obtain residence permits, they are forced to be invisible in the country of arrival, in this case, Italy. If they remain invisible, they have mainly two options: either they end up committing illegal works landing on the deviance, or either they end up being largely exploited. The effects of the Decree-Law 113/2018 contributed largely to expanding the marginalization and precariousness of many migrants; it turned out to be an evident obstacle to the process of social inclusion with great discriminatory effects. The fact that they cannot choose acceptable and tolerable options does not leave them many options: they become the perfect figure to be recruited and exploited in the fields. As David Mancini, Magistrator, has stated provisions can be considered criminogenic in that expanding the vulnerability of migrants, it has determined a great increase of the attractive force of criminal organizations.⁵⁶

Despite the Salvini decree has been abolished at the end of 2020, its effects are now visible in our fields. The consequence has been the enormous burden of the basin of irregularity.

2.3.2 The latest updates: Piano Triennale (2020 – 2022), the Italian national strategy to counter Italian labour exploitation in agriculture and *Caporalato*

A step that makes us hope for the best is the new strategy issued by the previous Government concerning gang mastering in the Italian agri-food chain: “*Piano Triennale di contrasto allo sfruttamento lavorativo in agricoltura e al caporalato (2020 – 2022)*” has the aim to counter labour exploitation in agriculture. It results from the relationships of many institutional actors and the debate between workers’ representatives and the associations of the Third Sector.

It is a three-year strategy to be implemented through ten priority actions aimed at preventing and fighting the phenomenon and protecting and supporting victims in their inclusion in society and access to decent work.

⁵⁵ Action Aid and Openpolis (2019), *La sicurezza dell’esclusione*

⁵⁶ Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto (2021), *Agromafie e caporalato: quinto rapporto*, Ediesse, pg. 44

The objective has been pursued through systemic interventions involving, in a coordinated way, the different administrations at central, regional and local level to maximise their impact, and to plan and maximise the use of human and financial resources.

The strategy has multiple directions, and it is based on an inter-institutional collaboration model which aims to get labour dignity, legality, and investments in agri-food chains. It is articulated in three phases: firstly, analysis of the phenomenon; secondly, emergency interventions in the most critical areas; thirdly, system action which covers all the entire national territory. Particularly, the last phase is modulated as follows: prevention, vigilance and fight against the phenomenon, protection, and assistance for victims, their socio-occupational re-integration.⁵⁷

Among the realities present at the Ministerial Table, Yvan Sagnet, President of the association No Cap promoter of the first ethical supply chain in agriculture. As for many of the realities of civil society involved, the role is to contribute for the identification of concrete solutions starting from the needs of the territories where the gang mastering is stronger. In particular, Sagnet asked for interventions to overcome ghettos that continue to “produce slaves and deaths”; an efficient system of transport of farmworkers to the fields where they can work; the full application of national contracts; the development of a traceability system for supply chains based on good practices.

To provide concrete tools for workers and citizens, the Plan will also launch an institutional communication campaign, with the final goal to raise increasing awareness on the issue of exploitation.

As the ex-Minister of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies, Teresa Bellanova, who has always been involved in the battles against agricultural exploitation, commented on the approval of the plan, stated: “for the first time the State gives itself a precise method for preventing and combating the phenomenon”.⁵⁸

The hope is that this strategy will concretely change the jammed mechanism. Certainly, the three-year strategy proves that the issue of labour exploitation in the agricultural sector in Italy is gaining more visibility.

⁵⁷ Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali (2020), *Piano triennale di contrasto allo sfruttamento lavorativo e al caporalato 2020 - 2022*

⁵⁸ Caporale, A. (2020), *Cosa prevede il piano triennale di contrasto al caporalato?*, Il giornale del cibo, available on <https://www.ilgiornaledelcibo.it/piano-triennale-contrasto-caporalato/>

CHAPTER 3

European scenario and future directions

In this last chapter, I will focus on labour exploitation in the agricultural sector in Europe. I think there is a need to frame the agricultural problem from a European perspective. Throughout the first paragraph, I will explain how the phenomenon is widespread in other countries of Southern Europe, particularly Spain and Greece. Moreover, I will explain the European law that should guarantee legality and profit to European farms: the Common Agricultural Policy; I will analyse the controversies of this law and how much it should be improved. Throughout the second paragraph, I will expose a particular case of a European country: The Netherlands, which can be considered cutting-edge concerning the new hi-tech instruments for future agriculture. Finally, I will discuss the tools that could help to destroy this broken system: the food license, in Italian the so-called *patente del cibo* and the storytelling label, in Italian the so-called *etichetta narrante*; they have some common points. Finally, I will show which path could be undertaken to stop this twisted system.

3.1 The European scenario and the CAP

At the beginning of 2021, an environmental association called “*Terra!*” published an interesting report, the “*E(U)xploitation. Il caporalato: una questione meridionale, Italia, Spagna e Grecia*”, that deals with the European dimension of labour exploitation in agriculture, highlighting the regulatory gaps, the imbalance in market power and the weakness of controls in the supply chains of important Mediterranean European products. The dossier is a collective work that deals with field surveys carried out in three critical countries for EU agriculture: Italy, Spain, and Greece. In Italy, gang mastering is usually labelled as internal news, a worrying issue that particularly afflicts the Southern regions. *Terra!* refutes this conventional narrative and tries to bring the phenomenon into a broader context: the European one. In this paragraph, I will skip the Italian part of the report because it has been greatly analyzed in the previous chapter, and I will go directly to the Spanish and Greek cases.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Terra! (2021), “*E(U)xploitation. Il caporalato: una questione meridionale, Italia, Spagna e Grecia*”

3.1.1 The Spanish case

In Spain, the report investigates the system of laborers' employment in agriculture made by service companies and temporary employment agencies that have assumed greater at have assumed greater importance in a system with a strong presence of large intensive productions. Murcia, also known as the "*Huerta de Europa*", is one of the areas of investigation; it has nearly 470,000 hectares of agricultural land., For this reason, it is known as the "vegetable garden of Europe". It is the third region in Spain by volume of exports abroad of fresh fruit and vegetables, with a total of 2.5 million tons. These companies currently account for over 55% of total new contracts across all sectors in the region; the agricultural sector is the one that weighs the most in this percentage: 490,000 contracts signed in 2019 in the sector, 366,000 were made through them, almost 75%. The main Spanish trade unions, such as the Workers' Commissions and the General Union of Workers, denounced these facts, which accuse farms of not wanting burdens and of relying, for this, on companies, which would be obliged by law to apply the collective agreement for the sector even if rarely happens. The Spanish recruitment has become a European model: the so-called *contratación en origen* is the direct recruitment of workers in developing countries; there are thousands of contracts made in Morocco to bring labor to Huelva, the Andalusian province where almost all of the national production of strawberries, of which Spain is the world's leading exporter, is carried out. A system that hides many gray areas, starting from the strong gender discrimination against Moroccan workers, subjected to exploitation and physical violence. This phenomenon is also characterized by the concentration of power and wealth in oligopolies; there are few large companies - just 6.5 percent of farm owners against 94.5 percent of natural persons – which own 42% of the production's value.⁶⁰

3.1.2 The Greek case

In Greece, the investigation starts from Manolada, the Southern region known for the cultivation of strawberries, where in 2013 the owner of a company opened fire on some Bengali workers. In the country, 90% of the workforce in the agricultural sector is made up of migrants, many of whom work informally, are paid illegally, and are not insured. For years, distribution groups and agricultural entrepreneurs have been more concerned with the quality threshold and production protocols than with social and labor standards. The greatest critical issues can be found in the absence of controls. Indeed, according to the report, there is a widespread lack of checks on farms. Theoretically, there should be controls, under the Ministry of Labor; practically, institutions do not control much in agricultural production because it does not have the appropriate

⁶⁰ "*E(U)xploitation. Il caporalato: una questione meridionale, Italia, Spagna e Grecia*"

tools and resources. The investigations depend almost entirely on the declarations of the workers, which are often opaque.

Moreover, the report claims that workers appear in the database only when employers purchase an insurance voucher in their name. Law 4635/2019 requires that each voucher must be declared in the corresponding telematics system of the Ministry of Labor. However, this has not yet been activated and, given that payslips are always issued at the end of the work performance, they cover a shorter time than the actual work period. The weakness of controls allows the Greek agricultural system to survive; there is a supply chain composed of a plurality of small and medium-sized enterprises - 98 % of the total - operating on an average area of 6.8 hectares, exposed to the pressures of a few and strong players in marketing and distribution.

As I briefly showed here, thanks to this report, it is possible to see how labour exploitation in the agricultural system is a crucial player in Italy but other European countries. The three countries analyzed by the report - Italy, Spain, and Greece – have in common the fragility of the agricultural sector and the economy in general: understanding deeply why this weakness is necessary to find concrete solutions. The weight of the agri-food sector in these three countries is impressive; thousands of farmworkers, often foreigners and seasonal, are forced to work and live in conditions of authentic exploitation. These facts let us wonder whether there is a correlation between the various situations and, most importantly if the European Union has a responsibility to counter this terrible phenomenon. In the next section, I will focus the attention on the Common Agricultural Policy that should regulate the complicated European agricultural scenario.⁶¹

3.1.3 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP): controversies and plans

The Common Agricultural Policy – CAP – is one of the most important European policies, committing around 39% of the European Union budget. It is provided by the Treaty establishing the Communities. The policy is an initiative of the European Union launched in 1962 as a partnership between the agricultural sector and the institutions. The leading purposes aim at ensuring support to farmers by providing acceptable economic conditions, improving productivity, and securing the supply of food; it should be sufficient and affordable. Furthermore, it should fight against climate change and sustainable management of resources, protect rural areas, and promote employment in the agricultural and associated sectors. The Common Agricultural Policy is necessary due to the complexity of those who cultivate the land.

⁶¹ *“E(U)xploitation. Il caporalato: una questione meridionale, Italia, Spagna e Grecia”*

Indeed, the agricultural work can be highly variable, and it is often not very profitable. Although the importance of food production, farmers' incomes are 40 % lower than in other sectors in Europe. Yields depend on several largely uncontrollable factors, such as weather and climatic conditions; those who work the land are also called to respect the environment, preserve the soil and the biodiversity. All these uncertainties justify the decision to make this sector controlled through a shared policy. Thus, the CAP provides for income support and control measures on the markets aimed at tackling, for example, the brutal collapses in demand.

For these reasons, the Common Agricultural Policy requires significant economic means. It is financed in two ways: on the one hand, through the European Agricultural Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. On the other hand, each member state manages the transfers at a national level and makes public the information relating to the beneficiaries of the transfers. In 2018, total support for European farmers was 58.82 billion Euros.

Analyzing the main advantages that the Common Agricultural Policy should guarantee, there are three axes of intervention: food production, development of rural communities, and sustainability of the agricultural sector. On the first point, the European states that on its territory there are about 10 million farms and 22 million people who regularly work in the sector, providing a great variety and abundance of accessible, safe and good quality products. Europe is known throughout the world for its food and culinary traditions and is one of the world's leading agri-food producers, and one of the major exporters of food products. Considering that Europe has exceptional agricultural resources, it has the responsibility and the role in guaranteeing food security for the entire planet. On the second point, the development of rural communities, the European Union recalls that farmers need machines, buildings, fuel, fertilizers and health care for their animals: the so-called “upstream sectors”. Others are instead engaged in the so-called “downstream sectors”, such as preparing, processing, packaging, storage, transport, and retail sale of food products. Overall, the agriculture and agri-food industry sectors offer nearly 40 million jobs in Europe. To operate efficiently and remain modern and productive, farmers need easy access to the latest information on agricultural issues, farming methods, and market developments. For this reason, the CAP is also committed to the supply of digital technologies and services. Finally, on sustainability, the European Union underlines that farmers must face a double challenge: producing food and, at the same time, protecting nature and safeguarding biodiversity. Using natural resources carefully is essential for food production and the quality of life, for the time being, and for future generations.

To improve the role of European agriculture in the future, the CAP has evolved over the years.

On June 1st 2018, the European Commission presented the legislative proposals for the post-2020 period, after a public consultation was launched in 2017. This led to October of last year when the European Parliament approved the package reform of the common agricultural policy. The document is based on the need to adopt

practices that respect the climate and the environment, to provide more aid to small and medium-sized enterprises, to ensure *ad hoc* measures to support farmers during crises and, finally, to issue stricter sanctions for repeated infringements, as environmental or animal regulations. According to the demands of Parliament's Members, at least 35 % of the budget will have to be invested in measures related to the climate and the environment; the other 30 % will go to voluntary ecological schemes that could increase farmers' income. Moreover, the document invites member states to encourage farmers to allocate at least 10 % of their land to landscape interventions supporting of biodiversities, such as hedges, non-productive trees, and ponds.⁶²

However, non-governmental organizations have been very critical of the text. For instance, according to Greenpeace, the CAP reform is a disaster for small farms, for nature, and the climate. Federica Ferrario, the association's Italian agricultural campaign manager, explained that the deputies had signed a death sentence for the environment, climate, and small farms, which will continue to disappear at an alarming rate. For over 60 years, European agricultural policy has been blind to the impact of agriculture on the environment. The European Parliament is voluntarily continuing in the same direction, while scientists warn that agriculture must change course to tackle the climate crisis. Similarly, the Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg spoke of choices that fuel ecological destruction. Eleven months after the European Parliament declared the climate urgency, the same body voted for the continuation of an agricultural policy which, in summary, finances the ecological ruin with about 400 billion euros. According to the young activist, this shows once again the breadth of the gap that separates current policies from what would have to be done to comply with the Paris Agreement. A coalition of 25 Italian associations - named *#CambiamoAgricoltura* -, including WWF, Aiab, Legambiente, and Slow Food, wrote a letter to the President of the European Commission Ursula Von der Leyen. Their request consists in withdrawing the proposal of the new Common Agricultural Policy; indeed, according to these organizations, Europe is reliving the same story of the past Common Agricultural Policy of 2014 where the European Union had as objectives the eco-sustainability of agricultural matter through the introduction of environmentally agricultural practices – e.g. Crop diversification and maintaining the richness of the landscape from an ecological point of view – which proved to be ineffective to achieve environmental objectives: in fact, as confirmed by the European Court it was certified that the public money invested in the CAP has not achieved any environmental policy results. The organizations highlighted that it is time to give concrete answers to the environmental emergencies in progress; the sole proclamations of sustainability are not enough. The Commission must give a strong signal of discontinuity concerning the current CAP.⁶³

⁶² Fondazione Heinrich Boll, Fondazione Cariplo, WWF Italia (2019), *Atlante della PAC: dati e fatti della Politica Agricola Comune UE*

⁶³ Fondazione Heinrich Boll, Fondazione Cariplo, WWF Italia (2020), *La PAC Post 2020 che vorremmo*

3.2 *The Dutch case*

In 2016, Italy imported about 37 thousand tons of tomatoes from the Netherlands, for over 53 million Euros. This did not occur only once; several thousand tons of tomatoes arrive from the Netherlands every year. The paradox is that the Netherlands, unlike Italy, is not a country with a good climate favorable to the growth of vegetables. The “secret” lies in the greenhouses, which, thanks to climate control and artificial lighting, can produce during the whole year, guaranteeing large-scale distribution, standardized and low-products. This would seem a perfect “Eden” for the agricultural sector, but are we sure that workers' rights are still protected? In this paragraph, I will briefly introduce their innovative agri-food chain techniques and later focus the attention on the workers' part.

The Netherlands consists of a small strip of land, densely populated, and therefore, the availability of arable land is scarce. Moreover, the climatic conditions are not the best, considering low temperature and reduced brightness. If we based our assumptions only on these characteristics, no one would consider this country a great land for agriculture. Surprisingly, in the Netherlands, the agricultural sector represents more than 10% of the national GDP, and the country is the second-largest exporter of agricultural products in the world. This “award” depends mainly on the investments in innovative systems: a new technological and precise model that proves to be successful in a perspective of high-tech and sustainable cultivation and indoor agriculture. The Dutch approach focuses on scientific research and technological innovation to develop new models of indoor agriculture. The “mind” behind this development is the Wageningen University & Research, considered the most important agricultural research centre globally. This university centre is led by national and international companies and acts as a real start-up incubator, being the hub of the so-called “Food Valley”, a vast territory rich in experimental farms, hi-tech greenhouses, and where indoor agriculture of the future is tested. The most interesting technologies are digital systems that allow monitoring and managing the growth process of plants in an optimal way. These are devices that calculate the necessary water supply, control the light intensity, evaluate some parameters such as temperature and carbon dioxide and estimate and adjust the height of the greenhouse ceilings to ensure a comfortable environment at each stage of plant development. Another important field of research is linked to post-harvest technologies; meaning, all those interventions that can be put into practice in the post-harvest phase to preserve fruit and vegetables better, avoid waste, and maximize distribution. A series of technologies are currently being studied; they focus on the sanitation, humidification, and refinement of fruit and vegetables to preserve their integrity, flavour, and freshness from the moment of harvest to that of selling.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Viviano F. (2017) '*This tiny country feeds the world*', National Geographic Magazine

I have analysed how the Netherlands is the forerunner in the innovation field in agricultural technologies; theoretically, since the cultivation shifts from open fields to greenhouses and consequently there is an all-year production, workers should have more stable wages and incomes and working conditions much more plausible for the fact that they work indoor without difficult weather conditions. However, this is not the reality. Even this sector is characterized by overtime payments and harsh conditions due to the humidity in the greenhouse. Moreover, this technological upgrade is more likely to cause precarious conditions regarding high labour intensity and income insecurity.

Indeed, according to the report of the Open Society Foundations, the Dutch high productivity in the agricultural sector entails high risks for migrant farmworkers, coming especially from Central and Eastern Europe. Low wages and flexible contracts are on the everyday agenda; farmworkers earn an average of ten euros per hour – much more in respect of Italy – but we should think that ten euros is half the wage of other European workers employed in the Netherlands. Fairwork, an association that fights against labour exploitation in the Netherlands, stated that most complaints do not regard labour exploitation or human trafficking; instead, the complaints are made by EU migrants who are employed “regularly” through the employment agencies. This phenomenon is labelled as “regulated precariousness”; practically, in the Netherlands, there is one stage before a person can acquire a permanent contract. In this one, workers are paid per hour and with a contract that may be terminated; in the second stage, workers must have a permanent contract and receive the wage even if there is no work. The real problem in agriculture consists in the fact that employment agencies do not go beyond the first phase; consequently, for farmworkers, there is the constant risk of dismissal and high-income insecurity.⁶⁵

3.3 How to achieve a non-exploitative future of agriculture

Reached this point of the research, we have a clear overview of labour exploitation in Italy and other European Countries. Now it should be helpful, understanding which are the tools that can contrast this ill system. During my studies, I have concluded that we should act in two ways: reforming the agricultural sector consistently and ensuring a realistic change in migration policies. In this case, I will focus the attention on the tools that should be issued to reform the agricultural sector: the license of food and the storytelling label. Media started to talk about the so-called “food license” when on Tuesday, June 16th 2020, the USB, Unione Sindacale di base, trade unionist Aboubakar Soumahoro symbolically chained himself under Villa Pamphilj, in Rome, the place chosen by ex-Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte for the meeting of the General States of the economy,

⁶⁵ Open Society European Policy Institute (2020), *Are agri-food workers only exploited in Southern Europe? Case studies on migrant labour in Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden*

which in addition to the government also involve trade unions, associations of category and other international institutions. The former Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte, forgot to give a voice to those who, during the peak of the pandemic, worked every day, such as farmworkers. After eight hours of the garrison, Soumahoro was received by the Premier. The trade unionist requested to the government: a strong modification of migration policies to regularize all the “invisible” people, a national emergency work plan to protect all those who risk losing their jobs due to the pandemic crisis, a reform of the agricultural supply chain.

The “food license” requires that a series of information must be made explicit that tells where and how that food. A similar proposal was made by the Slow Food Foundation, which proposed a new label, also called narrative label, which could become a real revolution in the world of communication of food products. Alongside the indications required by law, the narrative label provides precise information on producers, on their farms, on the plant varieties or animal breeds used, on the cultivation and breeding techniques and processing, on animal welfare, on the territories of origin. Only this narration could restore its real value to the product.⁶⁶

This tool could change the agricultural world significantly; however, system reforms are needed. Firstly, access to European subsidies, CAP, should be conditioned on respect of the rights of those who work to push all companies along the entire production chain to ensure a real change. Large-scale distribution will, thus, be obliged to check that subcontractors are in good standing. This would also reduce unfair competition from bad companies. Furthermore, a law that prohibits double auctions at the maximum discount should be approved, responsible for a bottleneck leading to a race for the lowest price and, therefore, exploitation. Finally, it would be necessary to overcome the regulations on permits for migrant workers, which determine an almost total closure of the access channels. Agriculture needs foreign laborers, but there is no way to legalize them, and the state encourages the underground economy and illegal production.

⁶⁶ Fondazione Slow Food per la Biodiversità ONLUS, *L'etichetta narrante: una rivoluzione nella comunicazione del cibo*

CONCLUSION

“Ma ciò che accade oggi non viene dal nulla, viene da lontano. Dalle ferite non sanate del Sud contadino.[...] E’ un’onda lunga che riaffiora. E poiché, in un modo o nell’altro, dalle campagne veniamo tutti, poiché non c’è famiglia italiana, gruppo, classe, partito che possa dichiararsi estraneo a quella che è stata l’evoluzione del lavoro agricolo, in quella rivoluzione lenta siamo tutti coinvolti. Ci sono fili invisibili che portano alle matasse aggrovigliate del passato. Nessuno può tirarsi fuori, conviene dipanarle.”⁶⁷

Alessandro Leogrande, Uomini e Caporali

I want to conclude my thesis with a quote from the journalist and writer Alessandro Leogrande. The last two sentences, taken by one of his masterpieces, “*Uomini e Caporali*”, started to resonate in my mind since the first time I read them. I believe that they echo an incredible power that pushes me to study - deeply - the phenomenon of labour exploitation and fight against one of our country’s most important problems.

The reason behind this research lies in the fact that I want to be aware of what happens in my country, of the cruelties that thousands of workers must suffer to bring us food products.

In my view, the first step to undertake is to study the phenomenon and then, to fight it in the foreseeable future. At a certain point in my young life, I realized that behind what our society pretends to make us live, there is a real cruel world that must be contrasted. Through a historical, sociological, and analytical perspective, this thesis has tried to retrace the steps that brought the widespread phenomenon of labour exploitation in the agricultural sector, unveiling what lies behind the “Great Italian Food”.

Gang mastering, in Italian the so-called *caporalato*, is a dirty and archaic productive model that can reduce labour to an inflated commodity; it does not offer implementation of the constitutional principle that protects and defends human dignity. It is one of the invisible threats that has continued for decades. No one can escape from this reality; it is the society we live in, and no one should be indifferent.

I have articulated the thesis in three chapters.

The first chapter aims at analysing the three pillars that characterize the ill agri-food system: capitalism, globalization, and exploitation. Throughout this first part, I have analysed capitalism from a historical perspective, exposing the myth that capitalism is born in factories and instead discovering that capitalism’s foundations do not lie in the cities but in the English countryside. This period, called the Golden Age of British farming, was characterized by large economies of scale of fruit and vegetables. Indeed, England became the

⁶⁷ Leogrande, A. (2016), *Uomini e Caporali*, Feltrinelli Editore

world's first society in which profit-maximization and capital accumulation drove the whole economy. Capitalism has a great responsibility in causing labour exploitation. Moreover, I focused the attention on globalization and, particularly, on its relationship with agriculture. Indeed, since the spread of globalization, particularly from 1980, the world food system significantly changed. Due to the growth of interconnectivity, there has been a consequent increase of supermarkets, and new technical possibilities of industrialised agriculture brought pressure for intensified production and profitability, at the expense of the workers' rights and environment. Finally, I have highlighted the phenomenon of exploitation and its relationship with agriculture; basically, the main idea is that landowners and entrepreneurs, to resist the cost pressure, sacrifice thousands of vulnerable and seasonal workers. The first chapter ends with analysing the correlation between agriculture and capitalism, globalization and exploitation: the result is an 'army' of human beings exploited.

The second chapter takes into consideration the criminal activities in the Italian agricultural system. 450.000 agricultural workers in Italy's agricultural sector are protagonists of a complex exploitation process and 132.000 of them are forced to work and live in similar slavery conditions. After having analysed the three protagonists of this sector, which are the workers - mainly migrants -, the intermediaries - known in Italy as the *caporali* - and the agricultural entrepreneurs, I have described the process of exploitation, by focusing on the phenomenon of human trafficking, in continuous expansion; the conditions of inhumanity in which these people are forced to work and to live in the ghettos, housing made of tents, barracks or containers where they lack every good sanitarian and social condition, forced to live without electricity, water and sanitary facilities. Furthermore, I have provided real cases of people who work between 8 and 12 hours a day, often seven days a week without any break, and they are paid from 22 to 30 euros per day. As the last point of this chain, I paid attention to supermarkets' responsibility this regard. Indeed, the food majors demonstrated to pay little or zero attention to the impact of their actions in the world: using, for example, practices such as a double auction market. The main issue concerning the food production corporations is that they have always relied on cheap land and cheap workers; to reduce costs, they sacrificed the quality of the products and the worker's conditions. To better understand the gravity of the problem, I brought a case, the Indian Sikh community in the Agro pontino, deeply studied and analysed by Marco Omizzolo, an Italian sociologist. Several kilometres from Rome, there is a big community of Indians that has been largely exploited for years. In 2010, Marco Omizzolo started his research using participatory observation, working with the Indians in the fields for three months. What is remarkable from his side is his wish to overturn the criminal system by letting the workers know their fundamental rights. One of the results was the first strike in Italy against gang mastering on the 18th of April 2016; this was the sign that people were becoming more aware. Albert Camus, in one of his masterpieces, "*L'uomo in rivolta*", said that the revolt is proper to the man warned, who is aware of his rights. I think that Marco Omizzolo's aim was precisely this: to make workers aware. Finally, I analysed the first law, which contrasted *caporalato*, Law n. 199/2016, and the effects of the Security degree issued in 2018, a provision that

enlarged the community of invisibles and irregular migrants. A glimmer of hope lies in the three-year plan 2020-2022, Italy's national strategy to fight *caporalato* and labour exploitation in the agricultural sector.

Throughout the third and final chapter, I focused the attention on the European scenario regarding this problem; particularly, I have analysed two cases in which I reviewed characteristics extremely similar to the Italian case: the Greek and Spanish ones. Furthermore, I have exposed the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which has the aim to increase agricultural productivity by encouraging technical progress and optimising the use of inputs the labour force; improve the standard of living of the agricultural population; stabilise markets; ensuring food supplies; ensuring reasonable prices for consumers. However, the current CAP does not guarantee provisions good for the environment and the protection of small local farmers, favouring the large retailers. Then, I brought the case of the Netherlands: a European country considered as an agricultural giant for its new technologies but, at the same time, guilty for its shortcomings concerning the wages of the workers. The last part focuses on the tools which I think could be useful to contrast the phenomenon of labour exploitation in Italy and other countries as well: the license of food and the storytelling label in which companies are asked to state a series of information concerning the method of food production and the security of the workers. This could be a solid stimulus to encourage agricultural entrepreneurs to undertake all the measures to protect the environment and the workers.

In addition to these tools, a prominent change of government policies and a considerable shift of culture is needed. Firstly, the access to the subsidies given by the CAP should be conditioned if a company respects the rights of workers and land; then, the double auction should be abolished, and a fundamental law governing the regulations on permits for migrant workers should be issued. These are policies that could reevaluate and raise the agricultural sector's future, but they should be accompanied by a change of culture or, as I prefer to say, by the revenge of awareness. Most of the time, our society demonstrates to be driven by the need to put profit before everything; basic human rights are every day violated to gain more profit. Society's indifference keeps up a criminal system that believes someone is more expendable than others. The common practice that today we can buy things with few Euros is a problem because this is not the actual cost, and the difference is not paid by companies but by workers and by the environment.

At the beginning of my thesis, I have asked a simple question: how it is possible that millions of people die for lack and food and tons of food are wasted every day. After the analysis of capitalism and labour exploitation, I concluded that under the process of capitalism, in which we live since decades, food is not produced to feed people, but to make a mere profit.

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ABSTRACT

Il mio personale interesse per le pratiche di sfruttamento lavorativo nel sistema agroalimentare italiano nasce dall'attenzione, via via sempre più crescente negli anni, per il mondo che ci circonda e dalla consapevolezza che ogni nostra azione ha un impatto, più o meno evidente, sull'ecosistema nel quale viviamo. Al riguardo, già intorno alla metà del 1800 Feuerbach, un filosofo tedesco, affermò che “l'uomo è ciò che mangia” nella convinzione che per migliorare le condizioni spirituali di una popolazione, occorra innanzitutto provvedere a migliorare le sue condizioni materiali. Secondo il filosofo esiste, quindi, un'unità inscindibile tra psiche e corpo; da qui ne consegue che, per pensare meglio, dobbiamo nutrirci meglio.

Personalmente ritengo che nutrirsi bene – scegliendo quindi del “buon” cibo – passi anche attraverso una maggiore attenzione alla filiera produttiva, escludendo dalle nostre tavole quei generi che vengono prodotti attraverso lo sfruttamento di altri esseri umani e senza assicurare la dovuta attenzione all'impatto generato sull'ambiente circostante. Per questo è importante essere consapevoli della provenienza e delle modalità di produzione e lavorazione dei prodotti che abitualmente consumiamo. In sintesi, ritengo non sia davvero eccessivo pensare che, decidendo come vivere e come mangiare, scegliamo anche il modo in cui indirizzare il futuro del nostro pianeta e dell'umanità intera.

Con questa tesi ho voluto, quindi, focalizzare l'attenzione sullo sfruttamento lavorativo nel sistema agricolo italiano, con l'obiettivo di svelare la crudeltà e la disumanità che contraddistinguono le condizioni dei lavoratori che assicurano gran parte del cibo che viene quotidianamente consumato. Nel percorso di cambiamento, ognuno di noi può fare la differenza. Innanzitutto chiedendosi, appunto, se il cibo acquistato non sia stato prodotto sfruttando qualcuno o maltrattando e offendendo la natura. In secondo luogo, richiamando l'attenzione e sollecitando – da più parti - un'attenta analisi del fenomeno.

Analisi che non può prescindere dall'approfondire il tema del “Caporalato” nel sistema agrario nazionale, uno degli argomenti più discussi della scena politica, soprattutto dopo lo scoppio della crisi pandemica, che ha fortemente contribuito a inasprire le condizioni di sfruttamento cui è sottoposto un numero sempre crescente di lavoratori agricoli, in particolare nel Mezzogiorno.

Al riguardo, secondo il quinto rapporto “Agromafie e Caporalato” pubblicato dall'Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto Flai Cgil, circa 200.000 persone sono considerate “vulnerabili” in agricoltura, trattate come “schiavi” nelle mani di caporali e imprenditori. Per comprendere la gravità della situazione è sufficiente guardare all'aumento della categoria dei “vulnerabili”: 140.000 nel 2017, contro i 160.000 nel 2018. Gli attuali 200.000

sono la somma degli occupati in regime di irregolarità, circa 136.400, e i 60.000 lavoratori che, pur essendo iscritti all'INPS, il principale ente del sistema pensionistico pubblico italiano, risultano avere un contratto informale e una retribuzione inferiore a quella prevista dalla normativa vigente, tanto nel Nord, quanto nel Sud Italia.

Lo scopo del mio studio è quindi, quello di scoprire cosa c'è dietro il tanto famigerato “buon cibo italiano” considerato uno dei migliori al mondo, mettendo in luce come il sistema agrario sia logorato dallo sfruttamento e dalla schiavitù.

Nello specifico, la tesi è divisa in tre capitoli; ognuno ha un suo specifico obiettivo.

Il primo capitolo si propone di analizzare i tre pilastri che, a mio avviso, caratterizzano il sistema agroalimentare malato: capitalismo, globalizzazione e sfruttamento.

L'analisi trae origine dalla volontà di smascherare la prospettiva storica secondo la quale il capitalismo nasce nelle fabbriche: le fondamenta del capitalismo non risiedono nelle città, ma nelle campagne inglesi. Questo periodo, chiamato l'Età dell'Oro dell'agricoltura britannica, è stato caratterizzato da grandi economie di scala di frutta e verdura, grazie all'introduzione della recinzione dei terreni comuni e dell'agricoltura intensiva che hanno, entrambi, fortemente inciso sull'aumento della produzione. In questo modo, l'Inghilterra è diventata la prima società al mondo in cui la massimizzazione del profitto e l'accumulazione di capitale sono diventati veri e propri driver dello sviluppo economico del Paese, dando vita a un nuovo tipo di relazione con il mercato caratterizzata da un'imprescindibile interconnessione reciproca e concentrando via via sempre maggiore attenzione nei riguardi del profitto, più che della qualità della vita degli agricoltori. Per questo possiamo, senza ombra di dubbio, affermare che il capitalismo ha una forte responsabilità nei riguardi dello sfruttamento del lavoro.

Nel capitolo ho, inoltre, focalizzato l'attenzione sulla globalizzazione e, in particolare, sul suo rapporto con l'agricoltura. Infatti, a partire dall'avvio del processo di globalizzazione, iniziato negli anni 80 del secolo scorso, c'è stata una conseguente moltiplicazione dei grandi centri di acquisto, i supermercati. Tale moltiplicazione, fortemente sostenuta dalle innovative opportunità tecniche dell'agricoltura industrializzata, ha generato una forte pressione sugli aspetti di produttività e di redditività, a scapito dei diritti dei lavoratori agricoli, che si sono visti fortemente ridurre i salari e sono stati costretti a lavorare sodo in condizioni di estrema precarietà per sé stessi e per l'ambiente circostante.

Infine, mi sono focalizzata sul legame esistente tra il tema del contenimento dei costi e il fenomeno dello sfruttamento, come dimostrano i molti proprietari terrieri e gli imprenditori che, ai giorni nostri, per garantire costante attenzione all'efficientamento dei costi, non esitano a sacrificare migliaia di lavoratori stagionali con l'unico risultato certo di incrementare, giorno dopo giorno, l'esercito degli sfruttati.

Il secondo capitolo prende, invece, in considerazione le attività criminali che caratterizzano il sistema agricolo italiano, focalizzandosi su alcuni esempi di sfruttamento lavorativo attualmente presenti nella penisola. Al riguardo, ho fatto un breve excursus della legge sul caporalato e del decreto Sicurezza, andando ad analizzare alcune delle attività criminali presenti nel sistema agroalimentare italiano: dal reclutamento illegale di lavoratori migranti, al trasporto e alla vendita dei prodotti. I numeri mostrano chiaramente la gravità del fenomeno: 450.000 lavoratori agricoli del settore agricolo italiano sono protagonisti di un complesso processo di sfruttamento e ben 132.000 di loro sono costretti a lavorare e vivere in condizioni praticamente equiparabili alla schiavitù.

Un fenomeno animato da tre protagonisti principali: i lavoratori (principalmente migranti), gli intermediari (conosciuti in Italia come i caporali) e gli imprenditori agricoli, la cui analisi mi ha permesso di ricostruire il processo di sfruttamento, concentrando l'attenzione sulla piaga della tratta di esseri umani, in continua espansione. In particolare ho cercato di mettere in luce le condizioni di disumanità in cui queste persone sono costrette a lavorare: orari che vanno dalle 8 alle 12 ore quotidiane, spesso 7 giorni su 7, per un salario che oscilla tra i 22 e i 30 euro giornalieri. E ancora, i veri e propri ghetti in cui vengono relegati a vivere, alloggi improvvisati fatti di tende, baracche o container assolutamente privi di adeguate condizioni sanitarie e sociali, considerata la totale assenza di elettricità, acqua e servizi igienici. Insomma, un vero e proprio inferno a cielo aperto in cui i principali diritti umani vengono quotidianamente calpestati.

Ultimo approfondimento di questa dolorosa catena è rappresentata dalla responsabilità che i grandi supermercati hanno al riguardo. Le major alimentari hanno dimostrato di prestare scarsa (e, in alcuni casi, anche nessuna) attenzione all'impatto delle loro politiche, sia nei riguardi delle tematiche di sfruttamento, sia nei riguardi della tutela ambientale.

Basti pensare alla pratica del mercato della doppia asta che permette alle grandi corporazioni di produzione alimentare di fare affidamento su terreni e lavoratori a basso costo, ovviamente a scapito della qualità dei prodotti e delle condizioni di vita dei lavoratori. Per avere il quadro della gravità del problema ho portato il caso della comunità indiana Sikh dell'Agro pontino, approfonditamente studiata e analizzata dal sociologo Marco Omizzolo che, nel 2010, si è trasferito a vivere nelle campagne agropontine di Latina, dove è presente una grande comunità di indiani, da anni ampiamente sfruttata. Nello specifico, Omizzolo ha iniziato la sua ricerca utilizzando il metodo dell'osservazione partecipata lavorando lui stesso, fianco a fianco con gli indiani, per 3 mesi nei campi. Nel corso del trimestre, il sociologo ha puntato a ribaltare il sistema criminale informando i lavoratori dei loro diritti fondamentali. Uno dei primi e più importanti risultati – in quanto segno tangibile dell'incrementata consapevolezza dei lavoratori, come ci insegna Albert Camus in uno dei suoi capolavori "L'uomo in rivolta" - è stato il primo sciopero in Italia contro il caporalato, che ha avuto luogo il 18 aprile 2016.

L'ultimo focus del capitolo è stato riservato all'approfondimento della prima legge finalizzata – almeno nelle intenzioni – a contrastare il caporalato, la Legge n. 199/2016, e gli effetti del Titolo di sicurezza rilasciato nel 2018, che hanno in realtà portato ad allargare la comunità di migranti invisibili e irregolari. Al riguardo l'auspicio di imboccare finalmente la direzione per arrivare, se non al superamento almeno al miglioramento del fenomeno, è riposto nel Piano triennale 2020-2022 e nelle linee guida delineate per contrastare il caporalato e lo sfruttamento lavorativo nel settore agricolo.

Attraverso il terzo capitolo ho voluto, infine, fornire una panoramica del fenomeno a livello dell'Unione Europea che, con la Politica Agricola Comune si pone l'obiettivo di garantire legalità ed efficienza al sistema agricolo, nella consapevolezza dei molti limiti che caratterizzano i sistemi agricoli nazionali. Sicuramente lo fa allo scopo di aumentare la produttività agricola, incoraggiare il progresso tecnico, migliorare il tenore di vita della popolazione agricola, stabilizzare i mercati, garantire l'approvvigionamento alimentare e garantire prezzi ragionevoli per i consumatori. Ma senza, tuttavia, garantire il futuro ambientale e la tutela dei piccoli agricoltori locali ma, al contrario, favorendo la grande distribuzione.

Per iniziare ho preso a riferimento Spagna e Grecia – paesi le cui pratiche sono molto simili a quelle italiane, in particolar modo per quanto riguarda gli aspetti contrattuali e di sfruttamento sociale dei lavoratori - per poi passare al caso dei Paesi Bassi in cui, pur a fronte di un sistema agroalimentare hi-tech, le condizioni retributive garantite ai lavoratori agricoli, soprattutto quando si tratta di migranti, non possono essere considerate eque.

Per concludere ho approfondito gli strumenti che ritengo possano essere utili per contrastare il fenomeno dello sfruttamento lavorativo in Italia e anche all'estero: la licenza del cibo e l'etichetta dello *storytelling*, prassi attraverso le quali le aziende sono costrette a riportare una serie di informazioni esplicite che rendono evidente al consumatore il luogo di provenienza del cibo e le modalità “etiche” di produzione dello stesso. Il tutto allo scopo di sensibilizzare al massimo gli imprenditori agricoli. Pratiche che implicano sicuramente un grande passo in avanti, ma ancora non sufficienti a garantire un reale cambio di paradigma.

Per assicurare una reale trasformazione del quadro di riferimento è, infatti, necessario riuscire ad assicurare, insieme all'evoluzione delle politiche agricole europee, una vera e propria trasformazione culturale. In primo luogo consentendo l'accesso ai sussidi concessi dalla PAC soltanto alle imprese che mostrano, a fronte dei dovuti controlli, l'assoluto rispetto sia dei diritti dei lavoratori, sia dell'ecosistema ambientale. In questo senso, fondamentale sarebbe riuscire ad abolire la *worst practice* della doppia asta, così come provvedere concretamente – nel rispetto delle leggi esistenti - alla regolamentazione dei permessi per i lavoratori migranti.

Certamente fondamentale riuscire a realizzare quanto sopra, ma anche molto complicato, perché purtroppo viviamo in un mondo in cui il profitto è al di sopra di tutto e in cui i diritti umani essenziali vengono violati ogni giorno, proprio in nome del “dio denaro”. Ecco perché, quando compriamo un prodotto a basso costo e gongoliamo soddisfatti per il risparmio conseguito, dobbiamo interrogarci come sia possibile farlo. E

dobbiamo essere consapevoli che quello non è il vero costo e che la differenza non è pagata dalla grande distribuzione, ma dai lavoratori senza diritti.

Al riguardo dovremmo prendere spunto da Aboubakar Soumahoro, attivista, sindacalista, nonché sociologo e figura di spicco che nel panorama nazionale lotta quotidianamente contro ogni forma di sfruttamento lavorativo, sottolineando continuamente la necessità di costruire una coscienza collettiva, partendo dall'analisi del mondo in cui viviamo.

All'inizio della mia tesi sono, quindi, partita domandandomi come sia possibile che nel 2021, siano ancora così tante le persone che ogni giorno muoiono per mancanza di cibo mentre, nel contempo, tonnellate di cibo stesso vengono quotidianamente mandate al macero.

Sulla base dell'analisi fatta, posso concludere che, intrappolati come siamo dalla mentalità capitalista nella quale da decenni viviamo, ai giorni nostri il cibo non viene prodotto per nutrire le persone, ma per realizzare un semplice profitto.