

**Migrant workers, temporary labour and  
employment in Southern Europe: A case  
study on migrants working in the agricultural  
informal economy of Sicily**

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this work to my husband Matthew Tom Clarke, for his unconditional support, encouragement and love. For always being proud of me and for making me feel proud of myself.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the migratory experience mainly of Tunisian and Romanian workers in the agricultural informal economy of Sicily (Italy), based on observation and 30 semi-structured interviews. Starting from the reasons behind the decision to migrate and the expectations towards their migratory experience, this thesis argues that family's needs are central motivational factors for the majority of the people who were part of my study and that the migratory experience tends to transform conventional gendering and parenting roles. The thesis also investigates the strategies used by Tunisian and Romanian migrants to enter the Italian territory and to be recruited in the agricultural sector. My data suggested that social capital (or the lack of it) and social networks are essential resources to enter the Italian territory and its labour market and to remain active within it. Furthermore, the thesis claims that the interaction between the widespread informal employment in Southern Europe and discriminating forms of citizenship creates a paradoxical situation where newly European Romanian workers have more opportunity to negotiate with employers within the informal economy, whereas non-European people must seek contractual work within the formal labour market to justify their immigration status, making them more vulnerable to exploitation by deceitful employers. For this reason an imaginary continuum line has been developed in the last two chapters of the thesis to highlight how discriminatory citizenship status interacts with the informal labour economy of the agricultural sector of Sicily, exacerbating unequal power relations and labour exploitation. By stretching the concept of the 'camp' developed by Agamben (1998), the informal economy will be considered as a dimension where people's rights are severely undermined. The thesis nonetheless asserts that recognition of human dignity and human rights offer a form of utopian critique that might be considered positive as it stands outside the limitations of national forms of citizenship and points to more inclusive ideas of global citizenship.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introducing the research**

#### **1. Introduction**

My thesis is about the living and working experiences of migrant people in Southern Italy. Empirically, the aim of my thesis is to gain an insight into the everyday life of newly European Romanians and non-European Tunisian migrant people who have moved to Sicily and work in the agricultural sector. My project is based on observation and interviews, and aspires to investigate the migratory experience of 30 people who work inside greenhouses, their reasons behind their decision to migrate and aspirations, their strategies to enter the Italian territory and its labour market and their perceptions regarding their working conditions. Although the citizenship status of my research participants plays a relevant role in this thesis, and their working experiences are inserted in a context of re-invigorated and expanding informal labour relations, my aim is to intercept forms of labour relations that are still able to guarantee a sense of self-worth, self-esteem and respect in the working and living experiences of migrant workers beyond juridical and political recognition.

Theoretically, the ambition of this thesis is to better understand the perpetuation of labour migratory flows and to insert them within major patterns of development and links among countries. The conceptual framework refers to the transformation of employment conditions during neo-liberal capitalism in the globalisation era and the development of certain global characteristics of employment which inevitably impact local realities. These have created or re-invigorated 'atypical' and pejorative consequences for the working conditions in low-skilled and semi-skilled work positions covered mostly, but not exclusively, by migrant people. To better understand the living and working conditions of my research participants, it is important to firstly situate my discussion in the peculiar social-economic context of



Southern European countries and their singular relation to migratory flows, which are still a relatively recent phenomenon. I then discuss the evolving relation between Italy and the migration phenomenon and the role of migrants in its informal labour market. The focus is the agricultural sector particularly of the Ragusa area, in Sicily, where my fieldwork was carried out. I then present my research questions to highlight why it is important to study migrant working conditions in the global era. Finally, I will describe my thesis structure.

## 1.1 The Southern European context

Even with national differences, Southern European countries share a degree of resemblance in definite features that can be considered critical in determining their economic and social structure. The most remarkable are: widespread informal sectors, high rates of unemployment, their weak welfare states and their demographic decline (Cole and Booth 2007). According to the accurate analysis of Southern Europe offered by Mingione (1995), overall it is possible to intercept in this region a variant economic model compared to European Capitalism characterised by lacking industrialisation, weak welfare state, informal economy based on small-scale family enterprise, intense agriculture and tourism (Mingione 1995). The author suggests that there is a strong relation between the capitalistic development in the area, the nature of the immigration system and the resulting societal patterns. In fact, compared to Northern countries, only restricted areas of Southern Europe, such as the Basque Country, Catalonia and the Industrial Triangle of North-Western Italy, have been involved in major industrial revolution and the more recent economic restructuring processes linked to the passage from the Fordist to the post-Fordist way of production. Mingione (1995) highlights that from this perspective Southern European countries can be considered as “late developers” in the industrial sectors as they have always relied mostly on agriculture, tourism, personal and urban services and leisure activities. Another significant characteristic to consider is the transformation from a

rural and agricultural social-economy to an urban and services-based structure without going through the industrial revolution and mass industrial growth that brought about the conversion of the nature of the labour demand in Northern European countries. Nevertheless, Southern Europe has been implicated in the global trends headed for more specific types of production and more flexible use of the labour force. The shift which changed the nature of the labour demand from the agricultural to the services sector resulted in increased unemployment rates, above all in the agricultural and artisan sectors (Andreotti *et al.* 2001; Mingione 1995).

Furthermore, it is possible to state that, as a result of widespread tax evasion and attempts to avoid heavy national regulations, all Southern European countries are widely affected by an informal economy that includes undocumented work (King and Zontini 2000). This also involves a variety of “flexible labour market practices including subcontracting, moonlighting and the diffusion of short-term, seasonal and part-time work regimes” (King and Zontini, 2000 p. 41). Portes (1995, pp. 29-30) defines the informal economy as:

the sum of total income-earning activities that are unregulated by legal codes in an environment where similar activities are regulated. Informal activities are distinguished from criminal ones in that they encompass goods and services that are legal, but whose production and marketing is unregulated.

Portes (1995) also argues that migrants are over-represented in those unregulated activities. A strong connection has been in fact noted by the sociology of immigration between its subject and the informal economy (Portes 1995, p. 30; see also Ribas-Mateos 2004). According to the United Nations System of National Accounts 93 (UNSNA93)<sup>1</sup> and the European System of Accounts 95 (ESA95)<sup>2</sup> regarding the internationally-agreed standard set of recommendations on how to gather measures of economic activity, the *informal activity* refers to productive institutional units

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<sup>1</sup>For more information see <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/sna.asp>.

<sup>2</sup>For more information see [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Glossary:ESA95](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Glossary:ESA95).

characterised by: low organisation activities, and precarious labour relations which are mostly based on personal or family relations, where there is no formal contract and negligible division between labour and capital (Monteleone 2004, p. 4). Informal patterns of employment were already well established in the economy and in the labour market of this area. Therefore migrants did not cause the development of the informal economy, which was already one vital components of this area. Although, in a larger context of development of certain global characteristics of employment during the neo-liberal capitalistic era, their presence has contributed to re-launching and expanding it.

Actually, the high number of irregular<sup>3</sup> migrants living in this geographical area is often seen as the cheapest solution for the demand for an informal and flexible labour force. Discrimination of migrants in the labour market is a common feature in this region (Kofman Phizacklea, Raghuram and Sales 2000; Shelley 2007). Inequality in the labour market can also be institutionalised through unfair state regulations. For example, recruitment in the public sector is available only for Italian nationals. Sectors such as education, health services, rail and postal services are reserved for national workers (Kofman *et al.* 2000). Therefore, after reaching Southern Europe, the migration experience of migrants is usually strongly shaped by the socio-economic characteristics of this region, by the type of labour economy that they find themselves in, and by their consequential relegation to some often undeclared niches of work.

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<sup>3</sup>In my thesis, the term 'irregular migrant' used is in line with the recommendation of Düvell, Triandafyllidou and Vollmer (2008). It uses the term 'irregular migrant' to specify that migrants are not criminals but they are irregular in consideration of their entry and/or residence status. Similar terms are 'undocumented migrant', a person without the required travel or residence documents, and 'unauthorised migrant', a person without legal permission to enter or reside in that country (Düvell *et al.* 2008). In the case of Italy, regular entry is linked to the possession of a regular work contract before arrival in the country. Therefore, people considered irregular may have entered in an authorised manner but then became irregular after the end of their contract.

Another common characteristic among Southern European countries is the centrality and, at the same time, the weakness of the central state (Andreotti *et al.* 2001; Mingione 1995, 2001; King 2000; Ribas-Mateos 2004). Southern European states can be defined as weak and inefficient in providing welfare provisions but highly interventionist in providing regulations (Mingione 2001). In this regard, Ferrera (1995) has identified some common traits of the welfare states in Southern European countries, such as: low coverage of the population; high discrimination of benefits and a substantial unevenness of expenditure along underdeveloped unemployment benefits and insufficient universalistic national systems (Ferrera 1995, as cited in King and Black 1997, p. 6). The deficiency in providing welfare provisions is often counterbalanced by 'strong primary solidarity networks based on kinship and community ties and by the third and voluntary sector' (Andreotti *et al.* 2001, p.50). The family in this region acts as a 'safety net', helping its members, particularly the unemployed, the elderly, children and disabled in the absence of strong welfare policies (Ribas-Mateos 2004). This aspect is extremely important in consideration of the migrant condition where these ties can be weak or absent, exposing the individual to a serious form of exclusion, marginalisation and poverty. Moreover, in countries with deficient and/or reduced welfare state or where the re-alignment in the sexual division of domestic labour was minimal or absent (see Kilkey 2010, p. 127), there has been an increased commoditisation of domestic and care work and the employment of migrants for these tasks (Kilkey 2010; Kofman 2006; Lutz 2007).

The general betterment of the living conditions of native people in Southern Europe, their absorption in the high-productivity industrial districts (e.g. industrial triangle in Northern Italy and Catalonia in Spain) and services, rising educational levels for their offspring aspiring to 'decent' jobs and the dramatic demographic decline are all concomitant factors shaping a labour market increasingly in need of migrant labour in the restructuring industrial services and rural economy (King 2000, p. 10). Southern Europe demographic data, in fact, are portraying a negative picture for the growth of the

population with a fertility rate at its historical minimum (Billari and Kohler 2004; Lanzieri 2013). This set the basis for a receptive context of labour from countries where the fertility rate is still very high, such as North Africa and Eastern Mediterranean countries, and that can help to explain this trans-Mediterranean migration.

Finally, a very important economic characteristic of this geographical area is the highly seasonal nature of its leading economic sectors, such as agriculture, tourism, construction and fishing. This element has to be correlated with the expansion of the tertiary sectors, particularly personal services, such as domestic and care work. Those features together have driven a high demand for an informal and flexible labour force, not unionised and employable when most needed (King 2000, p. 10). These key factors are important to distinguish among the working experience of migrants in Northern European countries in the 1960s and 1970s with the present working experiences of migrants in Southern Europe.

## 1.2 Southern Europe and migration

Through the decades, Southern European countries have been involved in different types of emigrations (e.g. temporary, internal, lifetime), with different destinations going from South to North Europe and overseas, and linked to a specific moment in the development of the global economy, such as mercantilism, colonialism, Fordism and so on (King 2000). Historically, Southern Europe emigration has been a vigorous factor in shaping the international division of labour in both Europe and South America and the development of the capitalist economy around the world and through its different phases (Baldwin-Edwards and Arango 1999; Baldwin-Edwards and Schain 1994; King 1996). Immigration, instead, is a relatively recent phenomenon for this area. Consistent immigration flows started to arrive in the 1970s and have been growing ever since, today becoming one of its most relevant characteristics. Looking at contemporary immigration in Southern Europe reveals two important characteristics of our time: the transforming

nature of global international migration and the importance of the interaction among migrants and the specific context of arrival; in this case, Southern Europeans in the post-industrial era (King 2000). In the last three decades, in fact, Southern Europe has changed from mass net emigration for Northern Europe and America to net immigration for people coming mostly from developing countries (Baldwin-Edwards and Arango 1999; Baldwin-Edwards and Schain 1994; Bettio, Simonazzi and Villa 2006; Cole 1997; King 2000; King and Zontini 2000; Salt 2002; Venturini 2004).

The transformation of Southern Europe into a new immigration area can be interpreted through the lens of global restructuring of the international division of labour that has re-positioned this region in the scenario of migration destinations (King and Rybaczuk 1993; Labrianidis, Lyberaki, Tinios and Hatziprokopiou 2004). According to the 'Southern European immigration model' developed by King (2000), the causes behind this global repositioning are several and interconnected. Among the main reasons there are the progressively more restrictive immigration policies in the emblematic European receiving destinations, such as France, West Germany, Switzerland and the UK (Colombo and Sciortino 2004), which King (2000) has labelled as the 'diversion effect' of the 1960s and 1970s (King 2000 p. 8), referring to the transformation of Southern Europe from a 'transit route' towards the North into a 'waiting room' (King 2000, p. 8). This is the case, for example, for many North African people that have started to settle in Southern Europe rather than proceeding North (e.g. Tunisians in Sicily or Moroccans in Spain). In the meantime, the absence of immigration policies and immigration legislations in the Southern countries unhindered the permanence of foreigners. Another contributing factor is the geographical nature of Southern European countries, such as Italy, Spain and Greece, where the long coastline makes it almost impossible to patrol them giving more chances to people to enter unofficially, while the mountainous borders with Slovenia and Albania can be crossed on foot. However, it is important to point out that the vast majority of people enter Southern Europe holding a visa and then overstay it. As trade

and shipping are the greatest resources for this zone, many people therefore enter, for example, with a touristic visa and then stay on (Bettio *et al.* 2006). King (2000) has highlighted how airports, such as Rome, Athens or Madrid, are vital global networks for the air traffic from South America, Asia and Africa (King 2000, p. 9). In addition, historical and ex-colonial links are other strong inputs favouring the settlement of certain nationalities in Southern Europe (e.g. Latin Americans in Spain, Somalis in Italy). A well-studied facilitating role has also been played by the Catholic Church, connecting families in Southern Europe and women in developing countries willing to work in the private domestic, nursing and caring sector (Andall 1998; Bettio *et al.* 2006; Palidda 2001). Furthermore, the dramatic modernisation of Southern Europe in the last decades has lessened the development distance among Northern and Southern European countries, contributing to lowering the need to emigrate for its population and has moved the 'development gap' Southward and Eastward (King 1998, 2000; Montanari and Cortese 1993). Political stability and the development of democracy after a period of dictatorship have also encouraged the establishment of a welfare state and social and political rights. The membership to the European Union has also contributed to social and economical transformation and betterment of living standards (Labrianidis *et al.* 2004, p. 4). However, a very important economic characteristic of this geographical area is the highly seasonal nature of its leading economic sectors, such as agriculture, tourism, construction and fishing. As noted by Labrianidis (*et al.* 2004), demographic stagnation in Southern Europe, particularly in rural areas, leads to shortages of labour which are filled by migrants. In fact, today migrants fill jobs previously performed by internal migrants from rural areas. Foreign workers have become fundamental in sustaining the internal economic transformation of this area and its consequent social changes. Higher living standards, educational levels and strong family bonds have raised the employment aspirations of young people in Southern Europe, delaying their entrance in the labour market and refusing the low wage sectors altogether. Therefore, labour-intensive sectors and rural areas are facing labour shortages (King

2000; see also Labrianidis *et al.* 2004). Finally, the last key factor in understanding the central role of Southern Europe in the new international division of labour is the separation between formal and informal sectors. The rigidity of the regulation in the first sector leads to an economy based on small-scale production rooted in labour-intensive practices and provides an opening for the flourishing underground economy (Mingione 1995; see also Labrianidis *et al.* 2004). The presence of a widespread unregulated economy attracts migrants, even in an unauthorised manner, confident of finding work opportunities. As a consequence, migrants in Southern Europe tend to be employed in informal “jobs in the secondary labour market, not directly competitive to local workers (low payment, low prestige, dangerous jobs etc.) and/or in places where the indigenous labour force is insufficient” (Labrianidis *et al.* 2004, p.5). However, often these people find themselves vulnerable to pressure from employers that want to stay competitive in the market by lowering wages and worsening working conditions. All of these factors together help to explain the intense transformation of Southern Europe during the globalisation process.

### 1.3 Who migrates to Southern Europe?

This is an interesting question to answer as migration flows to Southern Europe seem to show certain peculiarities that can help to better understand a larger picture of the distribution of labour migration not only in this zone but at the global level. In this regard, King (2000) has identified several key characteristics of the migration flows to Southern Europe that have been developed in what he defines as a “South European model” of migration (King 2000, p. 11). In stark contrast compared to the previous and more homogeneous migrations from South to North Europe, the key feature of the recent migration in the South is the heterogeneity of migrant nationalities (King 2000; Grillo and Pratt 2002). In countries such as Italy and Spain, the migrant population embraces several nationalities from numerous developing countries and the Eastern European zone. From the 1970s onwards, people



from North and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and South America have been arriving in Southern Europe and gradually settling in (Baldwin-Edwards and Arango 1999). This enormously varied migrant population that has settled during the last three decades has been troubled by great legal and economic instability. Furthermore, migrants are often geographically dispersed, living in poor cities or in rural areas and usually lack any institutional recognition (Cole and Booth 2007).

A second characteristic is that often these flows tend to be highly gendered and absorbed in defined niches of work (King 2000). Certain flows are, for example, overwhelmingly female and others male. However, this is not a static feature, as demonstrated by the Romanian women's part of my study; they are increasingly present in a sector previously dominated by the male presence. And, as shown by my Tunisian female participants, they have always been present in the territory but their contribution in the labour market has been overlooked and their role relegated to their domestic sphere and childcare only (see also Morokvasic 1993; Kofman 1999; Phizacklea 1983). Although migrant employment seems to be relegated to specific niches of work depending on their gender and nationalities, it is possible to argue that, generally, in Southern Europe, migrants are recruited in unskilled, dangerous and low-paid sectors (Cole 1997). Additionally, the extensive presence of atypical forms of economy in Southern Europe has considerably driven the irregular migration flows into the region and created new forms of coexistence (Reyneri 2008, p. 6). Together with indigenous people, regular and irregular migrants often agree to undocumented employment in small- to medium- sized enterprises and in the tertiary sectors, such as catering services and domestic work, as the only way to earn money (Baldwin-Edwards and Schain 1994).

A third characteristic identified by King (2000) is the mixed rural and urban background of migrants in Southern Europe, different compared to the previous decades when migrants were mostly from rural areas. Additionally,

what makes today's migration different from the past is what Castles and Miller (1993) have described as the global "industry" of migration with its own logic and market characteristics (Castles and Miller 1993). Only people with economical means can participate in the global distribution of labour as migration has got its entry prices defined by migration 'entrepreneurs', travel agencies, smugglers and criminals (Castles and Miller 1993). Related to this point is the labelling of irregular migrants as 'illegal people'. This happens not only in Southern Europe but also more generally in advanced countries and it can be considered the result of two major causes: the excessive emphasis on control and contrast migration by governments; and the general global economic trends that, instead, invite people to migrate, favouring a redistribution of labour and population (King 2000, p. 12). This paradoxical situation has contributed to boost the migration 'business' and to raise the price of migration and its risks. This is often the case for people crossing the Mediterranean Sea on makeshift boats, paying a high price to their smugglers and then often losing their life during the crossing from dehydration, infections, drowning or by being burned in major accidents.

#### 1.4 The Italian case

Similarly to other Southern European countries, Italy started to see the arrival of conspicuous and heterogeneous<sup>4</sup> immigration movements around the 1980s and 1990s. Before then, internal and international emigration were the main forms of population movements; therefore, the first decades of mass immigration during the late 1970s and in the 1980s were substantially unregulated (King and Black 1997). The Italian relation to immigration can be described as substantially focused on control and repression more than on acceptance and integration.

The first regularisation programme or amnesty was implemented in 1986 and documented the presence of 120,000 irregular migrants (King and Andall

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<sup>4</sup> Other characteristics of these migration flows to Italy are their substantial gender balance (Zontini 2002) and their greater transnationality and mobility (Grillo and Pratt 2002).

1999). The first consistent attempt to regulate non-European flows to Italy, instead, appeared in the early 1990s (de Haas 2008a) by introducing visa requirements for some nationalities that were representing the main migrant entries of the time: Tunisians, Moroccans, Senegalese, Peruvians and Colombians were discriminated as travellers who would have entry visas (Vasta 1993, p. 88). Since then, the migratory flows, from Africa in particular, have never stopped but have changed in character, becoming increasingly irregular in nature (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014); and, by diverting overland and maritime migration routes, the risks and costs of these migratory flows have risen (de Haas 2008a). This has generated both a growing public concern and a mounting political salience regarding irregular migration, leading to an exacerbation of border control practices and increasingly restrictive migration policies. In the analysis of the most recent Italian immigration acts offered by Zincone (2006) highlighted the connection between the negative feelings of Italian public opinion towards immigration, as confirmed by opinion polls, and the repressive measures undertaken by the centre-left governments with the aim of keeping the electoral consensus. In 1998, as in other European countries, Italy implemented a legislation allowing for the detention of irregular foreigners so they could be identified and deported. To date, detected irregular migrant people are kept in structures for administrative detention (*trattenimento*) or CIE (*Centro di Identificazione e di Espulsione*, or Identification and Deportation Centre), separated from the country's penitentiary system (Colombo 2013). Even in the most recent immigration law, Bossi-Fini 2002, which still has the immigration regulation in force, the focus is again mostly on control and repression (Colombo and Sciortino 2004).

According to the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, it is currently a characteristic of 'democratic' states to focus on control, not because they seek order or discipline but rather because they are unable to act over the causes of phenomena; therefore, they tend to act over the consequences by trying to control people (Agamben 2014). Often, these types of extremely

restrictive and controlling measurements over the freedom of people are labelled with the formula 'for security reasons', which is a useful *modus operandi* "in order to impose measures that the people have no reason to accept" (Agamben 2013, p. 1). According to Agamben the security reasons constitute today a "permanent technology of government" (Agamben 2013, p. 1). Furthermore, to confine people to definite spaces where the juridical order is suspended and the protection of human rights is seriously compromised means creating spaces or 'camps' (Agamben 1998, pp. 119-163) where national sovereignty power can act in its biopolitical essence, which is the power to create 'bare life' (zoè), a life that is biologically alive but politically and juridically dead. For Agamben, we have to focus our attention on the concept of the 'camp' as it is the inner matrix of modern politics. The camp is an interstitial zone that marks 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' and whose inmates are "stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life" or 'zoè' and included in the social-political order only through their exclusion (Agamben 1998, pp. 170-171). Today, examples of 'camps' have materialised everywhere, from the various slums around the world, to the detention areas inside airports or detention camps where irregular migrants are kept. It is in these types of spaces that the sovereign power can fully put into practice the 'state of exception' which is the exclusion of depoliticised individuals and can affirm all its normative power. Therefore, the camp has to be understood as the space "that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule" (Agamben 1998, pp. 168-169). According to Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2004, p. 33) "It is through the exclusion of the depoliticized form of life that the politicized norm exists" and it is in this interstitial zone that sovereignty confronts pure life without mediation and the most absolute biopolitical space is realised (Agamben 1998, p. 171).<sup>5</sup>

The biopolitical power invades and destroys the juridical and political life of the people that end up inside the 'camp', but it is also a powerful strategy

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<sup>5</sup> Agamben's speculations regarding the notions of biopolitics and 'camps' are strongly influenced by the thoughts of Foucault and Arendt, respectively.

that contributes to making migrants feel and be seen as a form of extra-human existence: the 'illegal aliens', a surplus of humanity with no right to be here and that must therefore be excluded from the life of the community, or the 'bios' as Aristotle would define it (Agamben 1998). The essential problem of these people is not that what they have done is a criminal offence but, rather, it is what they are. It is their 'being' that is the problem; their mere existence. The impossibility to erase them physically leaves the only option being to eliminate them juridically and politically, confining them in a non-judicial and non-political space. The abnormality of the 'camp' is so powerful that it influences the attitudes of people outside it, the citizens, and it works as a warning to other irregular migrants dispersed in the rest of the national territory. The several cases of uprisings, fires, protests, destructions, and hunger strikes aiming to give visibility to the 'camp' embitter the perceptions of the rest of the 'legal' Italian population, the taxpayers that pay for it. At the same time, it contributes to widening the distance between the controlling and protective body of the state, the police, and the remaining irregular population dispersed in the territory, leaving them at the mercy of their destiny.

Irregularity, for instance, can be the result of the impossibility to find a work position outside the informal market even when the entry was regular but the work contract has expired. This means that even people who have regularly worked and resided for years in the Italian territory can be detained for an undefined amount of time inside an identification centre and can potentially be deported to their country of origin. In the era of temporary forms of employment and growing informal economy, the regular admission in the territory only through a work contract determines the periodical need to launch amnesties to legalise the migrant presence in the territory and to help the re-emergence of people that have fallen into irregularity because of the conclusion of their work contract.

Overall, the Italian immigration policies have been mostly based on extraordinary measures, such as post-migration amnesties (six times since

1986) and quota system entries based on the national labour needs as in agriculture and care giving work as '*badante*' (Kilkey 2010; Kilkey, Lutz, and Palenga-Möllenberg 2010; Reyneri 2004). According to Sciortino (1999) amnesties should be seen not as the result of failing immigration controls, but as the product of a specific Italian system (Sciortino 1999) that needs a new and more vulnerable workforce for the pre-existing and prevalent informal economy (Cole and Booth 2007; Lee 2010; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2004; Reyneri 2004). In fact, this way of dealing with migration following a "mercantile logic" (Ribas-Mateos 2004, p. 1056) has generated a structural system that increasingly substitutes native workers with migrants but only in defined labour niches mostly in the informal economy (Colombo 2013; Quassoli 2004; Ribas-Mateos 2004) contributing towards fostering an already highly segmented local labour market (Reyneri 2004).

In this regard, it is interesting to consider the 'open' Italian approach to the new flows of people from the A2 countries, Bulgaria and Romania. Among the older EU-15 countries, Italy has demonstrated a quite welcoming approach for A2 citizens, but only to labour in definite sectors such as highly skilled managerial roles or agriculture, construction, domestic and personal services (Ivan 2007), which has rigorously constrained their labour opportunities. When compared to other EU-15 countries, Italy is the only destination that has witnessed a spectacular growth of the labour migration flows from Bulgaria and Romania particularly during the current financial crisis (Galgóczi, Leschke, and Watt 2011). Within critical social theory this tendency to encourage the recruitment of Eastern European citizens in the Western labour market has been interpreted as a 'theorisation of the significance of Whiteness' as an advantage in the employment world compared to dark skin (Dyer 1988, as cited in Pemberton and Stevens 2010, p. 1291; see also McDowell 2009). Although even white skin is still mediated through class, religion, age and gender in the construction of 'hierarchies' of whiteness (McDowell 2009), in line with McDowell (2009) it is possible to state that 'whiteness clearly is a marker of privilege even at the bottom end of the

labour market' (McDowell 2009, p. 27). As confirmed in my study, white skinned people from Eastern European countries are perceived by employers as more similar to Italian people and considered as sharing a common European heritage and identity with Westerners (see Chapter Six).

Taken together, the restrictions and abuses over non European migrants and the selected incorporation of new European migrants suggest the existence of a stratified system of socio-legal entitlements (Dwyer, Lewis, Scullion and Waite 2011), which support a 'hierarchy of vulnerability' (Gubbay 1999; see Dwyer *et al.* 2011 ) that generates the preconditions to forms of subjugations in the labour market. Another important and concomitant element to consider is that these recent flows of 'new' European citizens from Romania and Bulgaria have been substantially absorbed in the fast growing informal economy sector. This is mainly due to a relentless global financial crisis which is impacting the Euro-zone, constraining a large portion of the economy to go underground and posing severe economic, social and political challenges to people and societies (Jovanović 2013).

Behind the aggressive rhetoric and practices against migration, what remains unsaid is that both sending and receiving countries are often dependent on migration as remittances and as an informal labour force respectively (de Haas 2008a). A strong connection has in fact been noted by the sociology of immigration between its subject and the informal economy (Portes 1995, p. 30). By stretching the concept of the 'camp' developed by Agamben,<sup>6</sup> we can interpret the informal economy, on which all of the migrants part of my study rely, as another realised form of 'camp' where people rights, particularly the ones related to the employment world, are severely undermined. To work in the informal economy means to not take for granted any of the laws and regulations applying to formal employment. From working time to regular payments, from sick leave to paid holiday, nothing can be assumed. It is a space where the figure of the employer embodies a form of destituent power

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<sup>6</sup> The concept was originally developed to better understand the logic behind the Nazi concentration camps.

that can decide over numerous aspects of his employees' life, leaving the worker in a state of complete vulnerability and non-protection. Employers can find their own justifications to suspend the (employment) law with the main aim of reducing migrant employees to a pure physical life or *zoè*. As Agamben was explaining in consideration of the 'camp', it is a space of exception "in which not only the law is completely suspended but fact and law are completely confused" (1998, p. 170). It is a zone of indistinction between "exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer made any sense" (1998, p. 170). In this zone, people in the above-described exceptional state in particular are "so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives" that anything could happen to them (Agamben 1998, p. 171; see also Lee 2010) and they cannot claim any protection. In this thesis, the informal economy will be considered as a form of today's 'camp', where specifically the life of undocumented migrants but in general the lived experiences of all of my migrant research participants have been heavily marked by the 'informality' of their working experience.

Despite the above description, since the beginning of the new millennium migratory flows around the world have sharply increased (Castles *et al.* 2014, p. 116) and Southern European countries, such as Italy and Spain, seem to be primary destinations (King 2000). In 2007 Spain and Italy saw the peak arrival of approximately 912,000 and 515,000 respectively (OECD 2012, p. 292). Between 2002 and 2011, more than 3.5 million non-national people migrated into Italy. Among them, about one million were Romanian citizens (ISTAT 2011). In 2011 the foreign population in Italy amounted to 4,570,317 people over 60.650,000 Italian residents with an incidence of 7.5%. During my fieldwork period in 2012, the largest number of entries were counted for Romanian (82,000), Chinese (20,000), Moroccan (20,000) and Albanese (14,000) nationals (ISTAT 2012), while the Tunisian component, important for this study, was an already well-established presence but not a preponderant



entry (excluding the humanitarian emergency period of the so-called 'Arab Spring').

Table 1.1 First 16 legally present foreign populations in Italy, 31 December 2012

Italy	Men	Women	Total	Italy	Men	Women	Total
Romania	402766	530588	933354	Peru	40182	58991	99173
Albania	241217	223745	464962	Bangladesh	63204	29491	92695
Morocco	231155	195636	426791	Poland	23441	65398	88839
China	113237	110130	223367	Tunisia	53823	34468	88291
Ukraine	40254	151471	191725	Ecuador	34549	48242	82791
Philippines	60352	79483	139835	Pakistan	50761	29897	80658
Moldova	47680	92054	139734	Senegal	58117	22208	80325
India	77245	51658	128903	Sri Lanka	43555	35975	79530
Total				3340973			

Source: Italian Official Statistics <http://demo.istat.it> retrieved 14/08/2014.

Looking at the role of migrants in the Italian labour market, the great majority of people work in low-level jobs in sectors such as agriculture (especially in the South), housekeeping, construction, manufactories (e.g. plastics, ceramics, metalworking), urban and personal services, and street sellers (Reyneri 2004). Generally, migrants are employed in jobs that involve tough working conditions, physical effort, overtime, no upward mobility, very low social status and dangerous tasks. According to Petrillo (1999), it is possible to distinguish among three main variegated macro regional areas of Italy based on their labour positions available for migrants (Petrillo 1999, as cited in Però 2007, p. 29). In the Northern regions, for instance, migrants can find both stable 'blue collar' positions in industrial work, but they can also be involved in more post-Fordist 'atypical' industrial works characterised by flexibility and exploitations (Petrillo 1999, as cited in Però 2007, p. 29). In this region irregular immigration is at its lowest, compared to the rest of the country, as people have more opportunity to find regular work contracts. In the central regions, instead, work positions are even more varied, going from informal household and restoration works to small business enterprises (e.g. marble, leather) where there can be some opportunities for more stable and less

exploitative employment. It is especially in the South that migrants find 'highly intensive' work positions, especially in the agricultural industry (Petrillo 1999, as cited in Però 2007, p. 29).

In agriculture, the use of migrant labour has increased dramatically, becoming a constant feature of the Mediterranean-type of agriculture (Reyneri 2004, p. 10). Migrant presence is also widespread in greenhouses, intensive animal farming and stock raising. In this area, irregularity is at its highest as often people work in undeclared jobs and without formal contracts. The vast and rooted informal economy typical of this area, in fact, is a great source of employment even without documents and few opportunities to get a regular job even when eligible for it (Reyneri 2004). This is why a large pool of irregular and ex-regular migrants can remain and work unnoticed, contributing, in the meantime, to the reproduction of the informal economy. Overall, migrant workers substantially keep the viability of economic and society sectors that would otherwise collapse (Reyneri 2004). This is the case, for example, of small farms in the South, unable to invest in innovation and surviving only by lowering the payments by engaging migrants as labour. This substantially means that the 'bare life' of migrant workers, their political and juridical inexistence, is sought after to keep alive an informal system that "sustain[s] and reproduce[s] the hypercapitalistic order" (Lee 2010, p. 61). How could we otherwise understand a sovereign power that, while adopting labour market laws and regulations, accepts the existence of an informal economy? Only a disposable, submissive and non-political labour force can comply with such a capitalistic regime. Actually, in consideration of the development and triumph of capitalism, Agamben (1998) underlines how it would not have been possible without the creation of the "docile bodies" that it needed (Agamben 1998, p. 3).

### 1.5 The research setting: the greenhouse area of Sicily

Sicilian people highly contributed to the mass Italian emigration of the past century. Peasant people but also poor people from urban towns sought

fortunes in faraway South and North America and in Northern European countries in the post-war period (Cole and Booth 2007). In the decade 1950-1960 almost half a million Sicilians left home (Cole and Booth 2007, p. 17). It was in the 1970s that emigration steadily stopped and immigration of Africans, Asians and South Americans started. The entries of an increasingly diverse immigration population continued to grow throughout the 1980s and 1990s involving very different countries such as China, Bangladesh and Romania (Caritas di Roma 1997; see also Cole and Booth 2007). The foreign population holding a permit to stay in the Sicilian territory was 18,888 people in 1985<sup>7</sup> while the foreign population regularly residing in Sicily was 50,890 people in 2003 and 126,747 in 2012,<sup>8</sup> showing a gradual and growing settlement in the area. However, these data have to be taken with caution due to several factors, such as the absence of irregular people from official statistics or people registered in Sicily and then moving out. Overall though, those numbers describe a general trend regarding the increment of the foreign population in the island. In 2002 the largest foreign population in Sicily was the Tunisian community with 10,956 people, while the Romanian population was only a 13<sup>th</sup> with 840 people. By 2011 the Romanian presence had gradually grown, outnumbering the official Tunisian community by 21,843 people.<sup>9</sup> In fact, after the last European enlargement in 2007, the major foreign population in Sicily is now Romanian (17.8%), followed by Tunisian (15.1%) and then Moroccan (9.6%) (Nerozzi 2011). The province of Catania accommodates 21% of the total foreign population of Sicily, while Ragusa province has the highest proportion of foreigners when compared to the overall population (5.2%) (Nerozzi 2011). Their demographic profile is quite different compared to the Italian one, with a prevalence of people (76%) between 18-65 years old, 21% younger than 20 years old, and barely 2.4% older than 65 (Nerozzi 2011).

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<sup>7</sup> These data come from the Statistical Dossier Caritas di Roma 1997.

<sup>8</sup> These data come from [www.demo.istat.it](http://www.demo.istat.it)

<sup>9</sup> These data derive from [www.demo.istat.it](http://www.demo.istat.it)

Table 1.2 First 16 legally present foreign populations in Sicily, 31 December 2012

Sicily	Men	Women	Total	Sicily	Men	Women	Total
Romania	16383	24624	41007	Philippines	2128	2828	4956
Tunisia	10034	5001	15035	Mauritius	1360	1623	2983
Morocco	7697	5339	13036	Ghana	1564	973	2537
Sri Lanka	6032	4970	11002	Ukraine	320	1431	1751
Albania	3665	3155	6820	Germania	410	1129	1539
China	3120	3143	6263	India	799	535	1334
Bangladesh	3627	1479	5106	Senegal	939	175	1114
Poland	1022	4071	5093	Nigeria	519	530	1049
Total			120625				

Source: Italian Official Statistic <http://www.demo.istat.it>

Regarding the distribution of the foreign population around the island, it is interesting to notice that it is quite uneven and follows the different patterns of absorption inside the local labour market according to their nationalities (Cole and Booth 2007). Most Romanians, Tunisians, Moroccans and Albanians reside in rural areas where they work in the agricultural sector, while other nationalities, such as Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, Filipinos and so on are more involved in the service sectors in the major cities. The sex industry and street prostitution in the larger cities, instead, involve women from Nigeria, and South American and Eastern European countries (Cole 1997; Cole and Booth 2007, p. 18).

In consideration of the agricultural sector, which is of central concern for this thesis, it is mostly the province of Ragusa, in the southern-east corner of the island, which is the major area of production. An area defined as one of the “most impressive greenhouse districts” of Europe (Cole 2007, p. 388). Here, 61% of the foreign population are employed in the agricultural sector, particularly in greenhouses where Romanian and Tunisian migrants are the two mostly-involved nationalities labouring in this local sector. Two major factors have contributed to the settlement in the area of migrants: the

escalating growth of the greenhouse system in the last thirty years; and the emergence of migrant networks (Cole 2007; Cole and Booth 2007; Galesi and Mangano 2010). However, the agricultural development in this area has its roots in the post-war period.

In the 1950s, this rural area housed indigent peasants farming for local elites who owned land and controlled local governments (Cole 2007; Cole and Booth 2007; Galesi and Mangano 2010). The development of this vast area started in the 1960s when, after years of peasant struggles supported by trade unions against the local elites, peasants could access land through a land reform and the sale of ruined terrains (Cole 2007). Although the soil was considered poor for traditional agricultural production, peasants discovered the unexpected potentiality of this sandy land through irrigation and protection from the wind (Cole 2007). The first rudimental attempts of greenhouses in the area materialised in the 1950s by using simple plastic sheets laid down on top of 'fichi d'India', a typical Sicilian cactus. Propelled by a growing demand of products from the Italian and European markets, between the 1960s and the 1980s several local families became wealthy and property owners. Peasants became expert farmers, their living standards improved and even the education and aspirations of their children. Today, the area is mainly characterised by the presence of greenhouses, which can be small and rudimental or expensive and sophisticated, producing fruits and vegetables destined to fill the grocery shelves of the Italian and European supermarkets all year around (Cole 2007; Cole and Booth 2007; Galesi and Mangano 2010).

Despite the incredible growth of production, the sector soon went through periods of crisis due to the increased presence of foreign competitors on the more globalised European markets with resulting price fluctuations and increased production costs (Cole 2007). Consequently, larger growers signed contracts with retail distributors to serve North Italy and the rest of Europe, while smaller growers had to sell their crops to local and regional retail markets (Cole 2007) where local corruption dictates products' prices and

controls payment flows from the retail market back to farmers. In this more uneven and problematic context, migrants have been seen as an extremely useful labour force and as a way to lessen production costs. The general betterment of the living conditions of the local population has fostered the replacement of native people, aspiring for better jobs, with a foreign labour force. This is confirmed by the fact that today almost exclusively migrants labour inside greenhouses in an area formerly based on a family organisation of agricultural production (Cole and Booth 2007; Galesi and Mangano 2010).

### 1.6 Why do Tunisians and Romanians migrate to Sicily?

Although an univocal migration theory does not yet exist (see next chapter), to try to explain the connections between these three apparently unrelated and very different countries, Italy, Tunisia and Romania, we can appeal to a set of migration theories called 'Migration Transition Theories'. These theories see migration as an inherent part of broader processes of development, social transformation and globalisation (Skeldon 1997). The basic assumption for these theories is that development processes are usually related to increased level of migration, but in a complex and essentially non-linear way (Zelinsky *et al.* 1971). In a nutshell, in an early study made by Zelinsky and his colleagues (1971), internal and international mobility seemed to be strictly correlated to periods of transitions from pre-modern societies to more industrialised ones. During these periods of transformation the population grows, the employment in rural areas decreases while economical and technological development rapidly increases (Zelinsky *et al.* 1971). As industrialisation continues, labour supply declines and wage levels increase; consequently, emigration falls and the country becomes an immigration destination. This is a characteristic of many advanced societies that have become net immigration countries due to their low population growth, their residential mobility and urban to urban migration (Castles *et al.* 2014, p. 47). According to Massey (2000b), past experiences have shown that beyond a certain level of development countries change from net emigration to net

immigration countries. This is the case, for instance, of 'late developer' countries in Southern Europe such as Italy and Spain. Furthermore, these changes have created copious labour opportunities in rural areas that are increasingly populated by foreign people coming, as in the case of Sicily, from countries that are now undergoing deep transformations such as in the case of Tunisia and Romania. Skeldon (1997) has particularly emphasised the significant role of state formation and transformation in generating social, political and economical connections that usually tend to encourage migration. In the case, for instance, the expansion of the European Union eastward, it "incorporated millions of de facto international migrants without their even moving, but they thereby became entitled to move internally within the EU" (Skeldon 2008, p. 15). These people have been basically 'moved' into new situations as a consequence of political and economic agreements (Skeldon 2008). Furthermore, colonial links, welfare, labour recruitment and geographical proximity still play a great role in the decision for the migration destination, particularly in the case of low-skilled people (de Haas 2010a). In the case of Tunisian people, the geographical proximity, labour opportunities in agriculture and its welfare provisions, such as unemployment compensation and family allowance, have, de facto, encouraged the establishment of a long labour relation among these two profoundly different societies.

## 1.7 Research questions

Migration discourses are frequently framed around issues relating to the consequences of the presence of foreign people in the receiving countries (Ambrosini 2012; Castles 2010; Castles and Miller 2009; Sayad 2004; Stolke 1995; Zontini 2008). In reality, the understanding of migration only as a national/regional issue is partial, and obscures a more complex and deeper analysis which considers the phenomenon as a dynamic international social process (Castles and Miller 2009). Migrant workers – or economic migrants – tend to be portrayed by governments as a 'unit of labour' (Anderson 2000;

Kilkey and Merla 2014) with no connection to family or friends and who decided to sell their labour power in the global market space (Anderson 2000). However, while states and capitalists are interested in workers, what they receive are people (Anderson 2000, p. 108). Although a first exploration of the context of arrival is fundamental for the understanding of the overall migration experience of people in Southern Europe, as enunciated earlier, this thesis is concerned with the closer investigation of the migratory experience of Tunisian and Romanian migrant farm workers as actors in the transnational social space. For this reason, in this thesis I propose a journey to contrast the prevalent analytical tendency to look at migrants only through an ethnocentric and nationalistic lens (Glick Shiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992) and give a clearer perspective of life's trajectory of those transnational people. I will now give an overview of the research questions upon which my thesis is founded.

I have structured the research focus into three major research questions followed by two related issues of inquiry each:

*1) Why have my research participants decided to migrate?*

*1a) What sort of expectations they have towards their migration experience?*

*1b) How have they re-accommodated their life and gender roles according to the new situation?*

The first question and its related sub-questions are all going to be answered in Chapter Four. Through these questions I want to explore and understand the reasons behind the decision to migrate and the role of the individual agency and structural and social constraints over the migration choice. These questions are important to answer because they are extremely informative regarding the lived experience of people before becoming a migrant and in the development of their transnational life. My interest is to gather further information regarding migrant individual agency in the migration decision making, the role and the weight of their family conditions in the migration



decision, if they have reunited with their family (and if not, why not) and what migrants do to continue to care about their kin from a distance. All of this information can help to achieve a more comprehensive and realistic understanding regarding the migration phenomenon and its changes and perpetuation in the transnational social space.

*2) How did my research participants gain access to the Italian territory?*

*2a) How did they succeed to enter and interact with its informal labour market?*

*2b) What sort of labour relation did they experience?*

This second set of questions, which are all going to be answered in Chapter Five, help to investigate the interaction between migrant workers and the national and local socio-economic structure. Through these questions my intention is to achieve an overview regarding the everyday life of migrant farm workers in the agricultural economy of Sicily. By using the firsthand accounts of my research participants I would like to gain a deeper understanding of the international 'migration business' of the labour force, the role of social capital and social networks in these migration routes and dynamics and their function for its perpetuation. I am also interested to discover if there are any distinctions among non-European people and Newly European citizens in this Southern European labour market and its re-invigorated informal labour market during the Neo-liberal global era.

*3) What are the perceptions held by my research participants regarding their labour relations?*

*3a) Do labour relations differ in consideration of immigration status?*

*3b) Do they feel respected as a person and as a worker in the informal labour sector?*

The answers to these questions will be found in Chapter Six, where the focus is on the nature and the quality of the labour relations among my research participants and their farm employers. Through these questions I aim to let emerge a deeper and more personal account regarding the lived experience of people working in the agriculture informal economy of Sicily. I use immigration status, or the degree of institutional protection and access to rights for these people, as a reference point to analyse if and how the quality of the labour relations changes when migrants are in different life conditions. In a general context of informal labour relations, I am interested to find out if, beyond contractual agreements and citizenship status, there are ways to treat workers – people – in a respectful manner.

## 1.8 The thesis' structure

Chapter Two is dedicated to the key literature and theories in which this thesis is situated and through which my following data are analysed. Throughout the chapter, I situate my project's interest within the theoretical debate. Firstly, I am going to examine the main elaborations proposed by outstanding migration theories regarding its causes and consequences and I connect within them the socio-economic model of Southern Europe. Secondly, I emphasise the main theories that have helped me better understand the migration experience of my research participants, not merely as a labour force but mostly as family members, social networkers and transnational people in the globally interconnected space. Thirdly, I follow this discussion with an exploration of the impact of the globalisation process in shaping the new international division of labour and the reposition of Southern European countries in the new global labour immigration scenario. I question if the globalisation process in the neo-liberal era is a new world order or if is better to understand it as a political project ideologically driven. I also reflect on how neo-liberal capitalism has commoditised people and has reduced their role as workers to their physical capacity (*zoè*) to merely produce profit. I do this in order to understand the power of large

corporations in local realities, such as, the Sicilian agricultural sector and the drastic consequences of their business for the life of farmers and migrant workers.

Contrasting a widespread tendency to forms of exploitation of migrant labour around the world, this thesis calls for a different engagement of migration scholars with the struggles of migrant workers as the struggles of all workers in the neo-liberal era. This thesis also calls for more attention to forms of recognition of human dignity that can help to re-establish a sense of self-worth, self-esteem and respect in the working and living experiences of migrant workers in Sicily and around the world. In this vein, I then discuss the importance of concentrating our attention on developing a more grounded concept of human dignity, helpful in understanding the daily life of migrant workers and more generally in identifying the nature of dignified labour relations beyond contractual agreements and citizenship status.

In Chapter Three, I first present a chronological explanation of how I came to research this issue. Then, I discuss my research approach and the reasons behind my choice of qualitative methodology. I consequently expose my own research standpoint by giving a description of the paradigm that I use throughout the course of this research study by stating my ontological and epistemological perspectives. Subsequently, I continue by explaining my research methods, sampling and data analysis and interpretation. Finally, in the reflexivity section, I critically describe my role as researcher followed by some ethical considerations.

Chapter Four is the first of my three data analysis chapters, based on the data qualitatively collected from thirty research participants. Here I explore the reasons behind their migration decision, what sort of expectations they have towards their migration experience, and how they have re-accommodated their life and gender roles according to the new situation. I achieve this by reporting and analysing firsthand participants' accounts regarding their lived experience before becoming a migrant and during their life abroad.

In Chapter Five, the central concern is the way in which non-European and Newly European research participants gained access inside the Italian territory and get recruited in its informal agricultural labour market. I particularly analyse their agency in their use of social capital and social networks for both: to gain access to the Italian territory and to get inside the agricultural labour market and remain active within it in non-productive periods and in-between jobs. This aspect is extremely interesting because it reveals the differences between migrants with diverse immigration status and their consequent labour relations.

Chapter Six is the last data chapter and in it I address more closely the perceptions and opinions regarding the labour relations between the migrant workers and their employers mainly, but not exclusively, from the employees' point of view. By using an imaginary continuum line, I show the possible link between certain labour relation outcomes and the immigration status of those workers. How certain employers' attitudes and practices towards their workers can be analysed by looking at the different immigration status, thus, to the degree of institutional protection and access to rights that characterise the life of these workers; and also how the quality of their labour relations is based on the level of commitment to the business and the level of negotiation power and recognition left to the employees.

During the collection and the analysis of the accounts given by my research participants, in fact, it became perceptible how their feeling of living a dignified life and their perception of being treated with respect in the labour market were mostly related to their labour relations with their employers. Therefore, issues associated with the recognition of human dignity and respect were clearly important for several of my participants. These were not topics that I extensively considered before the beginning of my research study, although I did have a related question in my schedule. This is an example regarding the ways in which themes can emerge during the research process when using an inductive approach (Braun and Clarke 2006). I consequently concentrate my attention to better understand the notion of

dignity in the workplace, in the meantime highlighting the absence in the migration labour studies of such a central issue.

Studying forms of recognition of human dignity in the informal workplace can be a revealing starting position to improve our understanding of the nature of dignity as a mutual value that prospers within respectful human relations and the importance to recognise individual needs and agency in workplaces. I believe that this is an urgent academic call to answer in a world of growing informality and work precariousness, not only for the migrant labour force but more in general for all workers in the global era. Using the experiences of migrant workers not only reveals the nature of informal employment but mostly they clarify its consequences on the agency of the individual and on the feeling of living a dignified life.

Chapter Seven concludes this thesis. In it I illustrate together my findings and analyses from the three data chapters. I consequently present the more theoretical and abstract contributions of the thesis, whilst also considering the limitations of my research and how the research can be developed in the future.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2. Introduction**

In this chapter I present an overview of the theories upon which my study is grounded as well as indicating the ways in which my research project is related to the existing literature. My study is mainly positioned within the theoretical framework of migration studies and labour relations in the Southern European area. It has been acknowledged that migration is an historical and everlasting phenomenon very much related with the international division of labour; however, at present, there is still not a univocal migration theory able to explain it in its complexity and multifaceted nature. Therefore, I am going to examine the main elaborations proposed by outstanding migration theories regarding their causes and consequences. I will then describe the main characteristics of the socio-economic system of Southern Europe. This is important in relation to my interest in understanding the context of reception for migrant workers in Southern Europe and in relation to a more comprehensive understanding of the Italian case discussed in Chapter One. I consequently emphasise the main theories that have helped me better understand the migration experience of my research participants, not merely as a labour force but mostly as family members, social networkers and transnational people in the globally interconnected space.

I then follow this discussion with an exploration of the impact of the globalisation process in shaping the new international division of labour and the repositioning of Southern European countries in the new global immigration scenario. I question if the globalisation process in the neo-liberal era is a new world order or if it is better to understand it as a political project ideologically driven. I do this in order to understand the power of large corporations in local realities, such as the Sicilian agricultural sector and the

drastic consequences of their business for the life of farmers and migrant workers.

Globalisation, social transformations and development are increasingly seen as shaping factors in the relation among apparently unrelated countries, in this case, Italy, Tunisia and Romania and their role in the international division of labour. Contrasting a widespread tendency to forms of exploitation of migrant labour around the world, this thesis calls for a different engagement of migration scholars with the struggles of migrant workers as the struggles of all workers in the neo-liberal era. This thesis also calls for more attention to forms of recognition of human dignity that can help to re-establish a sense of self-worth, self-esteem and respect in the working and living experiences of migrant workers in Sicily and around the world. In this vein, I then discuss the importance of concentrating our academic efforts to develop a more grounded concept of human dignity, helpful to understand the daily life of migrant workers and more generally to identify the nature of dignified labour relations. This explains why my research is important, as the existing migration literature does not indicate the importance of concepts like recognition and human dignity as central concerns for decent labour relations. I decided to undertake this path according to the accounts offered by my research participants regarding their perceptions of the labour relations with their employers in the agricultural sector of Sicily, which in turn can result in being informative and inspirational for further migration and labour market studies.

## 2.1 How can we understand migration?

An important consideration before trying to answer this query is to remember that migration is not a new phenomenon and that human beings have always moved looking for new opportunities, and fleeing conflicts and poverty (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014). Having established that, it is true that since the second half of the twentieth century migration has become one of the major forces throughout the world (Massey, Arango, Hugo *et al.* 1993)

and, consequently, it has increased its political salience (Castles 2010; Castles and Miller 2003). Countries typically characterised by high immigration rates from Europe, such as the United States, Canada and Australia, have witnessed a conspicuous increase in the number of entries from developing countries such as Africa, Asia and Latin America (Massey *et al.* 1993). Similar patterns have occurred in new immigration countries, such as Japan, where the growing aging population and declining birth rate have created a need for a labour force satisfied mostly by people from poor countries, such as Asian and South American migrants (Sassen 1993). Meanwhile, European countries that were previously considered as mainly sending countries started to gradually become receiving societies. Particularly, Southern European countries, such as Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal, have increasingly seen the arrival of people from North and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and South America gradually settling in Southern Europe (Baldwin-Edward and Arango 1999; King 2000; Ribas-Mateos 2004). In the last three decades, in fact, Southern Europe has changed from being a labour supply zone for Northern Europe and America to net immigration for people coming mostly from developing countries (Baldwin-Edward and Arango 1999; Baldwin-Edward and Schain 1994; Bettio Simonazzi, and Villa 2006; Cole 1997; King 2000; King and Zontini 2000; Salt 2002; Venturini 2004).

In the panorama of migration studies, various theoretical models have been tested to try to understand migration causes and their perpetuation. Due to its complexity and multifaceted nature, a migration theory has to take into consideration a variety of factors, perspectives and conjectures (Massey *et al.* 1993). Today, more than a single and comprehensive theory of international migration there are disjoint sets of theories that have developed mostly independently from one another and which use different methods of analysis (Castles 2010; Castles *et al.* 2014; Massey *et al.* 1993). Each of these theories offers different views on migration because they are based on different hypotheses and assumptions. Therefore, they produce different explanations



regarding the migration causes, process and effects and different ideas about migration policies. A detailed overview of these theories can help to appreciate their contributions for the understanding of a very multifaceted and everlasting international phenomenon.

Among the most prominent theories a distinction can be made regarding the level of analysis used. In the case of the oldest and probably most known international migration theory developed around the 1960s, the 'Neo-Classical Economics', we can distinguish between a macro and a micro level of analysis. At the macro level, this theory tends to explain international labour migration as a consequence of the expansion of economic development (Lewis 1954; Todaro 1976). Both internal and international migration are driven by the demand for and the supply of a labour force. Simplistically, people from low-wage countries move to higher-wage countries causing a decrease of labour supply in the low-wage countries and an increase in wages, and vice versa: in the high-capital countries, the increased labour supply pushes wages down (Massey *et al.* 1993). Therefore, the differential of wages is seen as the motor that creates labour migration and should, in the end, bring a convergence between wages and therefore a state of equilibrium (Castles *et al.* 2014; Lewis 1954; Todaro and Maruszko 1987). Finally, this theory maintains that only labour market mechanisms induce labour migration; therefore, if governments want to control migration they have to regulate the labour market in both sending and receiving countries (Massey *et al.* 1993).

There is also a micro economic model of 'Neoclassical economy' that conceives the decision to migrate is related strictly to people's evaluation of income maximisation in the receiving society (Sjaastad 1962; Todaro 1969, 1976, 1989; Todaro and Maruszko 1987). International migration is seen as a type of investment to boost the productivity of human capital. Given their skills, people decide to migrate to countries where they can be most productive (Sjaastad 1962). According to Borjas (1990), before migrating, people make some estimations about the costs and advantages of moving to

a different country and then moving where the net return is at its greatest. Although it is a useful contribution towards the understanding of migration's selectivity, this approach has been criticised for being based on three main unrealistic hypotheses. The first is the conceptualisation of the migration decision being only a costs-benefits calculation between stay at home or migrate to a variety of destinations, which would not explain, for instance, the creation of ethnic communities in defined receiving countries. The second is the assumption that people are fully aware of the wage differential between countries and the employment opportunities available to them in the destination countries before migrating. This obscures completely the first stages of the migration process that usually relegate even skilled migrants to the bottom of the employment ladder (and often forever), the language barriers that frequently impede people from using their skills, and a series of other factors, such as the importance of personal connections to actually decrease the costs of migration. Finally, there is a misleading assumption that all markets are accessible, even for the poor. In reality, as explained by Castles *et al.* (2014), in developing countries people who migrate are the ones with the best financial and human capital. Furthermore, the restrictions for poor people to access credit programmes and/or accessible private and public insurance schemes prevent them from affording migration. Therefore, the migration of poor people has to be explained in other ways (see Castles *et al.* 2014).

The debate stimulated by this approach has generated a pool of theories that have tried to explain the causes of migration from alternative perspectives. One of them was developed in the 1970s and 1980s and it is defined as the 'historical-structural' approach. According to this perspective, migrants are not seen as free to decide whether to migrate or not as they are substantially constrained by structural forces. Migration is conceptualised as one of the most visible effects of the unequal trade conditions between developed and developing countries caused by the expansion of capitalism (Massey, Arango, Hugo *et al.* 1998). Consequently, people migrate because their traditional

economical structures have been unhinged by the penetration of the global political-economic system and its simultaneous practices, such as the mechanisation of agriculture and dispossession of small peasant properties that has also increased the concentration of landownership and so on (Castles *et al.* 2014). Against neo-classical thinkers, the historical-structural theorists maintain that the capitalist expansion will strengthen political and economical inequalities between developing and developed countries rather than equalise them. From their perspective, migration is a way to move valuable labour and skills from poor to rich areas as a source of cheap labour contributing to enrich the receiving societies even more (Sassen 1988). According to Castles *et al.* (2014), this theory is rooted in the Marxist political economy and the *dependency theory* born in the 1960s in South America, which sees colonialism and post-colonialism as the two ways used by capitalist societies to exploit the resources of developing countries and leave them underdeveloped. Therefore, migration in global capitalism is the result of the “development of underdevelopment” (Frank 1966, as cited in Castles *et al.* 2014, p. 32).

Similarly, another influential and more comprehensive theory was developed in the 1970s and 1980s with the name of ‘World Systems Theory’. It conceives migration as an expected outcome of economic globalisation and the merge of markets across national boundaries. The main founder of this theoretical model is Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), but also other sociological theorists have postulated the origin of international migration within the structure and the mechanisms of the world market(s) that have developed since the sixteenth century when the capitalist world economy began (Castells 1989; Portes and Walton 1981; Sassen 1988; Wallerstein 2004). According to this approach, the world economy and the capitalist system are held together by an effective division of labour (Wallerstein 2004, p. 24), which is functional for the expanding wealth of the capitalistic system. This theory essentially divides the world into core and peripheral societies connected by economical relations of capitalist production processes.

Over the last century, capitalism has expanded from its core units in Europe, America, Japan and Oceania to incorporate a vast portion of the peripheral world population into the world market economy (Wallerstein 2004). On one side, the concentration of the management of the world economy in a few urban centres, such as London, New York, Paris, Tokyo and Sidney (Castells 1989; Sassen 1991) has generated a strong demand for services from unskilled workers (e.g. waiters, domestic servants). On the other hand, through neo-colonial governments and multinational companies, capitalist firms have penetrated into peripheral, low-capital society seeking land, labour, raw materials and new consumers. These firms from core capitalist societies seek to take advantage of the local low wages, often by benefitting from “special export-processing zones” created by complicit governments (Massey *et al.* 1993, p. 445). The absorption of local workers, mostly women, inside factory production has deteriorated traditional relations of production. Moreover the extenuating work conditions and the low wages offered make those work opportunities unsatisfactory and economically insufficient after a short amount of time. Finally, the result is the creation of disrupting effects at the local level that encourage a population of economically and socially uprooted people to migrate (Wallerstein 2004). Therefore, the identical capitalist economic processes that generate migrants in peripheral zones at the same time draw them to core countries. For that reason, according to the world systems theory, migration does not depend on wage differential and unemployment, but rather it is linked to the global economy and its market creation. Consequently, governments that want to control migration flows should regulate corporations’ investments abroad and control international flows of goods and capital (Massey *et al.* 1993).

Along the same continuum, the ‘Dual (or segmented) Labour Market Theory’, retains that migration is strictly related to the structural needs of labour force in the modern industrial economies. The most illustrious proponent of this theory is Piore (1979), who argues that more than the ‘push factors’ in the sending countries, such as low wages and high unemployment, migration is

caused mostly by the 'pull factors' in the receiving countries, such as the structural and constant need for a foreign labour force. The author maintains that migration is principally caused by industrial demand. He explains this inherent need of a foreign labour force by analysing four central characteristics of advanced industrial societies and their economies: structural inflation, motivational problems, economic dualism, and the demography of labour supply (Piore 1979: 13).

The first factor refers to the link between wage, social status and prestige. Behind the perception of work and wage there are informal social expectations and formal mechanisms, such as union contracts and bureaucratic regulations, that guarantee that the wage received matches the status and prestige that people expect from it. Structural inflation refers to the proportional increase of wages according to the job hierarchy, so as to keep them in line with social expectations. Therefore, in time of shortage of labour, attracting native workers by increasing wages for unskilled jobs at the bottom of the hierarchy can be expensive and disrupting. Meanwhile, to motivate employers to employ migrant workers can be seen as an unproblematic and cheaper solution (Piore 1979).

The motivational problems also refer to the gathering and preservation of social status derived from work. Therefore, people working at the bottom of the job hierarchy face acute motivational problems because there is no status or prestige to be preserved and few mobility options. Consequently, employers need people that see these types of employment only as a source of income with no implications for status and prestige (Massey *et al.* 1993, p. 441). From this perspective, migrant workers, particularly at the beginning of their migration experience, can be the perfect target for bottom-level jobs. In fact, during the initial stages of the migration experience their social point of reference is their sending community and, as a consequence, their social interpretation of 'dirty jobs' is seen as temporary and related to the earning of some money (Iskander 2012). Furthermore, the higher wage in the receiving country makes it appear more generous compared to the one

received in the home community. Moreover, by feeling part of the sending community, he/she can preserve a certain status and prestige through his/her labour and remittances, ignoring the social stigma attached to these bottom level jobs in the receiving society (Iskander 2012; Massey *et al.* 1993; Piore 1979).

The economic dualism, instead, refers to the intrinsic dual nature of capital and labour in the advanced industrial economy. Capital is a stable factor of production that can be unused but cannot be made redundant like workers. Labour, instead, is a variable factor of production that can be laid off when demand falls and workers have to face the costs of their own unemployment. According to Piore (1979), capitalists look for the permanent portion of demand and preserve it for the use of the equipment and leave the unpredictable portion of the demand by adding or removing labour. This creates a bifurcation in the labour force. In fact, while workers in the capital-intensive sector get permanent, trained, high-skilled jobs, workers in the labour-intensive sectors access precarious, unskilled jobs and can be laid off anytime the demand falls (Doeringer and Piore 1985). In the resulting segmented labour market, native workers tend to be dragged into the secure primary sector, leaving spaces in the secondary sector usually filled by migrants (Massey *et al.* 1993). This has led to the creation of socially disadvantaged migrant groups and ethnic minorities in advanced Western countries (Castles and Miller 2003; see also Collins 1991). These ethnic and racial discriminations are functional for the capitalist economy, both for the society and for employers that can benefit from a supply of labour ready to be employed at the bottom of the work hierarchy (Castles and Miller 2003; Collins 1991; Harris 1995).

Finally, the demography of labour refers to three fundamental demographic changes in industrial societies that have transformed the physiognomy of the labour force. In fact, while in the past there were mostly women and teenagers filling the low-wage, precarious, dead-end and poor working condition jobs, today these positions are mainly filled by migrants (Doeringer

and Piore 1985). This happened principally for three sets of reasons: the increased participation of women in skilled jobs with higher social status and income; the increase of divorce rates with consequent transformation of women's jobs in primary income; and the decline of the birth rate and extension of formal education, encouraging teenagers to continue their education with the aim of gaining better jobs.

The analysis of the dual labour market offered by Piore (1979) can find a suitable example in the Southern European social economical model (Andreotti *et al.* 2001; King 2000; Ribas-Mateos 2004). The specific characteristics of Southern Europe, discussed in Chapter One, i.e. the general betterment of the living conditions of native people, their absorption in the limited, high-productivity industrial districts and services, rising educational levels and the dramatic demographic decline, are all concomitant factors shaping a labour market increasingly in need of migrant labour in the restructuring of industry, services, and the rural economy (King 2000, p. 10). The typical sectors where it is common to find a migrant labour force (often informally recruited) are agriculture, construction, small-scale manufactories and services. All of these sectors tend to be featured by high labour intensity, scarce levels of technological modernisation and low increase in productivity, which means that labour costs tend to undermine the economic profit (Reyneri 1998, p. 325). Mingione (1995) has highlighted the existence in Southern Europe of a very peculiar economy characterised by segmentation, partial duality, informality and dynamicity. Similarly, King (2000) has argued that an important aspect of Southern Europe is its striking economic dualism visible in a range of factors, such as the coexistence of both technologically advanced enterprises and backward ones, a distinct primary and secondary labour market and regional differences expressed paradigmatically by the difference between the more industrialised North and the agricultural South of Italy (Andreotti *et al.* 2001; King 2000; Mingione 1995). In this context, as shown by several studies, migrants tend to get inserted into highly nationality- and gender-defined employment niches all generally

characterised by poor working conditions, no upward mobility and prestige, and being highly demanding and informally based (Baldwin-Edward and Arango 1999; Mingione and Quassoli 2000; Reyneri 1998; Ribas-Mateos 2004; Solé, Ribas, Bergalli, and Parella 1998; Zontini 2010). Additionally, the main productive sectors of Southern Europe, such as agriculture or fishing and tourism, also require a temporary labour force available on a seasonal or part-time basis. Furthermore, their general backwardness also makes them competitive in the global market only by reducing production costs. This issue is often resolved by employing migrant labour at lower prices compared to locals (Iosifides and King 1996). In the meantime, wage differentials between sending and receiving countries push migrants to make themselves available to an economic system that often over-exploits them.

Overall, both theoretical models scrutinised so far, neo-classical and historical-structural approaches, hold polarised views about migration. The first over-emphasises the free and rational individual migration decision making (de Haan 1999) and neglects the historical causes of migration, the role of the state and the structural constraints (Castles *et al.* 2014). The other, instead, over-stresses the structural constraints upon the people agency and sees the power of capital as all-determining (Castles *et al.* 2014; de Haan 1999). Despite the useful insights offered by the segmented labour market theory in understanding migration even in the controversial Southern Europe area, generally historical-structural theories have been criticised for the victimisation of migrant people in global capitalism. Their negative and hyper-deterministic views of migration do not leave space for individual agency and its capacity to take the decision to migrate and actually succeed in improving his/her livelihood.

To rise above these polarities, recent theories have suggested developing theoretical models that can incorporate both dimensions, the micro individual level and the macro structural level, in which the migratory process develops (de Haan 1999). For the purpose of my study, I found that the following theories are extremely instructive in revealing the causes and the



internal mechanisms of migration that can apply even in Southern Europe. Compared to the previous approaches, in fact, the theories based on the meso-level of analysis (Faist 1997) are more incisive in capturing the life of people in their everyday reality and the individual and collective organisation behind migration. Macro structure factors can bolster as well as undermine individual and group actions, however people can still act to improve their livelihood. This means that notwithstanding the influence of structural global conditions on people life's trajectories, personal agency and collective organisation can still counteract constraints. The following theoretical models have helped me to closely understand the reasons that stand behind the decision to move and what tools people use to migrate. They also assisted me to analyse how migrants' identities are reshaped by the migration experience along the lines of gender, parenting and lifecycle. They have sustained me to investigate migrants' lives and working experiences and their perception of their labour relations. By being less deterministic, those approaches have also encouraged me to deepen my understanding of the matter and to promote a different interpretation regarding the future of the migration debate.

## 2.2 The crucial meso-level

Since the 1980s, a flourishing body of studies has highlighted the active and creative role of migrant people in overcoming structural restrictions, such as immigration constraints, social exclusion, insecurity and racism. By focusing on the micro and meso levels of analysis these studies have been able to explore more closely people's and groups' reasons to migrate, how they perceive their migration experience and how they shape their identity throughout the migration process, and so on (Boyd 1989; Chant and Radcliffe 1992; Faist 1997; Haug 2008; Kofman 2004; Zontini 2010). Another crucial aspect that these researchers have shown is the power of migrants' agency and their role in the maintenance of the migratory process. By creating social structures, for instance, as social networks, migrants set in motion migratory paths that can potentially involve other people in their networks. Generally, through the meso-level type of analysis it is possible to explore several

dimensions of the everyday life of migrant people. This is why I found this type of analysis extremely advantageous for my study. It allowed me to understand the power that individual agency can have in overcoming macro structural constraints, to realise the centrality of family concerns behind migration and, at the same time, not to lose sight over the macro structural dimension.

One of the most known theories that follows a meso-level approach is the 'New Economy of Labour Migration (NELM). It is mostly based on Giddens (1984) "structuration theory",<sup>10</sup> which conceives structure and agency in a relation of mutual dependency, rather than in opposition (Wright 1995, p. 771). Scholars that use this approach concentrate their attention on particular units of analysis that have achieved great relevance for the understanding of migration, such as family, household and migrant networks. The NELM approach has also been developed to challenge the hypothesis and conclusions of the neoclassical theory (Stark and Bloom 1985) and sees migration as a way to guarantee a certain degree of external support to the family/household unit. One of the main assumptions of this approach is that, in developing countries, as within disadvantaged groups in rich countries, the migration decision is not taken by an isolated individual actor, but it is undertaken within the person's larger unit, such as family and household (Stark 1984, 1991; Taylor 1986, 1999). Within these units people act strategically and collectively to maximise incomes, to minimise the family's income risks and defeat capital restrictions of family production activities (Stark 1984, 1991; Taylor 1986, 1999). According to Taylor (1999), while some family members work in the local economy, some others are sent abroad

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<sup>10</sup>Structuration theory claims that structures, rules, and norms are the results of people's daily practices and activities, both intentional and unintentional. These structural forms consequently form, facilitate and restrain people's actions, not by severe determination – as structural approaches tend to think – but within a range of possibilities. Although some individual actions are part of their routine and largely serve to replicate structures, rules and institutions, other actions encompass agency, helping to change the system and perhaps, over time, reform the rules (Giddens 1984). This continuous recreation of structures through agency is what Giddens considers as the recursive nature of social life, in which structures are seen as both means and result of the reproduction of human practices (de Haas 2010a, p. 241).

where income and work conditions are weakly or not correlated to the local economy. In doing so, the household can rely on migrant remittances if the local conditions deteriorate. This applies particularly for household and family units living in developing countries where there is a lack of private insurance markets and/or governmental programmes aimed to manage economical risks. Other reasons that seem to motivate migration are the absence or inaccessible credit programmes and private and public insurances that limit family projects and achievements in the sending country (Taylor 1999).

According to new economic theorists, the household is interested in sending the workers abroad not only to increase the income in absolute terms, but also to improve their income in relation to other households and reduce their relative deprivation (Stark 1991; Stark, Taylor and Yitzhaki 1986; Taylor 1999). From this approach have emerged some theoretical models suggesting a series of propositions, such as the analysis of household, family and any other culturally-defined “units of production and consumption” (Massey *et al.* 1993, p. 439). These units are useful for the understanding of migration and also highlight that local employment and international migration are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the household can be interested in developing both local activities and migration, particularly for the remitting support of the latter (Taylor 1999). An interesting policy suggestion made by these theorists is that governments can affect migration rates not only through labour market policies but also through a proactive management of indemnity and income distribution. Programmes such as unemployment compensation, for instance, can considerably affect the motivations for international migration as much as governmental policies that deal with income distribution, which can disincentive migration by affecting the relative deprivation (Massey *et al.* 1993, p. 440).

From the NELM perspective, migration is seen as a more practical and purposeful decision to improve the livelihood of the family. However, a pure household analysis has been criticised to neglect the intra-household conflicts and inequalities along the lines of generation, age and gender. In the family

and household dimension, for instance, we should consider that different family members can have different ideas about the need/desire to migrate according to their gender, age, class, culture and so on. Similarly, within the same household there can be influencing power relations that can encourage or discourage the migration of its members (Hondagneu-Soleto 1992; Hondagneu and Avila 1997). Furthermore, in some cases, people migrate to escape from oppressing social control, unhappy marriages or abuse (Zontini 2010).

Another theory that uses a meso-level analysis is the Migration Network Theory, which focuses on the perpetuation of migration and on the idea that migrants tend to keep their social relations with other migrants but also family ties and friendships in their home country. This usually leads to the creation of social networks that can facilitate the migration of other people belonging to the same network. According to Castles (2010) the adoption of the network theory in migration studies has been one of the most revealing ideas in understanding migration mechanisms, particularly because it highlights the “collective agency of migrants and communities in organising processes of migration and incorporation” (Castles 2010, p. 1581; see also Boyd 1989). However, this idea is not new as earlier scholars have used the concept of ‘chain migration’ to describe the role of the migrant’s interpersonal relations on shaping migratory paths (Lee 1966; Petersen 1958). The more recent version of migrants’ networks is based on the concept of ‘embeddedness’ in social structures developed in economic sociology by Granovetter (1973; see Portes and Sensenbrenner 1998). Today, there is a generous international literature that stresses the centrality of social networks not only for the phase of arrival, but also for settlement of new migrants (Ambrosini 2012; Bashir 2007; Boyd 1989; Castles 2010; Faist 1997; Hagan 1998; Portes 1995). The individual relations among migrants, former migrants and non-migrants both in the sending country and in the destination country enhance the prospect of international labour migration associated with forms of circular migration and chain migration processes

(Boyd 1989). Furthermore, the system of social networks creates the conditions for the establishment of transnational migration networks (Faist 1997; Pries 2004). From this perspective migrants are conceived as active committed subjects in maintaining social, emotional, cultural, economical and political relationships between sending and receiving countries. As defined by Massey (*et al.* 1993, pp. 448-449):

Migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin. They increase the likelihood of international movement because they lower the costs and risks of movement and increase the expected net returns to migration. Network connections constitute a form of social capital that people can draw upon to gain access to foreign employment.

These connections within social networks render the migration process easier by reducing and making more predictable the costs and risks involved in moving. Particularly, informal networks support migrants to finance their travel, to find a first occupation and/or accommodation. According to Haug (2008), each additional migrant widens and strengthens social networks so that any potential migrant is in the position to benefit from the social networks and ethnic communities previously established in the country of destination. Therefore, being part of migration networks can have significant influence on the migration decision. Several migration studies have, indeed, established that migration networks have a decisive impact on the individual migration plan and choice of destination (Banerjee 1983; Boyd 1989; Faist 1997; Fawcett 1989; Haug 2008; Massey *et al.* 1993). Social networks are vital channels for the diffusion of support, assistance and information. They are such a powerful tool that can help migrants to cross borders, even illegally (IOM 2003, p.14).

Regarding the causes of migration, reasons such as colonialism, warfare, labour recruitment, shared culture and language, geographical proximity and so on are seen as the contributing factors for the initiation of the migration processes (Castles *et al.* 2014; Massey *et al.* 1998; Skeldon 1997). According

to Portes and Bach (1985), after the settlement of the first migrants or pioneers, other factors start to intersect. Recruitment opportunities, for example, can play a great role in attracting other migrants. And this is the moment when those informal networks can start to offer crucial resources for other individuals and groups. Massey *et al.* (1998) define a migrants' network as a form of location-specific social capital that people use to access resources somewhere else (Massey *et al.* 1998). Social capital can be seen as the heart of the social network mechanism. Bourdieu (1986) has defined social capital as one of three forms of accessible capital: economical, cultural and social accounted within the family and community. The author describes it as the benefits derived by every individual from its membership to a group, a sort of 'credential', "which entitles them to credit, in the various sense of the word" (Bourdieu 1986, p. 51). Basically, social capital can be seen as a metaphor about advantage (Burt 2000, p. 347).<sup>11</sup> This involves a range of social relationships that go from personal, family and household ties to friendships and community relations. All of the above relationships can foster mutual help in economic and social matters (Castles 2010).

However, according to two of the most renowned theorists of social capital, mobility is seen as detrimental to the full potential of this resource. For Coleman (1990) "individual mobility constitutes a potential action that will be destructive of the structure itself – and thus of the social capital dependent on it" (Coleman 1990, p. 320). For Putnam, the greatest form of social capital is place-based and originates from well-built connections in a community (Putnam 1996). According to transnational theorists, instead, together with financial and cultural capital, social capital is the third resource that can influence people's capability and aspiration to migrate (Castles *et al.* 2014, p. 40). In the case of labour opportunities in the destination country, for instance, old but also new forms of social capital can be seen as an extremely incisive factor in finding jobs. Particularly, new forms of social capital

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<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed discussion on social capital see Chapter Five.

involving native people of the destination country can be an extremely useful tool to avoid unemployment and finding new positions.

Looking at the migration process in terms of a system of networks based on social capital can be informative regarding the relations between micro and macro levels during the entire migration process, and how it is constructed around the logic of the individual but also the family, the network and last, but not least, macro structural factors (Vasta 2004). However, we should remember that, while social networks can facilitate migration they can also have negative effects on the life of people that rely on them. When studying social networks in relation to the migration process it is important to consider their nature, their facilitating function but also their restrictive potential. In this respect, Portes has pointed out that “networks are important in economic life because they are sources for the acquisition of scarce means, such as capital and information, and because they simultaneously impose effective constraints on the unrestricted pursuit of personal gain” (Portes 1995, p. 8). According to Vasta (2004; see also Portes 1995), negative social networks can act in a constraining way by functioning as “gatekeepers” or marginalising some members. On the other hand, the connections with people already settled in the new country can operate as “bridgeheads” (Bocker, Birrell, Gaal *et al.* 1994), reducing risks and costs of migration, providing information, housing, finding work and, overall, supporting the new migrant during the adaptation process to the new environment.

## 2.3 Transnational perspective

Similarly, the transnationalism approach has emphasised the role of network ties in helping migrants to maintain their connections over time and space, but it has seen in the globalisation process a significant facilitative element. Improved transport and technologies are seen as the main ways through which migrants are helped to keep their connections with their country of origin. Mobile telephones, international banking, more affordable transport, and internet connection have all increased the possibility to live

“transnationally” (Portes 1999; Vertovec 1999). In line with Castells’ (1996) analysis of the Information Age, the new technologies are the motor of transnational networks, not by creating new social patterns altogether but by reinforcing the ones already existing. In this regard, Vertovec (1999, p. 447) argues that:

Transnationalism describes a condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent), certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common – however virtual – arena of activity.

Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) argue that the lives of migrants are increasingly not understandable if we only look at the national level, as their activities contribute to foster new transnational identities of migrants or ‘transmigrants’. The authors invite us to overcome a “container theory of society” (Beck 2000) that “does not capture, adequately or automatically, the complex interconnectedness of contemporary reality”(Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004, p. 6) and that has bound the sociological research to a construction of the society made through the lens of “methodological nationalism” (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004). Instead, the authors invite us to adopt a transnational approach that can help to study social life by making a critical distinction between ‘*ways of being*’ and ‘*ways of belonging*’ to the transnational social space (emphasis as original). Through this distinction it is possible to better comprehend the experience of people that live simultaneously within and beyond national-states’ boundaries (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004, p. 6). According to Portes (1995, p. 464) we should consider as “transnational activities” the economic, cultural, political and religious actions that:

... take place on a recurrent basis across national borders and that require a regular and significant commitment of time by participants. Such activities may be conducted by relatively powerful actors, such as representatives of national governments and multinational corporations or may be initiated by more modest individuals such as immigrants and their home country kin and relations.



In fact, according to the author, it is important to distinguish between the “transnational from above” type of activity which is performed by the first actors and “transnational from below” which is performed by ordinary people. This more ‘longitudinal’ and ‘broad’ approach to migration studies seeks to recombine the divide between sending and receiving societies and represent a necessary step to achieve a more wide-ranging understanding of the migration phenomenon.

The transnational approach also challenges the traditional vision of individual relationships as based on physical proximity and continuity (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). Particularly, in the case of family relations, several transnational studies have demonstrated how parenting and care distribution are organised and circulated in a more dynamic dimension and across the transnational space (Ambrosini 2012; de Haas 2010b; Gardener and Grillo 2002; Lutz and Palenga-Möllenebeck 2012; Zontini 2008, 2010). From this point of view, family life is possible in the international space and the maintenance of strong ties and transnational movements across countries are the ways in which settlement takes place in the receiving country (Brah 1996; Zontini 2008). Furthermore, migrants’ family and household strategies have been increasingly recognised by numerous transnational theorists as lying at the core of decision making, essential for an understanding of the migration phenomenon (Ambrosini 2012; de Haas 2010b; Faist 1997).

An aspect that is highly revealing in this case is the gender constitution of the migration flow, which seems to be strictly related to the conceptualisation of gender’s roles in the sending countries and strongly influenced by family and household dynamics (Kofman Phizacklea, Raghuram, and Sales 2000; Lutz and Palenga-Möllenebeck 2012; Zontini 2008). As Zontini (2004) has pointed out, the economic, labour and power inequalities between men and women, and kinship obligations within the household, generate gender-selective migration flows. In addition, “patriarchal gender relations in families and communities determine how structural pressures and opportunities lead to particular patterns of migration and settlement” (Ribas-Mateos 2004, p. 1054). The

conceptualisation of gender, in fact, together with social norms and unequal power relations within the household have been increasingly seen by migration theorists as a very critical element that plays a crucial role in the migration decision making (De Jong 2000; Grieco and Boyd 1998; Lutz and Palenga-Möllennebeck 2012; Phizacklea 1998) and also in regard to the access to migration networks (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Malher and Pessar 2006; Zontini 2010). Boyd (1989) argues that the migration decision is highly influenced by “sex-specific family and friendship sources of approval, disapproval, assistance and information” (Boyd 1989, p. 657). In this respect, according to Grieco and Boyd (1998), gender has a strong influence in many aspects of female and male life, such as status, roles and lifecycle.

Often in migration discourses, gender seems to be relevant only when women are the focus, as if men do not have a gender (Hibbins and Pease 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Sydnie 2007). Conversely, the daily practices of women and men are deeply embedded in gender expectations and norms (Parreñas 2005, p. 4). The socially constructed nature of these two concepts implies that both men and women, from the beginning of their lives, have to ‘acquire’ and then to ‘perform’ their gender roles according to their cultural context and their interpretation of them. Based on the dichotomy of Smith (2006), Vasquez del Aguila (2013) distinguishes between ‘gender ideology’, that is, what people think the roles of men and women are in society, and ‘gender practices’ which are the actual strategies put into action by men and women based on this system of beliefs (Smith 2006, as cited in Vasquez del Aguila 2013, p. 89). According to Connell, gender has to be considered as a large-scale social structure (1987), with a very complex, dynamic and multiple nature (Segal 1990; Vasquez del Aguila 2013). The diverse conceptualisations of gender are deeply entrenched in many aspects of human life and history such as class, race, ethnicity, politics, culture, language, psychology, sexuality and so on (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Sydnie 2007). Similarly, concepts such as masculinity and femininity have to be considered as socially constructed and intrinsically plural.

The complex construction of gender and its relevance is best expressed by the feminist Lorber (1994), who suggests defining it as “a process of social construction, a system of social classification, and an institution that structures every aspect of our lives because of its embeddedness in the family, the work place, and the state, as well as in sexuality, language and culture” (Lorber 1994, as cited in Moghadam 2003, p. 15). Likewise, Predelli (2004) has pointed out how family and work are two of the most important grounds on which gender relations are constructed, preserved, and challenged. Thus, analysing the gendered roles of both women and men in these two major domains can be quite central for a comprehensive analysis for the process of migration decision making and settlement. As a very pervasive aspect of human life, gender often determines people’s position in society. As a consequence, in the case of migration, it can even have a strong influence on the opportunities that men and women have got regarding the possibility to migrate and can affect their integration into the receiving society.

An aspect particularly revealing regarding the weight of gender roles over expectations is parenthood (Carling, Menjivar and Schmalzbauer 2012). According to Dreby (2006), this aspect is particularly evident in the case of migration, where the parenting expectations from mothers and fathers are quite different. Although both mothers and fathers send money and presents home and maintain communication, mothers seem to be more in charge of the provision of emotional care (Carling *et al.* 2012; Dreby 2006; Parreñas 2001, 2005). In the literature the emotional implication of living in a transnational family remains a largely under-researched topic, particularly from the fatherhood perspective (Kilkey and Merla 2014). However, it is possible to say that the intersection of gender norms and family separation can lead to the creation of “new family forms and to different arrangements within existing families” (Carling *et al.* 2012, p. 196). Therefore, an interesting aspect of parenting to observe is the way in which men and women with children live their experience to support their family across the world and

how their family and household organisation has been rearranged and accommodated according to the new situation (Carling *et al.* 2012; Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992). Furthermore, even the opportunity to enter the labour market can be related to the gender construction in a defined community and/or to family issues. In fact, in transnational studies of migration the 'contest of departure' (among other aspects) is increasingly seen as a major shaping factor for the organisation of the migration and for the consequent migration project and settlement (Madziva and Zontini 2012). In the study carried out by Madziva and Zontini (2012), for instance, it is highlighted how important it is to take into consideration the sending country, the migrant's migratory project, what sort of gender regime there is in the country of origin, how the migration experience is conceptualised, and if it is supported (Madziva *et al.* 2012, p. 430).

The importance given to family and household by the transnational approach seems to shade the importance of the individual process of decision making, individuals' agency, as well as the impact of more macro factors over the lives of people and groups. In reality, it is in this middle ground or "meso-level" (Faist 1999) that the individual sphere and large-scale of factors and influences can be recombined in a more meaningful frame. Castles *et al.* (2014) criticise this approach because it cannot be extended to all migrants as probably many of them do not fit the transnational model and cannot be defined as transmigrants, only because they send remittances home or they may have only loose connections with their sending community. However, migration networks do exist and migration remains a pervasive and shaping experience not only for the identity of migrant people but also for the non-migrants. This is a point mostly developed by the following theory.

Migration Systems Theory is concerned with understanding how migration is related to other forms of exchange, such as goods, ideas and money; and if and how these relations change the initial circumstances of migration in both the sending and receiving countries (Castles *et al.* 2014). The key assumption of this approach is that one form of exchange between places, such as in the

case of the trade exchange, is apt to produce another form of exchange and in both directions. The flow of information, for instance, can affect the migration capabilities of people that want to move. Furthermore, the exposure to this information about new lifestyles and ideas can also affect people's aspirations and preferences. With the concept of 'Social Remittances' Peggy Levitt (1998) described how the dissemination of ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital from the destination countries to the sending countries influences even the social and political lives of non-migrant people (Levitt 1998). "Migrants carry ideas, practices, and narratives and these enable mobility and different forms of membership" (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). This approach tends to bring culture back in migration studies, not only in terms of the religious or political beliefs that people hold, or ideas or artistic practices, but it also conceives migration as a cultural act in itself "because migrants' identities and actions are rich in cultural and social meaning" (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011, p. 3). When analysing migration through a transnational lens, it becomes clearer that people's ideas and practices preceding their migration will strongly influence who and what they will encounter in the receiving country (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). This, in turn, will affect what they will remit back to their country (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). This approach can help to improve our understanding of internal migration dynamics and how it is rooted in broader processes of social transformation and development (Castles *et al.* 2014, p. 43). Finally, with the concept of "cumulative causation" Massey (1990) has expressed the idea that the social and economic effects of migration enhance the probability of more migration. An example is the effect of remittances in the origin communities, which contributes to creating a feeling of relative deprivation among non-migrants. This "contextual feedback" (de Haas 2010b) can expand the probability of migration aspirations among non-migrants. When emigration becomes, for instance, associated with the idea of success, it can foster a "culture of migration" that sees the decision to stay at home as a failure (Massey *et al.* 1993). Therefore, remittances, feelings of relative

deprivation, and the facilitating effects of migration networks can all contribute to the perpetuation of migration (de Haas 2010b).

These meso-level theories have been useful theoretical tools to understand the role of migrants' agency in creating and sustaining migration flows through social, cultural and economic structures. However, they did not succeed in answering some important questions (de Haas 2010a, b). First of all, why did the majority of initial migration not lead to the creation of migration networks and a migration system (de Haas 2010a, b; Castles *et al.* 2014)? They also over-estimate the facilitating mechanisms of migrants' networks and do not explain the reasons behind the stagnation of the migration system over time (Bocker *et al.* 1994; de Haas 2010b; Massey *et al.* 1998). And finally they do not specify why pioneer migration to new destinations occurs (Castles *et al.* 2014; de Haas 2010b). According to de Haas (2010b), a way to improve our understanding about these matters is to develop a more critical understanding of the role of social capital and social networks. In this respect, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1998) argue that social capital can have positive but also negative implications, such as exclusion of non-group members, disproportionate material and social claims on successful members and strong pressure for social conformity (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1998; see also de Haas 2010b; Castles *et al.* 2014). These factors can lead to the rupture of the networks and can also explain why some migrants change from being 'bridgeheads' to 'gatekeepers', no longer willing to help other potential migrants (Bocker *et al.* 1994; de Haas 2010b).

All of the above theories and their empirical researchers have contributed to improve my understanding of such a multifaceted, continuous and intricate process involving millions of people around the world. Every theory has provided invaluable insights by operating at different levels of analysis and by focusing on different aspects of migration. However, in opposition to Massey *et al.* (1993, 1998) we cannot combine and integrate different theoretical perspectives on migration because they stand on different assumptions regarding the causes of migration (Castles 2010), they produce different

understanding of the same concepts (de Haas 2010a) and they even produce different policy suggestions (Castles *et al.* 2014). Therefore, they can be useful to understand certain manifestations of migration and in a defined context and for that level of analysis (Castles 2010; Castles *et al.* 2014; de Haas 2010a, b), but they cannot form all together a comprehensive theory of migration.

Although, until the present moment there is not a unique and comprehensive theory of migration, in line with Castles *et al.* (2014), it is important to think of migration as an inherent component of broader processes of development, social transformation and globalisation. Another central point is to explore its internal dynamics and mechanisms and how they are based on social capital and networks and “contextual feedback” (de Haas 2010a), useful to explain the perpetuation of migration. Furthermore, the understanding of migration in terms of internal dynamics within social networks gives the right relevance to migrants’ agency and their capability to create migrant communities in the receiving countries and international social networks leading to the formation of new transnational identities. Finally, the emphasis on migrants’ agency should not obscure the importance of macro-level conditions, such as economic development, labour market dynamics, demographic trends and also the weight that sending and receiving countries still have in starting and shaping migration movements (Castles *et al.* 2014, p. 51).

## 2.4 Global transformations

Regarding this last point, the globalisation theory can help to comprehend migration as an inherent part of broader and deeper relations between societies. Rooted in the assumptions of the Dependency Theory and World Systems Theory, the globalisation theory emerged in the 1990s. There is a flourishing debate regarding the conceptualisation of globalisation and there are several definitions of it. Among scholars there are different epistemological positions, disciplinary contexts, empirical approaches and consequent divergent conceptualisations of the term (Jones 2010). Generally,

it can be considered as the phenomenon that is speeding, deepening and widening the global interconnectedness in many fields of human life (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt *et al.* 1999, p. 2; see also Castles *et al.* 2014, p. 33). According to Croucher (2004) the globalisation process in the neoliberal era is “compressing time and space in ways that profoundly affect social, political and economic relations and realities” (Croucher 2004, p. 185; see Perrons, Plomien and Kilkey 2010 for a research-based example). For Giddens (1999), globalisation has to be seen as a pervasive process that is driving rapid social, political and economic changes around the world while reshaping a new world order.

Often globalisation is misleading, seen as a mere economical phenomenon since one of its most visible key characteristics is the opening of local national markets to international and global trade (Sample 2003). By removing economic boundaries and implementing policies aimed at reducing welfare state provisions and the impact of state intervention in labour and capital markets (or *deregulation*), national-states have encouraged both foreign direct investments and flows of capital, technologies and services (Castles *et al.* 2014; Sample 2003). In this regard, analysing the state, Harvey (2007, p.70) has underlined its double role:

In one hand, the state seems to be a passive witness of a world increasingly dominated by the market logic, in the other it seems to be an active entity in promoting a fertile business environment and by being a competitive actor in global politics.

In the meantime, though, by succumbing to the global pressures and the consequent arrival in their territory of circulating capitals and commodities, numerous families and local businesses have been put at risk and may have decided to close down or to move elsewhere (Bauman 2007). In fact, globalisation cannot be considered merely as an economic phenomenon because, while accelerating cross-border flows of raw materials, capital, technologies, goods and services, it also has a strong impact on the mobility of people, cultures, values, and most importantly for this context of analysis,



labour. By reshaping production structure, globalisation often impacts on the local labour market by augmenting social inequalities that ultimately can foster migratory flows by creating what Bauman (2007) has defined as a “human waste” dumping industry (Bauman 2007, p. 28). This prospective suggests linking the level of development to migratory flows. As postulated by Bauman (2007), “each new outpost conquered by capitalist markets adds new thousands or millions to the mass of men and women already deprived of their lands, workshops, and communal safety net” (Bauman 2007, p. 28). Therefore, the “latecomers to modernity” (Bauman 2007, p. 32) have to find local solutions to globally-caused problems. Among them, the ones with more resources may migrate elsewhere.

There is large agreement among scholars regarding the radicalisation effect that the globalisation process has generated regarding the new international division of labour (Castles *et al.* 2014; Fairbrother and Rainnie 2006; Frobels, Heinrichs and Kreye 1980; Munck 2002; Petras and Veltmayer 2000; Ribas-Mateos 2004; Wickramasekara 2008).<sup>12</sup> According to Frobels *et al.* (1980), the decolonisation process of the 1960s and the “economic imperialism” of the post-war period have generated in the developing countries economic, political and social pressures that have strongly contributed to the transformation of the international division of labour. For Frobels *et al.* (1980), three basic preconditions were necessary for this to happen: the disintegration of the traditional socio-economic structures in the developing areas, with the consequent formation of a considerable pool of cheap accessible labour; the subdivision of the industrial production process in small components, which allowed the transfer of unskilled sub-processes to low-waged developing countries; and the developing of low-priced transport and communication technologies that have contributed to make this relocation

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<sup>12</sup>The concept of a new international division of labour used in this chapter refers to the most recent phase of the division of labour defined by Cohen (1987) as “transnational division of labour”, which mostly involves post-imperialism neo-colonial relationships, major industrial restructuring in developed countries that required a consistent import of migrant labour, and the internationalisation of production in low-waged countries by economic giants, such as oil and car companies, and those producing consumer durables, electrical goods and electronic components (Cohen 1987, p. 240).

possible (Frobel *et al.* 1980, p. 13) and that also has increased the opportunities for people to move (Castles *et al.* 2014). Actually, as Coates (2000) has pointed out, “globalisation in its modern form is a process less based on the proliferation of computers than on the proliferations of the proletariat” (Coates 2000, as cited in Munck 2002, p. 6).

## 2.5 From globalisation process to neo-liberal globalism

In ‘The new imperialism’, Harvey (2003) argues that globalisation is more like a new form of imperialism perpetrated to boost the power of core national-states and to serve, through their ruling classes, the interests of colossal multinational corporations (Harvey 2003; see also Amin 2001; Petras and Veltmayer 2000). In the view of these authors, globalisation is not a new world order but the most recent evolution phase of the capitalist world economy. This more recent conceptualisation of the globalisation process has emerged particularly from the implementation of free or neo-liberal political strategies by the UK and USA governments in the 1980s (Castles *et al.* 2014; Petras and Veltmayer 2000; Sample 2003; Standing 2011). These political strategies were based on privatisation, deregularisation and liberalisation policies and were imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in agreement with the dominant elites and national governments (Castles *et al.* 2014 Delgado-Wise and Covarrubias 2008; Munck 2002; Standing 2011). The promises behind these policies were to reduce asymmetries among countries and foster new paths of development. However, the only strategies conceived to achieve these promises were based on liberalisation and deregulation policies, which involved a gradual rolling back of state intervention on economic matters.

Another central neo-liberal claim was that countries needed to achieve “labour market flexibility” to avoid the rise of labour costs and, as a consequence, the transfer of production and investments to cheaper areas of the world (Standing 2011). As globalisation proceeded, in the developed countries labour was made increasingly more flexible, therefore more

insecure. In fact, country after country started to adopt legislations that have facilitated the employment of workers on a temporary basis through sub-contracting, temporary employment and informal sector work (Castles *et al.* 2014, p.22; see also Standing 2011).<sup>13</sup> And firm after firm has emulated what is done in other countries and by market leaders in their sectors, a pattern known as ‘dominance effect’ (Standing 2011, p. 33). However, this did not stop the relocation of capital, investments and unskilled sub-process units to low-production-cost countries (Standing 2011). Furthermore, by allowing the production of goods to move to low-wage countries, the power of trade unions in developed countries has been weakened together with the power of leftist parties that should presumably defend the rights of workers and their welfare state provisions (Castle *et al.* 2014, p. 33).

Pechlaner and Otero retain that, to better understand the status quo, we should re-interpret the meaning of the national-state’s deregulation practices. The two authors argue that it is most appropriate to refer to the globalisation process as “neoliberal globalism”, that has fostered a neo-regulation of the state’s power more than a deregulation of it (Pechlaner and Otero 2010; see also Harvey 2007; Standing 2011). The neoliberal globalism “depends centrally on the state and its attempt to impose the market as a self-regulating mechanism” (Pechlaner and Otero 2010, p. 180). In fact, in neoliberal times, the state, while significantly changing, still maintains a crucial role (Hay, Lister and Marsh 2006; Otero 2004). This neoliberal globalism has generated deep social transformations in vast areas of the world but with uneven effects. The considerable inequality and power imbalances between diverse nation-states influence the way in which they are incorporated into the project of neoliberal globalism (Pechlaner and Otero 2010). However, as strongly suggested by Holloway (2002) we should consider the relation between capital and the state as “a relation between national state and global capital (and global society), and not as a relation

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<sup>13</sup> In Italy, for instance, forms of flexible work were introduced in 1997 through the Treu law which introduced temporary contracts and in 2003 with the Biagi Law that has allowed private recruitment agencies.

between national state and national capital, and that therefore states are not the centres of power” (Holloway 2002, p. 156-157). Countries with the greatest international influence will be the most dominant in planning the international regulatory regime but in accordance with the interests of multinational companies around which less influential countries will need to organise and adapt (Ó Riain 2000; Pechlaner and Otero 2010; Weiss 1997). In the words of McMicheal (2004): “the world market is a political construct in which exchanges between unequal societies and/or incommensurable cultures privilege powerful states and institutions” (McMichael 2004, p. 138). Therefore, the globalisation process is more realistically framed as a political project ideologically driven more than a new world order (Amin 2001; Harris 2002; Harvey 2003; McMichael 1996; Otero 1996; Pechlaner and Otero 2010; Petras and Veltmayer 2000; Urmetzer 2005).

Even in 1944 in *The Great Transformation* Polanyi accused modern Western societies of supporting a market-centric capitalistic economy and having power to subvert the rapport between an economic system and social relations. Polanyi defends the theory that in human history the economic system has always been embedded in social relations: “The economic system was submerged in general social relations; markets were merely an accessory feature of an institutional setting controlled and regulated more than ever by social authority” (Polanyi 2002, p. 53). He explains that giving supremacy to the self-regulating market means giving self-sufficiency to the economic system and disjoining it from its intrinsic bond with social relations. In turn, the social system must change to allow this new system to operate. Furthermore, a market economy must involve all elements of industry, such as labour, land and money:

But labor and land are no other than the human beings themselves of which every society consists and the natural surroundings in which it exists. To include them in the market mechanism means to subordinate the substance of society itself to the laws of the market (Polanyi 2002, p.60).

In these radical changes, Polanyi saw the development of an economic liberalism that would provide excuses for public policies aimed to transform labour (people), land (nature) and capital (power of the purse) from unmarketable substances to “fictitious commodities” to buy and sell (Polanyi 1944, p. 134). Similarly Agamben (1998), indicates how, in the classical world, simple natural life was excluded from the political realm as it was confined to its function of life reproduction and subsistence (Agamben 1998, p. 2). Drawing from Aristotle’s definition of the nature of man and following the Foucauldian concept of *biopolitics*, the author believes that, today, politics have transformed what for millennia was the relation between man and politics: if the ancient man was a living animal with the “extra-ordinary” capacity to have a political life, the modern man is “an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question” (Foucault 1976, as quoted in Agamben 1998, p. 3). This point is considered by both authors as the threshold of modern politics. From this type of politics is generated a sovereignty power that acts as power over human life with the sole intention to create ‘bare life’. Recently, in *What is a destituent power?*, Agamben (2014, pp. 65-66) explains how politics create ‘bare life’:

... life is not in itself political ... Life—that is, the Impolitical (l’Impolitico)—must be politicized through a complex operation that has the structure of an exception ... The strategy is always the same: something is divided, excluded, and rejected at the bottom, and, through this exclusion, is included as the foundation.

This is the bare life, the life that has been divided from its original “impolitical” form to a life that has been absorbed inside the political sphere so that the sovereign power can act upon it and can even ‘kill’ it, politically and juridically without technically committing a murder (Agamben 2014). This is the condition of the ‘Homo Sacer’, a man that can be killed “without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice” (Agamben 1998, p. 83). In today’s politics the simple living body or ‘zoè’ has become central for the political strategies that are the politicisation of ‘bare life’ where the humanity of living man is decided. It is by this gradual inclusion in the political

realm that the 'bare life' ended by becoming an undistinguished fusion between what should be included and what should be excluded. From this moment on, the 'bare life' becomes, at the same time, object and subject in the conflicts of the political order (Agamben 1998, p. 9). The objectification and subjectification processes, although seeming to clash with each other, converge in their concern for the bare life of the citizen, which is for Agamben (1998) the new biopolitical body of humanity (Agamben 1998, p. 9). Specifically, Agamben reached the conclusion that "the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power" (Agamben 1998, p. 6). In consideration of the development and triumph of capitalism, for instance, Agamben (1998) underlines how it would not have been possible without the creation of the docile bodies" that it needed (Agamben 1998, p.3).

In the capitalistic era, to treat people like a commodity to sell and buy in the labour market is functional to this new system, but before this could happen at this large scale there was the need to subvert the relations between humanity, politics and, particularly during capitalism, the economic system (Polanyi 1944). By subjecting people to market prices defined by the demand and supply means denying agency or the ability to resist for any worker. This also implies flexible labour relations are more dependable on the demand and supply to calculate labour's price or wage. The price of labour, in today's globalised capitalism, has actually become the most critical element in consideration of the labour force. The pursuit of flexible labour relations is, in the one side, crucial for the global labour process and, on the other side, the main source of insecurity for workers. In fact, one feature of flexibility is the increased use of temporary labour: easy to change, less paid and no commitment with other forms of entitlements, such as experience-rate or enterprise benefits (Standing 2011, p. 32). The search for flexibility has determined the end for the typical labour relation characterised by a stable full-time job with often opportunities for upward mobility within the same workplace. The tendency to make a 'disposable' use of workers can be seen

as a general trend that has influenced the labour relations in many countries where the security of employment is increasingly crumbling while other forms of work are progressively more widespread. In this respect, Bauman (2007), in his critique regarding the rising and overwhelming sense of insecurity of individual livelihood, pointed out the centrality of the development in recent times of new types of jobs, which are “of the part-time, temporary, fixed-term, no-benefits-attached, and altogether ‘flexible’ character” (Bauman 2007, p. 7). Job insecurity has been variously defined in the literature, however, always in terms of a “threat of unemployment” (De Witte 2005). For Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt it can be defined as “the perceived powerlessness to maintain the desired continuity in a threatened job situation” (1984, p. 438, as quoted in De Witte 2005, p. 1). According to Heany, Israel and House (1994) it refers to the “perception of a potential threat to the continuity of the current job” (1994, p. 1431 as quoted in De Witte 2005, p. 1); and for Sverke, Hellgren and Näswall (2002) to the “subjectively experienced anticipation of a fundamental and involuntary event related to job loss” (2002, p. 243 as quoted in De Witte 2005, p. 1). Taken as a whole, common denominators of job insecurity are the feelings of worry for the future, helplessness to preserve the desired job security and powerlessness to act on the situation to stabilise it. These conditions affect people psychologically and physically (De Witte 1999) not only at work but also outside it. People with temporary contracts can be induced to work harder if employed in peaks’ periods. They can be put in forms of underemployment without difficulty and, mostly importantly, they can be controlled simply through the fear to not be cost-effective. Therefore, the use of temporary labour has become the precondition to be competitive in the market by giving a cost advantage (Standing 2011).

Furthermore, the spread of atypical and precarious work positions have been parallel to an unprecedented expansion of the informal economy in recent times. The 2002 International Labour Conference titled ‘Decent Work and Informal Economy’ highlighted that:

Contrary to earlier predictions, the informal economy has been growing rapidly in almost every corner of the globe, including industrialized countries – it can no longer be considered a temporary or residual phenomenon. The bulk of new employment in recent years, particularly in developing and transition countries, has been in the informal economy (p. 1).

In the informal economy the power exercised by the employers is not limited by the rights enclosed in the formal contract. Employees can only partially protect themselves from exploitation or abuse (Anderson 2007) unless they decide to withdraw from the position. When the employee is also a migrant person, employer exploitative power can also involve brutal forms (ILO 2005). In the case of Southern European countries where these informal working conditions were already a reality for native people, we can witness an escalating aggravation of these traits when involving migrant workers. Informal labour relations involving migrants are reaching high level of concern regarding the respect of the worker as a person and his/her right to a dignified life.

## 2.6 Corporations' power in the era of globalisation: the agricultural example

The national-state legitimisation of the economic restructuration perpetrated by multinational companies and foreign direct investments in developing economies have produced at least two double effects: on one side, particular regions and social groups have been included in the world capitalistic market relations, while others lost their incomes and workplaces, and their qualifications became obsolete (Castells 1996). While the new economic system is highly integrated worldwide and involves all workers, at the same time, it is also enormously diversified because it does not engage with national economies, which instead today are increasingly disintegrated (Munck 2002, p. 44).

To give a tangible example greatly related to this thesis, in the agricultural sector around the world the major effect produced by the neoliberal



globalism is the entrance of global corporations in the seed sector. Corporations like Monsanto Syngenta, Duport, Dow, Bayer do today own, in form of private property, and control the seeds and the biodiversity through technologies of dependency that force farmers to seed dependency (Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002; Herring 2007; King and Schimmelpfennig 2005; Shiva 2004). In fact, the seeds used today in several intensive agricultural areas of the world, like inside the Sicilian greenhouses, are not renewable seeds. They yield a crop but “the crop is useless for seed because of hybrids based on male sterility, and the impending introduction of ‘terminator’ seeds—seeds which are engineered to be sterile” (Shiva 2004, p. 721). Furthermore, those corporations are breeding seeds that necessitate “chemicals—life herbicide resistant varieties” because they are predisposed to more diseases and pests (Herring 2007; Shiva 2004). These expensive pesticides and herbicides are, as expected, rigorously produced by the same corporations, which oblige once again farmers to be dependable on these corporations. Today, seeds that are patented or covered by breeders’ rights, cannot be freely saved or exchanged by farmers. In fact, seed saving and seed exchange is considered as a “theft” in intellectual property law (Harvey 2003; Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002; Herring 2007; Shiva 2004). This means that our share and cumulated seeds’ heritage, once preserved by local farmers, is now “either being destroyed by introduction of monocultures of non-renewable seeds or being hijacked by global corporations through patents and biopiracy” (Shiva 2004, p. 719).

In the meantime, the costs of agricultural products are collapsing, mostly due to the trade liberalisation and its removal of price and import regulations. Policies encouraging farmers to get organised in cooperatives or to aim for exports, in accordance with the recommendations of WTO’s Agreement on Agriculture, are another way to redirect support away from farmers in the direction of traders (Herring 2007; Shiva 2004). Consequently, as in the case of the Sicilian greenhouse farmers, the entire production process has become much more costly, leading to the concentration of ownership in the hands of

richer farmers that run their own packaging warehouses and deal directly with the large retail distributors and/or supermarket chains (Cole 2007, p. 75). For those small to medium farmers that still try to be independent producers by bringing their product to the local market daily, the local corruption and the extremely low prices offered for their products are another two overwhelming ingredients added to their staggeringly high indebtedness with their suppliers. Harvey (2003) has interpreted these rampant systems of patenting, licensing, bio-piracy and intellectual property rights in the WOT as “wholly new mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003, p. 75) that can be used against whole populations surviving on this productivity sector.

In this general dramatic picture of today's peasantry, the reduction of production costs through the employment of informal labour is more than necessary, it is crucial. In the case of the Sicilian-Italian-agriculture, a large pool of migrant labour force, often informally engaged, low paid and (sometimes) poorly treated, has become the only chance to try to stay in the market. In fact, if, at the beginning of the production in greenhouses in the 1950s, the labour demand was met by family members and locals, today, foreign workers override the labour supply and are vital for the survival of the sector. However, particularly in the case of small to medium farmers, often those workers are not paid the right amount established by the law and are not employed on a regular basis but through informal agreements. In the best of the cases, workers are given the 'ingaggio' (engagement), which is not a full employment contract but a form of collaboration with the farm based on the number of days worked. Due to the seasonality of the work, to possess this 'collaborative' position in a farm allows workers to request the Italian state for unemployment compensation and family allowance provided for the period of inactivity. However, this form is easy to counterfeit by farmers that do not want to fully declare their productivity to the state. The ingaggio needs also to be renewed by the employer annually, which does not guarantee to the worker the reconfirmation for the following production

year. This is a further incentive to work harder and longer to satisfy as much as possible the requests of employers in the hope of being reconfirmed for the following season.

It is since the 1980s that neighbouring Tunisian men have seen in the greenhouse production of Southern Sicily a profitable labour opportunity. This has generated the growth of a wide Tunisian community residing along this agricultural production area. Today, another large pool of labour workers from the newly European Romania country has joined the rank of greenhouse workers, with downward effects on the negotiation of the already poor labour prices. All of these factors together are creating situations of extreme poverty and marginalisation in Southern Europe, particularly for non-European workers, that demand rising attention for the undignified effect on the living experiences of these people.

## 2.7 The globalisation of exploitation

As discussed in the previous sections, the fundamental characteristics of employment in the neo-liberal global era are the emergence of widespread forms of flexible and insecure work positions. Overall, in the last decades, a combination of factors, such as the decreased protection of workers by the state, weaker trade unions and the deregulated labour market have created different “contexts of reception” (Portes and Rumbaut 2006) for the new migrants. Actually, often the presence of migrants has helped to legitimate the restructuration of the welfare state and has been strategically used to distinguish between what Schierup and Castles (2011) define as the “deserving” and “undeserving poor”. These transformations, together with controversial immigration policies and the decline of controls on workplaces by governmental authorities, have created conditions of vulnerability and social exclusion that have left space to forms of exploitative work practices by unscrupulous employers, but also gang-masters, smugglers and recruitment agencies (Shelley 2007). Furthermore, the denial of citizenship and labour rights contributes to condemn numerous migrants to deregulated segments

of the labour market dominated by wages and working conditions below standards (Bauder 2006). Although, without the labour of migrant people the economy of most industrialised areas of the world would suffer or even collapse (Bauder 2006, p. 4), the exclusion of the majority of the migrant population from the citizenship regime and labour rights confines them to a system of “global reserve army of labour” (Bourdieu 2002). Hardt and Negri (2000, p. 398) have argued “mass migration has become necessary for production.” In this regard, Bourdieu (2002) has described the ideal emigrant worker for the neoliberal business elites as “disposable, temporary, single, with no families and no social protection” (Bourdieu 2002, p. 40; see also Bauder 2006), perfectly suitable for the overwork in the dominant economies. From this perspective, migrant workers are the perfect candidates for the cheap and overloaded jobs.

When applying the neo-liberal employment features to the section of jobs defined as ‘unskilled’ and ‘semi-skilled’, which are already characterised by the lowest wages, there is a serious risk of confining people to severe forms of poverty and social exclusion. The largest portion of the migrant population around the world, particularly in the wealthiest countries, carries out all ranges of the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs that native people try to avoid; therefore, they are the ones most condemned to insecurity and vulnerability (Wickramasekara 2008). The 2004 ILO report gives a detailed picture regarding the vast exploitation of migrant workers worldwide and in several sectors, such as agriculture, construction, manufactories, and services like domestic and hospitality. In those leading work sectors the presence of migrant workers is at its highest (Allasino, Reyneri, Venturini *et al.* 2004; Shelley 2007). The report has also pointed out that the most vulnerable people among migrants are women, irregular people and trafficked persons (ILO 2004). As Rogaly (2008) has pointed out, for some employers certain types of workers are seen as more appropriate due to their acceptance of the work tasks and norms, their keenness to agree with an already set work programme, or vice versa to work without a specific end time, and finally

workers that are easy to dismiss when no longer needed (Rogaly 2008, p. 498). For the author, in fact, it is not uncommon for employers to take advantage of the migration status, the work inexperience and low language proficiency to actually exploit people for many tasks and duties (Rogaly 2008). However, as suggested by Shelley (2007) we should consider the exploitation of workers as a continuum line that goes from low forms of exploitation, such as the stretching of the working hours and denial of holiday pay to extreme forms of abuse like bonded labour, threatening and use of violence, better defined as a form of modern slavery (see Bales 2004). In between, there are labour relations based on gross underpayment, disproportionate subtractions of money for inadequate accommodations, workplace bullying and so on (Shelley 2007, p.7), which represent closer the type of exploitation most common among my research participants.

In the panorama of migration researches, the exploitation of migrant labour has been widely confirmed in numerous empirical studies, mine included. Exploitation of migrant labour in the global agriculture, for instance, has been described in numerous researches and, overall, the general picture that has emerged shows labour relations based on exploitative work conditions, informality, low wages, poor accommodation and high flexibility (Cole 2007; Galesi and Mangano 2010; Hartman 2008; Hoggart and Mendoza 1999; Hönekopp 1997; Kasimis, Papadopoulos and Zacoboulou 2003; Mangano 2009; Pugliese 1993; Rogaly 2008; Shelley 2007). In Europe, for example, the sharp increase of migrant labour employed in the agricultural sector has generated a vast literature centred on the reasons behind this change and on the consequences for the working and living conditions of farm labour. Hönekopp (1997), for instance, has investigated the general work conditions of Eastern European workers in Germany and found that they are confined in the low-skilled, low-paid and poor working condition sectors avoided by nationals. Furthermore, despite the implementation of specific agriculture employment programmes, he found that a high number of migrants are employed without a legal contract (Hönekopp 1997).

Similarly, Kasimis *et al.* (2003), have illustrated the case of Eastern European farm workers in rural Greece and how they have provided a “highly flexible labour force in the sense that they are employed in a multiplicity of tasks, in different sectors, with differing skills, and display significant geographical mobility over the seasons” (Kasimis *et al.* 2003, p. 182). The authors have also pointed out that the replacing role the migrants have got towards family labour relieves them from the heavy burden of manual tasks. However, migrants are often low and/or irregularly paid (Kasimis *et al.* 2003, p. 182). Hartman (2008), instead, has described the illegal gang-master system of Romanian farm workers in the Spanish agricultural area, which contributes to reducing the already poor wages of migrant workers while it is increasing the profits for gang-masters and employers (Hartman 2008). Rogaly (2008) has explained the intensification of the workplace regime in the English horticultural industries mostly caused by corporate retailers’ regulation of workplace regimes that require volume, quality and low margins of profits for farmers. This has lead to the increased employment of lower paid international migrant workers in the sector (Rogaly 2008). The author relies on the concept of “intensification” offered by Guthman (2004) maintaining that it commonly refers to innovations used to foster the accumulation of agrarian capital. It mostly concerns the technical control and improvement of the biological processes during the agrarian production, but also it can be considered as a nontechnical innovation in labour control. Guthman (2004) argues that “the use of vulnerability, to ensure a timely and compliant labour force come harvest time” can be considered as a form of intensification (Guthman 2004, as quoted in Rogaly 2008, p. 498 ). Mangano and Galesi (2010) have travelled across Southern Italy and revealed the extremely poor working and living conditions of migrant farm labour: casually and informally recruited, poorly paid and badly treated by employers and gang-masters (Mangano and Galesi 2010).

These are only some examples of the conspicuous literature about migrant workers in European agriculture. However, this general trend can also be

enlarged to the agricultural sector worldwide. Bauder (2006), for instance, has described how the lack of citizenship and cultural representation of Mexican workers in the agricultural district of Ontario (Canada) contribute to their vulnerability and powerlessness and create the pre-conditions for their super exploitation. Rothenberg (2000) has provided a large picture of the “hidden” migrant population around the agricultural areas of America, describing the usury and poverty of this labour, while Mares (2005) has explained how the labour shortage in Australian agriculture has encouraged the use of irregular migrants that once again are more vulnerable to forms of exploitation, underpayment and abuse (Mares 2005).

Already, from this small pool of studies, it is possible to infer that there is a tendency to abuse migrants in the agricultural sector around the world and particularly in developed societies. However, the tendency to ask for longer hours of work, underpayment, denial of legal contracts, labour rights and abuse seems to be confined not only to this productive sector but to all the unskilled sectors where migrants are present. According to Shelley (2007), the abuse of migrants is not just widespread but it is actually a key characteristic of the industry in the global North (Shelley 2007, p. 6). As capitalism is driven by profit, extracting as much work as possible from the workforce compared to their wages is a way to raise profit (Shelley 2007). Therefore, the greater the productivity of workers the greater is their exploitation.

Empirical studies of migrants employed in the construction sector seem to confirm similar findings (Abdul-Aziz 2001; Ghaemi 2006; Lillie and Greer 2007; Quassoli 1999). Abdul-Aziz (2001) for instance, has documented the employment of Bangladeshi people in the Malaysian construction sector and how the source of their exploitation originates from their widespread use of recruitment agencies that often resulted in being fraudulent: some do not deliver the services promised or overcharge for their services. The lack of language proficiency and awareness about the law of the country to seek redress from injustices exposes them to highly exploitative work conditions, particularly if they are irregular and fear being deported (Abdul-Aziz 2001, p.

63). Furthermore, many of these workers are employed in hazardous occupations and often lack health insurance risking that a mistake can leave them injured, unemployed and indebted.

The author also reports on the working conditions of women involved in domestic work, where the live-in conditions and the absence of co-workers make them more vulnerable to exploitation, harassment and sometime sexual abuse (Abdul-Aziz 2001). This description of the working conditions of migrant women involved in domestic work has also been widely confirmed in several other studies (Andall 2000; Anderson 2000, 2001; King and Zontini 2000; Lutz 2002; Zontini 2004). Anderson (2001), for instance, argues that in Europe the increased use of migrant women, often irregular, as live-in domestic workers is an excellent option to lower costs and guarantee flexible services, or more correctly “permanent availability” (Anderson 2001, p. 22) to the family. “Whatever the hours she is supposed to work, in practise it is extremely difficult for her to refuse to ‘help’ when a worker lives on the job” (Anderson 2001, p. 22). This is also a claim made by au pair migrants and live-in farm workers. Furthermore, the isolation given by the domestic walls leaves a large space for insult, sexual abuse and beating, which “are experienced on a daily basis by domestic workers in the EU” (Anderson 2001, p. 24).

The list of empirical studies witnessing these working conditions around the world is not only extensive but it also still continues to grow. What emerges from these cross-sector studies and from my research project data is that, overall, today migrants are increasingly reduced to a status of pure physical life or the Agambenian *bare life* by general governmental policies that aim to include migrants as a labour force in various sectors but to exclude them as political and juridical agents. Migrants live in a ‘state of exception’ that includes them as a *zoè* (physical body) but only in the form of their exclusion from the *bios*, which is the life of the community, on the grounds that this tendency is embodied by employers that use migrant workers as a pure physical force denying them, in the meantime, their employment rights and



protection. This realised the life of the *homo sacer*, a man that is alive biologically but dead politically and juridically and as such can be killed without committing homicide but cannot be sacrificed because he coincides with the essence of the political order itself, or biopolitics, whereby policy is based on the actual making of its “state of exception” (Agamben 1998, p. 9) to state its sovereignty power over human life. This human condition is not only extremely alarming regarding the future perspectives of human and work relations, but today it deprives men and women, fathers and mothers, parents and children (not just workers) of their dignity as human beings with a life worth living.

## 2.8 The need to recognise human dignity in migrant labour relations

Undeniably, the literature regarding the employment of migrants in the international labour market concur to sustain the idea that, in the neo-liberal global era, labour relations have gone through processes of transformation that have lessened the centrality of migrant workers’ rights in favour of employers and/or firms’ cost-benefit calculations. All employment relations are substantially unequal and tend to reinforce employers’ power and interests to the detriment of employees’ rights and needs. However, the vulnerable status of the majority of the migration population around the world has allowed the emergence of a clearer portrait of the drastic consequences of this transformation. The working conditions lived by migrants are extremely revealing regarding the historical moment that we are living and can tell us much more about its most likely future developments.

In the literature, among the most common adjectives used to describe migrants’ working conditions, there are: substandard wages, overtime, permanent availability, flexibility, compliance, informality, tolerance, denigration, powerlessness and precariousness. Although these labour conditions are most visible in the weakest labour group, I wonder if these characteristics apply only for the labour offers available for migrant people,

or is it possible to consider this trend as an expanding observable fact that is actually involving all labour relations around the world and in the great majority of labour sectors? Looking closer, what seems new compared to the past is that precarious works were understood as part of a dual labour market that confined them predominantly in the second segment of the labour market as opposed to the primary labour market characterised by stability and employment protection. Today, instead, insecure works have pervaded all sectors of the economy involving also managerial and professional roles (De Witte 2005).

In line with the suggestions given by Standing (2011) in his book *The Precariat*, millions of people in both affluent and emerging market economies have entered work positions characterised by flexibility and uncertainty. Often, many of those workers do not know who their employer is and how many co-workers they have or will have in the future. But mostly they do not know if their position will be confirmed in the near future. Their salary is usually unstable or unpredictable and they do not have access to benefits or a defined work status (Standing 2011, p. 6). Accordingly, I believe that, following a 'ripple effect', those core features of employment relations under neo-liberal globalism are progressively expanding to all sectors of the labour market disregarding any principle of qualifications, social protection, employment rights and conventions.

Notwithstanding the invaluable contribution of the migration literature in the description of the exploitative working conditions of migrant workers around the world, I found it quite limited in its scope. Scholars have studied the relation between migration and the labour market in all its detail, causes, consequences and characteristics but they often have treated it as a circumscribed phenomenon that applies only to a restricted group of people around the world. While researching this marginalised and exploited group as a distinct part of humanity, academics end up by 'exploiting' the reality from a defined angle to position their research in a distinct debate, journal or research agenda. What I found lacking about the general literature is its

engagement with the struggles of the migrant labour force from an observational and interpretative position, aiming at the description of their reality, and contributing, at the same time, to the marginalisation of the topic to a niche of interest in the academic field.

A second point that I would like to highlight, which is strictly linked to the first one, is the absence in the research of a shared human condition between researcher and researched. It seems as if we research inhabitants of a different planet, therefore subjected to different forces. As if there are no common struggles. My argument is, instead, that we should see the living and working conditions of migrant workers around the world during the neo-liberal global time as an extremely alarming phenomenon of our historical era. We should rather interpret it and engage with it as the most dramatic outcome of a system of exploitation through “abstraction of labour” (Holloway 2002) that has reached its epitome by progressively depriving labour relations of their main character as social relation between individuals and, as such, it has completely deprived workers of their sense of living a dignifying life. This is why this thesis calls for attention in migration studies to forms of recognition of human dignity in labour relations (or lack of it). As strongly suggested by Holloway (2002), in a world where misery and exploitation are intensified on a daily basis, if we do not want to be accomplices to the destruction of human kind through capitalistic relations, we need to start the exploration of radical changes in our work. However, we should first explore the meaning of the word ‘dignity’, since the word that we have inherited has a substantial philosophical and normative background.

## 2.9 The nature(s) of human dignity

First of all, it is important to acknowledge that the understanding of dignity as an inherent value of all human beings has been a central issue through the history of our civilisation (Berger 1970; Bolton 2007; Misztal 2012; Sayer 2007). Through the centuries, dignity has been a powerful inspirational value that has been informed by the speculations of famous philosophers. For the

Greeks, as for the Roman Stoics, it was also a central concept for Aristotle, Pico della Mirandola and for Kant. It is also present in various ancient literal and theological texts of Islamism, Judaism and Christianity alike (Iglesias 2001, as cited in Misztal 2012, p. 102). Additionally, it has been universally recognised as a central normative concept in cornerstone documents, charters and declarations of human civilisations.

In the aftermath of World War II, dignity started to have a normative relevance and was incorporated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights like an inherent human value as stated by the first article: *“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights ...”* and then later in the article 23(3), where the centrality of this right in relation to employment is affirmed: *“Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.”*<sup>14</sup> This statement can be considered as the apogee of the historical evolution of the idea of dignity and its strict connection with the world of employment. Furthermore, as several academics have pointed out, the affirmation of dignity, self-respect and recognition have been, and continue to be, the driving force of several social and political struggles<sup>15</sup> (see Honneth 1995; Thompson 1963) which formally require better material wealth but in reality are calling for a greater acknowledgement of those rights which are foremost human rights (Sennett and Cobb 1973).

Consequently, we should consider that, behind workers’ fights for better pay and work conditions, there are efforts to gain more respect for their dignity

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<sup>14</sup> The Universal declaration of Human rights is available at:  
<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>

<sup>15</sup> E.P. Thompson considered the rise of the Labour Movement itself as an attempt to gain recognition and respect (see Thomson, E.P. (1963) *‘The making of the English working class’*. Harmondsworth: Penguin). Also the eighteenth-century British writer, and philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft based her fight for the change of women’s status on the notion of dignity (see Wollstonecraft, M. (1792) *‘A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects’*. More recently, during the protests that have characterised the Arab Spring in 2011, the calling for a democratic society was based on the claim for dignity and respect.

from their employers through the recognition of their employment rights. However, to do this, a person must enjoy the opportunity to exercise rights, because it is only through rights that he/she can be recognised as a fully autonomous agent (Anderson and Honneth 2005). Therefore, there cannot be dignity without autonomy, and no autonomy without the opportunity to exercise rights. The opportunity to exercise rights, such as citizenship rights, has been shown to be a very critical aspect for the overall living experience of my research participants. The lack of recognition or the exclusion from citizenship rights for some of my non-European migrants, for instance, has been shown to be extremely influential on the opportunity to act as autonomous agent compared to newly European migrant people; from the freedom of movement, the possibility to reunite to their family in the destination country, to the possibility to receive state protection in case of labour exploitation or abuse (see Chapter Six).

All of these aspects are essential for the perception to live a dignifying human existence that is worth living. From this perspective, the concept of 'bare life' developed by Agamben (1998) is extremely pertinent. In the case of undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, and to a certain extent refugees, they are reduced to the status of 'bare life' (zoè) that is the condition of human subjects that are biologically alive but politically and juridically dead. This is the drama in the life of these people. They are constrained to live in a "space of illegality" or "space of non-existence", as "subjects who are neither citizens nor strangers" (Lee 2010, p. 62). As one of the trade unionists interviewed in this study said: "They are beings without being" because they are juridically inexistent. In this condition anything could happen to them and they cannot claim any juridical protections of human rights or citizenship. They cannot exercise rights or have their right respected and protected, as such they are not autonomous people and therefore they cannot claim to be treated with dignity.

In Western culture, the placement of the notion of dignity in the principle of autonomy has its origin on the philosophical speculation of the term offered

by Kant (see Bolton 2007; Hill 1992; Honneth 1995; McCrudden 2008; Misztal 2012; Sandel 2009; Sayer 2007), which is also strictly related to the principles of universal human rights (Sandel 2009). At the core of Kant's conceptualisation there is the belief that nobody should be treated as a means for somebody else's ends, but as an end in himself. In consideration of employment relations, this is a very delicate and controversial point, as dignity of the labour opens to a scenario "with highly unequal consequences" (Sennett 2003, p. 38). In fact, in the employment world people are recruited to fulfil an instrumental role, as a means to an end; therefore, the achievement of fully dignifying working relations is inherently problematic. Therefore, according to Lucas, Kang and Li (2012), "the employment relationship always will be rife with potential indignities" (Lucas *et al.* 2012, p. 3). The concept of dignity is such an abstract term that it does not indicate the practical ways to perform its recognition in a pragmatic and reciprocal way. According to Sennett, the personal construction of mutual respect relies on the individual character, which in turn is built on subjective interpretations of the social context (Sennett 2003). Therefore, the act of recognising others cannot be considered as univocal and presumed but, instead, it remains challenging and ambiguous.

The ambiguity of the term resides in the fact that, despite its classification as an inherent human value and its use as an inspirational notion for the normative foundation of human rights, dignity is still a controversial and highly contested concept. According to Schachter (1983) dignity continues to leave its definition to an "intuitive understanding, conditioned in large measure by cultural factors" (Schachter 1983, p. 107). Following this line of thought, Woodiwiss (2005), while admitting the efficacy of this concept for its prescriptive and morally uncritical function, simultaneously affirms that it still leaves some perplexities regarding its target range: is it about the autonomy of people, their reciprocity or both? (Woodiwiss 2005, p. 147). From its lawful function, instead, Carozza (2008) points out that the indeterminacy of the term 'dignity' can be even detrimental and dangerous to use. Due to its

superficial legitimacy as a universally valid notion, it is highly exposed to possible manipulation (Carozza 2008, as cited in Misztal 2012, p. 108). Also McCrudden (2008), referring to the difference between the concept of dignity as a universal idea and its practical use as a legal interpretation of human rights, claims that dignity is highly context-specific, it differs from one nation to another and can even change over time (McCrudden 2008; see also Misztal 2012).

Sayer (2007) suggests trying to understand the meaning of dignity by appealing to other sentiments and status that support our well-being (Sayer 2007). Sentiments, for instance, such as recognition, pride, respect and worth are positively correlated with dignity, while humiliation, lack of recognition, and being distrusted are usually not (Sayer 2007). Similar exercises have been made by Richard Sennett in the attempt to describe the notion of respect. According to Sennett (2003), there is a pool of synonyms that can help to describe different aspects of 'respect', such as status, honour, dignity, recognition, and so on. This further example helps us to grasp the idea that certain abstract notions such as 'dignity' and 'respect' are extremely difficult to describe univocally because they belong to the personal sphere, but also because they are constructed in the social realm and on the grounds of mutuality. Thus, they are contingent and vulnerable. It seems therefore that an inherent element of dignity is its exposition to factors that can act upon it: enhancing it or eroding it. In fact, a univocal definition of dignity would not be exhaustive as its fundamental nature is mutually constructed.

Interestingly, in his book *The Struggle for Recognition* Alex Honneth (1995) indicates how mutual recognition is the basic element of social relations fostering the individual's self-realisation. Drawing his conceptualisation from the assumptions made by the philosopher Hegel and the socio-psychologist and philosopher Mead, the author believes that, to perform as a fully autonomous and dignified individual, every person needs to develop three modes of "practical relations to one self", namely, self-esteem, self-respect and self-confidence (Anderson and Honneth 2005). Honneth (1995) places at

the core of his reasoning the element of mutuality, which is central in social relations endeavour to the individual's fulfilment. In fact, these three fundamental elements of the self can only be acquired and maintained by granting recognition from people who, in turn, enjoy the benefits of our recognition (Honneth 1995). Along the same lines, Hodson (2001) describes dignity as the ability to set up "a sense of self-worth and self-respect and to appreciate the respect of others" (Hodson 2001, p. 3). According to Sayer, the notion of dignity involves, indeed, the perception of self-respect, which in turn refers to the way the others with whom we regularly interact treat us (Sayer 2007).

From all these perspectives, dignity presents itself in all its vulnerability to external factors and its multiple structures. It seems in fact that it involves three fundamental elements: the personal conception that each individual possess of it; the actions that we put into practice to defend it, improving it, reconstructing it, supporting it in the external social reality. And, finally, to be enhanced in respectful social relationships, it also requires being recognised and confirmed by the personal notion that the others around us possess and the use that they make of it. Accordingly, I think that we should take into consideration at least three types of social relations in the understanding of dignity: the self to the self, the self in relation to others and the others in relation to our 'self'.

Individuals spend a conspicuous part of their life in work places where they socially interact with employers and co-workers and the workplace lends itself as a perfect laboratory of social interactions often structured and organised on unequal power relations. Therefore, the way people live these relations undoubtedly affects the other spheres of their life. As Sayer has pointed out "dignity is crucial for our well-being and has a significant influence on job satisfaction, and for many reasons, it is a risk in many kinds of work" (Sayer 2007, p. 565). In the employment world, the respect of dignity can be strenuously challenged, for instance, through the management of work conditions. Based in studies carried out in Western societies, Hodson



(2001) has identified four key categories that can be very helpful to discern between practices that can contribute to the denial of dignity at work, which are: mismanagement and abuse, overwork, incursions on autonomy, and contradictions of employees' employment (Hodson 2001; see also Lucas *et al.* 2012). These categories can be considered as highly revealing about workplace dignity and I am going to largely refer to them in the empirical section presented in Chapter Seven.

By exploring the social relations at work, we can grasp how recognition and respect for human dignity is a key element for the individual well-being (Bolton 2007; Calhoun 2003; Hodson 2001; Holloway 2002; Sayer 2007). In this regard, I found the analysis of the labour relations between migrant farm labourers in Sicily and their employers as extremely informative. In fact, the perception of having been treated with recognition can make a great difference to the way people interpret their experience at work. However, what is missing today and what I believe is urgent for us to concentrate on is to give a tangible dimension to a concept that has been largely used in the normative and philosophical world but leave a profound and dangerous void regarding its actual meaning in the everyday reality of people, particularly at work.

As Holloway (2002) has suggested, we need to use dignity "not just as the aim of the struggle but as the organisational principle of the struggle" (Holloway 2002, p. 158). We already possess it, we not need to achieve it but rather we need to reinstate its primacy. A society organised around the principle of dignity is a social order based on social practices that foster the mutual recognition of that dignity (Holloway 2002). In this vein, I want to explore the real nature of no dignified labour relations and the importance of concepts of recognition and human dignity in those relations to understand the daily life of refugees and undocumented migrant workers. I decided to undertake this path according to the accounts offered by my research participants regarding their perceptions of the labour relations with their employers in the agricultural sector of Sicily. From the accounts of both refugees and irregular

people, without mentioning the word 'dignity', it is possible to track down that when they lack recognition as human beings at work they experience a clear sensation of not living a dignifying life. And this undoubtedly affects their general living experience as human beings.

These issues are explored in greater detail in Chapters Seven, where the interaction between the access to rights of migrant through their legal status and the general attitudes of employers has allowed the emergence of a picture of lack of recognition for workers' rights and dignity. This theme will be also further developed in the eighth chapter of the thesis, where additional concluding remarks will be added. However, before proceeding any further we need to reintegrate migrant workers in the same humanity of other workers, we need to know who they are and their reasons and aspirations behind their decision to migrate. We need to explore how they have migrated and what resources they have used to enter the labour market in the destination countries. These points are the subjects of Chapters Four and Five, where, through the accounts given by my research participants, it is possible to build a clearer picture of the living trajectory of these working people in relation to the literature and theories covered within this chapter. In the next chapter, instead, I will introduce the methodological approach of this study.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

#### **3. Introduction**

The data presented in this thesis originates from the fieldwork I conducted between January 2012 and September 2012, exploring mainly the living and working experiences of Tunisian and Romanian migrants involved in the agriculture sector of Sicily, Italy. In this chapter, I begin to illustrate and talk about the methodology used to achieve data, how I accessed my research participants and negotiated the informed consent. I also consider the methodological and ethical concerns which arose during the fieldwork. Firstly, I present a chronological explanation about how I came to research this issue.

#### **3.1 Choice of Research Topic**

The motivations for this research project are deeply rooted in my Sicilian origin from which directly derives my profound academic interest for migration issues. When I began my PhD in September 2010, I initially planned to investigate the experience of unauthorised immigrant people crossing the southern sea borders of Europe coming from North Africa, specifically Libya. I was, and still am, extremely interested in the impact of the Italian and European immigration legislation upon the life of people coming through these migration flows; therefore, I planned my empirical focus in Sicily where a conspicuous and heterogeneous migration population lives and continues to arrive.

However, a change of research focus became necessary due to the drastic changes of the political situation in most North African countries. When, at the beginning of 2011, I was on the verge of starting to write my research project in greater detail, the succession of events that passed into the annals of history as the 'Arab Spring' altered completely the landscape of my

research. For weeks, eventful days followed one another involving several North African countries making the reality completely unpredictable and definitely chaotic. The Italian government put in place special programmes in response to the mass refugee immigration arriving from the North African shores. Numerous people previously living in Libya became displaced in the neighbouring countries, many migrants in Europe decided to go back to their countries to support their revolutions, international bodies such as NATO were ready to intervene in the territories involved, and so on.<sup>16</sup> I had in front of me a humanitarian crisis with unpredictable consequences, which is not the most favourable condition upon which to base a three- to four-year research project. The situations continued to deteriorate suggesting that it was not the appropriate time to carry out a research on immigration legislation in a period when Italy was dealing with it in an 'extraordinary' manner. Therefore, with great suffering and long torment and thanks to the strong encouragement and support of my supervisors, I decided to approach a different but related topic which would make my research project more practicable and analysable.

I decided to concentrate my attention on a more stable population of migrants, a community with a relatively long history of settlement and that could tell me more about the living experiences of migrants in the Italian territory. Yet I was still keen to conduct a study in Sicily because it was the reality that I can most relate to in terms of personal experience, contacts and a deep willingness to get closer to the lived experience of migrants in my original region and be able to give voice to them. I was also sure that some of the people that I would meet were migrants that have crossed the Mediterranean Sea in an unauthorised manner.

I began to search out academic works that could speak of migrants in Sicily and I came across a study carried out in various work sectors of Sicily by the Anthropologists Cole and Booth (2007). 'Dirty Work' is not only a superb

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<sup>16</sup> For more information, see Chesterman 2011; Daalder and Stavridis 2012; Pattison 2011.

ethnographic piece but it also represented for me, in that exact moment, a light at the end of the tunnel. By putting the dimension of work at the centre of their investigation of the immigrants' life, Cole and Booth succeeded in gaining information regarding their lived experience, their reasons to migrate, the labour relations, their troubles with legislations, their future perspectives and so on. Essentially, this book showed me the way to give voice to migrants by analysing a common place of experience: the work place. As pointed out by these two authors, virtually every migrant leaves home to achieve or to maintain some economic well-being at home. However, once in the destination country their daily life and future perspectives are shaped by their encounter with the local economies, the types of labour relations, the general stereotypes and so on. After all, it is widely recognised in academic debate that employment is the primary determinants of the situations lived by migrants (Castle and Miller 2009; King 2000; Mingione and Quassoli 2000; Reyneri 2004). Based on the model developed by Portes and Rumbaut (2001a), the book also gave some conceptual considerations regarding the strong influences that government policies and practices and the labour market have on the migrant economic performances (Cole and Booth 2007). This conceptual framework helped me further to build a research project that could investigate both the daily life of migrant workers and the effects on their life made by government practices and local labour market rules. I started to be interested in exploring the effects of the widespread informal economy, typical particularly of Southern Italy, in the life of migrant workers. Informal work arrangements are also something that I have personally experienced while studying for my first degree back in my original country.

Interestingly, while I was researching this topic, I came across a journalistic investigation carried out by an old friend of mine in the same agricultural area where the fieldwork of Cole and Booth was conducted six years earlier. In the book *'Voi li chiamate clandestini'* ('You call them clandestines') by Galesi and Mangano (2010), the migrants' reality described was for certain aspects quite different compared to the one described in 'Dirty Work', suggesting that

something has changed in the field quite significantly. No more predominance of North African agricultural workers but a substantial and escalating presence of Romanian workers. No more male prevalence but a wide presence of Romanian women undertaking the same jobs as men inside greenhouses. A certain degree of alteration was also described on the wage, accommodation and working conditions with direct impact on the living standards of the people described. I contacted my old friend, who confirmed to me that, compared to the reality described in the book by Cole and Booth that she also widely addressed in her journalistic investigation, the reality was different and full of new social dynamics, especially since the significant arrival of Romanian people in the area. I was there, I was looking at that reality and I had an opportunity: exploring a novel reality in an already long-established migrant social setting. I felt deeply enthused and motivated about my new research project, and also extremely relieved as the final deadline for the confirmation of my PhD course was approaching.

### 3.2. Research design: why qualitative methods?

For my empirical work I decided to use an ethnographic approach. Although ethnography is a qualitative method that derives from anthropology, it is frequently and fruitfully used also in sociological studies (Flick 2009). This qualitative approach is invaluable to analyse the real life context of people and usually involves different degrees of participation of the researcher. The most interesting aspect of the use of qualitative research is that it endeavours to scrutinise the meanings that individuals give to social acts, relationships and structures (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Greenhalgh 2006). As superbly highlighted by Denzin and Lincoln (2011a, pp. 4-5):

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible ... They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study

things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Therefore, I felt that its exploratory nature (Bryman 2001; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong 2007) was ideal to investigate the everyday life of my migrant research participants in relation to their migration experience, their family arrangements, their living and working standards, the quality of their labour relations, in comparison to other migrant communities, and so on.

Additionally, some of the migrants in my study that live in a position of irregular immigration status and work in the informal economy can be considered to belong to the category of vulnerable and hidden people, whose experiences can continue to be unknown if not adequate research methods are utilised by those researchers that are interested in gaining a deep understanding of their lived experiences. In this regard, according to Düvell, Triandafyllidou and Vollmer (2008) the juxtaposition of qualitative interviews and participant observation in studies involving irregular migrants helps to produce “highly personal and confidential data” (Düvell *et al.* 2008, p. 3). Several other research participants, with regular permits to stay in the Italian territory, were in any case involved in informal or semi-formal work positions and, as such, quite reticent to take part in studies involving questions regarding their labour relations and work experiences so as to avoid potential repercussions on their work positions. Similarly, employers that were recruiting migrant workers on an informal basis were quite reluctant to be involved in a study concerned with employees’ working and living conditions. Likewise, trade unionists helping irregular migrants to resolve their work troubles (e.g. missed payments) in absence of a regular work contract and/or permit to stay in Italy could be accused by the authorities of sustaining irregular immigration, and as such they were not so keen to take part in a study. Finally, farmers’ trade unionists aware of the presence of irregular migrant workers or informal work agreements between the farmers and their employees were quite unwilling to be researched. Despite the many

difficulties in exploring this hidden and illegal reality, the use of qualitative studies, particularly the one based on observation and interviews, can help to reveal important elements of the research setting. In fact the explanatory nature of qualitative data gives specific descriptions about the research settings, such as in the case of the informal work sector, and therefore they offer “a wealth of contextual information”(Fleming, Roman and Farrell 2000, p. 399).

From a positivistic point of view, the use of qualitative methods presents several limits and raises some technical questions, particularly in consideration of the generalisability of the results and sampling technique. Although these methods can generate *internal validity*, which is the ability to map accurately a phenomenon, they are criticised for their inability to produce *external validity*, that is the possibility to generalise the findings to similar settings and *reliability* or the degree to which the findings can be reproduced (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Fleming *et al.* 2000). These critiques are based on the quantitative assumptions that, to satisfy a certain degree of generalisability, a study needs to be based on the technique of probabilistic sample (Murphy and Dingwall 2003, p. 104). This will give to the study an estimation, within defined margins of error, of the distribution of an occurrence within the reality from which it is drawn. Basically, the aim of this sample technique is the statistical inference of the occurrence so much as to generate a degree of generalisability of the study in comparison to similar settings and from a broad perspective (Hammersley 1992; Murphy and Dingwall 2003; Seale 1999).

Although I am aware of the controversial debate regarding the general relevance of the ethnographic works and the importance of generalisability, in the case of my study a research would not be possible to be undertaken on the basis of official statistics, and the generation of a probabilistic sample would be an arduous, if not impossible venture. Ultimately, numerous migrant workers as well as numerous farms are absent from the official statistics, the first due to their irregular immigration status and the second



because their activity is developed in the underground economy. Furthermore, I do believe that generalisations are possible even in qualitative researches. This can be achieved at the empirical level and it can provide a strong basis to assert the general relevance of the ethnographic studies (Hammersley 1992). By focusing on a small sample to interview or on a small number of settings to observe, qualitative research can tend to reach a degree of generalisability by finding similarities and contrasts in the particularity and singularity of people, institutions, situations and settings. This means that analogous patterns can be found in similar qualitative research settings, with which it is possible to draw a parallelism at least for certain aspects of the study. In fact, qualitative studies of individual cases can find their strength in their 'naturalism' or 'ecological validity' (Lincoln and Guba 1985, as cited in Seale 1999, p. 108). Naturalistic inquiry can potentially be effective when full details of the research context are given and, as a consequence, the research can achieve a degree of 'transferability' to similar contexts (Seale 1999). For example, I found that my research study shares similar methodological and empirical patterns with the qualitative study carried out by Hartman (2008) regarding the informal Romanian labour force employed in the Spanish agricultural area. Although there are more differences than similarities between the two studies, it is possible to draw a parallelism at least for certain findings, such as the migration strategies followed by Romanian people, the labour recruitment techniques used by some farm employers, Romanian family arrangements, and so on. Therefore, in my opinion, through qualitative research methods it is possible to achieve specific information regarding a research setting that can be informative for other studies that apply similar methods in similar sceneries and, as a consequence, achieve a degree of ecological or naturalistic validity. However, it is left to the common sense of the reader whether or not the findings are relevant to his/her case study (Seale 1999).

My research study carries the limitations and strengths derived from the type of research methods and approach that have been in use, that is the case

study. As Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) have clearly pointed out, there are several limitations in the use of the case study; among them there is an issue with the large amount of data that is collected, which makes the analysis not easy to carry out. It also tends to examine complex reality, which is difficult to be represented simply. Furthermore, case studies do not lend themselves to numerical representation and therefore can be accused of lack of 'conventional' generalisability. However, as I have clarified above, qualitative researches as case studies tend to reach a degree of generalisability by finding similarities and contrasts in the particularity and singularity of people, institutions, situations and settings. This means that analogous patterns can be found in similar qualitative research settings with which it is possible to draw a parallelism at least for certain aspects of the study. In fact, qualitative studies of individual cases can find their strength in their "naturalism" or "ecological validity" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, as cited in Seale 1999, p. 108). Naturalistic inquiry can potentially be effective when full details of the research context are given and, as a consequence, the research can achieve a degree of "transferability" to similar contexts (Seale 1999). Usually, strong case studies tend to be the ones where researcher expertise and intuition are maximised; however, in the meantime this raises doubts about his/her 'objectivity'. Finally, case studies are unable to answer a vast number of questions, even when pertinent. And they can be easily dismissed by readers that do not agree or like the messages that they carry.

On the other hand, as described by Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001), a case study carries some strengths that are fundamental when the researcher is interested in better understanding the 'lived reality' of people. It is also suitable to understand 'complex inter-relationships' as in the case of my migrant worker research participants, their employers and the informal labour market examined in this study. As already mentioned, the case study is a supportive tool that facilitates the exploration of the unexpected and unusual, and facilitates the development of rich conceptual/theoretical development. Furthermore, it is possible to illustrate the processes involved

in causal relationships, as in the case of the reasons behind the ‘success’ of the Romanians as farm workers in my research area.

During my research study, other academic works on the migrant labour force have been highly inspirational for me. However, compared, for instance, to the mixed methods study on migrant agricultural labour in rural Greece by Kasimis, Papadopoulos and Zacoboulou 2003, my qualitative research approach is in strong contrast to it. Kasimis *et al.*’s 2003 study, based on semi-structured interviews and a survey questionnaire, in fact, takes off from some already made assumptions and as such it aims to test some hypotheses (Kasimis *et al.* 2003, p. 170) rather than create a theory, as strongly suggested by Esterberg (2002). Actually, my general attitude to my research has been quite inductive and has aimed to find out aspects of the reality around me rather than to prove already made assumptions. In line with Ambert, Adler, Adler and Detzner (1995), I tried to discover more than to verify (Ambert *et al.* 1995; Wykes 2013). However, despite my approach to the research project being driven by a sincere inclination to proceed in an inductive manner, as Hammersley (1992) has pointed out, no project can be entirely inductive or deductive (Hammersley 1992, p. 168). This is mostly due to the fact that the researcher is always moving from ‘data’ to ‘ideas’ and vice versa, and that both aspects are equally necessary (Hammersley 1992, p. 168). A study that truly motivated my research methods was the anthropological fieldwork carried out by Però (2008) based on ethnographic observations and interviews regarding the political engagement of Latin Americans settled in London. The writer’s ethnography is based on the idea that migrants should have a say about their experience in the receiving society (Però 2008, p. 73). From this standing point it is possible to address a “people centred” (Però 2008, p. 76) discourse, an approach that recognises migrants’ agency and subjectivity. This approach was extremely stimulating for my intention to give migrants’ opinions on their lived experience a central importance.

Finally, for what concerns the theoretical inferences for the legitimisation of the ethnographic work, I do believe that knowledge is a developing process

and it goes hand in hand with the empirical work. As a consequence, in line with Seale (1999), I do believe that all research generalisations are ultimately ‘empirical’ and, as such, they are systematically testable for our personal research only with further empirical information. In other words, we cannot establish *a priori* if a research finding is transferable to our research without first accomplishing it.

### 3.3 Uncovering a hidden reality

Driven by the willingness to give voice to migrants regarding their living and working experiences, I conducted thirty semi-structured interviews with migrant farm workers: twelve Romanians (six men and six women); fourteen Tunisians (twelve men and two women), two Algerian men and two asylum seekers (one Pakistani man and one Somali man). Furthermore, my data collection through this approach has also involved information regarding the accounts and perspectives held by other important actors involved in the study setting (Dingwall 1992, as cited in Murphy and Dingwall 2003, p. 170). Therefore, another ten accounts have been collected through semi-structured interviews to explore the perceptions of farm employers, their opinions and justifications regarding informal employment arrangements, and so on. An additional ten semi-structured interviews have been gathered to understand the opinion of trade unionists (eight workers’ trade unionists and two employers’ representatives) dealing with such informal employment reality. This choice sustained me to amplify and enrich my general knowledge of the study setting and supported my attempt to reach a *fair dealing* within all my participants (Murphy and Dingwall 2003). I made this choice also because I thought to avoid forms of *partisanship* on behalf of migrant agricultural workers, an intention that later, as I am going to explain in the next section, resulted in being unattainable. At the same time, I carried out a period of observation in two different settings: at the mobile clinic of EMERGENCY NGO<sup>17</sup> where migrants (and sometime Italians) were receiving

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<sup>17</sup>EMERGENCY is a well establish Italian NGO that operates nationally and internationally, delivering medical care to populations of people who are victims of poverty and war.

medical assistance; and at the immigration office of one of the main trade unions in the city of Vittoria. In each setting I have identified some “key informants” (Agar 1980), two at the union and one at the mobile clinic, that I have interviewed on an ongoing basis and took notes while observing and questioning them (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). I selected these key informants for both their knowledge and their role in the setting, and for their guidance and support for my research.

Furthermore, to facilitate the comprehension of the data into their economical, organisational and social context, the research has involved background interviews with relevant representatives of non-governmental organisations, as well as the opinions of academics, journalists, doctors, politicians, and priests who have been engaged at various levels with issues regarding migrant agricultural workers in their field of expertise. However, all those qualitative accounts were not taken as facts or unquestionable truths, but as research participants’ significant interpretations of their own experience (May 2001).

Nevertheless, I am aware that there are several processes that are merely indistinguishable to the researcher particularly during participant observation as ‘the researcher is invariably constrained in his or her interactions and observation to a fairly restricted range of people, incidents and localities’ (Bryman 2001, p. 331). Another limitation that can be ascribed to the ethnographic type of work is the easy blurring boundary between explanation and description. As pointed out by Hammersley (1999), often ethnographic description tends to attribute purposes to natural process and as such can become “vehicles for ideology” (Hammersley 1999, as cited in Bryman and Burgess 1999, p. 61). This is particularly important for studies that are informed by a substantial body of existing theory, as in the case of this doctoral thesis.

### 3.4 A constructionist paradigm: relativist ontology

From this perspective, my ontological position during my research has taken a constructionist standpoint, a position that is usually academically framed as in opposition to objectivism (Bryman 2004; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Silverman 1993) or between subjectivism and objectivism (Crotty 2003). In opposition to subjectivism, constructionism retains that there are objects in the world within which to find (shared) meanings. In opposition to objectivism, instead, constructionism holds that there are not universal truths to be found (Crotty 2003). For constructionists, in fact, social occurrences are not isolated and observable facts on their own, as their happening and the ways in which they are interpreted are continually undertaken by individuals (Bryman 2004; Silverman 1993). Furthermore, for constructivist theorists there is not a single reality but multiple realities (Denzin and Lincoln 2011a).

From this perspective, the research setting cannot be isolated and observed in a unbiased environment but still very much as a social occurrence and, as such, it still has the same connotations of any relational encounter. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) have pointed out that even the accounts collected during fieldwork “are not simply representations of the world; they are part of the world they describe” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983, as cited in Silverman 2004, p. 95), which means that, during the research setting, respondents were still actively involved in constructing meanings (Holstein and Gubrium 1997, as cited in Silverman 2004, p. 95). The same cognitive dimension is also shared by the interviewer that finds himself/herself immersed in the same ‘constructing relation’ with the reality. I believe that we do not only experience life but we also continually process and elaborate what happens to us and we create a meaning out of it. Furthermore, our social ‘being in relation’ to reality never stops to exist, not even if we are involved in a research setting. Actually, during an interview, for instance, we interpret our occurrences according to our individual and already constructed framework of understanding based on previous experiences (Esterberg 2002; Crotty 2003) and we report them accordingly with our perception of the

present situation/people. This is why, as pointed out by Crotty (2003), objectivity is not essentially attainable within social research (Crotty 2003) and the focus of social research should be the meanings that people continually confer to social relationships and to objects (Esterberg 2002).

One of the consequences of this approach is that constructionists have been criticised for their '*narrowness*' (Silverman 2004, p. 97) as they seems to focus on the 'conversational skills' of the interviews rather than on the content of their claim and on their relationship with the surrounding world. However, constructionists, such as Holstein and Gubrium (1997) retain that the premise of any interview is that any respondent is going to report on both dimensions called by the authors: the '*how*' and the '*what*' (Holstein and Gubrium 1997, as cited in Silverman 2004, p. 98). In fact, in constructionism, interview respondents are not only considered as people that can offer extensive thoughts and feelings regarding our subject of the study but also as people simultaneously aware of their role in the interaction with the person that is questioning them.

A similar standpoint is also shared by the researcher. In other words, I perceived, for instance, my migrant worker research participants not only as informed witnesses of their reality, but also as persons consciously active in reporting their reconstruction of it to a researcher, during that event and in that moment. They never stopped being who they are. They probably have selected their contents and have emphasised certain aspects of their accounts according to the perceptions that they had of me, the situation and the questions. Ultimately, I interviewed people, not just migrants; fathers and mothers, not just workers; women and men, not just an irregular labour force. Their social identities obviously exist in many interactional contexts external to the interview settings, but they are all present in the moment of the interview. This means that their informational standpoints were offered throughout the development of the interview relations and NOT as a preconceived set of information. This is what Holstein and Gubrium define as an 'active interview' (Holstein and Gubrium 1997; see also Silverman 1993;

2004) or a constructed narrative engaging activities that should be analysed as well. Therefore, this approach helps to study the skills used on both sides, interviewer and interviewee, while they are engaged in this process of constructing information based on shared common-sense knowledge (Silverman 2004). Consequently, the information gathered has to be seen as highly contextualised interpretations, inserted in a specific space-time frame, and reported by going along a process of reinterpretation of the self in the past and in the present situation as a research respondent. This also involves that information being open to re-interpretation and negotiation during conversation.

At the same time, for that which concerns the role of the research, I have aspired to put into practice the idea of the *researcher-as-bricoleur* (Guba 1990, as cited in Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 99). This is a concept largely developed in the qualitative research literature but it has been originally 'borrowed' from the poetical idea of Charles Baudelaire, reinterpreted by the sociologist Simmel (Denzin and Lincoln 2011a; for a deeper understanding of the term, see also Weinstein and Weinstein 1991, as quoted in Denzin and Lincoln 2011b). There are several types of *researcher-as-bricoleur*, such as interpretative, narrative, political and theoretical (Denzin and Lincoln 2011a, p. 4). What can be considered in common between those figures is that, for the *qualitative-researcher-as-bricoleur*, the interpretative practice that will be employed is not necessarily set in advance and that the researcher will use any tool and technique available for his/her trade, or invent them if necessary (Becker 1998, p. 2). For what concerns the interpretative bricoleur, that is the type more congenial to my experience of research, is that centrality is given to what is available in the context. This means that the research questions can change as a consequence of the context and what the researcher can do in the setting is not absolutely predictable all the time (Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg 1992, p. 2). The interpretive bricoleur sees the research as an ongoing interactive process shaped by the personal biography, social class, ethnicity, and 'race' of both the researcher and the participants (Denzin and



Lincoln 2011a). The result of the research work will be the *bricolage*, that is an assembled set of representations that are an integral part of the specificity of an intricate situation (Denzin and Lincoln 2011a). As pointed out by Weinstein and Weinstein (1991) “the result of the bricoleur’s method is an [emergent] construction” (Weinstein and Weinstein 1991, as quoted in Denzin and Lincoln 2011b, p. 4). Finally, the result of the research work will be a dense, intricate, reflexive representation of the researcher’s understandings and interpretations of the phenomenon under study. In his/her *bricolage* the researcher will try to unite the parts to the whole and highlight the momentous relationships in operation in the social world studied (Denzin and Lincoln 2011a).

My ontological position is mostly visible throughout this thesis, particularly in the use of certain terminology central in my study, such as irregular migrant, exploitation, dignity, transnationalism, meso-level, social capital, and so on, all of them sociologically constructed and meaningful. In this thesis, I have attempted to critically engage with the constructed nature of all these concepts, trying to always show to the reader my standpoint. Furthermore, I have not treated the accounts given by my research participants as incontrovertible truths, but as interpretations of their own experiences (May 2001). Essentially, I have tried to analyse them in relation to each other and theorise them in relation to my own understanding of “socio-cultural context and structural conditions” (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 85). From this perspective, my constructionist ontology has a close connection with my subjectivist epistemological approach.

### 3.5 Subjectivist epistemology

My epistemological position has been subjectivist and has aimed to see in the interview setting “a site of knowledge construction” (Mason 2002, p. 227; see also Denzin and Lincoln 2011a) between the two main actors, the interviewee and the researcher. As suggested by Mason (2002), I believe that, through interviews, it is possible to begin a process of meaningful knowledge

construction as a result of the cooperation between the interviewee and the interviewer (Mason 2002). The premise of the subjective epistemology is that we are a whole with what we know and we cannot be separated from how we know the reality. As a consequence, our relationship with our self, the world and the others exists in this correspondence between our being and our object of knowledge. Particularly during the configuration of the interviews that I have used, I paid attention to my role as co-participant in the process of creating knowledge. However, the priority of my study was still centred on the idea that the predominance was supposed to be left to the voice of my research participants. Therefore, I decided to adopt a semi-structured type of interview with the intent to not be too intrusive during the process, and leave the questions open enough to elicit narrations regarding relevant individual practices and experiences of their work-life and social world. I was conscious, however, about the impact of my personal views and feelings, not only on the type of questions that I asked but also on the way I was driving the general interview setting. These aspects became quite discernible for me during the entire fieldwork because I interviewed different groups of people and I could regularly perceive the differences in my feelings regarding their opinions, their stories, their explanations and so on. The more I was interviewing my participants, the more my standpoints became clear towards the entire matter.

A striking example was the interview that I had with one of the farmers' representatives. This person was clearly denying the existence of the black market by defining it as "only marginal." He also had a very strong opinion regarding the need to stop family allowance and unemployment compensation for farm workers and give the amount to the farmers in need. During the entire interview, which lasted about 90 minutes, the trade unionist inveighed against the policies that were financially supporting agricultural workers and their families, and my feelings of frustration and irritation were growing. In that precise period of time, I realised how clear-cut were my theoretical standpoints and how strong were my opinions regarding

certain aspects of the study concerned with the migrant labour force. After the first 45 minutes of the interview it started to become clear that my respondent and I had antithetic positions regarding the topic. Rather than kindly asking, patiently listening, thoughtfully interpreting, I started to challenge the opinions of my research participant with questions aimed to contradict his statements. The more the interview proceeded, the more I was failing any attempt to hold back my opinions. Rather than a sociological interview, it gradually became a strongly biased argument on both sides. To re-establish a productive interview setting, I decided to take a quick break from the interview setting. I stopped the recording, I apologised regarding the way I was conducting the interview and pointed out that my personal opinions should be not so permeable. I justified my conduct by emphasising my passion for the subject of my study and we joked about it. I drove the conversation towards futile matters, such as a pack of pasta that was on the office table, which was a product sponsored by the union as a result of a campaign for cooperation between farms. In this way I tried to relax the atmosphere, and then I tried to restart the interview by asking if I could pose the last question. However, when I switched on the recording to continue with my questions, I could feel that we were both trying to find more accommodating and dispassionate positions, but were manifestly contrived. Although, I define my performance during this interview as lacking in producing a site of 'constructive' knowledge, in the meantime it has brutally highlighted my clear *partisanship* (Hammersley 2000) on behalf of farm workers and my '*theoretical project*' (Mason 2002, p. 225). In fact, asking, listening and interpreting are all fundamental parts of the theoretical project that stand behind the research study. This mean that *how* the researcher asks the questions, *what* type of knowledge he/she hears the answers to be, and *what* it is assumed to be possible to achieve by asking and listening, are all techniques to express and pursue the theoretical orientation of the research project (Mason 2002, p. 225).

When I finished collecting all my data and started to analyse them in greater detail, I realised that I had far too many realities that I could talk about. My research could have been taken from so many possible angles. As Haraway (1988) has suggested, knowledge is not always rounded as a whole but we can gain from the fragments that we are able to glimpse or from the angle that we are able to scrutinise them from (Haraway 1988). I eventually decided to continue with my initial perspective and take the side of the migrant agricultural workers, to talk about them and their reconstruction of their lived experience. However, this was not a straightforward decision. I had to look at myself and choose for whom I was standing. I eventually decided this was not only because migration is the topic that I am most interested in since the beginning of this doctoral experience and even before it; nor because there was no valid truth in the perspectives given by the Sicilian farmers and their troubles; nor because I was lacking interest in the work and accounts given me by the trade unionists interviewed. I chose to take this perspective because, as the Secretary of one of the major workers' trade unions superbly said, "only if we start from the very last people we can make sure that even the others can have improvements in their life" (The Secretary, during an informal conversation).

In line with the Weberian position of Hammersley (2000), I do believe that the main goal of research should be the 'pursuit of knowledge' (Hammersley 2000, p. 11) and therefore research should be neutral in respect to other values and interests. However, I do also believe that truth is a crucial value of any social research, although everybody has got their own valuable truth, which is worthy of consideration. In my case, although I had already some general assumptions about my research study, it was during the fieldwork and the writing process that I understood which one of the truths was striking a special cord. Hence, I believe that partisanship should be lived more as a process that needs to be confirmed through a reflexive research practice more than a starting position. Therefore, I suggest a form of 'informed

partisanship' that will undoubtedly reflect the researcher's own vision of truth to which he/she decides to commit.

I realised that impartiality is desirable but hard to achieve and that, as Hammersley (1992) has argued, "we can never entirely escape our own assumptions about the world" (Hammersley 1992, p. 169) and that those "assumptions have not been independently tested" and will influence the entire research work (Hammersley 2000, p. 2). Actually, in "taking sides in social research" Hammersley (2000) rejects the idea of a "values free" research and supports the idea that partisanship should be taken for granted and made clear in all researches (Hammersley 2000, p. 4). Furthermore, according to Hammersley (2000), partisanship finds its own justification if it is committed to serve social transformation, equality, democracy and social justice (Hammersley 2000, p. 4). Therefore, social researches should not only be limited to saying how and why things are but they should aim to highlight what is wrong in the reality and what must be done to remedy it.

Although in this thesis I am not aiming to formulate any social policy, I have attempted to give my honest co-constructed interpretation of the reality lived by the migrant agricultural labour force that took part in my study. I have highlighted some of the aspects that I feel can contribute to understanding their daily life and suggested paying attention and revitalising the debate around one of the central themes that can be considered of universal importance for all workers, their dignity (see Chapter Six). I am not claiming that this thesis is representative or generalisable, but I do believe that the voices of my research participants are worthy of consideration and that the findings of this study can contribute to improve our knowledge. Finally, in the next section, I am going to give more information regarding the third part of the paradigm that I have engaged with in this study, my methodology.

### 3.6 Naturalistic methodology: sampling, methods of data collection and access

To achieve a degree of 'transferability' to similar contexts (Seale 1999), a naturalistic inquiry needs full details of the research context. As already mentioned, my project is based on 50 semi-structured interviews with migrant farm workers, farm employers and trade unionists, representative for both categories. All the interviews have been carried out in Italian, apart from two interviews with irregular Tunisian migrants who could not speak Italian. In one case the interview was carried out in English, which was the second language spoken by both of us; in the second case, I was helped by one of the EMERGENCY workers in the translation from Arabic to Italian and vice versa. All the interviews had been translated into English at the time of transcribing. The data have been collected in four neighbouring locations: Vittoria, Santa Croce Camerina, Scoglitti e Macconi. In all locations and for all the categories of research participants, I sourced my participants through the non-probability snowball/opportunity sample method (Silverman 2010). This choice was made purely for practical reasons and was seen as a pragmatic compromise between breadth and depth (Murphy and Dingwall 2003, p. 105). I used the snowball sample method because of the hidden character of the populations under study (Pope, van Royen and Baker 2002) and the delicate nature of the topic (Murphy and Dingwall 2003). Ultimately, also because, in the exploratory nature of qualitative research, sampling is often an ongoing process and has to be flexible enough to also adapt to unpredictable events (Bryman 2001; Murphy and Dingwall 2003).

All interviews were face to face, and they were conducted in different places around the research area. These included a private room at the trade union office, by the EMERGENCY coach in public places, in bars, in my car and so on. Only on two occasions did I go to the homes of people and then only because they were women recommended by friends and they were living in city centres. In any case, my partner was aware of where I was, whom I was with and how long the interview was supposed to last on average. The only issues

that I encountered during the interviews in public spaces were the background noises that sometimes obscured some words (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006; Wykes 2013). Particularly in the case of the interviews carried out in the surroundings of the EMERGENCY mobile clinic, I found that the coach's power generator was extremely noisy, even at a distance. The positive aspect was that perhaps nobody else could hear the interview, contributing to protecting the anonymity of my respondent. Ultimately, as Hatch (2002) has highlighted, interview location choice is often the result of chance and practicality even when the venues appear inadequate for an interview for their lack of privacy or because they are noisy. However, I do believe that my interviews were successful because I managed to collect some interesting data. Furthermore, the fact that several respondents (of all of the three categories) lined up further interviews for me suggests that they felt secure and comfortable during the interview process (Wykes 2013).

I have further integrated my interview data collection with a period of observation in two different settings: the immigration office of one of the major trade unions in the city of Vittoria and at the 'mobile' clinic of the Italian NGO EMERGENCY. These two settings have been central for my study, not only for their enlightening information during the observational period but also for their implications for my sampling 'tentative map' concerning the distribution of the phenomenon under study (Blanken, Hendricks and Adriaans 1992). In fact, professionals working with the hidden population concerned can greatly contribute in the construction of a 'tentative map' to judge its representativeness (Blanken *et al.* 1992; Faugier and Sargeant 1997). As Berg (1988) indicates, when lacking a defined sampling frame covering the population under study, insiders' knowledge is often required to locate people for study and to start referral chains (Berg 1988, as cited in Faugier and Sargeant 1997, p. 793). Furthermore, those two settings had a strategic role for meeting migrant research participants and gave me the opportunity to approach them from a more 'trustable' position.

However, only in the case of the workers' trade union was there an agreement on a sort of form of collaboration before the beginning of the fieldwork, while in the case of EMERGENCY it emerged during the course of the research. Before I left England to start my fieldwork in Sicily, I made two kinds of agreements. The first was involving regular visits to one of the main immigration offices of the city of Vittoria, and the second one was to regularly visit and freely collaborate with a local church largely involved in various services for refugees and asylum seekers (such as a daily canteen, accommodation and professional courses for refugees). After I arrived in the area, I managed to negotiate a period of observation at the trade union office and a period of volunteer work as a waitress at the church's canteen. Ultimately, I had to adapt my presence in these two places according to the nature of the services offered by them to the migrant population. In fact, in the first case, I was subtly invited to make my presence as neutral as possible so as to not interfere with the extremely busy daily life of the office dealing with people in need of official documents, legal assistance and bureaucratic information. In the second case, I was enthusiastically asked to come round and help in the extremely busy canteen dealing with roughly 100 hungry people at dinner time. And so I did.

### 3.6.1 Interviewing migrant agricultural workers

In spite of my hectic daily routine, for the first few months I found it very difficult to interview migrant workers. Both at the trade union as well as at the church canteen my interaction with migrant workers was extremely limited, notwithstanding their conspicuous number. In the first place, I was allowed to interact with the migrant users of the office but to be extremely careful to not discourage anyone to ask for help. This recommendation was given particularly in regard of irregular migrants that could be already concerned about asking for help and information at a legal institution. Consequently, at the beginning, I was feeling particularly constrained in my 'recruitment activity' of research participants around the trade union office and I was dedicating the majority of the time to observation 'mode'.



Another limitation that I encountered at the trade union office was that the great majority of the conversations were unexpectedly carried out fully in Arabic. In fact, due to the long-lasting and extensive presence of the Tunisian community in this area, the immigration offices of the main trade unions started to employ Arabic native speaker employees. As a consequence, Arabic became the language mostly spoken at the immigration office. This habit was definitely helping the Arabic users to fully understand the complex bureaucratic procedures, and it also would confer a certain degree of reassurance to irregular migrants when asking for help and information. However, stepping in the immigration office of this trade union was like entering an office of an Arabic country. Initially, this unexpected situation reduced my proficiency in that place and I had to concentrate part of my observation only to the non-verbal language. However, the Arabic speaking employee was one of my key informants, so I was questioning him regularly and I have to acknowledge that he was always very keen to help me. Furthermore, as the time passed by, the majority of the users became familiar with my presence and I eventually managed to interview some Tunisian migrant farm workers. This happened only after a very long period of friendship and collaboration with my Arabic speaking key informant who also eventually decided to facilitate my approach to these migrants. In the end, I was even allowed to use a small separate room to conduct some of my interviews in privacy and discretion.

At the canteen, instead, I was supposed to serve food in the hall where approximately 100 migrant people get served every day. However, my role was already taken by a rather arrogant young man that grew up in the centre and had been paid to work as a waiter since his adolescence. I ended up by helping the two super busy cooks inside the kitchen; by the time I had finished helping them, the majority of people had already left the large hall without even noticing my presence in that place. As a consequence, after approximately two months I realised that working as a kitchen assistant was not giving me the chance to get in touch with the users of the service. Thus, I

decided to drop this activity and look for a different and more fruitful strategy; a decision that will be revealed as extremely productive. However, before I left the place, I managed to make a very fertile contact with the manager of the professional courses organised for the refugee people living in the area. I had the chance to introduce my research project during the recreation time of a professional course regarding packaging of agricultural products and I managed to interview two asylum seekers and two refugee people, all of them with experience as informal workers in the surrounding agricultural sector.

In the meantime I was looking for a more prolific and cost-effective alternative. Coincidentally, an extraordinary non-governmental organisation, EMERGENCY, was running a specific project dispensing medical assistance to the migrant population disseminated in the countryside area. Thanks again to the friends that I was living with, I managed to enter into contact with the representative of this NGO in Vittoria, Mr Pitti. I was introduced to the team and I had to send a request to the headquarters of the organisation based in Milan. With great surprise, my presence was accepted on board and around the mobile clinic, so from the day after I started to take the coach to its daily placements. This was an extraordinary opportunity for my research, especially because it helped me to access migrant workers living in remote areas of the countryside that would have been potentially risky for a lonely and unreferenced woman. I particularly had the chance to involve in my research some of my Romanian research participants that were living on a farm and that rarely visited city centres and towns. The collaboration with the team of EMERGENCY gave me also the opportunity to approach these workers from a more 'trustworthy' position and gain lot of information regarding this population of invisible workers.

Although I always made clear my separateness from the team of EMERGENCY by presenting my project to any potential research participant, it is undeniable that the alliance with the team facilitated the attainment of the consent to participate in my study. This point is also valid for my relationship

with the immigration office of the trade union that I collaborated with. I believe that the acceptance of my presence around these recognised and helpful institutions greatly impacted the inclination of migrant workers to take part in my study. However, due to the complexity of this hidden reality and the severe consequences on the life of these people if, for instance, I would have failed to protect their confidentiality and anonymity, I am convinced that it would be harder to find irregular migrants and workers employed on an informal basis willing to be researched by an Italian (see ethical considerations). Finally, I recruited some other Romanian participants by shopping regularly in a countryside grocery used also as a meeting place for several Romanian people. This place was very safe as it was located next to a main road and it was very close to my accommodation.

### 3.6.2 Interviewing farm employers

Before the beginning of my fieldwork, I thought that 'recruiting' migrant workers and trade unionists willing to take part in my interviews would be comparatively easier than finding farmers willing to take part in a study mostly concerned with informal employment and farm employees' living and working conditions. This was a prediction that, in my case, could not have been proved more wrong. In fact, during the first few weeks of my fieldwork, several farmers were striking on roads against governmental policies and the general financial crisis. I could not miss this upcoming opportunity and its potentiality to open up for me some fruitful connections. Ultimately, in qualitative research, sample selection is sometimes referred to as "the art of the possible" (Murphy and Dingwall 2003, p. 106) and pragmatism is highly relevant in the sampling decision. Furthermore, qualitative research is the perfect strategy to undertake this type of opportunity because its flexibility allows more possibilities for questioning a particular issue when (and if) the opportunity occurs (Bryman 2001, p. 267). The flexibility of these methods is indeed particularly important when using non-probability sampling and when opportunism is one of the few possibilities available for the researcher, especially during the first exploratory phases (Murphy and Dingwall 2003, p.

105). However, pragmatism needs also to be combined with the principles guiding the goals and priorities of the study (Murphy and Dingwall 2003).

During my preliminary researches for the preparation of my upgrade panel document, the information regarding the agricultural sector of Sicily was suggesting the production process and the entire agricultural supply chain be divided into two major types of agriculture:

- A preponderant 'traditional' agriculture accounting for 87.5% of farms, which carries out a mass production planned for regional and national markets. Characteristically the productive structure involves individual agricultural farms. This agriculture is typical (but not exclusive) of small to medium farms<sup>18</sup> and adopts high-tech strategies for the production and the protection of products, but does not extend this to the concluding phase of production, such as packaging (Bacarella 2010).
- A more 'modern' agriculture which account for roughly 12.5% of farms. It is marketing-orientated, involving the whole production chain (including packaging), often certified. Its productive structure is typical of medium to large farms and can be individual, associated and corporate, usually run by professional managers and/or young entrepreneurs (Bacarella 2010).

Furthermore, according to Nerozzi (2011), the Sicilian agricultural sector absorbs the highest percentage (21.1%) of migrants living in the region. In particular, the province of Ragusa (where the study was based) has the highest percentage of foreigners when compared to the total population (5.2%), the majority of whom are employed in the agricultural sector (Nerozzi 2011). Thus, the chance to find 'traditional' and 'modern' farmers employing migrant workers was extremely high. As a consequence, the selection of the

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<sup>18</sup> The division of farms into small, medium and large is based mostly on the hectares covered by the factory farm. Usually farms with less than 20 hectares are considered small. Farms covering between 20 and 100 hectares are considered medium. Large farms are, instead, the ones that cover more than 100 hectares. For more information visit the INEA 2011 report available at:  
[http://www.inea.it/documents/10179/56536/Annuario\\_Agricoltura\\_Italiana\\_2011.pdf](http://www.inea.it/documents/10179/56536/Annuario_Agricoltura_Italiana_2011.pdf)

farmers' sample was aimed to have a perspective from at least two groups of farmers: the owners of small to medium farms following a more 'traditional' type of agriculture, and the owners or managers of more 'modern' types of farm, both having in common the presence of migrant workers as employees. In the end, I found that it was more useful to divide farmers into three categories rather than two – small, medium and large – as I found substantial differences in the employment of the labour force, in the recruitment practices of migrant workers, the choice of workers based on their immigration status, and their consequent labour relations (see Chapter Five).

To reach these farmers at the beginning of my fieldwork, I started to travel long distances every day to go to the main countryside roads where farmers were standing blocking the traffic. Not too surprisingly, the people that I found striking on roads were mostly owners of small and medium farms conducting a more 'traditional' type of agriculture. Those people are the ones suffering most because of the general financial crisis and its repercussions on the agricultural sector. I was listening to them, asking questions, taking pictures of their slogans, taking notes of their claims and trying to intercept potential research participants. One of the major issues that I met during these days was that I had to repeat endless times that I was a researcher and not a journalist. For days, these unprecedented events were in fact facing the deafness of the media and political institutions and I was one of the first 'outsiders' that instead rushed to those places to give an ear to the claims of those people. The connections that I made during those days will be revealed as extremely useful to open up to me access to farmers' public evening meetings, farmers' trade unionists, political conferences, leaders of the farmers' movement and even a free day trip to go and protest with them to the Sicilian capital city, Palermo.

For approximately 20 days, I spent a few hours in the morning at the margins of a road, talking and listening to farmers' reasons for striking; then I drove back to the city to be on time to help in the kitchen at the church's canteen and then straight to the immigration office for the afternoon session. A daily

activity that was quite costly in energy, money, time and involving a few rapid clothes changes to best adapt myself to the surrounding environment. Ultimately, as pointed out by Murphy and Dingwall (2003), qualitative research is “irreducibly labour intensive and inevitably time consuming” (Murphy and Dingwall 2003, p. 105). Finally, a remarkable source of access to farmers, agronomists, politicians and people expert at various levels in the agricultural sector of this area was the web of connections that I made through friends (Silverman 2010), especially my housemates Margaret and Giombattista. A fantastic, overly-generous couple in their thirties, happy to introduce me to all their networks of friends, acquaintances, events and useful information regarding their countryside living. Actually, the first (and one of the longest) interview of my fieldwork was involving a (‘modern’) farmer friend of this couple and it took place in our living room just before dinner.

Overall, while the time was passing by and my connections were getting more ramified through a snowball sampling technique, I managed to interview ten farmer employers: four small ‘traditional’ farmers, three ‘medium’ traditional farmers and three ‘modern’ large farmers.

### 3.6.3 Interviewing trade unionists and farmers’ representatives

Concerning the interviews with workers’ trade unionists, I had to wait months and I had to show all my resolution and commitment to the matter before my key informants found a break in their extremely demanding daily routine and gave me the chance to interview them. I was observing them working and I was questioning them on a regular basis, but I knew that I could obtain even more accurate information by interviewing them. In one case, I interviewed the same trade unionist three times on three different days by taking advantage of unexpected moments of calm inside the office. In the end, though, my protracted waiting period was highly rewarded by extensive interviews and extra contacts with other trade unionists highly involved in the topic.

Different, instead, was my experience with farmers' representatives. In the majority of cases, it was very hard to find people willing to be interviewed. I took a very long time, made incessant attempts and numerous calls and emails before I was allowed to visit the office of one of the main farmers' associations and be able to interview one of them. In my case, I found farmers' associations much less inclined to take part in academic research studies and contribute with information. However, distinctions need always to be made in terms of individual attitudes. After several months, almost at the end of my fieldwork, I finally managed to get in contact with the second farmers' representative part of my study. It only took one phone call to arrange an appointment with this person, who was very willing to take part to the study and eager to maintain an email correspondence through which he shared with me some more information and data.

### 3.7 Data analysis, interpretation and reflexivity

My data were derived from the transcriptions of all the audio-recorded semi-structured interviews, from my observation activities, and from a variety of informal conversations with various actors involved in the topic, such as politicians, agronomists, the Imam of the Mosque, journalists and so on. From the onset of the fieldwork I have adopted what Agar (1980) would describe as the "funnel approach" (Agar 1980, p. 13), which is an open-ended approach to all possible types of information and people. This is an essential part of the ethnographic type of work where material and concerns are not seized at the beginning of the work (Okely 1994, p. 20). Themes, patterns and priorities were let emerging during and after the fieldwork. Space was always left for the unpredictable and the uncontrollable (Okely 1994) and always taken as a further opportunity. I was always taking note of all the events that were perceived as relevant for me. My notes had the shape of a chronological journal; the only recurrent features were the date, the place and the time of the day. The content really varied from simple annotations on people's standpoints, disposition of furniture around the space, odours and noises to also my feelings, insights, interpretations, recurrent themes and so on and so

forth. During and after the observational periods, interpretations, intuitions, themes, ideas, and feelings were, indeed, going hand in hand with the process of gathering materials and they were annotated as fieldwork resources themselves (Okely 1994).

The choice to use semi-structured interviews was made to leave enough leeway to my participants to express their thoughts in a not too close-ended way, following at the same time a general outline. During the interviews with migrant workers, for instance, I was giving importance to how participants experienced their world, what kind of strategies they have adopted to deal with their situations before and after becoming a migrant, and how they were feeling about their labour relations, and working and living conditions. In the interview with farm employers I was giving relevance first to their problems as agricultural entrepreneurs in that local reality and then the conversation was driven more on the labour relations with their employees and on the reasons behind their recruitment strategies and employment conditions. Finally, in the case of trade unionists, questions were aimed at obtaining as much information as possible regarding the local agricultural context, its peculiarities and difficulties, the evolutions of the sector in general and in its encounter with the migrant labour force.

During the fieldwork I also carried out most of the transcriptions, an operation that supported me in the discovery of emerging themes that would require further analysis (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006; Pope *et al.* 2002; Silverman 2005; Wykes 2013). One of the strengths of the use of qualitative research methods is their flexible examination of emerging concepts and hypothesis during the course of the research itself (Murphy and Dingwall 2003, p. 116). After the first four interviews with Tunisian migrant workers, for instance, I found that a recurrent theme was their accusation of Romanian workers 'to steal' work opportunities by accepting lower wages. This information was also confirmed by some key informants. At that point I decided to start to investigate more in depth the employers' perceptions regarding the differences between the Tunisian and the Romanian labour



force to find out if there were any particular reasons behind the choice to pay Romanian workers lower wages. This emerging theme will open up an extremely interesting scenario on the reasons why Romanian people managed to become predominant workers in a sector previously dominated by Tunisian workers. Interestingly, the reasons were mostly related to widespread acceptance to live on a farm by the Romanian population, their new European citizenship status and the opportunity to work in the agricultural sector as semi-formal workers (see Chapter Five).

The experience of writing up was unpredictable, creative, unformulated, intense, and always open to new reinterpretations. During the first stages of writing up, thoughts and hunches were mixed together in an almost incompressible manner in my mind. Only after an extended period of contemplation did I succeed in abandoning minor information and working on the most relevant themes for my project. I started to make a provisional list of topics for all of the categories' part of the study. Subsequently, I proceeded by making a preliminary thematic analysis of all the interview material and observations. Thematic analysis can be described as the process of "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 79). During this process centrality was given more to what participants said rather than how they said it (Bryman 2004). Consequently, I read and re-read the interview materials countless times to try to find, in the commonalities and differences of their detail, some starting point for a more elaborate interpretation. I then decided to adopt a bottom-up perspective, giving relevance to migrant agricultural workers' work and life experiences. Consequently, I worked on an overall map of the most important themes and I prearranged them in a provisional thesis structure. Eventually, I started to write the first chapter of this thesis, which became the last one (Chapter Six) in the final thesis structure 'Respect for the dignity of all workers'. Somehow, writing that chapter was a cathartic experience. I needed to free myself from the weight of the turbulent theoretical and empirical experiences, but I needed to let them go in the most meaningful way possible. I tried to do so

by writing about the nature of the labour relations between the Sicilian farm employers and the migrant workers and how those are increasingly more influenced by issues related to citizenship rights over human rights. Afterwards I felt relieved and more persuaded regarding my thesis structure and its purposes; thus, I continued to write it as it is presented today.

### 3.8 Interpretation

In the sections of this chapter dedicated to my epistemological and ontological perspectives, I have already expressed my conceptualisation of the role of the researcher in the interpretative construction of its research data. It follows that the outcome of interpretative research is knowledge as a “social product” (Estenberg 2002, p. 16), as a result of the human nature of the researcher in the social world. The idea that stands behind this type of knowledge is that there is not one single truth about social processes because all events are individually filtered and subjectively understood, and that identities are fluid and not fixed (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba 2011, p. 125). Furthermore, the data so collected and elaborated are then put in relation to one another, again according to the interpretative intuitions of the researcher (Okely 1994).

Interpretative intuitions can be considered as partially the result of theoretical speculations and partially the result of the researcher’s reminiscences of the fieldwork or “inscribed memories in the fieldworker’s being,” as Okely suggests (1994, p. 30). As a consequence, the knowledge produced is not the absolute truth about social processes but a form of “fictional narratives” that is, as explained by Estenberg (2002), the researcher’s interpretation and theorisation of data according to his/her framework of understanding or *paradigm* (Guba 1990). A paradigm is “a basic set of beliefs that guides actions” (Guba 1990, p. 17). These are human constructions, and as such they do not hold any definitive truthfulness (Lincoln *et al.* 2011). Consequently, the data presented in this thesis by using a thematic analysis from a constructionist standpoint are not pretending to

show incontrovertible truths but an interpretation and a theorisation of the data according to the researcher' paradigm (Braun and Clarke 2006; Denzin and Lincoln 2011a; Estenberg 2002; Guba 1990; Wykes 2013).

However, the research outcomes cannot be considered as the mere products of my elusive imagination as the data are deeply rooted in the accounts given by the research participants. In this respect, I will try to give as many quotations as possible from my research participants to support my arguments all the way through the rest of the thesis. Finally, to substantiate my type of study, in this chapter I have given to the reader a broad description about how the research was implemented in terms of the methodology used, the data collection and sampling, negotiation of access, and so on. The finality of this operation is to give to the readers what Seale describes as "a vicarious experience of 'being there' with me, so that they can use their human judgment to assess the likelihood of the same processes applying to other settings which they know" (Seale 1999, p. 118).

### 3.9 Reflexivity

Reflexivity can be described as "the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, on the 'human as instrument'" (Guba *et al.* 1981, as quoted in Lincoln *et al.* 2011; Richardson 2000). The action of reflecting on what I have done, how I have done it and why I decided to do it, can be comparable for me to climbing of a rock fortress in a hot jungle in Sri Lanka. At the beginning of 2014 I visited Sri Lanka with my husband and some friends. One of the daily trips involved the climbing of the Sigiriya Rock, a remarkable archaeological site. It constituted an immense 200m rock topped by a ruined fortress surrounded by beautiful gardens. It was a once in a lifetime experience. I prepared myself for this experience by reading my thick guide book, asking for information from my Sri Lankan friends and our tour guide, looking at the map and wearing the most appropriate comfortable clothes (pre-fieldwork preparation).

For the first time in my life, I felt like an explorer of a unique and symbolic setting. The vast garden is cut in the middle by a lengthy path that takes you straight underneath the rock. While going through the garden I was observing everything around me with brand-new eyes. I wanted to ensure that I saw and experienced and cast to memory and film as much detail as I could (observation period). While I was proceeding, I questioned our tour guide about the meaning of every feature and every animal and plant living in that special place and he patiently would elucidate to me about our surroundings (my key informants). When I approached the bottom of the rock, I was so immersed in that reality that it became incredibly familiar. Just then, the level path finished and I started to climb the first of many sets of stairs. Every set of stairs gave me a clearer idea about the venture that I was undertaking (interviews with all research participants). At that point, I could not see the rock anymore; I was completely enveloped by the surrounding jungle.

Eventually, I reached the foot of the rock and was faced with the task of climbing approximately 1,200 very precipitous steps to reach my goal of seeing the ruined fort. I took my time, I did not rush. During the climb I passed many interesting features, artefacts and peculiarities, ranging from wall paintings and ancient art to wild monkeys and signs warning about possible hornet attacks, all of which gave me a better understanding of the place I was experiencing (writing up). Out of breath, I climbed the last few steps and saw the ruined fort. I was overawed by its ancient beauty. Now, I could see the garden below with more clarity, realising its complex shape and architecture. My horizons were now broadened and I could see over the jungle tree tops to other ancient sites and statues and see how this monument related to all the others (engagement with the vast literature and academic debates).

Only after reaching the top did I realise that, during this course of actions, I was driven by my natural instinct to nurture my curiosity as explorer (the why). To understand that place I stimulated my imagination to visualise how life was for the people that lived there according to the stories and

information that I was told (the what). I used my body as a camera that relived those places and those stories by making my own film *montage* (Denzin and Lincoln 2011a). I used my body as an instrument to create an interpretative and aesthetic reconstruction of people, stories, events, places, symbolisms, etc. to communicate the experience firstly to myself and then to others (the how). I blended images, sounds and interpretations in a new creative written form. I agree with Silverman (1997a) that the expression of truth tends to have a beautiful quality in that it is able to let emerge tacit knowledge by making it explicit and, at the same time, enriching it by “bringing new objects to the sphere of rational discourses” (Silverman 1997a, as cited in Seale 1999, p. 185). Now, I invite the viewer (the reader) to construct his/her own interpretation about the sequence of scenes, the *montage* (Denzin and Lincoln 2011a, p. 6), that as ‘filmmaker’ I propose. However, this film is based on true stories where any reference to real events and people are intentional.

Through this metaphor, I would like also to state that I think I never was an insider in my research setting and I never was seen like one. Before planning my fieldwork, I made my ethical considerations (see the next section) to support my idea of the role of the researcher in the field. I decided that I did not want to be fake to my research participants, to be an intruder, a spy, basically a liar. I did not want to exploit them and their friendship and trust for the sake of my research. I did not want to pretend to be someone that I had never been and I will never be. I do also believe that, to become an insider in a research setting, you need many years, which is not feasible for a three to four years PhD project, unless you are already part of that community (see McKenzie 2009). I wanted to treat my research participants ethically, which for me means first and foremost giving the opportunity to the person in front of me to know the precise reason why I am approaching and questioning them about delicate and vulnerable aspects of their private and working life. I wanted to give them the opportunity to consciously be part of a research study and say what they feel able to tell during the interview.

Although I have tried to give voice to some of my most vulnerable research participants, in the end, what is going to benefit most from this research study is hopefully my career and my university by trying to contribute to the academic knowledge. As a consequence, I decided that if there was anyone that was supposed to do anything for the sake of this research study that person was only me, but in the respect of other people full awareness of being the subject of a research project.

During the course of this research, I somewhat had to lose myself in the outside world to find me again in the several identities that I had to wear. To succeed to implement the research from all possible perspectives I eagerly encompassed a wide range of roles. Actually, during the entire research process I went from being a kitchen assistant to a note taker, from a driver to a sort of journalist, to a negotiator, an explorer, a learner, an expert, a listener, an observer, an inquirer, a nagger, a respondent, a dealer, a thinker and obviously a reader. Interestingly, in this regard, Reinharz (1997) suggests dividing the several selves that we create in the field into three main categories: *research-based selves*, *brought selves* (the ones that contribute to creating our historical, social and personal perspectives) and the *situationally-created selves* (Reinharz 1997). In the research setting, all of those selves come into play under distinctive voices (Lincoln *et al.* 2011). Those voices usually intersect one another and alternate with each other during the process of writing.

According to Richardson (2000), it is during the process of writing that we discover the subject that we have studied aligned to our self-ves. Writing is more than the mere process of transcribing the reality, but it is also – and most probably – the process of understanding it. I do believe that the experience of writing is a method of inquiry, how we “word the world” (Richardson 2000, p. 923). Nevertheless, the efforts, writing as a method cannot be a precise, accurate and comprehensive research practice, but it provides to us a way “to investigate how we construct the world, ourselves and the others” (Richardson 2000, p. 924). It is a creative experience: how

created were all of the selves that I made during the research process and because of this research project. For example, in this very moment I am mostly a writer and all I am writing about is the reality that I have co-created as a result of all my co-created selves in action and in relation to the outer world. However, only now that I am attempting to formulate them through my dynamic and creative writing am I actually acknowledging them and reunifying them again. Researching and writing are creative experiences; nevertheless, while during the first I have produced multiple selves, during the second I am attempting to, ultimately, convey all of my researching selves into my 'founded' self. However, because of their dynamic and creative nature, these processes cannot be considered as finite, but always changing and developing.

### 3.10 Ethical considerations

In a normal life situation, questioning friends and family regarding their wages, employment conditions and living standards is quite unusual, if not considered rude. Approaching strangers and inviting them to talk about their personal and working conditions while being recorded is not so straightforward. Furthermore, knowing that most of these people work in the informal economy, without legal contracts and sometimes with an irregular immigration status complicated the picture even more. Similarly, trying to interview employers recruiting workers on an informal basis was not so easy considering that they can risk a great deal if discovered by the authorities. Likewise, trade unionists helping irregular migrants to obtain, for instance, an amount due from their casual employers can risk being accused of aiding and abetting irregular immigration. As a consequence, during the entire course of my research's fieldwork in this hidden reality, I was extremely careful, prudent and sensible, particularly protecting participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Therefore, all the interviews have been recorded and stored in a password-protected hard drive and deleted from the recording device for security reasons (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). After their

transcriptions, interviews were kept in a locked filing cabinet in my accommodation during fieldwork and at my university office afterwards.

Although all my research participants were informed and consented to take part in the study and to be recorded, for reasons related to their anonymity concerns the great majority of them refused (understandably) to sign the consent form. Therefore, I decided to spend more time at the beginning of each interview to verbally explain the study and participants' rights over the research, particularly the right to refuse to participate and to withdraw at any time from the research project. I also always gave some examples of the type of research questions that I was going to ask, to make sure that the respondent was as confident as possible about what he/she was consenting to. I made sure that all of them had a copy of the consent form with my contact details and detailing my university department and supervisors. Interestingly, though, some of my migrant participants asked me to use their original name, rather than an invented one, stating that the interview was about their life and they were not lying to me. Consequently some of the participants' names in this thesis are real and some are invented. This made me feel that, to a certain extent, some participants felt empowered by taking part in the research and were able to get their voice heard.

On more than one occasion, I could feel their eagerness to be part of the study. This happened with both some migrant farm workers and some farm employers. Some of these people were clearly stating that what they were telling me was the truth and I had to make sure that it was going to be written down. However, the way I have analysed and interpreted my participants' accounts has given great relevance to migrant workers' standpoints more than to farmers'. On the other hand, I have always been clear about the fact that the aim of my research project was to understand agricultural labour relations and migrants' living and working conditions more than the reasons why farm employers cannot respect the conditions of a regular employment contract.



Furthermore, the final research product is unknown until the end of the data analysis (Sin 2005) and usually, as noted by Maynard and Purvis (1994), even reaching the research's conclusions is a social process and the interpretations of data are always a "political, contested and unstable activity" (Maynard and Purvis 1994 as cited in Sin 2005, p. 281). Therefore, the concept of a consent form can be considered as insufficient to guarantee that the process and the product of the research are conducted in an ethical manner all the way through the research (Sin 2005, p. 281). Accordingly, ethical considerations have to be an ongoing part of the research process (Miller and Bell 2002; Sin 2005) because they change from when the ethical committee has given the approval to the research, through to the fieldwork and even during the data analysis. From these perspectives, it is possible to agree with Humphries and Martin (2000) when they state that objectivity and impartiality to seeking consent are mere illusions (Humphries and Martin 2000, p. 72; see also Sin 2005).

Although, in line with Patai (1991), I do believe that a perfect ethical research strategy is impossible to put into practice (Patai 1991, as cited in Murphy and Dingwall 2001, p. 343), I felt that, through my honest and uncovered approach to all my research participants and in all settings, I have managed to establish a 'transferable' power relation between me and my respondents. I do believe that the power dynamic within a research setting tends to give dominance to the researcher. Particularly for those interviewees that I approached within the outreach of recognised institutions such as trade unions and EMERGENCY NGO, I am aware that my figure as researcher was enhanced to the point that perhaps some participants felt they could not refuse to participate. However, I did so in the sincere attempt to be seen and perceived as a trustable person, particularly in the case of irregular migrants. I also think that participants can always try to guide data collection and analysis on their behalf or to their advantage. As Düvell *et al.* (2008) have pointed out:

The relationship between interviewer and interviewee is quite ambivalent as the interviewer has higher social prestige and power but at the same time provides a 'service' to the interviewee who finally finds someone who is willing to listen to their personal story and valorise it" (Düvell *et al.* 2008, p. 17).

Additionally, as noted by May (2001), the researcher's biography, as well as that of the research participants, can influence the research process; individual experiences may lead to the manipulation of the way in which data are collected, recorded and analysed (May 2001). There are also gender, class, education and, in some cases, even cultural and nationality differences between me and my participants that probably have played a role in my data collection, and which possibly have potentially exposed participants to forms of exploitation (Patai 1991, as cited in Murphy and Dingwall 2001, p. 344). When, for instance, the opportunity to approach farmers during their strike arose, I felt that I was taking advantage of the situation and of my position of being a middle-class, highly educated woman. The only ethical action that I could take on that occasion was to tirelessly repeat to the people I approached about my role as researcher and the aim of my study. Finally, I tried to avoid building very intimate relationships with all my informants so as not to be drawn into the issue of exploitation which may unintentionally cause some forms of manipulation (Murphy and Dingwall 2001, p. 343).

### 3.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reflexively portrayed the ways I conducted my research project. I started by introducing the reasons that stand behind the conduction of this research project. After, I explained why I chose to conduct a qualitative research and gave a description of the paradigm that I used throughout the course of this research study by stating my ontological and epistemological perspectives. Subsequently, I continued by explaining my research methods, sampling, data analysis and interpretation. Finally, in the reflexivity section, I critically described my role as the research's instrument followed by some ethical considerations. In doing this, I hope that I have been clear and

coherent enough to earn my reader's trust that I have conducted this project and analysed the data in the most honest way possible (Pyett 2003).

## Chapter Four

### Family commitments, gender and parenting in migration decision making

#### 4. Introduction

Migration discourses are frequently framed around issues relating to the consequences of the presence of foreign people in the receiving countries (Ambrosini 2012; Castles 2010; Castles and Miller 2009; Sayad 2004; Stolke 1995; Zontini 2008). In reality, the understanding of migration only as a national problem is partial, and obscures a more complex and deeper analysis which considers the phenomenon as a dynamic international social process (Castles and Miller 2009) very much embedded in family and household<sup>19</sup> strategies (de Haas 2010a; Stark 1978). Migration needs to be understood more as a collective action that fosters social change and affects both sending and receiving countries (Castles and Miller 2009, p. 20). According to Castles (2000, p. 16):

migration is not a single event (i.e. the crossing of a border) but a life-long process which affects all aspects of a migrant's existence, as well as the lives of non-migrants and communities in both sending and receiving countries.

Migrant workers – or economic migrants – tend to be portrayed by governments as a “unit of labour” (Anderson 2000; Kilkey and Merla 2014) with no connection to family or friends and who decided to sell their labour power in the global market space (Anderson 2000). However, while states, capitalists and employers are interested in workers, what they receive are people (Anderson 2000, p. 108). The idea of migration as a whole life and social process has to be seen as an epistemological starting position in migration studies to avoid fragmentations and partial understandings. In the attempt to have an even more comprehensive vision of migration we also need to embrace a transnational perspective of this phenomenon that

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<sup>19</sup> By ‘household’ I refer to the definition given by Moore (1988) of the “basic unit of society involved in production, reproduction, consumption and socialization” (Moore 1988, p. 54).

conceives migrants as social actors involved in two or more societies (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Portes 1997, 2003). This more 'longitudinal' and 'broad' approach to migration studies seeks to recombine the divide between sending and receiving societies and represent a necessary step to achieve a more wide-ranging understanding of the migration phenomenon. From this perspective, for instance, the social ties between the 'movers' and the 'stayers' do not automatically vanish (Faist 1997) and migrants are conceived of as active committed subjects maintaining social, emotional, cultural, economic and even political relationships. This ongoing process is achieved through network relationships in which migrants are embedded (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999).

For this reason, in this chapter, I am going to propose a journey to contrast the prevalent analytical tendency to look at migrants only through an ethnocentric and nationalistic lens (Glick Shiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc 1992) and give a clearer perspective of the life's trajectory of those people. With the focus on a 'transnationalism from below' type of analysis (Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt, 1999; Smith and Guarnizo 2006; see also Baldassar 2007; Castles and Miller 2009), and in the attempt to foster a 'micro' (individual) and 'meso' (individual's ties and relations) levels of migration investigation, I will try to explore migrants' agency and choices (de Haas 2010a; Però 2008; Zontini 2010) and how those are forged inside a family, homeland kin and community perspectives.

In this chapter, attention will be given to all information that can help to answer the question 'why' people migrate, what sort of expectations they have towards their migration experience, and how they have re-accommodated their life and gender roles according to the new situation. Along these lines, further information can be obtained regarding their family's involvement in their migration choice, if they have reunited with their family (and if not, why not), and what they do to continue to care about their kin from a distance. All of this information can help to achieve a more comprehensive and realistic understanding regarding the migration

phenomenon and its changes and perpetuation. The chapter is divided in two main sections. In the first section, attention is given to single migrant men and the effects of their family relations and commitment over their decision to migrate. In the second section, instead, relevance is given to migrant men and women with spouses and children, and how the migration experience has challenged their gender and parenting roles and expectations, inviting migrants to reorganise them according to the new situation.

#### 4.1 Agency and migration project

In migration studies, a central question remains as to why people migrate and how migration is maintained over time (Schmitter-Heisler 2000, p. 77). Within the field, there is a flourishing debate regarding the degree of individual choice over the decision to migrate (Bakewell 2010). For numerous scholars, migrants fully exercise their agency and have a considerable level of choice over their decision to migrate. Particularly for the neo-classical approach, migration is seen as a rational and individual response to a cost-benefit calculation (Bakewell 2010; De Jong and Gardner 1981; Houghton 1964; Wright 1995). Structuralist theories, such as the Dual Labour Market and World Systems Theory, tend to give less importance to individual actions and behaviours, preferring instead to focus upon the macro structural causes of migration, such as economic causes, migration policies, cultural norms and so on (Coleman 1990; Hamilton 1997; Hollifield 1992; Solé 2004). My research project is more in line with others scholars that opt for the middle ground, concentrating their attention more on finding a balance between individual agency and the macro structure (Chant and Radcliffe 1992; Faist 1997; Haug 2008; Kofman, Phizacklea, Raghuram *et al.* 2000; Zontini 2010). One such approach is the New Economy of Labour Migration (NELM), mostly based on Giddens' (1984) 'structuration theory', which conceives structure and agency as being mutually dependent, rather than in opposition (Wright 1995, p. 771). Scholars that use the NELM approach concentrate their attention on what has been defined as the 'meso' level, and that particular level of analysis has been of great relevance for the understanding facets of migration such as

family, household and migrant networks. In this chapter, this last approach will be advantageous, believing in its efficacy to produce a deep understanding of the dynamics that stand behind the individual choice to migrate, the migration strategies used, the type of settlement followed, and the labour outcomes.

However, before proceeding it will be useful to identify clearly the meaning of the two often antithetic terms: structure and agency. Although there is an extremely vast literature regarding the relationship between structure and agency, of which examination is beyond the scope of this chapter, I take into consideration the conceptualisations more in line with my thought. In consideration of structure, such as the case of the state or cultural norms, it is particularly interesting to note the definition offered by Giddens (1984) that proposes to understand structure in terms of its dual nature as both the “medium and the outcome of the social practices that it recursively organizes” (Giddens 1984, p. 25). This “structuration theory” (Giddens 1984) implies that structure not only forged social practices but also reproduces them and it is transformed by them. From this point of view, structure not only constrains but also enables social actions. Furthermore, social actors are seen as conscious of their actions and outcomes and, if necessary, they modify them accordingly by exercising their agency (Bakewell 2010).

In consideration of agency in line with Sewell (1992), I refute an atomistic view that reduces agency to the mere capacity of social agents to reflect upon their position, to develop functional strategies, and proceed to achieve their desires. I prefer a more creative approach to agency, conceiving it more as a “*relational property*” (Sewell 1992) that involves some degree of control and modification over social relations:

to be an agent means to be capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree (Sewell 1992, p. 20).

Applying this definition to the process of decision making over migration implies two fundamental aspects to the decision-making process: firstly, the migration of the individual takes place within an active social environment and, secondly, that migration is not only a matter of a pure risks-benefit calculation. In fact, the individual has to 'manage' his/her social relations and put into action a transformative behaviour to adjust them in a way that will be fruitful in the event of migration. Furthermore, considering the migration as an interactive 'social product' is validating the idea that social networks, such as family and household, have got a strong influence over the decision-making process (Boyd 1989:642).

These two above flexible definitions can help to better comprehend the importance of structure in understanding social actions and, at the same time, they leave space for some freedom of manoeuvre for the individual agency in reproducing or transforming social actions. In my understanding, it is erroneous to conceive of the macro structure as a rigid and immobile container, because this will not help to explain its changes over time, for instance, in cultural or legislative norms. At the same time, I consider agency as a transformative and creative entity with the power to change, challenge and even deceive the macro structure if necessary for the achievement of an individual/family goal. Following these definitions, the relation between these two entities is believed to mutate over time and under different conditions.

## 4.2 Individual or family migration?

Among my thirty research participants, three people, all irregular Tunisian unmarried young men, have migrated to remit money to their indigent parents and siblings. Seven other married people, three Romanians and four Tunisians, migrated to sustain their spouses and children they left behind. An additional three Romanian people, all single parents, have migrated to sustain their children left behind in the care of other family members. A further two married Tunisian women have migrated to join their husbands and having a more sustainable family life abroad. Five single Romanians have



migrated with their partners or family members to save as much money as possible in order to buy a house or to pay for the wedding. Finally, seven other people, all single men from both Romanian and Tunisian communities, originally migrated to work and save enough money to start a business in their sending country that will allow them to have a sustainable family life. Finally, there are three refugee men that complete my sample and who would rarely work but still do so in order to earn some extra money to send to their families. Overall, and from the onset, family can be recognised as a driving factor for the great majority of my sample.

From a social networks perspective, all of the above migration cases have to be seen within the wider context of interpersonal and intergroup relations (Faist 1997, p. 69). Even with the seven young single men that have migrated to improve their personal economic situation and to accomplish some personal goals, their individual decision to migrate is often based on the achievement of predefined goals that can be fruitful for the wider family or household unit. In any case, the strategy used to migrate usually involves people of the same family or the larger household unit.

Generally, in the vast panorama of researchers that have been trying to understand the migration decision process, Fischer, Reiner and Straubhaar (1997) suggest paying attention to the *expectations* that people have got regarding their decision to stay or to move. The authors suggest that expectations are a dynamic research focus because they catch the process of evaluating future outcomes of alternative options. This means that, in consideration of the chance to migrate, expectation is the process of imagining the future advantages and disadvantages of staying in the home community in opposition to potential opportunities in alternative destinations (Fischer *et al.* 1997). One of the irregular Tunisian migrant participants of my study, Fatah, decided to illegally cross the sea borders of the Mediterranean Basin to alleviate his family's serious financial deprivation:

I have decided to leave for reasons of misery ... I have got a father, a mother and five siblings. I wanted to work here because I want help

them to buy food, pay the water bill and so on ... here I can earn more.

Fatah's family's financial situation was particularly lacking, and behind his decision to migrate there was the prospect of being able to increase the family income. The migration of an adult child as a family strategy to enhance the family earnings is not unusual in the migration literature (Sana and Massey 2005). I met Fatah outside the Emergency mobile clinic because he needed medical attention. He has a serious congenital heart condition that he does not reveal to his potential employers in order not to miss any of the casual work opportunities offered to him. Fatah has problems breathing during work and feels tired quite quickly, but he would not mention this so as not to compromise his commitment as provider for his family. Furthermore, despite the short distance, due to his irregular immigration status it is extremely risky and costly for Fatah to travel to the other shore of the Mediterranean Sea and visit his family. In the meantime, in the destination country, Fatah tends to live a hidden life so as not to incur detainment and/or expulsion.

This is a typical condition lived by unauthorised migrants around the world (Zentgraf and Chinchilla 2012). They live in a limbo where the commitment to their original migration project clashes with the risks and fears of their new life in the destination country (Vasquez del Aguila 2013). As already mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, undocumented migrants live in a condition of 'bare life' (Agamben 1998) whose existence is merely physical but not juridical or political; therefore, they have to live hidden from the main stream of society so as not to risk detention and expulsion. Being reduced to a life barred from its juridical and political function is the precondition for the realisation of the 'homo sacer', the man excluded from the life of the community where the political activity takes place. Similar conditions are lived by another irregular Tunisian young man, Terir, who emigrated to sustain his family. His family is even more numerous than Fatah's family. Terir has got nine siblings and his mother to provide for as his father is dead:

Before I was working in Tunis ... but I wanted to come here because I did not have a lot of work and the money was very little. Five dinars per day is like three Euros. I had a stand and I was selling all sorts of things ... so I came here to find a job. When I was working there I was not able to reach [to pay] the electricity, the food ... we are six brothers and four sisters. There are the ones married and the ones that are not, and there is only me that can work for them ... so I have to work and send the necessary money. Can you understand? ... [When I arrived] I was in a centre. I could eat and sleep and that was it ... but I needed to work. This is why I could not stay in Tunisia ... I came out [from the centre] because I had to find a job.

If Terir had migrated only to survive from poverty he could stay indeterminably in one of the immigration centres for irregular migrants around Italy. But he had a clear mission that was deeply linked to the actual nourishment of his numerous family members. Therefore he escaped from the centre to accomplish his strong duty. Although without juridical recognition, Terir, as for Fatah, decided to act as agent, escaping the 'camp' (Agamben 1998) where he was detained to enter another form of camp to which he was relegated, that is the informal economy. Another two of Terir's siblings have also migrated: an older brother went to Germany but was, at the time of the interview, unemployed, and a younger brother who was in custody of the Italian state programme for unaccompanied minors.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the feelings of responsibility and the commitment towards his family pushed Terir to illegally cross the sea borders twice to come and work in Europe at the risk of his own life. Similarly, another person that has irregularly migrated to sustain his indigent original family is Mohamed:

I don't want to go back to Tunisia ... because I work 28 days a month for 400 dinars, like 200 Euros. This is not money. This is no money because I am the only one working in my family. My brothers and sisters do not earn enough. It is just me that I work here to help the family.

The high unemployment rate and low payments among young Tunisian people have probably been catalyst elements of their migration towards Europe (Zohry 2005). In all of the above three cases, the lack of profitable

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<sup>20</sup> For more information regarding the Italian programme for unaccompanied minors see: <http://www.anci.it/index.cfm?layout=sezione&IdSez=10321>

work opportunities in the sending country, the poverty of the family and the commitment to the family members can be considered as crucial factors in the decision to migrate, even irregularly and at great risk of dying during the crossing or being detained in a migration centre. Another common element between the three people is the lack of network support in the receiving country. All irregular young men have decided to cross the Mediterranean Sea without having anyone on the other side that could help them to find work and accommodation. This element has probably had a strong influence on the unpredictability of their migration project and on their labour outcomes. In fact, all the above people have always worked on a casual basis and, as in Terir's case, with extremely negative consequences in his labour relations (see Chapter 6).

Another interesting aspect of the above three cases is that, in spite of the precarious living conditions of their family and regardless of the number of daughters and sons, only the sons would leave the household looking for work opportunities abroad. This is a trait very much related with the conceptualisation of gender roles among the Tunisian community that favour the migration of men instead of women. Tunisian women, in fact, face strong cultural and social constraints upon their decision to migrate, even when unmarried and unemployed (Bouchoucha 2013). Recent studies have demonstrated that the migration of Tunisian men and women is influenced by highly gendered tradition and social values that see economic migration as more appropriate for men, while women tend to leave the country through marriage and family reunion (Bouchoucha 2013; see also ILO 2014). Although the number of single Tunisian women migrating on their own seems to have increased in recent years (ILO 2014), patriarchal ideals of the masculine breadwinner role, and women's reproductive roles, are still a reality faced by many women and men in Tunisia with repercussions for their migration decision and strategy (Bouchoucha 2013).

Another Tunisian migrant that has an irregular immigration status is Samir. However, compared to Fatah, Terir and Mohamed, Samir was in a better-off

position, having a job, a self-sustaining family and a network of connections in the receiving country. When Samir decided to undertake his trip to Sicily in 2003 he was confident of finding an 'Eldorado' of opportunities for his life. He is still quite a young man, only 28. His leather jacket, blue jeans and his well-groomed hair gave him quite a trendy appearance. His irregular migrant status never prevented Samir from finding work opportunities in agriculture, which implies that the employers of this area often have recruited irregular migrants as their labour force (see the next chapter). Samir decided to leave his country, dreaming of saving enough money to open a mechanic garage in his home country and be an independent worker able to afford a future family life. He thought that following the route to Europe of other Tunisian emigrants would bring him the desired economic prosperity:

Before I had a job, I was fine in Tunisia. Then, I was seeing people coming back from Europe with beautiful cars and lots of beautiful things, so I thought to come as well to improve everything ... you do not see what they do here, the negative side. You only see their beautiful clothes, good stuff ... you see that they spend lots of money and you start to think that here there is lots of money and I thought 'I go away too' ... I left in a boat and then, after I arrived, I joined a cousin of mine ... When I arrived I had a girlfriend but then everything is finished. Here with all the problems that you get you even stop thinking about it [having a family] ... I help my [original] family. When I can, I send money or more technological objects that they do not have there.

As suggested by Samir, migrants' decision to migrate, when there are not critical economic circumstances, can be related to personal aspirations to achieve greater and quicker economic gains than would be possible if they were to stay in the country of origin. When emigration becomes associated with the idea of success it can foster a 'culture of migration' that sees the decision to stay at home as a failure (Massey *et al.* 1993). This 'contextual feedback' (de Haas 2010b) can expand the probability of migration aspirations among non-migrants. However, the hardship and the solitude that he has experienced in Sicily disheartened him to even think about his future family life, so he tried to contribute to his original family income. Similar to the study carried out by Vasquez del Aguila (2013), being able to send money

and technological presents can contribute to increase symbolically the masculine image of a successful modern man and counterbalance the sense of destitution and solitude lived by single migrant men (Vasquez del Aguila 2013).

The propensity to migrate in order to increase individual economic profit is also common among some Romanian research participants. Dorin, for instance, already had a work position but decided to migrate with the intention of saving some money for his future. Interestingly, the major reason that pushed Dorin to migrate to Italy was the negative family experience that he had with his previous wife:

Before leaving, I was working as an agricultural engineer in Romania ... Slowly, slowly, though, I realised that I had to go away because I was earning too little ... now I work all day, without a fixed time but when I work lots I can even reach 25, 30 Euros a day. There, instead, I was always earning the same money and it was sad because I was living badly ... I was also married for two years ... my wife was the wrong person though and she came to Italy with another guy. At that point I thought to go away myself too ... So I decided to ask one of my mother's friends that was already here ... Now some of the money that I make [earn] here I send there for my future.

There is a certain idealisation of migration as a more quick and successful strategy to achieve economic goals. But there is also a degree of emulation that often encourages people to follow other people's migration patterns and directions. In the case of Dorin, a negative family experience acted as a motivational factor to emigrate. In other circumstances, positive family aspirations and projects can really encourage family members to spend some time abroad in the hope of achieving faster results.

Sorin, for instance, has migrated together with his three siblings in order to improve their personal economic conditions and be able to save more money for their family project in Romania. Although there are low wages, working in the agricultural sector of Sicily is allowing Sorin and his siblings to carry on building their individual house on their family land:

After I finished the national service I had started to work ... then I found work here. A friend of mine asked me this question: 'would like

to come?’ Like this, a chance to increase my earnings that happened like this. So I made this life move ... back home we [siblings] have got land that my father gave to us. We are two brothers and two sisters here. All of us [siblings] are here to save money and build a house there.

Sorin and his siblings have benefited from a connection with an already emigrated friend to make a group move profitable for the entire family. Additionally, even the female members of the family have migrated to enhance the family project. Furthermore, the type of migration that they had in mind was a temporary one and related to the accomplishment of the family project. Overall, these previous accounts showed how even what seems like an individualistic perspective upon migration can be contextualised within a family context and strategy or a future family perspective. As the above cases demonstrate, within my sample, a first distinction can be made between people that are in serious economic straits in their country of origin and have had to migrate in order to sustain their family and people that are comparatively better off and have migrated to accomplish future personal and family goals. However, in all the above cases, family resulted as a major reason behind the decision to migrate.

The view of migration as an opportunity to improve personal life standards is also confirmed by De Jong (2000) who pointed out how one of the major predictors to move resides in the evaluation process regarding the chance of future achievements in the home community and in an alternative location (De Jong 2000). On the other hand, De Jong (2000) adds an important element to the decision-making process; family norms about migration. These norms can support the decision to migrate but they can also be an obstacle to them. Furthermore, as the social psychologist Ajzen (1988) argues, social norms, as for family norms, are the critical element in transforming expectations into intentions and then into actions (Ajzen 1988; see also De Jong 2000). The connections used to migrate usually involve both family members and also people outside their original household unit. As a consequence, figures such as brothers, cousins, and uncles can have a strong

influence on the decision and on the migration strategy to follow (see also next chapter).

An example of a research participant that has migrated purely to improve his personal economic conditions but in a context of an already undertaken family migration is Farhat. When he arrived, Farhat had already got seven years' experience working inside greenhouses in Tunis, even though this was for about 6 Euros a day (approximately 13 Dinars). The opportunity to earn 25 to 30 Euros a day to carry out the same job was extremely attractive and, thanks to his brother already in Sicily, he 'managed to obtain' a work contract to legally enter the country (see next chapter). Only after being in the receiving country did Farhat realise that there were not major differences in the buying power between the two countries:

In Tunisia they were paying me 6 Euros a day, but it is not the same because life is not that expensive ... Basically 6 Euros in Tunisia has got the same value as 25, 30 Euros in Italy. But I wanted to change my life. I thought that here I could have a better future because when people speak they say that Europe is good, there is work ... I don't know what, but you know a person always want good things, a good job ... So I joined my older brother who was already here and who helped me with the documents and my job.

By joining his brother already emigrated to Sicily, Farhat put into action a migration strategy already existing within his family and that was supposed to improve its future opportunities.

The case of another research participant, Semi, who left Tunisia in 2004 when he was only 16 to follow his father, is similar. Semi thought himself to be a very lucky boy to work almost all year, being able to save some money and then go back to his country for a long holiday period, living a comfortable life with his family back home.

I am in Italy since 2004. I came with my dad that has spent 27 years in Italy. Now, he is retiring in Tunis and I remained here ... I arrived here with the ship to Palermo and I had all the documents, like for family reunion ... I wanted to come to Sicily and [also] my dad saw that I left school and I did not have anything to do in Tunisia and he wanted to take me here ... I remember my first trip to here, I was with my dad and I was happy to go to Italy, starting another life and be with him ...



Every summer I went back with lots of money to spend for me, my family and have fun with friends.

As the last two above accounts can tell us, the migration experience had already been undertaken within the same family, and it probably was seen as a realistic option to overcome problems related to unemployment or shortage of economic resources and work opportunities. Kinship networks existing across spaces “are the conduits for information and assistance which in turn influence migration decisions” (Boyd 1989, p. 643). In fact, in the transnational social space, the traditional concept of family has been challenged and reconceived in a broader idea of household that, in the words of Boyd (1989), is “a social group geographically dispersed” (Boyd 1989, p. 643). This group of relatives takes part in “multi-stranded social relations which link together migrants’ societies of origin and settlement” (Baldassar and Baldock 2000, p. 63). However, family is still a very contested concept and it has to be understood as an intricate and changing entity where practices can differ greatly (Ackers and Stalford 2004; Baldassar and Baldock 2000; Kofman 2004; Zontini 2010).

One of the variables within the family and the larger community is, for instance, the conceptualisation of gender relations. These can greatly vary and have different outcomes even over the migration decision making. According to De Jong (2000), migration expectations work not only in a context of social norms but also of gender roles (De Jong 2000, p. 307). Studies observing the relations between migration and the family have highlighted the influence of it in determining who is going to migrate within the unit (Boyd 1989) and also have improved our understanding of the differences among male and female migration (Ackers and Stalford 2004; Baldassar and Baldock 2000; De Jong 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Kofman 2004; Lutz and Palenga-Möllenberg; Malher and Pessar 2006; Phizacklea 1998; Zontini 2010). In the case of my research participants, although suffering from the physical separation, for most of them the survival of their family relies on the remittances that one or both parents send to the

family left behind. In the following section, I am going to illustrate the experience and the family life arrangements made by both Tunisian and Romanian men and women with children and how the migration experience can reinforce or challenge the way the individual lives the predefined gender and parenting roles and expectations.

### 4.3 Fatherhood, gender and migration

In the transnational parenthood literature a clear distinction has been made between transnational motherhood and transnational fatherhood (Ambrosini 2014; Boccagni 2009; Carling, Menjivar and Schmalzbauer 2012; Lutz and Palenga-Möllenberg 2012; Parreñas 2008). Generally, most of the studies which have focused on the difference between transnational parents have agreed that migrant mothers are in charge for the transmission of care, even from a distance, while fathers tend to keep the breadwinner role and be less involved in the transmission of emotional care (Ambrosini 2014; Boccagni 2009; Lutz and Palenga-Möllenberg 2012; Parreñas 2005, 2008). As noticed by Carling *et al.* (2012) “care arrangements are often the most tangible challenge for transnational parents, and an area where material and emotional concerns intersect” (Carling *et al.* 2012, p. 191). However, while many studies have paid attention to transnational motherhood, far less has been said about fathers from a distance (Kilkey, Plomien and Perrons 2013; Parreñas 2008; Pribilsky 2012).

In this regard, Parreñas (2008) has highlighted how a possible reason for this relies on the fact that “father-away migrant families usually mirror modern nuclear households” (Parreñas 2008, p. 1057) and that the main difference is that, rather than returning from work every night, he is usually back after months or even years of work. Furthermore, the lack of academic discussions regarding fatherhood from a distance seems also to be related to the gender-ideological equation of male-breadwinner (Fenstermaker and West 2013; Parreñas 2008) and cultural expectations regarding care-giving obligations and practices (Baldassar 2008). Actually, according to Hondagneu-Soleto and

Messner (2000), the migration experience, with its income potential, increases for the men the chance to perform and strengthen men's breadwinning role (Hondagneu-Soleto and Messner 2000, as cited in Parreñas 2008, p. 1058). However, as pointed out by Ryan, Sales, Tilki and Siara (2009), the emotional implications of living in a transnational family remain largely an under-researched area, particularly in regard to transnational fathering (Fresnoza-Flot 2013; Parreñas 2008; Pribilsky 2012; Ryan *et al.* 2009). In reality, the migration experience of women, or men, or both can actually be seen as an event that really transformed the pre-acquired notions of genders for both the movers and the stayers. As a consequence the highly gendered role of parents can be subjected to tensions within transnational gender relations of parenthood.

In recent studies, for instance, involving the male component of Filipinos' families, for both fathers and sons it has been highlighted how the male gender roles have been transformed by the migration of their spouses and how these men are entirely absorbed in their role of caregivers, childcare and housework while women are working abroad (Fresnoza-Flot 2013; Shinozaki 2012; Sørensen 2004). In other studies, migrant men have been shown to be quite self-destructive in their coping strategies compared to their female counterparts. Alcohol abuse, depression and the use of prostitutes seem to be typical ways of dealing with the suffering of the distance from loved ones and the failure to live up to pre-conceived standard of masculinity (Carling *et al.* 2012; Schmalzbauer 2005; Worby and Organista 2007).

#### 4.4 Tunisian men and their family arrangements

In my study, married Tunisian men would have their family with them in the receiving country or left behind in the sending country. Usually, Tunisian women are fully in charge of the care of their children and they tend to not share it with other family members or relatives. However, the Tunisian men who took part in my study have shown quite a strong family orientation with clear feelings of distress due to the distance from their nuclear family. Those

men, particularly when they can enjoy the provisions offered by a regular immigration status and work contract, make every effort to visit their family at regular intervals of time. In fact, the seasonal nature of the work in agriculture is actually quite compatible with a transnational family life organised around intermittent contact family time. According to Kilkey and Merla (2014), these Tunisian men can be described as 'reappearers' in the transnational arrangements of care-giving roles, which are "migrants who provide or receive proximate care during short-term visits to their country of origin" (Kilkey and Merla 2014, p. 212). Having said that, the Tunisian men as part of my study tend to equate the idea of being the father with the one of breadwinner, and, as a consequence, they tend to be first concerned with the productive activities (Moghadam 2003; Predelli 2004).

However, the intent to send remittances home conceals the dark side of solitude and self-denial of life away from family members and community (Cole 2007). Many unaccompanied Tunisian men look at the other side of the Mediterranean horizon as a place called home. They spend their entire working life living abroad, having a provident life to remit as much money as possible to their family at home. Mustafa and Omar, for instance, represent the perfect examples of early Tunisian emigrants that came to labour in the agricultural sector of Sicily to sustain their large families. Both fathers of six children, they have lived almost their entire working life employed in the Sicilian agricultural sector of this area. However, while Omar has tried to move his family to Sicily in the attempt to share the reproductive activity with his wife, Mustafa decided to sacrifice himself but never allowed his wife and children to cross the Mediterranean Sea to come and live there.

Mustafa arrived in Sicily in 1979 and, since 1984, he has worked inside greenhouses growing flowers and plants destined for the big markets of Italy and Europe. He decided to live a life of loneliness and isolation confined in the Sicilian countryside, but never let his children cross that sea of hardship and solitude that he himself had lived during most of his life:

I live on my own. All the time on my own. I work on my own and I live on my own. My family is all in Tunis. I have got a wife and six children all in Tunisia ... I would never bring them here. I have got a brain myself. No, no no. It was enough to live my life like a dog; I do not want my children to do the same ... they do not even think to come here; because I do not lie to them, I say to them the truth ... Sometimes I was left without food, without money, without cigarettes, without anything. It was very hard. And I should wish this to my children?? I decided to undertake this road and I found lots of tenterhooks in my way ... My children are tranquil, they live in Tunis with my wife and I do my life here. I am their guardian and God guards me ... I always go back to Tunisia. Every three, four months I go back. And I can spend some good time with my family.

It is quite clear from Mustafa's words that he has decided to sacrifice his own life and live in solitude while providing financial support for his large family. According to Seidler (2009), to be a man in the liberal capitalism era means to be ready to self-sacrifice to achieve something 'higher'. Self-sacrifice is today a central trait of masculinity (Seidler 2009, p. 65). 'Self-sacrifice' and 'hard work' are also seen by Seidler as methods that fathers use to assure the respect from their children and keep a form of control over the family (Seidler 2009, p. 116). However, 15 years ago Mustafa succeeded in finding a stable work position, with a regular work contract, periodical seasonal leave, unemployment compensation and family allowance (see the next chapter). These working conditions give the opportunity to Mustafa to visit his family at regular intervals and to contribute to the reproduction, socialisation and organisational roles. For Mustafa this was a family arrangement that would protect his family, particularly his children, from the suffering of the migration experience and, in the meantime, was a way to guarantee a serene and prosperous lifestyle for the family.

Different again is the experience of Omar. The first time Omar arrived in the area was 1986, when he was "young, hopeful and single" he said. At the beginning he had a regular work position that allowed him to recurrently visit home. Later on he got married to a Tunisian woman with whom he had six children. Omar's dream was for the family to join him in Italy. However, after he lost his long-term position and could not manage to find a stable job he

has since become an irregular migrant and his family project could not be fulfilled:

Before I became an emigrant I did not know anything about Europe and I was thinking about it as a different place, where you could go to build your own house, to work well, let's say a place where you could have a better life and a family ... Now, part of my family is in Tunis and part is here. My wife with the ill daughter is here with me. She has kidney problems and she needs dialysis ... I have got six children, three there and three here ... After I lost my job I could not afford anymore to reunite all of them.

Although Omar left Tunisia as an independent man looking for work opportunities abroad, when he started his family life he thought to remain working in Sicily and try to reunite the family in the destination country. However, the work opportunities have drastically worsened since he first arrived and it became quite unaffordable to join all the family together and very risky to bring his children abroad in a period of austerity. Furthermore having a seriously ill young daughter constrains Omar and his wife to stay in Sicily and receive good quality free health care. As a consequence, the family remains split and the dream of a united family life remains unfulfilled.

Omar's story highlights the cases of those fathers that have tried to join the family but with meagre results. This was mostly due to the fact that he ended up working on the informal labour market and lost his right to regularly stay in the Italian territory. As a result, he had all the disadvantages of working in the informal market, such as no juridical status, hidden life, low payments, lack of workers' rights and a regular permit to stay, exploitation, and so on. All of these conditions are typical of the status of the 'bare life' of people constrained to live confined to 'spaces of illegality' and deprived of basic rights (Agamben 1998). These conditions can seriously undermine the possibility for a family reunion in the destination country. Carling *et al.* (2012) have highlighted how "the immigration law can be decisive for separation and the prospects for reunification, as well as for the practice of parenthood from afar" (Carling *et al.* 2012, p. 191). Recently, transnational researchers have pointed out the weight of legislation on the separation of parents and

children. It seems in fact that major receiving countries of immigration have more rather than less restrictive policies about family reunion (Calavita 2005; Carling *et al.* 2012).

Although in the literature the role of mothers in distributing care for the offspring is still preponderant, the suffering of fathers away from family, their sacrifices and their wish to join with their family cannot be underestimated. Toufie, for example, is a young man from Madhya who left Tunisia hoping to find work opportunities in Sicily that would ensure a comfortable life for him, his wife and their three children. In the words of Toufie, a central concern is the impossibility of living with his nuclear family and particularly the failure to economically sustain them in the receiving country:

[At the beginning] my son was always asking me how I was, what I was doing there and if I could make him happy and go to him straightaway ... in other words at the beginning it was hard. The first year in particular it was far too hard to stay away from them ... I would never have thought that life could be so difficult. I thought that here there was plenty of work, that they were always paying you, that I could save some money to buy a car, for my children, money to take back to Tunisia to build another house. I was thinking like that but then when I arrived here it was different ... now my family is still in Tunisia. I cannot bring them here because there is not enough work and I cannot afford rent, bills and shopping here ... I hope God will help me because it's too hard like this.

In an interesting study carried out by Walter, Bourgois and Loinaz (2004) regarding the migration of Southern American men to San Francisco, it has been shown that the impossibility to sustain a family left behind was seriously undermining migrants' sense of self-worth towards their 'masculine' obligations (Walter *et al.* 2004). The authors have observed how migrants' cultural construction of patriarchal masculinity was giving meaning to their self image and also defined their experiences of poverty and marginalisation (Walter *et al.* 2004, p. 1160). Similarly, for my Tunisian research participants, their cultural construction of patriarchal masculinity supports their sense of self and defines the meaning of their migration and labour experience. This aspect has emerged clearly when they were unable to fulfil their obligations to economically support their families.

As for Omar, and even for Toufie, the main reason that has hindered his reunification with his family in the receiving country is the lack of a regular work position and a consequent regular immigration status that will allow a legal and affordable family life. From this perspective, transnational family life is more a consequence of the institutional context more than a migration strategy, sustaining the idea that the influence of structure over individual agency can be sometimes overwhelming (Baldassar 2008; Kilkey and Merla 2014). The denial or the severe restriction to access social rights, as for other types of rights, can be considered as a form of “structural violence” (Balibar 2004:40) that often affects the life of people considered outsiders in respect to the citizenship regime (see Chapter Seven).

These people live in a ‘state of exception’ (Agamben 1998), which is a form of violence against rights. This is created by the law that constructs its own justification to suspend itself (Agamben 1998, p. 17). The ‘state of exception’ is the precondition to realise the depoliticised ‘bare life’, a life that is lived in an interstitial zone that determines the social conditions for people “who are neither fully recognized as members nor completely excluded as strangers” (Lee 2010, p. 61). In the case of citizenship status, it can be seen as a sovereign tool to legitimate itself and to promote exclusion and inclusion through exceptions rather than as a tool to foster the protection of rights. In fact, while citizenship discriminates humans based on their membership to a defined national state, it claims to apply the law by creating a permanent ‘state of exception’ for certain people but not for others.

For many groups of migrants around the world, as for some of the Tunisian fathers who are part of my study, an irregular migration status can directly affect the parenting options available to them (Balibar 2004; Calavita 2005; Carling *et al.* 2012; Riccio 2008). In fact, when living in a condition of irregularity, not only is the individual at risk of financial deprivation and exclusion from citizenship rights but so is the rest of the dependent family. As pointed out by Bernhard, Landolt and Goldring (2005), it is important to highlight that children of irregular parents can encounter severe difficulties



when accessing social services such as health care and education (Bernhard *et al.* 2005). Therefore, as suggested by Kilkey (2010), when analysing transnational family life, there is the risk of incurring ‘hyper-transnationalism’, which can lead to the underestimation of the territorial constraints given by state policies and international regulations over the life of transnational families (Kilkey 2010, as cited in Kilkey and Merla 2014, p. 211; see also Baldassar 2008).

#### 4.5 Tunisian women and their family arrangements

Rigid gender roles, family arrangements and social norms seem to greatly limit the labour opportunities of Tunisian women in this agricultural area. The majority of Tunisian women in this area of Sicily follow a family-related type of migration as marriage is very often the precondition to migrate and family duties are still considered women’s prerogatives (Esposito and De Lon-Bas 2001; Kofman 2004). Tunisian women have been mostly seen working only in farms where their husbands work. Samia, a divorced mother of three children, pointed out that the opportunity to enter into the local labour market for Tunisian women is strictly related to the presence of their husbands:

I worked with my husband [in greenhouses]. This is the only job you can find in this area ... everybody works where their husband works. It is extremely rare to find a lonely Tunisian woman without a husband inside a greenhouse ... almost all work together or inside the same greenhouse or in the same farm ... The Tunisian woman is here always with a family, she is like that, she is a reserved woman, that looks after the family that has strong values about it.

Samia’s account is extremely interesting because it clearly highlights some central points regarding the family-related type of migration followed by Tunisian women, the limitations of labour opportunities that they can access, and how patriarchal family norms and gender roles exercise power upon women who have migrated.

A further element that helps to describe the type of Tunisian women in the area is their commitment to children and family duties, which is a recurrent

trait among Muslim women (Esposito and De Lon-Bas 2001). Miriam, another Tunisian migrant and mother of four confirmed the same points as Samia. Miriam works with her husband in the greenhouse that they rented out from their previous Sicilian employers. As self-employed people, Miriam and her husband can be considered successful migrants; they can afford a large house near the main square in Santa Croce and pay for the education of their four children. However, family duties are still the priority of Miriam's life:

I work in the farm that my husband has rented. I work only in the morning. Then, around 11.30am I go back home to prepare lunch. My husband arrives around 12.30pm and then we have lunch. I only work part-time because in the afternoon I look after the children and the house.

The organisation and conduction of family life is clearly the priority of Miriam's life. She is completely in charge of the care of her children and the house, as her husband is the primary breadwinner. Furthermore, Miriam does not get paid for her work in the farm because it is part of the family business and as such her contribution is considered a way to sustain the family. In the Tunisian Muslim tradition, the idea that it is the man that sustains the family is a central norm, as confirmed by Moghadam (2003) and Predelli (2004), and it is one of the most important factors when considering women's lack of economic power and consequent gender inequalities (Moghadam 2003, p. 15). On the other hand, when under the pressure of external factors even family norms and gender relations can change. Miriam, for instance, has stressed how the recent increase in living costs has generated a growth in the percentage of working women:

Before, there were less women working. Many less. Now much more ... before it was different. Before the woman could stay at home, now the money is not enough and she has to work. Before, it was possible. Now the average is of three kids and if only the husband works you cannot 'walk' because there is rent, electricity bill, taxes ...

As suggested by Miriam, changes in the economic sphere can lead to changes in the family norms regarding the prospect of women working, allowing them to access more opportunities. Actually, as noticed by Standing (1999) although a patriarchal ideology together with religious constraints, marriage,

and child-bearing have always played a containing role in women's participation in the labour market, a change in the economic needs, opportunities and modifications in working patterns can be strong incentives to work away from home (Standing 1999). Although, as Miriam pointed out, the presence of her husband in her work place is an element that is never missing:

I never work without my husband. Before starting to run our own farm we worked in other people's farms but never without my husband. There was this family, where there was the wife, the daughter working with me ... never where there were many other people.

Being accompanied by the presence of her husband in the work space is perceived by Miriam as a matter of decorum and respectability. In an interesting article regarding the various interpretation of gender relations in Islam by migrant women in Oslo, Predelli (2004) has highlighted how Muslim women use Islam as a "flexible resource for interpreting their own constraints and opportunities in paid labour and in the family" (Predelli 2004, p. 498). The author has described how the interpretation of gender relations by migrant Muslim women in Oslo can be organised on a continuum that goes from a patriarchal vision to a gender equality and sameness in carrying out important roles for the family.

In contraposition, when talking with Samia she gave a completely different perspective on the condition of the Tunisian woman who has emigrated to Sicily. Samia, as for Miriam, joined her husband in Sicily and they started to work together in farms and then later ran a rented farm. In Samia's case, after years spent in an unhappy marriage with an over-controlling husband, she felt relieved when she divorced him:

... now I conquer my freedom ... I paid a certain price to get divorced ... but I feel a free woman, peaceful, I can express my opinion, I can speak as I like, I can say what I think because before I was suffocated, I could not say what I wanted, in terms that I had to pay attention, I had to select my words ... For a man the woman is an object and he is in charge to decide what she has to do. It cannot be the woman deciding for herself.

In opposition to Miriam, Samia decided to take full responsibility for her children and the house but to be independent from her husband:

I can tell you that I had to pay a high price to get divorced ... Now I have got three beautiful children and everything is on my shoulders, but I am happier because I feel a free woman.

Deciding to get divorced, Samia had to challenge important family, gender and even cultural norms regarding her role in her community in the receiving society. In Muslim society women often carry the burden of family honour related to their private conduct; this becomes shame when it does not conform to the code of conduct expected within the binomial mother/wife role (Akpinar 2003; Moghadam 2003). However, Samia succeeded and became a trade unionist at the local immigration office, which forced her to face her community on a daily basis:

At the beginning it was not easy. At all. For them [Tunisian community] I was first of all a divorced woman, so a rebel. A woman that gets divorced! that is alone! with her children?! ... let's say that they did not accept me straightaway.

Samia had to be extremely courageous when challenging family, gender and community norms regarding women's conduct and role. Furthermore, as she said "everything is on my shoulders" as she assumed the full responsibility for childcare after taking the unpopular and unusual decision to divorce her husband. Although facing challenges, as for Miriam, even Samia decided to permanently settle in the area and bring up her children in Italy and try to settle permanently. For both women, childcare is their primary responsibility as, in their cultural context, the role of mother is inseparable from the one of childcare.

As we have seen, Miriam and Samia represent two different examples which describe how gender issues are quite a remarkable characteristic in the Tunisian community under study. Although with different personal outcomes, they can also be considered as two perfect examples of family-related migration. In contraposition, since the arrival in the area of Romanian people, the presence of unaccompanied women has been a constant and mounting

element in the agricultural sector. This new wave of migrant women has shown a different way of living the role of women as both breadwinner and transnational mother by accelerating the feminisation of the Sicilian agricultural labour market and by sharing their childcare duties with other family members, usually grandmothers.

#### 4.6 Romanian women and their family arrangements

Generally speaking, in Romania the active role of women in the labour market is a normal and very widespread practice (Lokshin and Fong 2006). Furthermore, the emigration of women to enter the labour market of West Europe and beyond is a phenomenon largely accepted and encouraged in the community (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenberg 2012; Madziva and Zontini 2012), and also perceived as a contribution to the national economy through remittances (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenberg 2012). These women appear to follow a more 'autonomous' type of migration; in reality, behind these women there are family concerns (King and Zontini 2000). Although marriage is not a precondition to migrate and a men's presence is not a requirement, the most common reason for their migration was related to family, particularly the children left behind. Among the three unaccompanied women who took part in my study there is Maria, a 53-year-old woman who emigrated in order to sustain her daughter at university who had been left in the care of her husband. The other two women were single mothers who emigrated in order to sustain their children left behind in the care of grandmothers. All of them, Maria, Silvia and Donna, have been living for several years in the area, working in the agricultural sector and have never been accompanied by a male presence. The other three women interviewed were accompanied by their Romanian husbands or partners but did not necessarily share the work place with them.

What is happening in the agricultural labour sector of Sicily is quite peculiar: single Romanian women, as well as single mothers and unaccompanied wives, have been an active and growing presence in a labour force previously

dominated by a male presence. In the past, locals and Tunisian women were predominantly taking part in the later stages of the production process, such as in packing warehouses. Today, instead, Romanian women actively work inside greenhouses and follow all the production stages previously seen more as a male expertise: from the initial preparation of the soil to the last stages of hard work during harvesting time and the dirty and heavy tasks to take apart the greenhouses. The presence, in the area of accompanied and unaccompanied working Romanian women, is today a widespread and largely accepted phenomenon. However, it is still a major new entry for the previously male-family dominated Sicilian agricultural sector.

The presence of Romanian agricultural working women inside greenhouses has accelerated and intensified a process of '*feminisation*' of this labour sector that was still quite marginal with Sicilian and Tunisian women. This feminisation can be included in a larger global phenomenon that sees women as fully inserted into what is described by Castles and Miller (2009) as the "feminisation of international migration" and can be considered as one of the central elements of the contemporary "age of migration" (Castles and Miller 2009). The increased entry of women into the labour market has been a phenomenon witnessed worldwide and relates to several factors such as the 'informalisation' of labour sectors to cut labour costs, the widespread delocalisation of production in countries with lower labour costs, recessions, growing labour market flexibility, increased income insecurity, new technologies of production and so on (Buvinic 1995; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2008; Standing 1999). These factors have mostly contributed to the entrance of women into precariously low-paid work, a phenomenon described by Buvinic (1995) as the "feminisation of poverty."

In agriculture, both the emergence of employment opportunities in small farms but also the intensification of work in the larger agro-business industry have attracted women workers in large continents such as Europe, South America and Africa (Buvinic 1995; Dolan 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2008; Standing 1999). According to Dolan (2005) and Lastarria-Cornhiel (2008),

there is a certain preference in horticultural export firms for young single women who are flexible, capable of multitasking and prepared to work longer hours when it is necessary (Dolan 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2008). Additionally, Dolan (2005) highlighted how many of these women are often migrants (Dolan 2005, p. 422). The highly requested presence of women in this sector has also contributed to the creation of a stereotypical idea of working women on farms as obedient, having greater dexterity, being patient and flexible to working long hours (Dolan 2005, p. 422). In my study, I found that migrant single mothers with childcare arranged in their country of origin are potentially the best candidates for this type of employment. In need of work to sustain their children left behind but free from daily family duties, which make them more available, these women are willing to work long hours during high pick periods. Furthermore, to accept lower wages often these workers agree to live on the farm, an aspect that contributes to their exploitation in terms of overtime and extra duties (see Chapter 6). These migrant women can even be considered as ‘reappearers’ (Kilkey and Merla 2014) in the life of their children left behind. In some cases children act as “visitors” (Kilkey and Merla 2014, p. 212) to their mothers during school holidays.

Maria, for instance, is an unaccompanied wife. Although she has been running several small private businesses in Romania and her husband is regularly employed at the local council of their city, they were not earning enough to cover the household expenses and the university fees for their only daughter. The desire to help the daughter finish her higher education pushed Maria to migrate, leaving their daughter in the care of her husband. As observed in the literature by Parreñas (2005) “the attainment of education for one’s children is a central motivating factor for labour migration” (Parreñas 2005, p. 7), which can increase the chance to have a better life for the offspring. Maria decided to migrate to help her daughter from abroad rather than prevent her from achieving a higher education qualification:

I have got a daughter of 22 years of age. She is at university studying international relations, and me – I am here to help her. As soon she started university I had to come here to help her. She is quite grown up but my husband is looking after her.

In this case, the migration strategy used in Maria's family has encouraged a female migration rather than a male one. The reason relies mostly on the fact that Maria's husband was already securing an income for the family, being regularly employed at the local council. Therefore, in this case, the family migration strategy was based on the availability of the family members more than on the gendering of migration opportunities or predefined breadwinner role. Furthermore, despite the undeniable suffering for the physical separation, the new family arrangement did not create any major problems in the distribution of care for the offspring as Maria completely trusted the ability of her husband to care for their daughter, who was, in any case, adult.

Another exemplar case of an unaccompanied woman farm worker is Silvia. She can be considered a pioneer of the Romanian migration to this area of Sicily as she illegally arrived in Sicily in 1996 through what has come to be called a 'phantom agency'. In her country Silvia was a single mother of two children and was working as a qualified seamstress. The lack of welfare resources for a single mother and the low wage pushed her life to what she described as a 'dead point'. After she sold all her last gold belongings for the survival of her children, she decided to leave them with her mother because "I could not see my children starve to death" and went away to look for a job. She only knew Sicily as the land of gangsters through mafia films and documentaries; therefore, she did not really dream to go and live there, but she heard that she could find informal work offers. After the first years spent working for several families as a care giver for their elderly relatives, she ended up working in greenhouses. Today, Silvia sells fruit and vegetables from the surrounding greenhouses in a road-side shop and, regarding her reasons for migrating, she said:

... the Romanian society did not help me at all. Although I had my work abilities it was not enough. A woman on her own does not receive any help. I left to help my children to go to school. We did not



have a house. We did not even have food to eat really. This truly pushed me to go somewhere else to find a decent and honest job. At that time I was in such a desperate situation that I did not have any other choice.

In Silvia's case the decision to migrate was a quite dramatic life event as her children were very young and their living conditions extremely poor. Unfortunately, she could not rely on her husband to help as he had abandoned them. Furthermore, the deterioration of the care regime in the Eastern European countries in the late 1980s was one of the major factors that has allowed a more family-oriented care regime to emerge, which has pushed grandmothers to increasingly substitute for working parents and look after children (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenberg 2012). Unfortunately Silvia's income has never been adequate to allow her to have a family reunification in Sicily so she is still working and remitting money home, periodically visiting her children or having them around during school holidays. For Silvia the most important thing was to have the opportunity to send money home so her two children could finish their higher education and obtain some European recognised qualifications that will one day give them good work opportunities.

Similarly, Donna is another single mother who migrated to Sicily in 2004 to provide the financial resources to raise her young daughter left behind in the care of her mother. As with the other Romanian women, Donna was able to cut her living expenses because she always lived on a farm in the accommodation provided by her employers. This gave her the chance to sustain her daughter from abroad, but at the cost of being completely committed with the farm. However, she was already planning her return home as she felt that her adolescent daughter now needed the presence of her own mother more than ever. As suggested by Ryan and Sales (2011), decisions around the timing of migration shows a sensitivity to children's life-stages (see also Kilkey and Merla 2014):

I left her when she was 7 years old and now she is 15. This year she has started high school and I am still here ... I really would like to go back because there are too many years since I left my daughter with

my mother; she is already a grown up girl and I think she now needs her mother with her in this moment ... but I have to see what job I can find there ... Otherwise, I am afraid, I have to come back here again but I don't want to.

The prices of emigration are clearly not only the economic ones. Although the migration experience was undertaken to assure the primary needs of the family's members, a significant downside is the loss of the physical contact with the loved ones and the estrangement from their life (Ambrosini 2014). The separation from the most important people in life is a condition that can generate feelings of emotional loss, impotence and guiltiness (Carling *et al.* 2012; Horton 2009; Parreñas 2005). These feelings particularly occur when the people left behind are the ones most in need of care, such as children and older parents, which are also strong influencing factors on driving migration patterns and settlements (Bailey and Boyle 2004). Sometimes, in fact, the distance from the loved ones, particularly children, can shorten the migration duration.

Another Romanian woman that was planning her return to Romania because of the suffering for the distance from her child is Alina. Her story is quite different from the stories of the other three Romanian women just described. Like the two Tunisian women, Miriam and Samia, Alina is a married woman who has followed a family reunion type of migration (Kofman 2004), joining her husband to work in the Sicilian agricultural sector. Both husband and wife have been always working with an 'ingaggio'<sup>21</sup> and the consequent unemployment compensation and family allowance. However, receiving 30 Euros a day, per person, and living on the farm was not sufficient to meet the needs of their three children in Sicily. They found a temporary solution by sending the oldest of their three children back to Romania to live with Alina's sister-in-law. This family solution arrangement was getting increasingly unbearable for Alina who was suffering very much because of the distance from her older son:

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<sup>21</sup> An 'ingaggio' is not a full employment contract but a form of collaboration with the farm based on the number of days worked.

I must stay. I must stay another few years to let them [the youngest child] finish school and then we are going to see what we can do because forever like this is not possible for me. It is too difficult because my son is there and I am here with the other two and I feel too bad about it ... he is now with my sister-in-law and I go back every time the harvest season finishes and for two months, or two months and a half, but it is still too difficult every time to leave him. He is ok there but he wants to come here, but it is not [financially] possible for us.

Although the migration of Romanian people has become increasingly inexpensive and organised, it is possible to see from the accounts given by all my interviewees that rarely do the economic gains make up for the emotional and affective loss, unless they are very temporary. Furthermore, by accepting low wages, it becomes quite costly to arrange regular visits home. Although the seasonality of the agriculture sector allows many migrant workers to go back to their country during defined periods of the year, mostly in January and from June to September, from a child's perspective this is probably not considered a reasonable amount of time to be together with the family. And probably it is neither enough time for the parents to actually be supportive in the life of their children, as the role of caregivers often cannot replace the void left by the parents (Widding, Devi and Hochschild 2008; Zentgraf and Chinchilla 2012). Furthermore, as highlighted by Erel (2002) in her study with women of Turkish origin in Germany, the departure of parents in the early years of their children may leave a permanent mark (Erel 2002, as cited in Kofman 2004, p. 251; see also Zentgraf and Chinchilla 2012).

The awareness of the consequences of split families and children left behind is encouraging some Romanian couples to postpone their family life after their return home. Michaela and her husband Flaviu, for instance, arrived in Sicily to save enough money to pay for their bank loans and their wedding. Now that they have reached their goals, they are ready to go back and start their family life by conceiving a baby. In the words of Michaela, the importance of avoiding leaving the children behind is paramount:

Now is the time to have a child and be able to stay at home and not work. When a child arrives ... we have always thought that you should

not leave your child behind with a grandmother or with others ... my brother is already in this situation, like so many other Romanians that have got their children with their parents. But we want absolutely to avoid this because it is horrible for everyone.

Although shared childcare is widespread among Romanians families, the consequences for the offspring being left behind should be not underestimated. Furthermore, the labour migration of these people to Western Europe is increasingly considered as the direct cause of a collateral phenomenon, which is the growing number of children and teenagers that have remained in the care of relatives (mostly grandmothers) and friends (Kofman 2004; Zentgraf and Chinchilla 2012). In the last few years this phenomenon has received a large media attention; so much so as to coin the phrase 'Euro-orphans'<sup>22</sup> to describe the lives of those minors considered socially and emotionally at risk because of the absence of their parents (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenberg 2012; Madziva and Zontini 2012; van Kranenburg *et al.* 2010). However, today, migrant parents tend and usually succeed to live forms of migration theorised academically as 'circular' or 'rotational', where the aim is to spend short periods of time in the destination countries with no intent of settling (Kupiszewski 2001; Morokvasic 1996; Okolski 2001; see also Kofman 2004, p. 250). In spite of the undeniable suffering for physical absence, a certain degree of social presence and participation has been observed in the life of transnational families (Carling *et al.* 2012; Hondagneu-Soleto and Avila 1997; and Palenga-Möllenberg 2012; Madziva and Zontini 2012; Parreñas 2005). Consequently, from a transnational perspective, those children cannot be considered strictly as 'orphans' as if they have been completely neglected by their parents.

In contrast with a more traditional understanding of family life, several studies have observed how particular transnational mothers succeed in

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<sup>22</sup>'Euro-orphan' is an expression mostly used in the media of Eastern European countries and not yet academically defined and explored. It refers to the large percentage of children that have been left in the care of relatives, friends and in some cases in children's home by one or both parents after their decision to migrate to Western Europe looking for better work opportunities. Generally included in this category are only those children left behind for a long period of time and, as such, considered socially and emotionally at risk.

maintaining their gendered mother role in several ways (Ambrosini 2014; Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2012; Hondagneu-Soleto and Avila 1997; Madziva and Zontini 2012; Parreñas 2005). Studies centred on transnational motherhood have reported how the daily life of migrant women is centred upon communication with caregivers and concern about the transmission of affection to their children (Ambrosini 2014; Madziva and Zontini 2012; Parreñas 2005; Zentgraf and Chinchilla 2012; Zontini 2004). Furthermore, according to Horton (2009), often material things such as money, goods, gifts and so on represent the “currency of transnational love”, helping transnational mothers in sustaining and maintaining not only their breadwinner role but also their gendered role of care distributors (Horton 2009; see also Madziva and Zontini 2012). Although it is not an ideal condition, emotional care and psychological support can also be regularly transmitted via telephone and the new technologies (e.g. Skype), which are particularly affordable these days (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2012).

We can conclude that, within certain migration flows, “mothering from a distance” is a new form of taking care of children during periods of physical absence for work (Ambrosini 2014; Boccagni 2009; Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2012). It is also a form of motherhood which directly questions the principle that childcare is a responsibility uniquely of biological mothers, as is mostly considered in certain cultural contexts (Hondagneu-Soleto and Avila 1997). Consequently, a transnational perspective on family migration invites us to rethink family ties beyond the traditional idea of the nuclear formation and traditional gender roles (Bailey and Boyle 2004), and calls for the need for study of the family to be contextualised and understood in its variety and diversity (Smits 1999).

#### 4.7 Romanian men and their family arrangements

Regarding migrant Romanian men, their fathering practices can be considered quite similar to their Tunisian counterpart. Most of them regularly remit money back home to their spouses or caregivers and they make every

effort to go and visit them regularly, 'reappearing' in the life of their loved ones. As with Tunisian men, some of these men have consciously decided to sacrifice their own life and be physically distant from their family, while always supporting them financially. However, the major difference is that Romanian people enjoy the European free movement provision and do not need a regular work contract in order to regularly reside in Italy as they are also free to move back and forth.

Yet, as with their Tunisian counterparts, fathers who are in informal and therefore unpredictable employment conditions tend to stay away from their nuclear family for longer periods of time. Usually their casual employment opportunities and/or the low payment received are the main reason why they are not able to regularly visit their children, who were left behind. On the other hand, the fathers who are regularly employed tend to visit home frequently and according to the seasonality of the sector. Alessandru, for instance, belongs to the category of "fathering from a distance" (Parreñas 2008, p. 1057). He left Romania with his wife in 2004, arranging the care of their three children within both of their families. He has been an agricultural worker in this Sicilian area since his arrival and, although he has always been working, he never had a regular work contract and has frequently changed employers (see next chapter). Nevertheless, as in the case of all the parents encountered so far, his migration decision has been made to provide money and goods for the offspring:

I have got three children. They are 17, 15 and a younger daughter that is 12. All of them still live in Romania. Two of them live with my mother-in-law and the oldest son with my older sister ... I always send money to them and even my ex-wife does it ... Last time I saw them, it was four years ago. I mostly speak with them by mobile phone. Unfortunately I don't have any pc myself [to video call them], but they have got everything they need.

As for all the parents who took part in my study, for Alessandru the main concern is to provide his children with the material goods needed to live a comfortable and modern life. From food and shelter to clothes and education, computers and mobile phones, the offspring can be considered

significantly less deprived than their parents. Additionally, contrary to the study carried out by Pribilsky (2012) with Ecuadorian Andes men who emigrated to New York City, the absence of consumption activities in the countryside area, such as cinema, dancing clubs, bars, shopping centres, casinos and so on, contributes to the chance to be able to save money to remit home.

Another Romanian remitting father is Andrei. Compared to Alessandru, during his migration period in Sicily Andrei always had a regular employment contract that has allowed him to sustain his family and visit them at regular intervals:

My family is all in Romania. I have got a wife and four children. Four grown up boys now of 22, 20, 18 and 12 years old ... During summer I always go to Romania. From September to June I am here and then I go away ... I stay for two months. I feel better there ... I had a strange life myself. I don't talk much about it really. I like the job here but I really dislike staying on my own without my family ... I'm going to work here for the last three years and then stop ... Because, me in Romania [in the mean time] I have built a house, I have got land now.

Andrei's experience can be considered a quite successful emigration experience, not only because his regular work conditions have given him the means to sustain and visit his family quite often, but also because he managed to remit enough money to buy some land and finish building a house.

This is also the dream of the last of the Romanian fathers that I interviewed, Marin. He came to Sicily with his brother Sorin whom we met in the first section of this chapter. Both brothers and their other two sisters came to Sicily to remit money home to finish their houses on their inherited land. While working in Sicily, Marin met his Romanian wife and then later had a child. Now, Marin and his wife are considering living their family life transnationally as the cost of living for two adults and a small child have proved to be prohibitive in Sicily:

My wife is not working at the moment because she is breastfeeding. With the money that I'm getting, first comes the baby, then the wife

and for me there is nothing left ... We are trying to build a house there but we are not sure how the work is going to be here, we are thinking that my wife could live there for six months a year while me, I'm working here ... I would like to avoid this but what can you do with 30 Euros a day? ... we need more money.

Marin and his wife have attempted to have a united family life in the country of destination, but the low payment received on a daily basis makes the family life for this young family quite costly. The general payment and work conditions received by the labour force of this agricultural area will be considered at greater length during the next chapter. For now what needs to be underlined is that often migrants, male and female, regular and irregular, tend to live close to their family. However, their relegation to certain niches of work with certain payment and working conditions and, for some of them, their struggle to have and keep a regular immigration status, makes the wish of a close family life mostly unachievable.

#### 4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have applied a meso-level type of analysis to explore the reasons and the expectations behind the decision to migrate of Tunisian and Romanian single men, single parents and married people. My investigation has considered migrants as transnational actors actively involved in maintaining social, emotional and economic family links between both sending and receiving societies. In all of the above cases, family relations across countries have been shown to have a central role as a driving force behind the decision to migrate. Among my research participants, in fact, some have migrated to remit money to their indigent original family (parents and siblings) and other people did it to sustain their families (spouses and children) left behind. Some have migrated to be financially able to raise their children left behind in the care of other family members and others have done it to start a new family life, saving money to buy a house and pay for the wedding. Finally, some others have migrated dreaming to improve their economic condition in the hope that they may be able to go back to their



sending country and own a business that will allow them to have a sustainable family life. Overall, family concerns and future perspectives of family life have been confirmed to be central in the decision to migrate for these farm workers in the agricultural sector of Sicily, confirming the idea that migrants are not a “unit of labour” (Anderson 2000; Kilkey and Merla 2014) but people with family and friendship relations.

Taken as a whole, concerning the expectations towards their migratory experience, it can be said that all of my research participants thought to find in advanced ‘Europe’ plentiful work opportunities to improve the economical conditions for themselves and their family left behind. They thought to find a place where there would be work, rights and where they could have ‘grown’ economically. Looking at the individual cases, the picture becomes more complicated and very much related to the conditions of the family left behind. In some cases, even adult children would migrate irregularly and undergo great risks to life in order to guarantee an income to their indigent family left behind. Meanwhile, some other adult children, without a needy family, would migrate to improve their personal financial condition for a better future personal and family life. For people with children and spouses, instead, the migration choice is strictly related to the sustainment of their dependent family, either in the sending country or in the receiving society. It is particularly for these groups of people that immigration status can seriously undermine their family perspectives and future outcomes.

Furthermore, analysing the experiences of migrants with children has confirmed how often parenthood practices are strongly gendered and often determine the type of settlement, care arrangements and labour outcomes. However, the conceptualisation of gender taken in consideration in this thesis is of large-scale social structure (Connell 1987), with a very complex, dynamic and multiple nature (Segal 1990; Vasquez del Aguila 2013). The diverse conceptualisations of gender are deeply entrenched in many aspects of human life, such as class, race, ethnicity, politics, culture, language, psychology, sexuality and so on (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Sydnie

2007). As a consequence, even concepts such as masculinity and femininity have been considered as socially constructed and intrinsically plural. This can help to explain, for instance, the diverse practices of motherhood and fatherhood among Tunisian and Romanian people. In the case of Tunisian women, for example, childcare is an indissoluble duty of the biological mother; while, among Romanian women, the tendency to share their childcare with other family members – usually grandmothers – during the period of their migration is very widespread. This wave of migrant women has shown a different way of living the role of women as both breadwinner and transnational mother. They are accelerators of the new phenomenon of feminisation of the Sicilian agricultural labour market, mostly independent from male figures and tend to share their childcare with other family members.

Finally, in consideration of fatherhood, it can generally be said that fathers of both communities tend to be concerned with their role as family economic provider. However, this can be a simplification that does not give enough prominence to the suffering of these people caused by the distance from their loved ones, their self-sacrifice, their attempts to join their family in the sending country, or their efforts to visit home at regular intervals. These men, if they are in satisfactory wage conditions and, in the case of Tunisian fathers, with a regular immigration status, tend to visit their family frequently and in accordance with the seasonality of the agricultural sector. This fosters a type of “circular” (Kofman 2004) migration that can be combined with a family life. However, the widespread presence of informal economies or, in any case, the low payments received by those workers, tends to complicate the individual situations and it may result in unwanted prolonged periods away from their family members. Particularly for the non-European Tunisian workers, an irregular immigration status can seriously compromise their chances to visit and/or reunite with their family members.

## Chapter Five

### Recruitment, Social Capital and Labour Relations

#### 5. Introduction

During my fieldwork in the Sicilian agricultural sector the stage of recruitment of migrant workers has been shown to be central for the consequent labour relations with their future employers. Throughout my data collection, I came across different types of recruitment practices involving migrant workers and, overall, all of them were showing a degree of correlation with the migrants' immigration status. Generally speaking, the recruitment practices in my research area can be divided into three main categories: the first one is the type of recruitment that was *previously arranged* in the migrant sending country through transnational social relations and networks, such as relatives, friends and acquaintance. As we are going to see, this type of recruitment greatly differs between European citizens and non-European citizens; the second type of recruitment is based on *social capital* and *networks* developed in the receiving country. This approach is usually more profitable for established and experienced Romanian migrant farm workers and often involves native people of the destination country. Mostly due to their European citizenship status, Romanian workers seem to have fewer restrictions regarding work arrangements in the informal economy and more negotiation power with employers. Finally there is a purely *casual* form of recruitment from defined places, such as local squares, petrol stations and the immigrant centre, which particularly involves more vulnerable people, such as irregular migrants and refugees.

It is possible to argue that the common feature between all these types of recruitment is their reliance on social capital that each individual possesses already or creates to gain access to new networks. In the first two types of recruitment practises it was evident how social capital played a major role in helping migrants to access the Italian territory, find a work position and/or to

avoid periods of unemployment by finding new work opportunities. On the other hand, in the latter type of recruitment, it was mostly the workers' lack of social capital that contributed to the status of absolute uncertainty regarding their life in the receiving country, work opportunities and exposed those workers to an even greater risk of labour exploitation.

Social capital is, indeed, a central resource with major implications for the entire migratory process in terms of the social wealth that people set in motion to start and maintain their transnational activities, transforming their previous social capital into new forms. However, the most prominent literature concerning social capital, such as the studies carried out by Coleman (1990) and Putnam (1995), implies that the potential of social capital that a person can benefit from is rigorously linked with their home community. From this premise, we should thus suppose that individuals who decide to migrate lose these connections and thus the potentiality of their social capital (Evergeti and Zontini 2006). On the other hand, to understand the migration phenomenon, particularly in the globalisation era, it has become progressively more important to grasp the links between communities in the sending and receiving countries (Vasta 2004). From this perspective, approaches such as the migration network theory (Boyd 1989; Brettell and Hollifield 2000) and transnationalism (Vertovec 1999) particularly have focused their investigations on social relations and networks even across countries. Actually, transnational research proposes a concept of social capital that extends itself even across countries and considers it as a resource which is ever-present even beyond borders (Faist 2000). Theories of transnationalism have been shown to be an important foundation of analysis to understand how social relationships and networks are developed. Looking at the migration process in terms of a system of networks based on social capital can be informative regarding the relations between micro and macro levels of the entire process and how it is constructed around the logic of the individual but also the family, the network and last, but not least, structural factors (Vasta 2004), for instance, a defined labour market.

Based on the evidence which emerged during my fieldwork, in this chapter I am going to demonstrate that both transnational and local forms of social capital are key resources for the migration process. However, while transnational social capital is extremely useful, particularly at the beginning of the migration journey, it is usually more ethnic and family related (see Anthias 2007). My data suggest that, in the new country, the most profitable form of social capital which can be used as a type of “social currency” (Magdol and Bessel 2003) in new networks includes people outside the family and ethnic links and possibly involving natives of the receiving country. Particularly in consideration of labour market outcomes, the best results were achieved by research participants that succeed in utilising their social capital in local networks of the receiving country. From the experiences lived by some of my research participants in their specific local labour market, the persons that were most successful in avoiding periods of unemployment and exploitation were the ones that were actively integrated in networks of employers in the receiving country. However, it is important to remember and stress that even the best activation of both types of social capital does not guarantee excellent labour market outcomes when interacting with the informal economy. In fact, the very widespread informal labour agreements available in this area do not give workers the economic advantages and employment rights’ protection that are usually guaranteed in the formal labour market.

### 5.1 Social Capital as a ‘movable’ and ‘bridging’ resource

Before exploring in more detail the most common recruitment practices in the agricultural sector of the Southern coast of Sicily and the consequent labour relationships, it is significant to delineate more accurately the notion of *Social Capital*. It is important to notice that there is not an unequivocal definition of the subject in the literature and particularly about the consequence that mobility has upon it. The term has been variously described by scholars and a preliminary examination of the diverse emphasis that

authors have proposed in relation to it would be revealing. However, it is possible to say that it is definitely a sociological concept which is useful to illustrate the interconnections and relationships linking social networks.

Famous scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu (1986) have been contributing to the description of social capital in several fields of research. In the attempt to tackle problems related to class and inequalities, Bourdieu (1986) has defined social capital as one of three forms of capital accessible: economical, cultural and social, accounted within the family and community. The author describes it as the benefits derived to every individual from its membership to a group, a sort of 'credential' "which entitles them to credit, in the various sense of the word" (Bourdieu 1986, p. 51). Later, Bourdieu, together with Wacquant (1992), described social capital as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 14). The resources from these relationships can vary in structure and purpose based on the relationships themselves. In fact, social capital is often understood as "the resources embedded in social networks accessed and used by actors" (Lin 2001, p. 25). This strict correlation of social capital with the concept of resource in terms of networks and ties has been challenged by Floya Anthias (2007) who argues that this makes the concept too broad, and as pointed out by Portes (1998) too general and unspecific. Anthias (2007) strongly supports an active idea of social capital related to its mobilisation as facilitator to gain advantages or mitigate disadvantages, in her words: "networks and ties which are not 'mobilisable' for the pursuit of advantage, or the mitigation of disadvantage, are not usefully referred to as social capital" (Anthias 2007, p. 788). This view is much more in line with Portes' conceptualisation of it as: "the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures" (Portes 1998, p. 6).

As I have already mentioned, one of the most well-known analyses of social capital as a civic virtue is offered by Putnam (1995) who, together with

Coleman (1990), conceived social capital as a functional bond inside the community to create trust, mutual solidarity and cooperation. In his original essay, *Bowling Alone. American's Declining Social Capital* (1995), Putnam has portrayed it as the “features of social organizations, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam 1995, p. 67). Later, the writer has described it as the “social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness” (Putnam 2007, p. 137). The author argues that in current societies it is possible to notice a decline in community participation because of the progressive individualistic nature of lives due to the loss of “civic-mindedness”. This is confirmed, according to the author, by the registration of a sharp down turn of participation in trade unions, voluntary organisations and sport leagues. Putnam’s approach has been criticised for its arbitrary application (Portes 1998); for uncertainty in relation to whether social capital is owned by people, informal social networks, or the whole community (Bankston and Zhou 2002, p. 285; see also Portes 1998); for depicting a moralistic model of community (Amin 2005, p. 612; see also Anthias 2007); for being “cross cut with troubling presences and absences around gender and generation” (Edwards 2004, p. 4; see also Anthias 2007); and ultimately, it has been criticised by Goulbourne, Reynolds, Solomos *et al.* (2010) for presuming that social capital is more perceptible in an homogeneous than in a heterogeneous society, although the majority of human societies are heterogeneous and, in the context of globalisation, a monoculture community can be considered more as a singular event (Goulbourne *et al.* 2010, p. 28).

Another contentious view on the subject of social capital has been offered by Coleman (1990), who describes it as: “not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspects of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure” (Coleman 1990, p. 598). The writer clarifies that, like other forms of capital, social capital is a fruitful resource which gives to people that possess it the opportunity to accomplish

aspirations that would otherwise be unattainable (Coleman 1990, p. 598). Coleman has identified the centrality of the element of “closure” inside the social networks for the formation and preservation of social capital, which facilitates the appearance of norms and intensifies the level of trust among the components of the network. From this perspective, it is created inside the social relations in three forms: producing high levels of obligations and expectations, offering potential information, and creating norms and effective sanctions (Zontini 2004, p. 5).

In this regard, Putnam (2000), while recognising a form of social capital that is based on family ties, which he defines as *bonding social capital*, at the same time classifies it as a less beneficial form for both the individual and the community. For this author, the sources of social capital external to the family or *bridging social capital* are much more advantageous for the well-being of the person and the larger society in terms of resources available. He suggests that “bonding social capital” is “inward looking and tends to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups” (Putnam 2000, p. 22), while “bridging social capital” is “outward looking and encompasses people across diverse societal cleavages” (Putnam 2000, p. 22). Similarly Lin (2001) defines the former types of relations as “strong social ties” more useful for “expressive action” (Lin 2001, p. 76) such as support and help, whereas the latter types of connections can be considered as “weak social ties” more useful for access and gaining resources, thus more apt for instrumental actions (Lin 2001, p. 77), for example to gain knowledge and information.

Enlarging and applying this perspective to my fieldwork, it seems that, when the migration process begins, family and ethnic ties act as bonding social capital useful particularly for access in the new country and the initial stages of settlement. In this regard, according to Zetter *et al.* (2006), for migrant people the production of social capital is often about “negotiating entry to the host society and its structures and combating lack of access (2006, p. 11, as quoted in Evergeti and Zontini 2006, p. 1029). This can be put in relation



with the conceptualisation of social capital proposed by transnationalism studies. However, transnationalism sees social capital as a 'moveable' resource that does not need to be strictly linked with the original community. From this perspective, social capital can be seen more as an *a priori* and potentially everlasting resource that each individual can activate either before beginning the migration journey or during it, and it can continue to be a reliable source even in the attempt to return to the home country (Evergeti and Zontini 2006). However, in the receiving country, this type of social capital resource could be a limitation for the individual development and his/her access to the available resources. It is much more profitable for the individual to work on activating new forms of local social capital, which in my research acted as a bridging social capital which was particularly important in order to enter the labour market and to remain active within it.

In fact, to achieve the best possible labour market outcomes in the new country, the new migrant needs to recreate forms of local social capital that will also involve 'out-group' ties, such as nationals of the receiving countries whether employers, colleagues (even from other nationalities), or acquaintances. Therefore, my understanding of social capital is more of an essential element to enter social networks and be active within them in order to achieve further advantages, such as information, knowledge, and help. However, simply being part of a network does not guarantee the best access to the resources available. In the case of my research, participants that developed forms of 'local' social capital, by being part of a network of local employers, for instance, would find it helped them to avoid periods of unemployment. On the other hand, in my study, the profitability of this type of social capital relies most on the compliance of the workers to act as a 'willing' component of the network structure. Issues of reputation in this case became paramount. To be perceived as an honest, flexible, reliable, hardworking and willing person was the strategy upon which was built a solid reputation spendable inside the network.

The literature regarding social capital and networks has been particularly revealing to understand how each of my migrant research participants has made use of their social resources to enter Italy and the local agricultural labour market. However, the conceptualisations of social capital tend to be mostly concerned with the demonstration of the importance of the already existing strong and weak ties that a person possesses. Conversely, based on the evidence that has emerged from my fieldwork and in consideration of labour market outcomes, the best opportunities that a migrant can achieve are mostly the ones related to 'brand-new' forms of local social capital created in the receiving country and involving ties with new people. This involves new social contacts and networks useful in the new country but without the need to deactivate or disclaim the usefulness of the preceding ones. Regarding labour market opportunities, the brand-new social capital can sometimes be based on family ties and on ethnicity links but more often it relies on labour relations with employers and co-workers and on the worker's reputation. This applies particularly in the case of the second form of recruitment, where this new social capital proves to be an extremely efficient tool for experienced migrant workers in the informal Sicilian agricultural labour market. It acts as a sort of 'sponsorship' offered to the workers and allows them to have more negotiation power compared to the workers employed through the other two forms of recruitment and greater mobility inside the network. However, before getting more into the details of this employment strategy I would like to start by analysing the recruitment practice through the transnational social capital or the recruitment in the migrant sending country.

## 5.2 Recruitment in the sending country

Several of my Romanian and Tunisian research participants arrived in Sicily to join their relatives that were already established there or following advice and information about work opportunities from friends and acquaintances. In general, these types of contacts fall within the category of social networks

indispensable for the circular and transnational migration, and also for the reproduction of the migration process itself. Migrants' networks are substantially based on the *social capital* owned by every single person. In particular, the transnational approach to migration studies emphasises that individuals mobilise a great amount of skills and resources to support groups and family life across national borders. Authors who study transnationalism, such as Goulbourne *et al.* (2010), Portes (1998), Levitt (2001) and Vertovec (1999) believe that migrants' mobility is an expedient to create innovative forms of social capital. Goulbourne *et al.* (2010, p. 289), for instance, refers to social capital as a:

... largely intangible and unquantifiable series of resources such as informal networks, and connections that are essentially social in the sense that the realization of its use-value is observable only where the individual and the group taps into it to produce or attain desired or beneficial results.

In the case of the majority of my research participants, for instance, family ties and local connections often worked as a prompt and efficient source to find labour opportunities across borders. It was quite recurrent, in fact, that, in agreement with employers, people already in Sicily pre-arranged work positions for the future migrant, often with on-site accommodation. Domenico, one of the employers that I interviewed, expressed quite clearly how easy it is to recruit a labour force, particularly Romanians, through family networks:

It is extremely easy to recruit your labour force. From the day that Romania is in Europe if you need labour force you only need to ask one of your Romanians and he send to you his entire family. Of course, one of the Romanians that already works for us, if I say: 'I need labour force, can you see who you have got in Romania, your uncle, your brother, your cousin etc ... in three days, with a bus, you get your labour force.

The types of farms that most use this type of recruitment are medium farms (from more than 10 hectares) and large farms (more than 80 hectares).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> It is possible to divide farms into small size (from 1 up to 10 hectares), medium size (from 10 to 80 hectares) and large size (from 80 hectares onwards). For more information see ISTAT (2010) *Sesto Censimento per l'Agricoltura*. Available at:

These types of farms are quite common in the transformed strip,<sup>24</sup> which in turn explains why this type of recruitment is also so widespread. This type of recruitment usually involves on-site accommodation and a high degree of labour commitment with the work tasks on the farm and tends to have very negative repercussions on the negotiation power left in the hands of the worker and a high risk of exploitation. Although this is not the worse labour recruitment strategy that I have come across, it can definitely undermine the wellbeing of the workers that can find themselves trapped in unknown realities.

### 5.2.1 New European workers

Since Romania entered the European Union in 2007, Romanian people can enter the Italian territory much easier and much less expensively compared to their Tunisian counterparts, specifically in virtue of their new status as European citizens. Actually, Italy has demonstrated a quite welcoming approach for A2 citizens, but only to labour in definite sectors such as highly skilled managerial roles or agriculture, construction, domestic and personal services (Ivan 2007), which has rigorously constrained their labour opportunities until 2014.<sup>25</sup> Although Romania today belongs to the European Union, most research participants claimed that in their country (as in Tunisia) the usual work payment is in the order of 200 Euros a month. This is too little remuneration for a family life and rewarding future perspectives. Meanwhile in Italy they are probably aware that they can arrange to be paid approximately 125 to 200 Euros a week. This can be considered as a strong incentive to migrate, especially for those workers that succeed in being *engaged* or legally employed and can benefit from the unemployment compensation and family allowance at the end of the agricultural season.

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<http://censimentoagricoltura.istat.it> (retrieved 6/11/2012).

<sup>24</sup> The transformed strip corresponds to approximately 80 kilometres of the Southern Sicilian coastline converted to agriculture production and defined as “one of Europe’s most impressive greenhouse districts” (Cole and Booth 2007, p. 388).

<sup>25</sup> When the seven years labour restrictions period would be lifted.

In spite of the strong economic motivations to migrate, in the case of Flaviu, one of my Romanian research participants, some unexpected circumstances made his and his fiancé's migration experience particularly unpleasant. Flaviu and Michela, as for most of my Romanian research participants, decided to move to Italy after making an agreement with friends or family members already migrated in the receiving destination. Those networks are very important when finding work or to change from one job to another. Although social networks can play a very helpful role in facilitating, especially in the initial stages of the migration process (e.g. providing information), they could also have a negative effect on the life of people relying on them. After arriving at their new work place, arranged through their Romanian neighbour friends, the couple had to live in inadequate living conditions. Flaviu found most remarkable the extremely low hygienic standards of the accommodation provided by their employer:

When we arrived here and they [friends and employer] took us there [to the farm], there was not a house! We had to stay for thirty days with four people in the same room ... four people! ... at night we were taking the bed inside the room and in the morning at 4:30-5:00am we were taking the bed outside because there was not space in that room to take breakfast ... We were taking the water from the well. The well was always dirty, the water was green, there were frogs inside ... Everything. We had a period ... Too harsh ... I spend one year and a half under medical control for skin problems, because I start to feel itching. I went to two or three specialist visits in Vittoria, and I have spent 100 Euros per visit. You should consider that I was earning 125 Euros a week. All the money that I was earning ... Too harsh.

The unpredictability of this labour recruitment strategy carries with it the high risk to be then constrained to get adapted to poor living, but also working conditions. Furthermore, negative aspects of living on a farm were highlighted by the majority of my Romanian research participants, but not all of them had to live in such inadequate conditions. Some of them had minor problems with regards to the hygienic and safety standards of the accommodation offered. However, there is always the risk of encountering awkward situations.

Another aspect of the use of social networks in relation to the migration process is their restrictive potential. In this respect, Portes has pointed out that “networks are important in economic life because they are sources for the acquisition of scarce means, such as capital and information, and because they simultaneously impose effective constraints on the unrestricted pursuit of personal gain” (Portes 1995, p. 8). According to Vasta (2004, see also Portes 1995), negative social networks can act in a constraining way by functioning as gatekeepers or marginalising some members. This can have negative consequences, particularly on the more fragile people that could not have access to existing resources. In some cases, negative social networks can even treat people willing to migrate as a source of income without the guarantee of the promised work and living arrangements. In fact, migrant networks not only involve personal relationships such as friendships, kinships and community links but also other figures, such as, for instance, intermediaries, labour recruiters, smugglers and so on (Vasta 2004). These forms of networking are also based on social capital and can seriously undermine the survival of people with scarce economical resources, as in the case of Dorin who arrived in Italy in 2006:

The way I arrived here is a sad story because it involves a friend of my mother that was working already here in Sicily. He said to my mother that there was a way to arrive in Italy or anywhere else out of Romania. I went to see him [in Romania] to ask what I could do, where he was taking me, what I had to do and how much money he needed, because at that time you were coming here by paying. He said 100 Euros for me and 100 Euros for the coach. But I did not come with the [official] company that does the trip between Romania and Italy, but with another coach that left me in Foggia [a city approximately 500 miles away from Sicily]. I left Romania with 450 Euros and I have arrived here with 200 Euro debts ... In Foggia he said that the employer was coming to pick me up, he took the money and he left. There was nothing, there was not a house, not electricity ... only a hole where you would never step in ... He left me without nothing.

Dorin’s experience demonstrates the power of negative networks in seriously undermining the survival of people using them and also the truthfulness of their employment promises. Similarly, in the experience of Flaviu and

Michela, their own neighbours in Romania took advantage of their extraneousness with the new place and the work sector, and their impossibility to speak the new language. This left the interaction with the employers completely in the hands of their intermediary, much to their disadvantage. In this regard Flaviu said:

Before we didn't know Italian 100%, we could understand but we could not speak so through this Romanian [we interacted with the employer]. But what he was doing? I was saying yes and he was saying no to the employer ... [he was] a friend, a neighbour from 100 metres from our home in Romania. So what happened, let's say the employer said to him 'let the guys work 8 hours', so he was right at the beginning with us, and what did the Romanian said to us? You guys have to work 12 hours, and he made us work 12 hours ... for the first week we worked 12, 13 hours [per day]. After that, because I could understand more Italian but I could not express myself I heard a conversation between the Romanian and the employer ... the employer said: 'What do you mean 13 hours? I said 8 hours.' And the Romanian made him believe that we wanted to work like that because we needed money.

Overall, all of my research participants that pre-arranged their work position and accommodation in their country of origin have had a very negative experience in the new reality that they found in Sicily. This negative impact can be related to the type of connection used (in terms of a family member or an acquaintance) but not necessarily deriving from them. In the case of Flaviu and Michela their contacts in Sicily definitely contributed, with their insincere behaviour, to exacerbate the already objectively poor living conditions.

However, we should consider that often the whole experience of their new life can on its own generate quite negative feelings. The beginning of any migration journey is in general a quite challenging and stressful change of life. But, undeniably, the strenuous work conditions typical of the agricultural sector, the confinement in the countryside and the poor wages and accommodation standards can heavily contribute to the disappointing perception of the entire experience. There are also other factors that can shape the entire migration experience in a negative way, such as the distance from family members (especially when children have been left behind), work

load, employment relationship and so on. There are people such as Alina, for example, who has joined her husband (who in turn has joined his brother) to work on the same farm for 30 Euros a day each, with free Sundays, without accommodation problems and with guaranteed unemployment compensation and family allowance. These work conditions can be considered as very advantageous. However, when I met Alina she was in the waiting room of the Emergency mobile clinic<sup>26</sup> waiting to be seen by the doctor. She was quite worried about her health because in the last year she had lost approximately 10 kilograms and she was continuing to lose weight, probably as a consequence of the load of work that she has to carry out:

The work inside the greenhouse is too heavy and when you go out of it you do not feel like doing anything else because you are already so tired ... let's say that I like it, but I would love to do another thing, a lighter work. Something more appropriate for a woman.

Alina's quote highlights that the strain of the work in the agricultural sector can often be too heavy for a woman, who may also have additional household and mothering duties. Most importantly, the factor that was making working in the agricultural sector of Sicily increasingly unbearable for Alina was that the received wage was not enough to allow her and her husband to provide financial support for all three children, thus they had to send the oldest back to Romania to live with her sister-in-law (see previous chapter). Thus, notwithstanding the advantageous work conditions compared to many other people, the low wage received still did not give the opportunity to Alina and her husband to financially support a family life in all its needs. Therefore, we can start to ascertain that even when social capital and networks work successfully, they do not necessarily produce satisfying working and living conditions. This is undeniably mostly due to the informal nature of their work agreements in the submerged agricultural economy of Sicily that cannot guarantee dignifying levels of economical profits, which are foremost for dignified work and living conditions.

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<sup>26</sup> Emergency is an independent Italian organisation that provides free, high quality medical and surgical treatment to the victims of war, landmines and poverty. For more information see: <http://www.emergency.it/italia/polibus.html>



### 5.2.2 Non-European workers

For non-European citizens, it is much more difficult and often expensive to legally enter the Italian territory compared to their Newly European counterpart. This is mostly due to their need to possess a pre-arranged work position in the receiving country to gain a visa. It is not unusual for this category of people to actually buy a regular contract from inclined employers. However, very often there are kinfolk already in Italy that can connect the aspiring emigrant with the inclined employer. The requirements to enter the Italian territory for non-European seasonal workers can be considered as one of the main substantial differences between the two major communities.<sup>27</sup> This is established by the current Italian immigration legislation that, aggravated by the complacency of deceitful employers, has generated through the years an active illegal trade of work contracts that has dried out the finances of many migrants and in some cases has been revealed to be only a fraud. Although there is a flourishing market of work contracts, the need to provide proof of their employment via a regular work contract is a strong incentive for many of my non-European research participants to look only for legal work positions, which in turn guarantee to them a degree of employment protection through their work rights. Ideally all migrant agricultural workers holding a regular work contract should enjoy the respect of all their work rights. However, in order to keep a legal work contract, it is quite widespread to accept lower wages, unpaid holidays, unpaid overtime and mistreatment sometimes.

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<sup>27</sup> Non-European migrants can 'legally' access the Italian territory through a regular work contract stipulated in their homeland before their arrival in Italy. In the case of farm workers, the periodic entry in the Italian territory of non-European citizens for seasonal work is regulated by the current Italian immigration law Bossi-Fini 2002. Every year it allows the entry into the country of only a fixed number of workers from defined countries with whom Italy has established labour agreements. Based on the request made by employers, each year it generates a list called 'decreto flussi' or *flow decree*, through which a specific number of seasonal workers are allowed in the Italian territory (for more information regarding the Bossi-Fini immigration law 2002 regarding the regulation of the seasonal work for the year 2012 see: [http://www.governo.it/GovernoInforma/Dossier/decreto\\_flussi\\_stagionali\\_2012/index.html](http://www.governo.it/GovernoInforma/Dossier/decreto_flussi_stagionali_2012/index.html)) . Another way to enter the Italian territory is by illegally crossing the borders and then staying in the territory without the required documents or overstaying a visa.

During my fieldwork, I met several Tunisian research participants that shared with me their story regarding the price that they had to pay to regularly enter into Italy. One of them was Toufie:

I arrived on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2009 to Palermo by ship. And then from there directly to Niscemi [a little town where his sister was living]. Clearly I paid [for the contract] ... Not too much because I did it through friends and my brother-in-law ... 2000 Euros maybe ... I could not get in clandestine. It is different to be regular than be clandestine ... So, I came to Italy and it was too hard because I could not speak any Italian. I did not work for 4-5 months and I did not have money. The contract was true, the contract was regularly registered. The contract was ok ... I came here but there was not work to do in that period so I stayed five months without working.

In the case of my research participants that entered Italy with the required documents, a contact was already in Sicily to find an employer willing to give away a work contract for thousands of Euros, but it was never clear if the intermediaries received a sum of money for the given favour. However, what was undeniably certain is that the work contract market is a flourishing and well-established business among non-European migrants and Italians.

Especially remarkable is the story of Jamel, a first league basketball player for his city team who arrived in Sicily in 2009. To try to increase his wage in Tunisia Jamel was also working as a fisherman with his father. The total amount for both jobs was not more than 600 Euros a month. Therefore, he decided to come to Italy to earn some extra money to buy a house in Tunisia and to meet the expenses for the wedding with his fiancé. The work contract that a friend of him found in the agriculture sector was only a way to get the legal requirements to enter the country, but Jamel's aim was to continue as a basketball player in Italy. Unfortunately, he did not succeed in entering any basketball team in the Ragusa province and had to find another type of job. Even in this second phase of job seeking, social capital revealed its power. In fact, despite all of his efforts trying to avoid the strenuous work in the agricultural sector, Jamel called another friend who found him a work position growing aubergines inside greenhouses:

I arrived here on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2009 with a visa to work ... I had the contract through a friend and I paid for it ... When I was looking for a job [after he failed the basketball team's trials], I called a friend and he told me that he was working in agriculture. For me it was the first time that I was doing this. When I arrived there and I saw the greenhouses and the house where I was supposed to sleep with other guys. I asked myself: 'and me, I should work here?' ... when I saw that place I felt very bad.

Jamel's account demonstrates not only the importance of having social capital to enter Italy, but also to find a work position, although poor, that could help in a time of need. The complex phenomenon of the illegal trade of contracts was explained to me more in detail by another Tunisian, Samir:

If you need a contract you need to do it under [through] somebody else. There are people that ask you 1000 Euros, somebody 1500, there are some who ask you 3000 ... you can reach even 4000 Euros! ... let's say that an employer makes a contract, as if he needs a worker from Tunisia, even if in reality I am already here, but it has to look as if I am there instead. Then he has to fill a request and when it goes through I go back to Tunisia and I go to make my request to work in Italy, then the visa and then I come back again in Italy. So finally I can have my permit to stay. The problem is that the employer spends no more than 100 Euros and asks you 1000 Euros!! And the others that have to find you the contract [the connection with the potential employer] want another 1000. If it passes the hands of 3-4 people, by the time that the contract finally arrives to me I have to pay 4000 Euros!

Samir's account draws quite a clear picture of the illegal market of work contracts and how it is quite a widespread and fruitful business for deceitful employers but also for the other figures of the network that can even be conational. Although it is an illicit activity, it is still inscribed among social network activities and relations and often it is the only way to enter 'documented' inside the Italian territory. However, as in the case of Toufie and Jamel, it may still not guarantee a satisfactory work position after arrival in the area, but is a way of crossing the border legally.

### 5.3 Recruitment through new local social capital and networks

A second form of recruitment that I came across during my fieldwork is the recruitment based on new 'local' social capital and networks. I have

intercepted this type of local recruitment mainly by interviewing some of the more experienced Romanian agricultural workers. This type of recruitment is mostly needed between jobs, when the harvest in one farm has finished and workers continue to look for other jobs or when a work agreement is broken and the worker needs a new position. Mostly due to their familiarity with the work sector and their labour experience with several employers, numerous Romanians prefer to use the 'passaparola' (word of mouth) technique through friends, but also through employers and colleagues to go from one job to another. This type of recruitment applies on the whole to small and minor medium farms which need less constant labour dedication. It was also confirmed by some employers such as Emanuele, an agronomist and medium farmer who was saying about his Romanian labour force:

... my brother-in-law has got greenhouses, my uncle has got greenhouses so, sometimes, when there are harvesting periods we borrow from each other the labour force. Rather than leave them without anything to do, when I need them my brother-in-law will lend them to me and we let them work which makes them happier because they get a paid day.

Agriculture is the prevalent economic activity in this area and the majority of families have got, or share, a farm. However, this quotation gives an idea of the level of commoditisation of the labour force in this labour sector, which seems to be treated as a mere tool for the execution of the production. From this farmer's words, the labour force can be used, exchanged, returned and reused based on the needs of the production process. Furthermore, all of these movements between farms are not contemplated in any form of employment contract but remain at the level of informal agreements. However, they are justified by the fact that this makes the worker 'happier' because it covers periods of non-production that otherwise would be not paid. Actually, for migrant farm workers it is much more convenient to fall in a network of farms that will allow them to avoid jobless days.

Experienced Romanian workers prefer to rely on the 'word of mouth' between employers and friends to go from one farm to another. Interestingly, in the study carried out by Hartman (2008) regarding

agricultural workers in the vast greenhouse area of Southern Spain, Romanian workers belonged to “established networks of work teams” managed by their fellow countrymen that were interacting as intermediaries with the local farmers (Hartman 2008, p. 498). Although in a less organised form, even in the Sicilian greenhouse system, Romanian workers showed the ability to use established networks to find work positions or to move from one job to another. Similar to the Romanian workers in Spain, even in the transformed strip Romanian workers consider the ‘hanging around’ strategy very unsuccessful and leave it to their North African counterparts or to workers without networks (see the next section). However, the absence of a well-established gang-master system enlarges the chances for Romanian workers to find durable and reliable work positions compared to their fellow countrymen working in the Spanish greenhouse system (see Hartman 2008).

As my research participants were explaining to me, to make this type of recruitment work, it is essential to have a good reputation as an honest person and as a reliable worker. This is also confirmed by the perception shared by most farm employers that I have interviewed who see Romanian workers as reliable and honest hard workers and capable of understanding the different work tasks. Salvatore, a medium farm employer who recruits mostly Romanian people said:

About labour, I haven’t got a preference but happened this situation [all Romanian employees] ... probably because they render more, in terms that they are more intelligent, they understand more the work, they are more flexible.

This widespread preference towards a defined migrant group compared to others is a tendency observed also in other research confirming the ‘racialisation’ of certain niches of work in the labour market (Castles and Miller 2009). The research carried out, for instance, by Zontini (2010) regarding Filipino migrants as domestic workers in Bologna, confirmed this positive perception regarding a migrant group in carrying out a certain job compared to other nationalities (Zontini 2010; see also Parreñas 2001).

During my fieldwork, I have noticed how this positive perception towards Romanian workers is increasing their recruitment as farm workers to the detriment of their Tunisian counterparts. In fact, for some of my Romanian research participants, having a good reputation is a strategy finalised to build a form of social capital which is useful in this local labour market to find jobs. However, in contrast to the Filipino domestic workers in Bologna, this strategy is not used as a 'marketing' solution to sell their labour more expensively (Zontini 2010, p. 199) but to secure themselves overall better and more durable work positions. In point of fact, agreeing to a lower wage has been the winning strategy for this less-established and more recent wave of migrant workers from Romania. In their case, it seems that social networks help to find a job but do not increase the chances of finding a better paid work position. This labour outcome has been verified in a study carried out by Franzen and Hangartner (2006) regarding the non-monetary benefits of social capital. In their research, the two authors contrast the hypothesis promoted by Granovetter (1974) who suggested that social networks help individuals to find better-paid jobs. Instead, Franzen and Hangartner (2006) highlighted how networks are "helpful with respect to non-pecuniary job characteristics but not concerning the monetary pay-offs" (Franzen and Hangartner 2006, p. 353). For these authors, networks can help find a job linked to the individual's professional skills or with higher career prospects which can be considered as non-pecuniary job characteristics.

In the case of my research participants, however, we should consider that the most important aspect of finding a work position through networks was not better payment but finding employers willing to secure them a formal *engagement*<sup>28</sup> position in the farm. The formal engagement is a pecuniary job

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<sup>28</sup> The engagement position is a peculiarity of the Italian agricultural policy. It does not correspond to a regular work contract but represents the existence of an administrative work position of a worker on a farm. Workers can have either a contract and an engagement position or only an engagement position. The daily wage for one day of agricultural labour in the province of Ragusa is equal to 52,87 Euros. Because employment in the Italian agricultural sector is seasonal and the regulation takes into consideration a period of inactivity due to the nature of the work, the government provides an unemployment compensation calculated on the actual number of days worked by all the agricultural workers

characteristic specific to agricultural employment in Italy that does not greatly affect the employer's finances but allows the worker to request from the Italian social security institution (INPS) unemployment compensation and a family allowance for the period of inactivity typical of agriculture.<sup>29</sup> These extra financial resources are strictly related to the management of the seasonal agricultural employment in the Italian system and give some social protection and security to workers. This element can be considered as a strong incentive to migrate to Italy to go and work in agriculture, as suggested by the New Economy of Labour Migration (NELM) theory, which proposes that governments can affect migration rates through a proactive management of indemnity and income distribution. Programmes such as unemployment compensation, for instance, can considerably affect the motivations for international migration (Massey *et al.* 1993, p. 440).

A further reason that explains the declining recruitment of non-European people is the fact that they need to document their stay in the Italian territory by a more expensive regular work contract which would also allow them to enjoy social, civil and employment rights. Interestingly, this creates a paradoxical situation where the European citizenship status for Romanian workers is translated in the reality with the possibility of having more space of arrangements in the informal economy, more negotiation power with employers regarding working conditions and access to some forms of economical and social protection from the Italian state. In everyday life, holding an European passport and being allowed to reside in the Italian territory without a work contract have, *de facto*, created favourable conditions for Romanian workers but mostly for employers that see this new

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*engaged* in a farm. In brief, each worker that has worked for at least 102 days in the last two working years is entitled to receive 40% of the provincial agricultural rate (52,87 Euros) for each day worked. This is seen as one of the reasons why workers tend to accept being under-paid as long as they can prove they have been working for at least 102 days in the last two-year period. Another strong incentive that motivates workers to accept being under-paid, working long hours and carrying out heavy duties seems to be the family allowance calculated for each dependent child. For more information regarding the unemployment allowance, see:

<http://www.inps.it/portale/default.aspx?itemdir=5799>

<sup>29</sup> For more information see: <http://www.inps.it/portale/default.aspx>

labour force as much easier to employ only through the *engagement* and for lower labour and administration costs and risks compared to the non-European workers. By contrast, this confirms the “state of exception” (Agamben 2003) lived by all non-European migrants, even the ones that have arrived and settled before the introduction of new entry requirements. Workers without a European passport and a regular work contract are in a status of juridical exception compared to other European workers. In practical terms, as also confirmed by Hartman (2008) in his study with Romanian workers in Spain, compared to the non-European workers “informal Romanian workers have a greater ability to leave unsatisfactory work situations and move on, to change occupations, and to pursue different strategies to gain working rights” (Hartman 2008, p. 498). This is detrimental for the Tunisian workers in that, even after years of living and working in the area, they still need to rely on the renewal of their work contract to legally reside in the Italian territory and to continue to live as ‘included’ and not as ‘excluded’.

In the case of my research participants, it is specifically through the attainment of the *engagement* positions that Romanians succeed in gaining some working rights, such as unemployment compensation and family allowance from the Italian state. The research participant that most highlighted the importance of having an engagement position was Marin. This would allow him a relative economic stability and avoid periods of unemployment by going from one employer to another, but he first needed to build a good reputation as a ‘trustable’ worker among friends and acquaintances. After five years working in the same area, he actually was very confident regarding the efficiency of this labour recruitment strategy, which was successful for him on different occasions:

I found work positions through friends and word of mouth. If you are a good person another employer will be interested in you, and he [the employer] can say ‘this is a good guy, works well and works for this price’. And then, if I accept, it is because he gives me the *engagement*. I always worked with the *engagement*. Now [after the end of the seasonal contract] you work on daily basis. And if you make a bad



impression it passes a bad word about you and you cannot go from this [employer] to that one. If you are a good person and he likes you, you go from that person to a friend, to another one ... Little steps but you can still keep going. If he [employer] is a good person [helps you]. Also, we have been here for many years so we have got a few friends that can help a bit when there is the need ...

*R. So you will not wake up in the morning and go to a square or a bar to find a daily job?*

No, not this no. Nobody takes you ... There are Tunisians succeeding in this but Romanians never ... Through friends ... no streets or bars ... Also I never say 'I don't like this type of task' or 'I don't like to do this job', otherwise tomorrow who is going to look for you? Nobody is going to look for you.

Not all Romanian workers succeed in the acquisition of an engaged position in all their work places, but a good reputation and established networks are always helpful at least to go from one job to another. Another Romanian worker, Alessandru, had the same view about recruitment through an established local employers' network and the word of mouth strategy that has helped him to find a job when he needs it:

Here I have got lots of friends. There is Mr Baffo that I know for seven years, his brother-in-law [another farmer] that I know for seven years as well. Another one as well that I know for a long time ... there are lots of people that I know ... When I am without a job and I come here they will find me a job ... at the moment I am working, with tomorrow will be five days [of work] ... [for] next week, I have spoken with a Romanian that has spoken with his employer, so ...

This recruitment practice based on the good reputation of the worker as reliable, experienced and so on includes also another personal characteristic, trustworthiness. When an employer takes a worker from another employer for a short period of time it is quite certain that the person agrees with the unwritten rule of underpayment, no legal contract, no allowances and so on. The employer is quite certain that the worker will not take out a legal action against him which will imply the end of his chances of finding another job and ruining the process of establishing a good reputation. This aspect was pointed out by a Romanian worker, Sorina, who said:

If I had problems I would not report it because if, in the end, I decide to stay here and I get my life here and I make a report [to the authorities] and the word goes around, where I am going to? You hurt yourself most. The most damaged will be you ... You cannot do anything; you cannot argue about it; if you do it the worst is for you.

In other words, if the worker starts a legal action against a fraudulent employer then the worker will seriously compromise his or her reputation as a 'trustworthy worker' and, as a consequence, any chance to find other work positions. This is a growing perception regarding the longer established Tunisian workers that in recent times have opened legal actions against their employers who have been increasingly dismissive with them in favour of cheaper and more 'trustworthy' Romanians. This was confirmed by one of my medium farm employers, Michele, regarding Tunisian workers:

Because today the Tunisian, the 'extra-communitarian' [non-European] Tunisian, with the legal action that has been opened, with the reports that have been made to the trade unions, has lost too much. He has lost. Also, the attitudes that the extra-communitarians have got are not the same attitude of a Romanian. A Romanian is much more European, more close to us. Obviously there are people and people ... everywhere you find good people and less good people. But if we generalise a bit, Romanians get almost half price.

Michele expressed quite clearly some negative racial prejudice against Tunisian migrants on the grounds of their research of protection for their employment rights through trade unions. The use of the term 'extra-communitarian' is widely used in Italy and shows the perception of 'extraneousness' of these people from the 'imagined European community'. For Michele, Romanian people, instead, by being complicit with the informal agreements and by earning half price compared to their counterparts, show their 'similarity' to the European attitude.

On the other hand, several North African research participants expressed their apprehension for their difficulties in finding a work position covered by a contract. This is the case, for example, of Omar, an experienced Tunisian agricultural worker, who became irregular due the difficulty in finding employers willing to regularly employ him. Omar was still trying to get a job

by going to the same bar where employers were habitually recruiting workers in the past. Today, instead, this recruitment strategy seems to not be that effective anymore and Omar, who is the father of six children working in the area since 1986, struggles to even find a daily employment:

Before, it was easier to find a job. You were going to the bar and immediately you were finding a job. People [employers] were looking for workers. Today it does not happen anymore. Today, even if you come to the bar every day for a week or ten days, you cannot find a job ... the recruitment places are always those like the bar, the square but ...

The new recruitment strategy followed by Romanian people, based on 'word of mouth' and local social capital, is drastically undermining the opportunities left to Tunisian people, leaving them unemployed and at the great risk of becoming irregular. This brief account from Omar links to the last type of recruitment that I came across during my fieldwork, which is the *Casual Recruitment* from definite places such as bars, petrol stations and squares that have been reference points through the years. These types of work positions can be described as the residual labour opportunities in the area and they mostly involve refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented and inexperienced migrant workers.

#### 5.4 Casual recruitment

Casual recruitment is potentially the most undignified and dangerous recruitment practice that I came across during my fieldwork. It involves all the people with uncertain legal status such as undocumented people, asylum seekers and refugees that live in the area and accept occasional work offers. This type of recruitment practice has been widely explored academically, mainly because the absence of citizenship status creates a "state of exception" (Agamben 1998) that leaves the worker at the mercy of any potential employer and without the protection of his/her rights against exploitation and mistreatment (Allasino, Reynery, Venturini *et al.* 2004; Galesi and Mangano 2010; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2004; Rogaly 2008; Shelley 2007). In this regard, the concept of 'camp' developed by Agamben (1998)

seems quite pertinent. By stretching the concept of 'camp' and applying it to the informal economy we can infer that the exceptional state of these people is functional "to sustain and reproduce the hypercapitalist order" (Lee 2010, p. 61). It is in this zone that people chiefly in the above-described exceptional state are "so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives" that anything could happen to them (Agamben 1998, p. 171; see also Lee 2010) and they cannot claim any protection. It is not uncommon, in fact, that employers take advantage of the migration status, the work inexperience and low language skills of these people to actually super exploit them for many farm jobs and duties (Rogaly 2008).

In the literature as well as in the opinion of employers and experts, these migrant workers are described as "essential" for an agricultural sector that would otherwise suffer due to a profound lack of manual labour (Allasino *et al.* 2004; Galesi and Mangano 2010; Shelley 2007). The incidence of the irregular migrant population is, according to the INEA (National Institute of Agrarian Economy) report 2009, a structural labour element that supports the agricultural sector not only in Sicily but in all Southern Italy (INEA 2009, p. 34).<sup>30</sup> In spite of the indispensability of those workers, their employment in the agricultural sector is mostly based on casual daily hiring from the main streets, specifically petrol stations and central squares next to areas of agricultural production (Cole and Booth 2007; Hartman 2008; Kasimis, Papadopoulos and Zacoboulou 2003). Generally, for undocumented migrants in this area the duration of the period of work can greatly vary from a day of work to a few weeks; however, the recruitment practice is substantially identical.

Based on the information collected during my fieldwork, I consider this particular category of labour force the labour supply that can accommodate the specific request of work for small farms (no more than one hectare).

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<sup>30</sup> For more information regarding the presence of migrants in the Italian agricultural sector, see the INEA report 2009, available at:  
<http://www.extracomunitari.it/briguglio/immigrazione-e-asilo/2010/febbraio/inea-immigr-agricoltura.pdf>

These types of farm usually need less constant labour activities and most will be concentrated at the beginning of the agricultural cycle and at the end of it, at the time of harvesting and for the dismantling of greenhouses. Considering that in the transformed strip the smallholding is still a quite predominant form of farm, although this is declining, the recruitment of this type of labour force is particularly common as a strategy to attain help during harvesting time but to avoid the expense of a longer employment relation. This general inclination has led undoubtedly to an increased casualisation of this labour market with serious consequences for the economic and social opportunities of the workers involved. However, it largely contributes to the cutting of employment costs, which are a consistent expense especially in times of global financial crisis that predominantly afflicts farmers. Furthermore, as explained by Sciortino (2006), this is also a strategy used by employers to evade tax, to escape cumbersome national regulations and is justified by the expectation that employing an undocumented migrant involves only minimal risks (Sciortino 2006).

Moreover, to be randomly recruited in the square of a countryside bar, where numerous other people go every morning to offer their labour force, probably reduced the workers' negotiation power over the work conditions: "Not everybody, but approximately 30-35 people everyday go to the bar 'la rotonda'. Like you, every morning another 30-35 people!" said Mohamed. This phenomenon has been already described by Guthman (2004) as 'intensification', which commonly refers to innovations used to foster the accumulation of agrarian capital. It mostly concerns the technical control and improvement of the biological processes during the agrarian production, but also it can be considered as a non-technical innovation in labour control. Guthman (2004) argues that "the use of vulnerability, to ensure a timely and compliant labour force come harvest time" can be considered as a form of intensification (Guthman 2004, p. 65). Also, as Rogaly (2008) has pointed out, for some employers certain types of workers could be seen as more appropriate due to their acceptance of the work tasks and norms, their

keenness to agree with an already set work programme or vice versa to go to work without a specific end time, and finally workers that are easy to dismiss when no longer needed (Rogaly 2008, p. 498). According to Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2004), to keep undocumented workers in their “state of exception” is functional and vital for the type of neoliberal economy in which we live. In the same line, Lee (2010, p. 62) points out that “undocumented labor is left in an exceptional state of interstitiality and in-between-ness so to be constituted as an imminent and productive part of neoliberal economy.”

Another factor important to consider is the lack of social capital, a condition typical of certain types of migrants for whom the migration process is quite uncertain, such as in the cases of asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants. Social capital is an important factor that can play a key role, particularly in the first stage of the migration process. Newcomers, especially undocumented people, without the adequate financial conditions to provide for their living expenses, without social capital and networks that can help them to enter the local labour market, can be particularly exposed to fraud and exploitation. According to Grzymala-Kazłowska (2005), chiefly at the beginning of the new migration experience “a lack of social capital makes the start-up of life and work abroad an extremely tough undertaking because such migrants are devoid of practical, emotional and material support for coping with the new situation” (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2005, p. 698). The importance of established and reliable social capital and networks to enter the local labour market was actually emphasised again by Mohamed, a young Tunisian undocumented man, who said:

Everybody has got his father, his brother, his friend so they call each other on the phone and say ‘come to work with me for five days, for ten days’ everybody like this ... I don’t know anybody, when I speak with somebody and say ‘can you help me? I want to work’ he says to me ‘I don’t know’ but when he has got work he just calls his cousin, his father, his brother, his friend.

Despite the declining success of this labour recruitment strategy, across the transformed strip, before the sun rises, silhouettes of men start to walk along the highways and city roads to reach the recruitment places. What was really

impressing for me was the fact that every morning those people stay in defined squares or places for hours waiting to be approached by a potential employer. I still remember in particular that day when I followed trade unions to another city to protest against the introduction of a voucher system<sup>31</sup> in substitution of work contracts for temporary work opportunities:

Today there was a Trade Union protest in favour of seasonal workers in Catania [one of the main cities] and I went with them. One of the Trade Unionists gave me a lift. We met at 6:30am in a petrol station of our neighbourhood. The sun was still very low in the skyline but at the petrol station there were already several North Africans waiting there to be recruited. There were at least 20 people there divided into small groups of 4-5 people chatting to each other. I am particularly impressed by the apparent ordinariness of this labour market recruitment. They stay there hours waiting while the sun gets higher and bigger. It really reminds me of the prostitution sector but under the growing sunlight. *The prostitution of the labour force*. Sell themselves to anyone interested in exchange of money. (From my Diary 27/4/2012)

This type of recruitment leaves completely in the hands of any casual employer the entire management of the work setting from the work hours to wage, from the tasks to carry out on the farm to the management of breaks and free time. This was particularly clear in the experience of Terir, a young undocumented Tunisian that I met at the CGIL Trade Union office where, despite his migration status, he went to start a dispute against his previous employer. Terir worked for a quite long time in an 'agriturismo', which is a farm with usually domestic animals, restaurant and accommodation. Terir was hired one morning from a random employer in one of the 'recruitment' squares of Vittoria and then worked for him for several months with the promise of getting a regular work contract that could allow him to obtain a regular permit to stay in Italy:

There is this square where you need to go early, at 5am and you have to stay there until the employers arrive looking for workers. If you are lucky he takes you with him, if you are not you go back home ... I spent almost two months like that and then I met this Italian at the square ... he said: 'Do you want work?' And I said 'Yes.' So, 'Come with

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<sup>31</sup>For more information regarding the voucher system see:  
<http://www.inps.it/portale/default.aspx?itemdir=5592>

me.' I asked 'How much you going to pay me a day?' And he said 'Come, so we can speak about it but first I show you the work.' I accepted. I arrived there and he had an agriturismo ... Then, after a week of work, he said that he was going to give me 600 Euros a month. I looked at him and I said 'ok' ... I was working from 6am to 6-7pm. From when the sun comes up to when it goes down. And then, after a shower, I was going up [to the restaurant] to eat with them and then they made me work ... I was doing washing up until 3 in the morning ... the day that he said that he was going to give me 600 Euros a month he also said 'and on Monday you are free.' I said 'ok.' On Monday, when I was free, he knocked at my door and said: 'Wake up!' 'What happened?' I said. 'Wake up and let's go.' I put on my work clothes and I went out and he said, 'Today you going to do half day of work with me.' I arrived at the point that on Monday I was working all day.

Terir's experience was one of the most extreme examples of the disproportionate workloads that can occur when hired on a casual basis by random employers without any previous agreement on work tasks, conditions and wages. Another element that undoubtedly has an impact over the work conditions given to Terir was probably the fact that he was living on farm. This is a strategy that especially documented and experienced migrant agricultural workers absolutely tend to avoid, so they don't end up in conditions of exploitation and isolation. Unfortunately, often this is the only option that other workers must accept due to their migrant status, to the low wages offered/accepted or simply because the farm is too distant to reach without a means of transportation. This also seems to be one of the strategies used to cut living expenses such as rent, bills, petrol and so on.

Generally speaking, workers that live and work in the countryside seem to be more exposed to the preconditions for situations of exploitation by employers. Living in a remote area can contribute not only to exclusion from services such as the health system, banking, social services, trade unions and so on, but can also contribute to the extreme exploitation of working hours and duties. Furthermore, the standards of accommodation can vary greatly: from holiday farm houses on land that the employer makes available for his workers to (more often) shanty constructions with very low standards of hygiene and safety. There are also other aspects of living on a farm that are



particularly important such as the management of free time, which can be highly compromised by the needs of the farm and by invasive and non-respectful attitudes of employers.

The use of undocumented people for short periods of time is a quite common practice in this area. According to Coats (2007) “the freedom to hire and fire lies at the heart of the employers’ power and creates what economists would describe as an ‘information asymmetry’” (Coats 2007, p. 54). On one hand, employers will always have more chances to find employees, probably knowing the places where to find them and being able to accommodate the costs of training. On the other hand, employees are not always aware of the job opportunities around and they may have to risk unemployment (Coats 2007). In practice, this is often translated into a tendency of employers to make a ‘disposable’ use of migrant workers particularly those ones with vulnerable life conditions such as poverty and/or irregularity. This tendency was particularly clear in the words of some of the employer research participants. In particular, small farm employer research participants were keen to employ a labour force for a short period of time, as Francesco and Salvatore, were saying:

I do not even ask myself the question when I need it. If I do not find anyone and I need [to harvest] I do not even ask if he is irregular or not, because I need him only for a short period. Obviously, if I have to do a long work I need somebody that can be engaged ...

About the labour force ... it depends. When there are those couple of months that are dangerous [because of the need to harvest] whoever I found I would get. I mean that I did not have any ... even if he was irregular ... I only needed to find one and then even the relatives were coming ... like a chain ... And especially I was getting ‘furnished’ from priest Cabibbo from the church ... I was giving the money to him and he was keeping something for himself while he was letting them sleep there. He was giving them accommodation ... I was picking them up in the morning and then I was paying the priest on Saturday, and he was keeping the expenses.

Both employers were inclined to recruit workers without any interest for the persons themselves but merely for their labour product. Salvatore was using the 'service' offered by a local priest to get his supply of workers, without any form of personal agreement with them or recognition of their agency. Generally speaking, as this example showed, from the perspective of capital's profit, the only function undocumented workers have got is the work produced by their physical body but in a status of "bare life" (Agamben 1998), which means that they are not protected by the state from unfairness, mistreatment, work injuries or exploitation (see also Hartman 2008). In the case of undocumented migrants, for example asylum seekers and to a certain extent refugees, 'bare life' is the condition of "human subjects reduced to a naked depoliticized state without official status and juridical rights" (Lee 2010, p. 57). In this condition anything could happen to them and they cannot claim any protection for their human rights or citizenship.

The tendency to make a 'disposable' use of workers by employers is not only a prerogative of Sicilian employers as it is, instead, a general trend that is influencing the labour relations in many countries where the security of employment is increasingly crumbling while other forms of work are progressively more widespread. In this respect, Zygmunt Bauman (1998), in his critique regarding the rising and overwhelming sense of insecurity of individual livelihood, pointed out the centrality of the development in recent times of a new type of jobs, which are "of the part-time, temporary, fixed-term, no-benefits-attached, and altogether 'flexible' character" (Bauman 2009, p. 7). This negative development can be seen as the outcome of the gradual and inexorable change of the late modern society from a "society of producers" to a "society of consumers" and consequently from a society led by the "work ethic" to a society regulated by the "aesthetic of consumption" (Bauman 1998, p. 2). One of the main characteristics of the society of consumers is that it no longer requires mass labour and as such it creates a "reserve army of labour" (Marx 1976) of poor and disposable people with scarce social functions to improve their positions.

Regarding the case of people vulnerable due to their legal status, the story of Amid is quite revealing. He is an Algerian young man residing in one of the refuges and asylum seekers' centres that I visited. The isolation of the centre and consequently for the people living in it was particularly remarkable for me:

When I arrived at the centre I immediately figured out that it was pretty far from the city [Vittoria], so much so as to not give any chance to the men that live in this centre to go out on foot. To arrive there I drove along a small country road with only farms on both sides for almost half a mile, then on the right there was the gated entrance to the centre. I arrived in a little courtyard where I parked my car. The place was nice enough but pretty isolated. Inside there were only four bedrooms to share between sixteen people (four people in each). It had got a kitchen and a dining hall. There were also a few offices where people that run the centre work. Around the courtyard there was a bit of greenery. One of the men told me that one of them was doing some gardening to make it look that nice ... I succeeded in interviewing an Algerian man of 30 years of age. ... He told me very interesting things and shared with me a very critical perspective on the situation in which he and his centre mates were living. (From my diary 5/5/2012)

Amid has a serious health condition that he did not want to reveal to me. Although he arrived in Italy undocumented, in an overcrowded boat from Algeria, he managed to gain a permit to stay in the Italian territory for humanitarian reasons. When I interviewed Amid, he explained to me that he receives 75 Euros a month from the centre where he is living and that, to earn something more, he and his friends at the centre were occasionally recruited as agricultural workers. He also explained to me how the recruitment works and shared with me his thoughts about why employers go to his centre to recruit labour:

I have sometimes worked in agriculture because I am free to get out from the centre ... they [employers] come here to take one or two people. Because they give only a little money and we are here and we don't know anything ... The first person that speaks to him gets the job ... The days you never know how many they will be. Sometimes it is a day per week. Sometimes it is a day every two weeks. Sometimes for a few months there is no work. Sometimes a week of work ... is not ... it is luck! ... Everywhere there are Tunisians around here. Everybody has got experience in agriculture. Everybody has worked in it. Why do

they not go to Comiso [a town nearby] or to another town rather than come to the centre to get some foreigners that are isolated and do not know anything? Because they work more and for less money! ... If you now come with me I will show you many Tunisians, all of them at work harvesting tomatoes or something else and if I ask how much they earn they will say: 35-40 Euros. For 25 they do not work. But if you come to the centre and say: 'Tomorrow I need two people to work 10 hours for 20 Euros, who wants to come?' Here there will be a battle to decide who is going to go!!

It is clear from Amid's interview that employers take advantage of certain people's vulnerable living conditions to get cheap labour for brief periods of time. The life of refugee people can be described as characterised by "rightlessness" (Arendt 2004). The first right denied to recognised refugee people is often the right to work and provide for their own life and the life of their family. This constrains these people to necessarily resolve their lack of economic opportunities by labouring in the informal economy and exposing themselves to its work conditions.

Another example of a person vulnerable because of his immigration status is Mohamed, an undocumented Tunisian man that arrived in Italy in October 2011 in an overfull boat. I could only interview Mohamed because, during his vocational course for tourism and hotel management, he studied English as his third language. Fatherless, Mohamed decided to come to Italy because the money that he was earning in Tunisia was not enough for him, his mother and four brothers to live on. Mohamed does not speak any Italian and in the three months that he has been in the transformed strip he has worked only four days in total and every day for more hours:

Ok, I am going to tell you what happened when that boss took me to work. I asked him how much he was giving me for one day's work and he said 30 Euros. I said to him: 'ok, no problems!' He picked me up at 7 o'clock. At 12 o'clock he said to me to go and eat something. I went to my house and had something to eat and at 2 o'clock I went back to work and as normal at 5 o'clock I was supposed to go back home. 8 hours. But when I asked if I could go home he said to me, 'No, you can go at 7 o'clock'. 12 hours. From 7 o'clock am to 7 o'clock pm. I had to work until 7 o'clock because I needed that money ... and then he said: 'Tomorrow can you come at 35 past 6?' I said 'ok, no problems' ... I had to work because I needed to work, I could not say no to him or 'I

only work until 5' because I needed this work. I needed the money from the work.

As we have seen, the nature of the casual recruitment of workers from defined places can be seen as a strategy used by employers to get a labour force with a very low level of employment obligations towards them. Undocumented people live in a status of 'juridical non-existence' that exposes them to work conditions where the worker's negotiation power is drastically reduced to accommodating acceptance. Furthermore, the interaction between being undocumented and work in the informal market definitely contributes to the feelings of apprehension and uncertainty for the future that exposes the person to a greater risk of exploitation. According to Hugo (2007), the migrant population seems to be the one most at risk of exploitation due to their often social, economical and physical marginalisation compared to the local population. In the case of my research participants, clearly their immigration status contributed to their risk of being exploited. We should always remember that within these categories of people there are also refugees and asylum seekers waiting for the recognition of their status, and that, due to their lack of adequate institutional support, they often have to accept the first job that they can acquire (Reyneri 2004). There are also people who have previously been regular who are forced to work in the informal labour market because they are unable to find a legal work contract again. Being undocumented often means being relegated to the informal labour market which consequently means having no other option than to accept certain types of jobs.

## 5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the three main recruitment practices that I came across during my research fieldwork which are strictly linked to the way migrant agricultural workers access the Italian territory. I have also started to consider the nature of the labour relations that they experience. I looked at the resources of social capital mobilised by migrants to enter the country and

the labour market, their immigration status, the types of farms where they were employed and their labour relationships with their employers. The first recruitment practice discussed was the one pre-arranged in the migrant's sending country through forms of transnational social capital and connections with kin, friends and acquaintances between the two countries. This recruitment type was mostly useful for medium- to large-sized farms and has shown different outcomes for European workers compared to non-European migrants, especially in terms of the documents required and the migration costs. However, in both cases this type of recruitment did not reveal itself to be the most profitable one, but actually as a particularly unpredictable way to enter the country and to find remunerative and acceptable working and living conditions.

The second type of recruitment strategy was based on forms of social capital developed locally mainly by Romanian agricultural workers. In contrast to their Tunisian counterparts, due to their European citizenship status Romanian workers can stay in the Italian territory without necessarily holding a regular work contract. This legal precondition paradoxically has given the Romanian workers more room to make arrangements in the informal economy, more negotiation power with employers regarding working conditions and access to some forms of economical and social protection from the Italian state through the engagement position. In everyday life, holding an European passport and being allowed to reside in the Italian territory without a work contract have, *de facto*, created favourable conditions for Romanian workers but mostly for employers that see this new labour force as much easier to employ, to deal with and for lower labour and administration costs and risks compared to the non-European workers. This has generated notable consequences for the long-established Tunisian workers that struggle to find regular work contracts and for the general labour market, which has registered an evident deterioration of general working conditions for non-Europeans.

Finally, the third kind of recruitment practice which has emerged is the one involving mostly undocumented migrants and refugees living in the area. Both types of migrants have entered the territory in an unauthorised manner. Due to their lack of social capital and for reasons related to their immigration status, these people were usually recruited on a casual basis and for short periods of time, such as casual daily recruitment or during harvesting time in small farms. Overall, the types of work offered through this form of recruitment were the most undignified and dangerous with serious consequences for the social, economical and psychological status of the people involved. As we have seen, none of the above recruitment practices was giving full employment rights and protection and dignified living and working conditions. This is mostly related to the informality of the work agreements involving those workers. Furthermore, even in the case of non-European migrants holding a legal work contract, the official wage was never gained and workers were often forced to pay for their own contract. It seems that too often migrants are seen by employers as a labour force resource useful for cutting production costs and as a potential source of fraudulent economic gain. This section has also highlighted even more how undocumented migrants are used only for their physical body but in a substantial status of “bare life” (Agamben 1998). The ‘bare life’ is the condition of human subjects which are not protected by the state from unfairness, mistreatment, work injuries or exploitation. They are “depoliticized and without official status and juridical rights” (Lee 2010, p. 57). They also live in an area where the informality of the labour opportunities offered to them on one side contribute to their survival but, on the other side, work like an exceptional zone or a “camp” (Agamben 1998) where anything can happen to these people but they cannot access any form of protection.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Citizenship, Human Rights and Vulnerability to Labour Exploitation**

#### **6. Introduction:**

As explored in Chapter Five, social capital and social networks are important vehicles to enter the destination country and its formal and informal labour market. Although my research participants followed similar migratory strategies to pursue entry and labour opportunities, their outcomes in terms of costs of migration, ability to maintain formal and informal labour agreements and access to human and employment rights, resulted to be quite dissimilar. The factor that has most differentiated the labour outcomes of my research participants and has affected most of their migration experience, was their different immigration statuses and consequent citizenship entitlements (or lack of them). There are also consequences for their level of vulnerability to labour exploitation. People with non-European citizenship and precarious migration status were, in fact, those most exposed to precarious, casual and exploitative work positions of the labour market (see Chapter Five). In fact, immigration laws do not just decide who is welcome in and who is not, but they also structure 'the vulnerability of those who enter by assigning them to various categories of precariousness, ranging from illegality through permanent temporariness, transitional temporariness, and permanent residence to citizenship' (Macklin 2010, p. 332).

In this chapter, I will endeavour to understand the shaping role of citizenship and immigration status over the everyday life of the migrant people. First I am going to discuss the recent debate about citizenship and human rights and how it has been academically conceptualised as a national or supranational matter. Then, I will explore in more detail, the contingent nature of citizenship entitlements and its effects on the exercise of basic



human rights of family reunions and the freedom of movement of migrant people.

I will then explore the relationship between the citizenship/migration status and the vulnerability to labour exploitation affecting the lives of my research participants. I will endeavour to do this by systematizing the everyday experiences of my research participants on an imaginary continuum line of exploitation (Shelley 2007). Furthermore, when analysing their working and living conditions of all my research participants, it became perceptible how their feeling of living a dignified life and their perception of being treated with respect in the labour market were greatly related to their labour relations with their employers. Therefore, in this chapter, I address more closely the perceptions and opinions regarding migrant labour also from the employers' point of view. In addition, I will try to show the possible link between certain labour relation outcomes and the immigration status of those workers; how certain employers' attitudes and practices towards their workers can be analysed by looking at the different immigration status, thus, to the degree of institutional protection and access to rights that characterise the life of these workers.

In this chapter, however, I have decided to present only the personal accounts of the Romanian and regular Tunisian people. My reason for this is because I want first to comparatively analyse the consequences of immigration status and citizenship entitlements for the migrant groups that can be considered in the most 'advantageous' positions. In the next chapter, I will focus my attention on the experiences of people with more precarious immigration status such as refugee people and undocumented migrants. Therefore, the imaginary continuum line will run across both chapters and it would be useful to discern the various experiences that my research participants have collected through their immigration status and by working in the informal agriculture sector of Sicily. Finally, it is important to stress, that when working in the informal economy, access to citizenship rights is still not a sufficient condition to avoid forms of labour exploitation, such as

overtime, substandard wages, informal recruitment and so on. This will be demonstrated through the accounts of the newly registered European citizens that have participated in my research study.

### 6.1. Citizenship in theory and in practice

Before starting to explore the more positive side of my imaginary continuum line, it is interesting to highlight how the academic debate regarding the relationship between citizenship systems and global human rights have been hit by a wave of enthusiasm regarding the opportunities of migrant workers to access and exercise their rights (Basok 2004). Thanks to the emergence of supra-national human rights institutions, such as the United Nations (1945) and the European Court of Justice (1952), and documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and international conventions including the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990), several scholars viewed these developments as a sign of a change from a 'state-based' to a more 'individual-based' universal conception of rights, or from national citizenship to post-national citizenship' (Soysal 1994; Jacobson 1996; Yuval-Davis 1999). In the same line, Cohen (1999, p. 26) asserts that:

'[H]uman rights discourses are now a pervasive feature of global public culture. Their effectiveness goes well beyond moralistic exhortation: they constitute an international symbolic order, a political-cultural framework, and an institutional set of norms and rules for the global system that orients and constrains states.'

In the discussion, it is particularly Soysal (1996) that has pointed out how national citizenship has been increasingly eroded towards a more global model of membership embedded in universal ideas of human rights. The author argues that today's rights are not anymore accessed exclusively through nationality but are now extended to the alien population and that we are spectators of a transition from national to 'post-national citizenship' (Soysal 1996, p. 28). Together with other academics, Soysal (1996 pp. 95–6)

considers that, today, in Western countries, immigrants enjoy civic, social, and in certain countries, political rights even without legal citizenship status. They can also access other important social services such as education, welfare, health insurance and unemployment benefits thanks to their residency in their destination country (Bloemraad, 2000; Sassen, 1996; Soysal 1996; see also Basok 2004).

Although it is true that migrants in many Western countries have achieved certain legal rights which are in line with the moral principles set by the international conventions, other scholars have highlighted the limitations of the 'post-national citizenship' and the lack of assurance that these rights can be exercised in everyday life (Castles and Davidson, 2000; Hall and Held, 1990; Schuster and Solomos, 2002; Turner, 1993a). According to these scholars, the main limitation of the 'post-national citizenship' thesis is its propensity to underestimate the role of the nation-state's control over citizenship regime and does not recognize that not all citizenship rights are accessed by all migrant workers. As pointed out by Schuster and Solomos (2002), post-nationalist theory tends to focus the analysis on the legally settled migrants and fail to consider the conditions of the asylum seekers, the undocumented and those with more precarious statuses. However, Hansen (1998), believes that European citizenship depends on holding national citizenship and is therefore denied to the long-term residents or denizens.

Furthermore, although the existence of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the UN the ILO and their recommendations to host countries regarding reasonable living wages, equality, decent living and working conditions, they do not have a mandatory nature (Canefe 1998). Also, they are only signed by a limited number of countries involved in emigration and immigration (Castles and Davidson 2000, p. 19). Hall and Held (1990) argue that 'rights can be mere paper claims unless they can be practically enacted and realised' (Hall and Held, 1990, p. 175). Similarly for Winer (1997)

citizenship should be understood not in terms of legal rights but more as a 'set of practices that lead to the establishment of rights, access, and belonging' (Winer, 1997, p. 535).

In consideration of the migration phenomenon, the notion of citizenship can be considered as a contradiction in terms. In fact, even if it is based on some universal principles and rights, at the same time, the access to them is rigorously based on nationality (Castles and Davison 2000, as cited in Sales 2007, p. 106). Actually, according to Kofman (2006) 'despite the discourse of international human rights and its application to a growing number of fields, the nation-state continues to frame the exercise of citizenship and difference for migrants' (p. 464). In fact, in everyday reality, migrants, like other groups of people, experience diverse forms of human right violations regardless of the existence of laws to protect them. An illustration, which is also pertinent to this study, can be 'considered migrants' participating in temporary and seasonal work arrangements that tend to be deprived of human rights (Stasiulis and Bakan 1997). For these people entitlement to rights is purely connected to the length of their work contract and/or work visa and not on their personhood. Furthermore, as highlighted by Kofman (2006), temporary work status is coupled with partial access to economic, social and civil rights and can also be used to obstruct access to citizenship, which generally requires continuity of residence. The author interprets this trend as a consequence of the combination of globalisation with skilled migrants and resulting national immigration legislations which tend to marginalise the less skilled workers. Restrictions are particularly posed on permanent migration of the lesser skilled who are considered likely to create welfare problems and deemed to be in competition with local labour. Therefore, policies tend to make it very difficult for them to move from temporary to longer-term work and residence permits (Kofman 2006).

As Balibar pointed out, the difficulty in achieving, or the total denial of, national citizenship for non-European residents are deprivations and forms of

“structural violence” (Balibar 2004, p. 40), which work against the mutual recognition and the sense of belonging in the receiving society. As a result, it is more appropriate to investigate citizenship not as a given status but as a practice which involves negotiation over access and the exercise of rights (Basok, 2004; Isin, 2000; Stasiulis and Bakan, 1997). From this perspective, citizenship can be described as a peculiarly double-faced system. On the positive side, it bonds together its members under a privileged umbrella of rights and advantages: the included. On the negative side, it reserves for the non-members a restrictive and often punitive system: the excluded. The resulting procedures for the non-members are, for instance, restricted access to social, civil and political rights, indiscriminate incarceration for undocumented migrants, the continuous menace of deportation for bureaucratic reasons and so on (Balibar 2004). These measures are creating a widespread status of vulnerability that influence migrants’ inclusion in the society and their whole lived experience, leaving them in the most precarious living conditions comparable with an apartheid regime (Balibar 2004). This has particular repercussions on the employment world, which is already structured on unequal power relations and where people that are not considered entitled to citizenship rights feel threatened and made vulnerable by bureaucracy. They often encounter exploitation in the labour market.

For Schuster (2003) this is the result of a clash between universal principles and state interests to preserve national identity. This tends to affect in different ways the diverse form of migration (labour, family and asylum). States solutions tend to ‘filter’ wanted from unwanted migrants by classifying, selecting and stratifying people in different migration groups with different ‘qualifications’ for rights (Schuster 2003). As Bridget Anderson and Martin Ruhs (2010, p.30) explain, ‘In most wealthy countries immigration policies are characterized by a plurality of status. Each status (such as work-permit holder, student, working-holiday maker, and dependent) is connected with different rights and restrictions in and beyond the labour market’. When

the exercise of human rights can be compromised by conditions and changes dictated by a national immigration regime, then this challenges the universal nature of human rights themselves, treats people as commodities and shows how immigration regimes and citizenship systems can act in highly particularistic and discriminatory ways. What is at stake here is that for economic migrants, employment rights are the main entry door to exercise human rights and to enjoy their provisions offered by national welfare state such as housing, education, health care for them and their family members. Therefore a highly stratify and constraining immigration regime can undeniably create obstacles to access rights and provisions.

## 6.2 Immigration status restrictions and vulnerability

In the case of labour migration, the link between immigration status, employment contracts and human rights, have also generated an array of restraining circumstances that influence other spheres of migrant workers and are connected to the person wellbeing and his/her social life. Particularly migrants with uncertain or vulnerable immigration status can experience a series of limitation, disadvantages and, not least, the impossibility to enjoy rights. Family rights for migrants for instance have been generally interpreted in a very restricted way by European states through 'a narrow definition of what constitutes the family and conditions which must be fulfilled to qualify for the right' (Kofman 2006, p. 458). In Italy, migrant people that would like to join their family in the destination country need to be a regular resident of the host country for many years or have a work contract of a minimum of twelve months. Seasonal agriculture workers can usually access nine month contracts therefore they cannot maintain that contractual continuity which prohibit them any family reunion opportunities. This is often the case for migrants that annually migrate to Sicily for work in the agriculture sector. They may even work for the same employer as previous but will still be given a seasonal contract.

In the absence of a regular and stable immigration status even the opportunities to travel back and forth to visit family and friends can be seriously compromised. This can lead to years of unwanted distance from family members (see Chapter Four). The opportunity to enjoy a stable immigration status can also drastically reduce, if not eliminate, the tendency of irregular people to live hidden from the main stream society for the fear of detention and deportation (see Chapter Six). This could also give them the opportunity to enter formal employment, report exploitative employers and seek justice for their cases. Observably, as in the case of Romanian workers, a stable immigration status can be the pre-condition for a higher negotiation power over labour agreements on behalf of workers even when dealing with the informal economy (see Chapter Five). This has clear consequences even for the attainment of better living and working conditions beneficial for both the worker and his/her family members. Confirming a general tendency discernible on immigration legislations to consider migrants as a mere “unit of labour” (Anderson 2000; Kilkey and Merla 2014) with no connections to family and friends.

Migrants’ rights ‘restrictions’ also suggest the existence of a stratified system of socio-legal entitlements (Dwyer *et al.* 2011), which support a ‘hierarchy of vulnerability’ (Gubbay 1999; see Dwyer *et al.* 2011 ) that generates the pre-conditions to forms of exploitation in the labour market. In fact, in this study, unstable immigration status or the lack of it is highly correlated to severe forms of vulnerability to labour exploitation. Preibisch (2010, p.406) explains immigration restrictions as a way to produce through immigration laws a supply of precarious labour for precarious employment positions. Nicola Phillips (2013) uses the concept of ‘adverse incorporation’ to explain how migrant workers are negatively included in the socio-economic system through exploitative and precarious work positions where their vulnerability and poverty tends to be produced and reproduced. The concept of ‘adverse incorporation’ is focused on the ‘terms’ ( such immigration status) on which

people are involved into specific socio-economic processes and structures (Phillips 2013, p.175) and that prevent people from achieving employment security and accumulations. According to Kofman (2006), this happens because in more advanced countries, states have been in pursuit of a 'managerial' logic of immigration. This has the intention to select people based on their beneficial effect on economic globalisation and has tried to do so even to forms of migration covered by normative principles such as family migration, asylum and refugee. Following this policy, states have created a complex system of civic stratification where specific categories of migrants and asylum seekers and refugees have different restricted access to rights. In this regards, Bridget Anderson (2010, p. 301), argues that:

'[T]hrough the creation of categories of entrant, the imposition of employment relations and the construction of institutionalized uncertainty, immigration controls work to form types of labour with particular relations to employers and to labour markets. They combine with less formalized migratory processes to help produce "precarious workers" that cluster in particular jobs and segments of the labour market'.

In the same line, Lewis, Dwyer, Hodkinson, and Waite (2014, p.9) have highlighted that migration processes and restrictions combine precarity and generate various unfreedoms that can hinder any valid and adequate opportunity to engage 'in (severely) exploitative labour'. This is how my research participants are inserted in the socio-economic tissue of the Sicilian agriculture sector and where it is possible to associate certain working conditions and outcomes to their immigration status (their terms of inclusion) and to their right to reside, work and access to welfare (Dwyer *et al.* 2011). However, another important aspect to reflect on is the perceptions that employers have got of their workers and their consequent attitudes towards them that clarify further the informal nature of their labour relations.



### 6.3 The perception of farm employers

In the attempt to understand the research setting, during my fieldwork, while I was investigating migrant workers' labour experiences, I also explored the perceptions held by some farm employers. Generally speaking, for all farm employers interviewed in my study, the prevalent idea was that the migrant labour force is a functional resource to cut production costs, but it is not their favourite labour choice. During my fieldwork, in fact, most of the farm employers that I interviewed openly stated that the recruitment of all type of migrants as a labour force and their underpayment is the only option left to them to cut the extremely high production costs and to be able to keep up with the production. However, in different circumstances, farm employers would prefer to recruit fellow countrymen. For instance, Michele, who owns a medium-sized farm, stated: "In this moment, I have to be honest with you and even with myself around this table: I have to say: Yes. Migrants are the only way to cut some money off." Also, Emanuele a young agronomist was saying:

"In a period of crisis the migrant is convenient. Yes, it is thanks to migrants that many farms are still open. Probably more than 50% of them ... it is convenient for everybody that there are migrants. We have tried to work with people not only from Vittoria but also from nearby towns, but locals are only interested in high wages, but then the amount of work they do is less than half compared to Romanians".

Interestingly, the majority of those employers would actually still prefer to employ local people if they could afford to pay the right amount of money established by the formal agricultural contract. Paolo, for example, was previously running a medium-sized farm but, after a declining financial decade, is now running only a small farm. As for Michele, even Paolo in the past was employing local workers and would still prefer to pay local labour if he was able to afford it:

"Before I was using all Italian labour but now they are all emigrants ... Because it was a different time and one could afford to spend something more and one preferred the Italian, the local, the countryman. Now, because more we go forward and less we are earning, one has to save something even on the labour force ... I

would prefer, not to be racist, but I would prefer to help people from my own town, I would not help the ones from outside”.

The general perception of migrant labour is, first of all, of a resource that comes from a ‘foreign’, ‘alien’, place and for this reason their labour can be paid less money. In this account they are defined as ‘emigrants’ that come from ‘outside’. This is fair enough. They are also only a mere convenient solution to cut labour costs but not the preferred option. This widespread perception of migrant workers as outsiders and therefore different, underlines to a certain extent the idea of migrants as people that are not entitled to the same employment treatment compared to a local countryman; therefore, they can be paid less, work longer hours, not be covered by a contract and so on. This aspect became even clearer when employers were expressing the idea that, for them, it is considered more shameful to recruit a fellow countryman and then not be able to pay him a regular remuneration, than to recruit a foreign person and not be able to guarantee them any employment security and a reasonable payment. Benedetto, for instance, runs a small farm with the assistance of his son and one migrant employee. He was quite clear regarding this aspect:

“... Since I have started to not have enough [financial] returns I have to limit myself and go to look for a cheaper worker ... on equal terms, I would prefer the Italian labour force. Of course I would. I have lots of friends that ... But how can you tell someone [local] to come to work and then not be able to pay him a formal engagement”?!

The general justification for the ‘migrant solution’ is the financial crisis of the sector as a consequence of the high production costs such as plastic sheets to cover the greenhouses, pesticides, seeds and the low prices offered for the final agricultural products at the retail market and so on. But what makes a worker a cheaper worker? Why can this labour force be considered worth less money to carry out the same work and the same duties? It is definitely not just a matter of European citizenship. A mitigating factor can be considered that often farmers offer migrant workers on-farm accommodation with all the expenses included, while countrymen would go back to their home and family and would, therefore, need to pay for their living expenses.

However, as we saw in the previous chapters, this does not apply for all migrant workers as some of them would rather live outside the farm to protect their privacy, have free time and a social life.

What I found interesting is the fact that the unequal treatment of migrant workers is not perceived as important and influential for the farmer's 'reputation' of being a good employer, an honest entrepreneur or a respectful local. As expressed by Benedetto: "how you can tell someone [local] to come to work and then not be able to pay him a formal engagement?!" Migrant workers can, instead, be recruited, used, underpaid, and denied any employment rights without any sort of alteration of the reputation that the farmer holds in his local area, which is their reference frame of meaningful relations and prestige. This means that the relationship with foreign workers is not conceived to be the same as the relationship with peers but it implies a sense of supremacy of the employer towards his foreign employees. In turn, this means not recognising the same human condition in the foreigner compared to the local person. While the local belongs and represents the life in the community (*bios*), the foreigner is not part of *bios* and represents the *zoè*, the pure physical life without political connotations. This aspect gets even more radical when the worker has got a precarious immigration status or is undocumented. This preliminary information regarding the employers' perceptions concerning the migrant labour force sets the scene where the labour relations experienced by the most precarious and vulnerable workers are situated.

#### 6.4 The reality of Tunisian and Romanian farm workers

Many of the acts illustrated in this and in the following chapter are violations of employment rights and some of them can be considered as indicators of forced labour following the suggestions given by the ILO (2006). However, against a dichotomist tendency to conceptualise labour as a binary of free and forced labour (O'Connell Davidson 2010; Phillips and Mieres 2010) in everyday reality it is preferable to consider a continuum of a variety of

exploitative work experiences. Therefore, to distinguish between the significant differences experienced by my research participants in terms of both immigration status, access to citizenship rights and consequent labour conditions, I have organized them on a continuum line of exploitation (Shelley 2007). These, as suggested by Shelley (2007), go from low forms, such as the stretching of the working hours and denial of holiday pay, to extreme forms of abuse like bonded labour, threatening and use of violence which is better defined as a form of modern slavery (see Bales 2004). In between, there are labour relations based on gross underpayment, disproportionate subtractions of money for inadequate accommodations, workplace bullying and so on (Shelley 2007, p.7), which closer represents the type of exploitation most common among my research participants. The idea of an imaginary continuum of exploitation (Shelly 2007; Skrivankova 2010) has helped me to describe in more detail the effects of the immigration status on the labour relation outcomes.

In my study, although all of my research participants have experienced labour exploitation, people with a stable immigration status as European citizens, such as the Romanians, have shown a higher capacity to interact profitably with informal work arrangements than people with a more precarious immigration status, such as non-European migrants. Therefore, when analyzing the everyday life of my participants, citizenship status began to be considered a strong shaping factor to understand migration experiences and opportunities.

Newly European people, such as Romanians, can freely reside in Italy without necessarily holding a work contract, because of their citizenship status. However, as already mentioned elsewhere in this theses, until 2014<sup>32</sup>, citizens of the A2 Countries (Romania and Bulgaria) had only restricted access to the labour market except for highly skilled managerial roles in sectors such as

agriculture, construction, domestic and personal services. This has rigorously limited their labour opportunities. The highly demanding nature of these types of work opportunities and their easy absorption in the sphere of informal arrangements have characterised the labour experiences of all of these workers in a way that can be considered beyond decent work standards and can be defined as exploitative.

However, when analyzing comparatively the everyday life of these two groups of people, it appeared that holding an European passport and being allowed to reside in the Italian territory without a work contract has, de facto, created more favourable conditions for Romanian farm workers but mostly for their employers. They see this new labour force as much easier to employ through the engagement system. Other incentives for the employer are the lower labour and administration costs and risks compared to the non-European workers (see Chapter Five). On the other hand, the other categories of migrant workers struggle even to gain and maintain formal written employment (see Phillips 2013) and they are pushed into even more exploitative work arrangements (Dwyer *et al.* 2011).

#### 6.4.1 Romanian Workers

By organising the various labour experiences on a continuum line of exploitation (Shelley 2007), the labour experiences collected by some Romanian workers are located on the more positive end. Although all of them were underpaid and without an official work contract, (only the engagement position in most cases), some of my Romanian research participants declared to have a friendly relationship with their employers and felt very satisfied with their informal work arrangements. Furthermore, all of them worked and lived on the farm, which made their lives heavily dependent on their employers and their families. For instance, Donna, a working 45-year-old single parent of one daughter, said:

“I get 30 Euros per day. I am a bit old in the sector so I have got experience. I know the job. I remember that at the end of the first day

he [employer] asked me 'how much do you ask?' and I said that in the previous job I was getting 30 Euros and he said ok. He also added 'the programme here is eight hours and 30 minutes every day and five hours on Saturday, which will be paid as a full day' ... it is a friendly relationship, honestly. Not only with him but also with his family. Sometimes we even eat together. A friendly relationship. Sometimes he made homemade pizza and we eat together or sometimes we go out together. If I need to do something or if I need to go shopping it is not a problem, he will take me to town".

Also Andrey, a 51-year-old father of four, has received similar treatment from his employer:

"When I arrived in the work place the employer said 'eight hours for 25 Euros even if it is a minute late.' But we never finish late. Always eight hours fixed ... I can't find the words to describe my employer, he is a very good person, very good. He more than respects me ... let's say that we are friends. Friends as it can be between employer and the worker, but he never makes differences, he never has made me feel different because I am Romanian and he is Italian ... if I need to go to the supermarket he will take me there. Always when I needed something he is available. He never said no. But also his brother, wife, mother ... all of them if I need something they will help me, like if I need to go to the city to send money back in Romania they will take me there. I never had problems, nothing, never. They pay me regularly once a month ... For me they are good people. For me, yes".

Silvia, a 51-year-old mother of two adolescent children, about her relationship with her employer and her work conditions said:

"We have got a relation of great friendship and respect. He never has offended me in any way and if there is a misunderstanding between us we talk about it. We do not get angry straightaway. Here we speak and we clarify in a civil way ... I have succeeded to negotiate my work conditions. I did. We mutually agreed on the conditions, even if there is still not a contract but soon there will be one. There have been not the [economic] conditions ... but I am happy. I have got paid holidays and I don't pay any rent. I don't even pay food because we eat what we've got here. We mutually agreed that we eat together. We do not have anything to hide, in terms that we are like a family.

These last three accounts show that, even in the absence of employment rights guaranteed by a legal contract, when the relationship with the employer is based on friendship and understanding, the overall work experience is perceived by the worker as favourable to their wellbeing. These

workers also had quite a clear understanding of their work arrangements and had some negotiation power over conditions. Donna, for instance, set the price for her work day while Silvia has negotiated some paid holidays. However, living on the farm means being completely depended on the employer and his family, which could be seen as a method to exercise power over workers. In fact, where is the power within apparent "familial" conditions? Can the positive relationship with the employer in reality represent a situation of 'multiple dependency' (ILO 2012) in which their ability to negotiate conditions is constrained by the provision of work, accommodation and food?

The Romanian workers that decided to live outside the farm have quite different perceptions of their work conditions. Their employment relationship is perceived as challenging and the search for the respect of human dignity became a strong necessity. Two such people are the two siblings, Marin, 31 and Sorin, 33. They tend to ask for higher wages to pay for their living expenses outside the farm, ask for engagement position and tend to be more independent from farm duties. Marin said:

"With the employer I think there should be respect, I think there should be. But you must attain it, because if you don't do anything to achieve it they will always think about their business first ... in fact I have never had problems at work because I always ask for the 'ingaggio' even if you get less money [compared to the formal contract]... in fact if I get problems and I am engaged I go and report him. Because it is my money and I am not on my own. I have got my wife and my daughter, so ..."

Marin affirms the idea that respect in labour relations is not something that can be taken for granted. Instead, it is a necessity for the worker to fight to attain it and not to be reduced to a mere means of production that only boosts the employer's profit. However, as a European citizen, Marin can negotiate at least the engagement position with his employers (see Chapter Five), which guarantees some institutional protection and legal power in the hands of the worker. The engagement position is the minimum requirement that almost all of my Romanian research participants tried and usually

succeeded to obtain. It provides some legal protection and access to unemployment allowances and family benefits. However it does not guarantee the same social security and juridical protection of a formal contract and needs to be renewed every new production season. Therefore, even those workers, are vulnerable to the employers' power to withdraw from their commitment with the workers. Moreover, when Romanian workers do not succeed to negotiate the engagement position they can encounter sever forms of exploitation and disrespect. In this regard Sorin said:

“For them [employers] workers are people with whom they can do many things. You must have the will to fight against this thing because they [employer] are taking advantage of this. Because it is our right to ask for better conditions because in the end you have to carry out the job anyway ... With your master if you have a friendship let's say [has to be a friendship] of respect, because if he respects me, I respect him. But there are many that do not respect their workers, they treat them like slaves, like dogs. They even speak badly to you. Two years ago I almost had a fight with an employer. I worked there for two months and he didn't even [legally] employ me. And then while I was working he kept talking like 'work faster!', 'get the work done!' ... He wanted to force people to do more and then he started to speak badly to me ... And [I said] to be careful with his words because we were all men there, there is no difference between us ... 'You may have a bit more money than me but you're still a man like me' ... If you say that I am your slave you are more slave than me because you must have respect for people that you need. There should be no difference between workers and employers. There should be friendship because I am here to help you make some money and you help me to earn something so there should be friendship”.

In this example Sorin was informally recruited and did not received any legal contract or engagement. It is possible to detect in this example how, in the absence of legal requirements, employers can attempt and succeed to exploit and abuse workers while workers struggle to defend their rights. In fact, Sorin has highlighted the need to counterbalance the employers' power to exploit him as a worker, by reaffirming his idea for the respect of people's dignity, both as a human and as a worker and not just as a means of production. For European workers their opportunity to negotiate at least the engagement positions has proved to be of high significance in influencing



their labour outcomes as a minimum because they can access some form of protection in the case of employment rights violations.

#### 6.4.2 Documented Tunisian Migrants

Moving forward on the imaginary continuum line, there are the work experiences of regular non-European citizens. For them the engagement position is not sufficient to reside regularly in Italy. Therefore, they arrive with a regular work contract which is usually pre-arranged by friends or family already in Italy (see Chapter Five). This is the case of the young Tunisian man Farhat, 28, who joined his older brother to work inside the greenhouses. Later he started to work at the local agricultural retail market for the same employer. The employer provided him with accommodation which was, in this case, a small stockroom with water and electricity:

“I have got a regular contract but in the contract there is written to work only from 6.30 in the morning until 12.30 in the afternoon. The same time of the market. But me, when I work a half day, he sends me to work in his greenhouses ... the Italians [colleagues] go to the beach and he sends me to the countryside. I don’t know what he thinks, but he definitely does not think that I should rest sometime ... I always work, I am not like the others, half day work and half day rest ... I would like to do a free work. I don’t know what, but free, because one here works like a slave. At this moment, I have got a dislocated hand and he calls me and says: ‘Are you coming to work?’, ‘Where are you?’ ‘What are you up to?’, but I am on sick leave”!

Employers always try to make the most out of their employees, particularly when they provide the accommodation for them. This creates cases of ‘multiple dependency’ (ILO 2012). A regular work contract is the only way to be juridically considered as a regular worker for non-European people; yet this is often used by employers like a form of blackmail to produce overwork. This is a central challenge to their dignity at the work place as it leaves the

worker not only physically exhausted, but also emotionally exhausted (Hodson 2001, p. 115). Farhat clearly stated that he feels enslaved by his employer and found it very frustrating to be treated differently in terms of work conditions in comparison to his Italian colleagues. Although he has got a regular contract, he was still reduced to a purely physical life, and was even denied suitable rest periods.

Another regular Tunisian is Omar. He is a 56-year-old father of six children and has been working for almost two decades in the Sicilian agricultural sector. He is struggling to maintain a formal work contract that can help him to keep a regular immigration status. Just like Farhat, Omar sadly represents another example of commoditisation of the labour force and a reduction of the worker to a 'work tool' by the employer:

"In any case, you always do more than eight hours a day. Sometimes 12, sometimes 13 or 14. Even everyday and the employer is still not happy. Even if you do 12 hours and he paid you less he is still not happy. Thirty Euros per twelve hours and he is still not happy!! ... He is not interested in anything only the work ... Sometimes I cannot breathe because inside the greenhouse the air is too hot. When you always breathe hot air your head spins and you lose your balance. Some employers do not allow you to even get your head out to breathe some fresh air for a minute. He is worried for the illnesses that the tomato plants can get so the webs are always closed. Let's say that the plant is worth more than a person ... sometimes I continuously work four months without rest, not even on Sunday, always. I have worked seven years with the same employer and there was a period of four months that he did not let me rest because of the amount of work. Four months even on Saturday and Sunday, continuously. Then, when May was arriving and I was working less, he decreased my wage saying to me "Well spend less money and on Sunday you can rest now"!

This last account helps us to grasp the idea that, for some employers, the consideration of their workers does not stray far from the perception of having a mere tool of production, as a work instrument to whom they can even deny vital human needs. However, the need to keep a regular work contract and immigration status, constrain workers like Omar to accept these super exploitative work conditions.

Another example of a regular worker mistreated and seemingly unrecognised in the work place is Toufie. He is a 36-year-old father of three that, notwithstanding his legal status in Italy, has collected a series of misadventures by working for fraudulent employers in exchange of a regular work contract:

“Once, one of the many employers that I had, for two months he only gave me 50 Euros a week and then when at the end [of the harvest] he was supposed to give me the rest he started to say that there was no money because the market did not pay him. I gently asked him to pay me and he promised that he was going to do it a week later ... after that week he did not give me either money or the official days [useful to receive the engagement benefits]. Instead, he started to say that he never worked with me. I said ‘Ok there is God in life. I have got a family and you are saying that you have never seen me. Ok, life is long. I will see you later’ and I left him with only two or three hundred Euros ... I did not go anywhere. I don’t think that going to trade unions or to the police is a solution because at the end of the day I am still a foreigner here, so ...

The withholding of wages is a clear indicator of forced labour according to the ILO (2012).<sup>33</sup> Although regular migrants are in the position to ask for legal help from institutions such as the Trade Unions or the Employment Inspectorate Office, often the fear of losing their work contract and, therefore, their regular immigration status, prevented even regular migrants from asking for institutional help. This situation contributes to the underestimation of the phenomenon of labour abuses and exploitation. Family concerns are also very important factors that constrain these ‘breadwinner’ people to comply with exploitation and various other abuses to continue working for their employer. They have to support their loved ones. Although he is legally in Italian territory, Toufie revealed all of his vulnerabilities and his sense of powerlessness and lack of trust in the institutions (such as trade unions) that could help him to interact with his employer. He still considered himself a foreigner and, as such, powerless to fight employment problems and injustices. Often the feelings of being

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powerless and at risk for their safety are prevalent perceptions among this category of farm worker and it only increases as we go forward on our continuum.

## 6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how the factors that have mostly differentiated the labour outcomes of my research participants and has mostly affected their migration experience was their different immigration status and consequent citizenship entitlements (or lack of them). This has also had severe consequences for their level of vulnerability to labour exploitation. Immigration laws, in fact, do not just decide who is welcome in and who is not, but they also structure 'the vulnerability of those who enter by assigning them to various categories of precariousness, ranging from illegality through permanent temporariness, transitional temporariness, and permanent residence to citizenship' (Macklin 2010, p. 332).

In this chapter, to understand better the shaping role of citizenship and immigration status over the everyday life of migrant people, I have first discussed the recent debate about citizenship and human rights and how it has been academically conceptualised in terms of a national or supranational matter while underestimating the contingent nature of citizenship entitlements and its effects on the exercise of basic human rights as family reunion or freedom of movement of migrant people. I have then explored the relationship between citizenship/migration status and the vulnerability to labour exploitation affecting the lives of my research participants by systematizing the everyday experiences of my research participants on an imaginary continuum line of exploitation (Shelley 2007).

In this chapter though, I have only presented the personal experiences of Romanians and regular Tunisians people. The reason for that was related to my intention to comparatively analyse the consequences of immigration status and citizenship entitlements for the migrant groups that can be

considered in the most 'advantageous' positions. The major result of this comparison is that, although all of my research participants have been exploited during their labour activities in the Sicilian agriculture sector, thanks to their European citizenship status, Romanian workers have shown a higher degree of negotiation powers over labour conditions, partial access to formal entitlements through the engagement position and, altogether, more institutional protection in cases of withheld payments or abuses. On the other hand, regular Tunisian workers tended to be overexploited by their employers in exchange of a regular work contract. They tend to avoid asking for legal help so as not to risk to lose both a regular contract and regular immigration status at once. Similar findings are confirmed in the study carried out by Hartman (2008) with Romanians and non-EU workers in Spain where "informal Romanian workers have a greater ability to leave unsatisfactory work situations and move on, to change occupations, and to pursue different strategies to gain working rights" (Hartman 2008, p. 498). This is detrimental for the Tunisian workers in that, even after years of living and working in the area, they still need to rely on the renewal of their work contract to legally reside in the Italian territory and to continue to live as 'included' and not as 'excluded'. In the next chapter I will focus my attention on the experiences of people with more precarious immigration statuses such as refugee people and undocumented migrants.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Immigration Status, Human Rights and Dignity, during Neo-Liberal Globalism**

#### **7. Introduction**

In this chapter, the focus will be on the labour experiences of the refugees under the SPRAR provisional programme (System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees)<sup>34</sup> and the undocumented migrant agriculture workers that live in the countryside of Sicily. Both these migrant groups do not enjoy any citizenship status and as a consequence they do not have access to political and socio-economic human rights. An immediate consequence of this type of life conditions for these people is the impossibility to live or reunite with their family. This has a tremendous effect on their feelings and well-being (see Chapter Four). For these groups, in fact, travelling home to visit their relatives is not possible and family reunion is a rare occurrence for refugees and just unattainable for undocumented migrants. However, they would still try to work in order to remit some money to their families left behind or to top up their phones to contact their love ones. These are the major reasons why these people get involved in the informal Sicilian agriculture labour market (see Chapter Four).

As already stated in Chapter One in this thesis, the informal economy is considered comparable to the Agambian concept of 'camp' that is a dimension where the national sovereignty power can act in its biopolitical essence, which in effect, is the power to create 'bare life' (zoè), a life that is biologically alive but politically and juridically dead. In consideration of this, in this thesis, I argue that the interaction between the informal economy (the camp) and the access to rights through a political belonging to a national state, impose severe forms of indignities on migrant workers and raise questions of their self-respect and self-worth. In Chapter Five, it was

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<sup>34</sup> For a description of the services offered by SPRAR centers see:  
<http://www.serviziocentrale.it/file/server/file/SPRAR%20Description%20-%20Italy.pdf>

highlighted, that these two groups of migrants tend to cover the most casual and precarious work positions with consequent unpredictability about their future and the future prospects of their families.

Furthermore, compared to the other two groups of migrant workers discussed in Chapter Six, these people cannot access any institutional protection in the cases of labour exploitation, mistreatment and abuses. For the refugee people under a provisional programme, it is clearly a factor, that they should not take on work unless it is the same SPRAR organisation that integrate them in a specific and formal work position at the end of their two year programme. This is also the case for the undocumented migrants, due to the fact that they should not be present in the country. They are not existing either as people or as workers. Employment rights do not apply for these two groups of people. This leaves them with no other option but to get involved in the informal economy in order to gain some money and to provide financial support for their families in their countries of origin.

As the experiences of my research participants are going to show, compared to the first two groups of migrants explored in the previous chapter, the labour opportunities for these people are purely informal and rely even more heavily on the personality, attitudes and behaviours of their casual employers. Furthermore, the lack of any sort of institutional support and access to employment rights and protection, make them feel very vulnerable and defenceless when confronting the powers exercised by their employers. These conditions have had severe repercussions on their well-being. It has made some of them feel that they have been reduced to some form of sub-human existence. In the most extreme cases, some people felt they had not been properly treated as human-beings by their employers and so were not living a dignifying life. This is why, in this chapter, the concept of human dignity and feelings are of a primary concern.

Although the issue of human dignity was not premeditated in my research, it became a central consideration in the labour experiences collected by these

people. Their exclusion from the citizenship regime became translated in their reality, not only as the lack of opportunity to have a family life and to work in the formal economy, but as the precondition for labour relations where their personhood was often not recognised. Their being as a holder of human rights and, therefore, human dignity, were recurrently overlooked and disrespected.

For these reasons, in this chapter, I will focus my attention to first reaffirm the universality of the concept of human dignity, its role as a foundation for human rights, its potential existence in terms of people's capability *to be* and *to do* (Nussbaum 2011, Sen 2005) and its importance for people wellbeing at work. However, as the experiences that I have recorded on the ground show, under neo-liberal globalism rules (see Chapter Two) and states' intervention on deciding who is going to access rights through citizenship regimes (see Chapter Two and Six) give primacy to political rights over the equality of all human rights (social and economic included). This makes the accomplishment of the expression of human dignity for some people more than unfeasible, it makes it an unreachable utopia. A better attention on the meaning of human rights and on their fully expression, instead, offers a form of critique that might be considered positive as it stands outside the limitations of national forms of citizenship and points to more inclusive ideas of global citizenship. I will show the importance of this point by returning and completing the continuum of exploitation started in Chapter Six where I am going to give voice to refugees and undocumented people as part of my study. I am going to do this to demonstrate the level of 'unworthiness' to which these people feel they are reduced to as a consequence of their inaccessibility to the existing system of 'allocation' of human rights. As in the previous chapter, the continuum will still consider the impact of the nexus between immigration status and work precarity over the feeling of been respected and recognised as a human being and owner of human dignity.



## 7.1 Dignity on the ground

In my research project, the importance of the concept of dignity was not pre-meditated. The first time that the term came forward was three months after the beginning of my fieldwork and it happened during the interviews with a highly experienced trade unionist of the fieldwork area. During the interview, the trade unionist was telling me about a recent tragic story involving an irregular migrant farm worker, highlighting how disastrous can be the consequences that can occur when elementary employment rights are violated and people's human dignity is not recognised. He drew my attention to the centrality of the "element of justice" essential for all workers and particularly for the more vulnerable ones:

"In three days, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March [2012] will be celebrated in Vittoria an anniversary, the first dramatic anniversary that is the death of a young Albanian man that set himself on fire in the middle of the [main] square exactly the night of the 16<sup>th</sup> March<sup>35</sup> ... He has set himself on fire in the middle of the 'Square of people' and a few days after he died at the civic hospital of Palermo. This person was an irregular and the only thing he said to the police before entering a coma and then died after a few days was that the boss [*padrone*] did not pay him. He went out of his mind and made this action. This person must have been in such conditions that his dignity as a human being was seriously downgraded because he could not do anything about it. You should consider how much is basic the element of justice that is the fact that you work and you must be paid. What I mean is that the negation of this right is almost like the negation of the right to breathe for a worker. And above all, what aggravates it is that who does that [employers] is covered by the fact that in any case those people are *clandestine*.<sup>36</sup> Even the idea of calling them clandestine is an Italian characteristic that holds within itself an absolutely negative connotation ..." (Extracted from the interview with the secretary of one of the major trade unions.)

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<sup>35</sup>The tragic event was reported in several local and national newspapers: [http://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/immigrazione/2011/03/17/news/albanese\\_che\\_si\\_da\\_fuoco-13740871/](http://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/immigrazione/2011/03/17/news/albanese_che_si_da_fuoco-13740871/)

<sup>36</sup> The Italian immigration law defines as 'clandestine' the foreign people present in the Italian territory without a regular visa to enter the Italian territory and 'irregular' as the foreign people that have lost the compulsory requirements to stay in the Italian territory (e.g. expired documents). For more information visit: <http://www.interno.gov.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/temi/immigrazione/sottotema002.html>

Georg Semir was a 33-year-old 'irregular' Albanian agricultural worker that was not officially employed in any of the farms existing in the area; therefore, no employer had been tracked and no trial had been made in his defence. Georg Semir was an eloquent case of what Agamben (1998) would have defined as 'Homo Sacer', a man excluded from the life of the political community, without juridical status, i.e. can be killed without it being considered a homicide. This condition is the result of the status of 'bare life', to what irregular migrants and people without citizenship status are often reduced to. Unfortunately, Georg Semir's tragic story is not an isolated case of the consequences of extremely exploitative working conditions as several other studies and journalistic investigations have proven (see Brigate di solidarietà attiva *et al.* 2012; Cole and Booth 2007; Galesi and Mangano 2010; Leogrande 2008).<sup>37</sup> As the trade unionist stated during the interview, "To commit suicide, Georg Semir's living conditions were such that his dignity as a human being was seriously downgraded because he could not do anything about it" as a consequence of his unequal role in the labour relation with his employer and the vulnerability derived from his non citizenship status. As we have already seen in other sections of this thesis, the immigration status and the citizenship rights very often play a central role in the life of those depoliticised people reduced to 'bare life' who cannot receive any protection for their human rights and citizenship (Agamben 1998). These conditions also influence the feeling of not being an autonomous agent. Any person must enjoy the opportunity to exercise rights, because it is only through rights that s/he can be recognised as a fully autonomous agent (Anderson and Honneth 2005) worth of human dignity.

By looking closer at the above account, the central elements are indubitably the outcomes of the employment relations that have acted upon the *dignity*

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<sup>37</sup> In particularly, Leogrande (2008) has investigated the mass escalation of migrant labour replacing the aged native agricultural labour force in Central-South Italy. In the book *Uomini e Caporali* the author reports the miss and the dead of several migrant agricultural workers for unknown reasons. He also describes the conditions of forced labour and often the reduction to slavery of numerous migrant agricultural workers. Those workers described their work experiences during the trials against their gang masters and some of their employers.

of the worker (*his being*), eroding it, and *the impossibility of acting* against them to protect and reaffirm the respect and the primacy of his dignity. Thus, the violation of the right to receive a fair payment for a work done and the feeling of being institutionally powerless to re-establish a sense of self-recognition and agency, have infringed the perception of dignity possessed by Georg Semir inducing him to make the reverberating act of taking his own life. This was, as it seemed for Georg Semir, the only action left for him to counterbalance the state of *bare life* (Agamben 1998) that he was reduced to: the power to act over his life as *an active agent*.

In the case of all of my research participants, informally recruited and with vulnerable immigration status, their labour relations with their employers were often marked by forms of misuse of power and exploitation over their depoliticised life. In formal employment there are several ways through which employers can use their power in the labour relations to deny dignity of their employees at work. According to Hodson (2001), these can be resumed in: mismanagement and abuse, overwork, incursion on autonomy and contraction of employee involvement (Hodson 2001; see also Lucas, Kang and Li 2012). In the informal economy, these 'in-dignifying' labour conditions can be enlarged to include abusive communication, missed payment, abrupt layoff, overwork and unpaid overwork, the withholding of payment and physical abuse.

The workplace lends itself as a perfect laboratory for social interactions structured and organised on unequal power relations. Individuals spend a conspicuous part of their life in work places where they socially interact with employers and co-workers. The perception of having being treated with respect and the recognition of human dignity can make a great difference in the way people interpret their experience at work. Without mentioning the word 'dignity', this theme became central in the accounts given by my migrant research participants that were viewing their approach to the workload and their relations with employers based on the perception of being treated with respect and recognised as human beings owner of dignity.

Exploring the labour relations involving these people will highlight how the respect of human dignity at work is a key element for the individual wellbeing and for a propitious civil society (Bolton 2007; Calhoun 2003; Hodson 2001; Sayer 2007).

## 7.2 Human dignity as the 'reason d'être' of human rights and the inadequacy of citizenship

According to Habermas (2010), human rights are born to inform laws against despotism, oppression, and humiliation that create degrading conditions for human dignity. Following this reflection, the conceptual relations between dignity and rights should be quite clear in our Western understanding of the idea of human dignity. Against the vision of 'human dignity' as a vacuum, empty, intuitive and even a dangerous concept to use (see Chapter Two) and together with Habermas (2010), I argue instead that human dignity is the 'reason d'être' of all human rights, which function is to express it and take it to mean. Its uniqueness and universality at the same time 'grounds the *indivisibility* of all categories of human rights' (Habermas 2010, p. 465). Actually, it is only when basic rights collaborate together, that they can accomplish the moral undertaking to respect the human dignity of every person in an equal manner (Lohmann 2005, as cited in Habermas 2010, p. 465).

From this perspective, the concept of human dignity is the theoretical centre that connects 'the *morality* of equal respect for everyone with positive *law* and democratic law making in such a way that their interplay could give rise to a political order founded upon human rights' (Habermas 2010, p. 468). It is through the very idea of human dignity that the democratic and universal aspects of morality are transported into the law and order that then nurtures the political community by giving to people equal rights and freedom: '[t]he guarantee of these human rights gives rise to the status of citizens who, as subjects of equal rights, have a claim to be respected in their human dignity' (Habermas 2010, p.468).

For the very fact that human dignity applies equally and universally, it also implies that the idea of self-respect is linked, in turn, to the idea of social recognition. In other words, everybody enjoys a social status as member of the human community and is recognised by everyone else as owner of active rights in the democratic political order because of his/her human dignity. From this perspective, all humans are citizens of the same legal system to which they belong to in reason of their egalitarian human dignity.

In the eyes of Jeremy Waldron (2007), dignity is a paradoxical concept that, in one hand, unifies the universality of rights and in the other hand, elevates the particularistic dignities of every single person to the highest rank possible, the one of humanity. In opposition to the ancient Roman conceptualisation of dignity as *dignitas* which belonged only to the nobility rank, the contemporary concept of dignity instead has elevated all humans to the same rank: 'Once associated with hierarchical differentiation of rank and status, 'dignity' now conveys the idea that all human persons belong to the same rank and that the rank is a very high one indeed" (2007, p.201). This is why, by contrast, the contemporary idea of citizenship as a vehicle to exercise rights based on nationality and national boundaries, result as a contradiction in terms and represents a dystopia when compared with the universalistic nature of human dignity from which human rights directly derive. By moving the centrality from universal human dignity to the particularity of political rights, citizenship regimes is biased and inadequate to build a political order informed by a moral and egalitarian legislation able to guarantee and develop the freedom(s) of all citizens. And if human rights are understood as rights to certain specific freedoms (Sen 2005) then the focus should be on what it is possible to do to safeguard these freedoms and how we could, and might, develop them in the light of a more egalitarian society.

In this respect the Capability Approach developed by Sen (2005) and Nussbaum (2011) can shed some light on the importance of human well-

being. It identifies a humans well-being in terms of the beings and doings (the *functionings*) an individual attains and his/her *capability* to choose among diverse combinations of such functionings (Leßmann and Bonvin 2011, p.85). The approach distinguishes between aspects that a person can influence and aspects that s/he has been given by society. In an egalitarian society, there would be numerous combinations of functioning available for each person or his/her *well-being freedom* and the choice that s/he will take will be his/her *well-being achievement*. Furthermore, this implies that in a policy decision making process, his/her point of view is taken into consideration and it is defined as 'capability for voice'(Bovin 2008; Leßmann and Bonvin 2011).

### 7.3 Dignity as Capability?

In consideration of people wellbeing, the Capability Approach sees employment as an extremely relevant component of the life of all adult people. When people are involved in work that they consider valuable, they draw out worth for their own life as well. However, a precondition for that is that individuals can exercise their agency by being involved in decisional processes that are designed to enable their agency (Leßmann and Bonvin 2011, p. 97). On the other hand, in these processes, freedom of choice becomes an indissoluble ingredient (Leßmann and Bonvin 2011) as it is positively correlated with the well-being of active agent. In the case of labour relations, the Capability Approach promotes democratic measures and participation to reach a more valuable life and attain valuable work as the result of 'collective efforts to create conditions for human flourishing'(Leßmann and Bonvin 2011, p. 97). For this approach, freedom, participation and 'capability for work,' are all highly correlated to people well-being. Therefore, people's views about well-being, need to be heard and voiced. However, in order to do that, people must access opportunity to develop both their views and their voice (Sen 1985c).

Here, the concept of opportunity as conceptualised by the Capabilities Approach is extremely helpful. More specifically, considering the idea of opportunity as understood by the Capability Approach, it would allow us to discern if an individual is in the position to actually be able to do the things s/he would consider worth doing and if s/he has the instruments to follow what s/he would like to do, depending on his/her contingent circumstances (Sen 2005, p.153). Actually, Sen (2005), establishes an analogy between the freedoms given by capabilities (i.e. the opportunity to accomplish valuable combinations of human functionings or what a person is able to be and to do) with the freedoms given by the opportunity to access rights: '[a] theory of justice — or more generally an adequate theory of normative social choice — has to be alive both to the fairness of the processes involved and to the equity and efficiency of the substantive opportunities that people can enjoy' (Sen 2005, p. 156). In Sen's (2005) version of the Capability Approach, the opportunity aspect of freedom in terms of capability to choose is central. It distinguishes between having choice and not having any choice at all. To be able to choose is considered the most fundamental act of a free agent.

The Capability Approach has tried, and is still trying very hard, to understand how it is possible to concretely improve everyday people's lives and has emphasised the importance of the freedoms given by the opportunity to access rights. However, we are living in the era of neo-liberal globalism (see Chapter Two) where the conditions apt to access these rights are increasingly undermined. They are strongly influenced by state interference and are substantially based on the consideration of political and civil rights as superior compared to social and economic rights (Sklair 2009). In this regards, when Nussbaum (2011) argues that all humans deserve respect from all laws and institutions in reason of their human dignity (p. 31), but she considers it strictly linked with the equal allocation of political entitlements. Here she is, in fact, implying a hierarchical consideration of rights. In this way she is aligning her thought to a distorted idea of human dignity by reducing it to a matter of political recognition. In other words, it is like saying that people

that enjoy the rights to vote or are free from torture but struggle to access decent jobs, food and education are, nevertheless, living a dignifying life. Needless to say, that they do not.

This is a very common understanding in the contemporary neo-liberal state approach to human rights where political and civil rights (such as rights to free speech and association, freedom from torture, equal protection before the law and the right to vote) are considered as superior rights (Steiner and Alston 2000: 183). On the other hand, social and economic rights, such as, right to decent jobs, food, shelter, education and health care, are considered as second-rate and subjected to available resources (Steiner and Alston 2000: 183). Rather than be considered as indivisible and of equal importance, human rights are more frequently portrayed in hierarchical order (Sklair 2009). Behind this divisive conceptualisation of human rights lays a neoliberal state logic that enforces discriminate forms of access to political and civil rights through citizenship as the main entry door to then access economic and social well-being. This makes economic and social well-being subjected to the level of resources available and lift states from their absolute duty to meet all these rights (Sklair 2009, p.86). The state, however, keeps in the meantime, the power to decide who is and who is not able to access these rights. Steiner and Alston (2000, p.300) affirmed this point quite clearly: 'Pressures to reduce the size of the public sector, to privatize various functions previously performed by governments, and to stimulate growth by reducing taxes, all render governments less able to accept responsibility for economic and social rights'. Instead, the national state should just be a vehicle to guarantee the equal and effective access of all rights by everyone.

This would stop the development of strong social-class polarisation and the increased feeling of insecurity among people that most need access to social and economical resources such as low income and low skilled people, individuals with handicaps or illnesses, the unemployed and foreigners with no citizenship status. Furthermore, national state as a vehicle to access all



human rights would end the drastic exclusion from the system of people for whom political and civil rights are unavailable. These would include people such as refugees, undocumented migrants and travelling communities and would guarantee their integrity and dignity before and above any law and in reason of their humanity. Therefore, the way in which citizenship is conceptualised today and used by national states, produce a series of consequences that affect the access to rights including employment rights.

As explored in Chapter Six, access to human rights via national citizenship still instead giving predominance to state's interfering over universal human rights and makes their ultimate mission to express the universality of human dignity as an unfeasible utopia. This is confirmed by the reality I have discovered on the ground, the crude experience of people, who live in conditions of incapability of expression of their shared humanity, trapped in an human dimension of exclusion, unworthiness and exploitation. They have a status of invisibility as a free agent, as a carrier of meanings and values that condemned them to a destiny of sub-human existence. All of this derives from their non-political belonging to the national state where they physically exist. Metaphoric affirmations of being treated as a work tool, a slave, a dog, an animal or as an employer's end to make profit were actually quite widespread among these research participants. I will now return to the continuum of exploitation elaborated in Chapter Six to give voice directly to the people involved in this study and to critically evaluate the employment relations and life conditions of refugees and undocumented workers involved in the agriculture informal economy of Sicily. I will follow this with my final considerations.

### 7.3.1 Refugee workers

In my imaginary continuum line of exploitation in the Sicilian informal agriculture labour market, there are also the work experiences collected by people that have been granted the status of refugee in the Italian territory.

These people reside in SPRAR centres (System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees).<sup>38</sup> To benefit from the numerous facilities and services provided, these people should wait until the end of their two year programme before they start working. Usually these people also receive a small sum of money for their extra expenses which amount to approximately 35 euro per week. The people within this group that took part in my study were all adult men that had left their families behind. This was the main reason they would try to earn some extra money to send home by working on a casual basis in the surrounding agricultural sector.

Another reason to work in this labour market is to get additional money to spend on goods such as cigarettes, clothes or phone top-ups to stay in contact with their families. Finding themselves with large amounts of free time and confined in the middle of the countryside, these people accept work whenever there is an opportunity to labour. Often they are also recruited by employers at the doorsteps of their centres. Not surprisingly, even in the cases of these workers, I have found that their labour relations were characterised by a high level of work exploitation and power abuse by employers. Gadi, for instance, is a Pakistani English teacher that had to flee his country to secure his own life. He succeeded in gaining a refugee status and was living in a centre that provided him with food, accommodation and an Italian course. However, Gadi left his family behind so he feels the need to provide some financial support for them; thus, when there is the opportunity of working in the agricultural sector, he would willingly accept:

“I go sometimes with those people [employers] and I work with them because I need to work, I have got a big family, I have a load on my shoulders therefore I have to do something ... Sometimes I had problems with them. Once, I was working harvesting tangerines and the person that I was working for, from nine to six o'clock continuously, did not want to pay me. We [with other refugees] had to ask the director of our refugee centre where we are living to call him and ask for the money. He [the employer] kept saying ‘I will come and pay you on this day’ and then that day ‘I will come and pay you on

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<sup>38</sup> For a description of the services offered by SPRAR centers see:  
<http://www.serviziocentrale.it/file/server/file/SPRAR%20Description%20-%20Italy.pdf>

this other day'; finally, after 15 or 20 days he paid us but only 25 Euros a day." [rather than the agreed 30 Euros].

Farm employers probably see the recruitment of these men from the refugee centre as a very profitable labour resource. The fact that they already have accommodation, food and facilities, possibly makes the employers feel less responsible for these people and maybe this makes them more inclined to try to escape from their obligations and responsibilities towards their refugee employees. Clearly, not all farm employers are the same, as Amid, a young Algerian refugee, has highlighted.

"Look, me I cannot tell you that all Sicilian [employers] are bad people or good people. There are people and people. Me, I have been working even more hours but happy because they were nice people. Some other times instead, I have worked eight hours but not happy at all. I say this even to the boss. If he is a likeable person and I can talk with him, I see how I can help him. I can work with joy. But if the boss is a nasty person I cannot ... The relationship depends on the boss ... If he is a good person you work well, even when he is not there. He goes away and then back and the job is done. You work with your heart. But if the person is not nice and he makes fun of you, speaks dialect, insults you ... you cannot ... Work in the countryside is not good for foreign people. It is ok for the Italians that work eight hours and get paid 40 Euros. Foreign people work for 10 hours and get pay 20 Euros. It is not equal. If you go to work for 20 Euros you feel like an animal. I do not want to feel like that anymore".

The quality of the labour relation can greatly vary depending on the personal characteristics of the individuals involved. As a refugee, Amid is not supposed to work but should live his life inside the centre where he merely survives. In this way he can live his life as an included outsider that is neither completely an insider nor a complete an outsider, but in-between (Lee 2010). When he decided to work, as any other insider, he encountered the real face of the biopolitical power, interested only in his pure life, his body (Agamben 1998) and its capacity to produce profit. Being conscious of having been underpaid and recruited for longer hours compared to a local person is the most humiliating feature of Amid's perception about his labour experience. He feels to have been included in the economical production but in a negative 'exceptional way', which reinforces his feeling of been an outsider, a

foreigner body, reduced to the level of a pack animal, to the level of *zoè* (Agamben 1998). Furthermore, the sensation of being treated as a sub-human with no choice to decide among opportunities is a form of abuse that has a negative impact on employees and their pursuit of dignity (Lucas *et al.* 2012). This is the primary consequence on the life of people that are treated as pure body without dignity and human rights and that therefore struggle to exercise their agency and reaffirm a sense of self-worth and self-esteem: 'I don't want to feel like that anymore,' Amid said.

### 7.3.2 Undocumented Migrants

Finally, at the more negative end of my exploitation continuum in the Sicilian agricultural sector, I will present an account of the remarkable working and living conditions lived by irregular migrants with expired or without documentation. This stateless population of migrants usually is out of any statistics and lives hiding from the police so as not to be detained in identification centres with the risk of being repatriated. During the night, these people, inhabit abandoned houses in the countryside or get temporary arrangements in the accommodation offered by acquaintances. During the day, they congregate around specific informal recruitment places to get any possible farming positions that will allow them an income to survive. I will present some accounts that will describe in more detail the level of vulnerability experienced by people in a condition of depoliticised 'bare life' (Agamben 1998). They are not sheltered by any sort of employment and/or state protection, to whom the exercise of agency and voice is completely denied and that find themselves completely at the mercy of their employers. Feeling exploited, abused and powerlessness, are all common conditions experienced by this category of research participants.

When working in the unofficial labour market, all the basic elements of a legal employment position are often completely disregarded. Payment rates, hours, breaks, holidays, sick leave, employment protection and so on are all aspects entirely undermined by the informal nature of the work agreements.

In the case of undocumented people, there is an extra ingredient that can be added, that is the lack of institutional support in case of problematic employment relations. Undocumented people are completely uncovered from any sort of institutional help. This aspect becomes clearer when undocumented people have to face cases of withheld payments that occur when the employer refuses to pay the worker and denies acknowledgment of that person's work. In the absence of a legal employment contract, this can happen to any worker but it is a quite common experience involving undocumented people. Samir, for instance, is an undocumented Tunisian man that has worked for more than a decade in the sector. On one occasion, Samir attempted to obtain some institutional support for a withheld payment:

“Once, I had the problem that I didn't get paid and I went to a trade union. They talked with him [the employer] and he said that if I wanted I could talk with a lawyer because he did not have any money to give me. Before that, I went to the employment inspectorate office in Ragusa and they say that without a permit to stay it was better for me to escape or I was risking being arrested. So, I got scared and I left. I let it go ... I left him four months worth of work.”

Often, on the ground, trade unionists try to interact between employers and workers, even when the latter are undocumented. They try to guarantee some sort of employment protection. Unfortunately, this interposition is not always successful and it also exposes the trade unionist to be liable of being taken to court as a supporter of irregular migration. Even so, during my participant observation, I have witnessed several cases of trade unionists helping irregular migrants to try to get their payments back.

Within the trade unionists that I interviewed, Northern African unionists in particular are regularly approached by undocumented people with whom they can speak in Arabic. In fact, the recruitment of Arab-speaking people as collaborators in the immigration offices of major trade unions of this area, has been a sensible strategy. It is used to give the opportunity to people who are afraid of public institutions, to feel more comfortable in asking for

information and support. As, Amel, a young Tunisian trade unionist woman, explained to me during the interview:

“We try to do what is possible to do even for the irregular, because in the end they are people, they are workers and we take care of them as any other client. In the end, when he comes here even only for five minutes to ask for information you should assist them because to come here means that they need help ... The working and living conditions of undocumented migrants are in one sentence the one of ‘beings without being’ ... You can see them physically but they do not exist institutionally. They cannot live peacefully as they cannot go freely around. They cannot. People are afraid to be arrested by the police and being deported back to Tunisia. Me, I have understood their feelings of living with fear ... they suffer and also they live in conditions that everybody takes advantage of them. They suffer moral pain and physical pain. They live in the hope that the government looks at them and gives to them an opportunity.” [through an amnesty].

Amel points out how the lack of institutional recognition creates walking dead people: “they are beings without being.” You can see them physically but they do not exist in juridical terms. They cannot make a claim, they have no voice, no opportunities to choose and they are completely depoliticised. This has devastating consequences on the feelings of these “institutionally orphan” people. They cannot exercise their agency and, as such, they are not free or respected in their human dignity.

In line with Amel are the considerations given by Kaled, another Tunisian trade unionist. Kaled, actually, has personal experience of being undocumented when he first arrived in 1992. Thanks to a governmental regulation in 1995, he succeeded in becoming a regular migrant and started to integrate himself into the Italian society and enjoy civil and social rights. Asked the question regarding the quality of the living and working conditions of undocumented migrants, Kaled answered:

“I would define them as awful, terrible ... I don’t know ... Worse than the regular people anyway. Because the regular person has in his hands the rights and even the faculty to try to integrate himself in the society. To [freely] walk in the society. To have a house in the society. To have other rights like other citizens in the society. They do not

have any rights, so they are constrained to live hidden. But hidden means in the countryside ... where everything is lost”.

These people live in the countryside where everything is lost and where they are left at the mercy of their destiny. This is the drama in the life of these people. They are constrained to live in a “space of illegality” or “space of non-existence”, as “subjects who are neither citizens nor strangers” (Lee 2010, p. 62). In this condition anything could happen to them and they cannot claim any juridical protection for their human dignity. They cannot exercise rights or have their rights respected and protected; as such they are not autonomous people and therefore they cannot claim to be treated with dignity.

As in the tragic story of Georg Semir, the lack of institutional protection induces undocumented people to feel particularly powerless against employers’ abuse. Furthermore, the employers’ awareness of the vulnerable immigration conditions of these people probably reinforces their deceitful attitudes, confident of the defenceless condition of the worker. The status of ‘institutionally orphan’ and defencelessness, have been underlined by several participants. Cases of missed payments, for instance, are very frequent for this population of workers, and the story of Georg Semir reminds us it is the most disrespectful and painful act that a worker can receive. Faisal, an undocumented Algerian man and a father of a two-year-old child left behind in Algeria, said:

“When once I had problems with an employer that did not pay me I did not do anything. I went home to pray to God. What could I do? A report to the police? And then after three months the employer will search for me to kill me? No thank you. This is a problem for me in Italy to make a report to the police, I feel frightened to make a denouncement, to create problems. When I asked for my money and he said no, I went home. I don’t like problems.

Also Amir, an undocumented Tunisian man, said:

“About employers it depends. Not all of them have been nice. With some of them I had to wait days and days to get paid. Even if it was only two days [of work]. It never happened to me to not get paid but it happened to other people that I know ... if it would happen to me I

don't know what I would do, also because if I go to the police they will send me away or arrest me."

Overall, feelings of being powerless, fear, loneliness, distrust in legal institutions, lack of protection and so on, are all common features in the accounts given to me by undocumented people. It is the very nature of their immigration status or 'statelessness' that exposes them to such experiences and feelings. However, the abuse of power that an employer can put into place, especially against these unprotected and more vulnerable people, can go beyond missed payments, work exploitation and verbal mistreatment. It can even take the form of physical assault. The most extreme case of mistreatment and abuse that I came across during my fieldwork not surprisingly involved an undocumented migrant. I met Terir, a young undocumented Tunisian man, at the immigration office of one of the most prominent trade unions in the city of Vittoria. Despite his immigration status, Terir was trying to find justice for his case. He found a casual work position in a square [see the previous chapter on recruitment] and worked for the same family business for a long time with the promise of a legal work contract that would allow him to stabilise his migration status:

"I think that my work place is like my own home so I have respected them [employers]. Do you understand me? But then I found that they were doing many things that were not good. I had too many problems with them. There was not respect, there wasn't. Because when they were swearing at me without any reason then ... only the first week everything was ok, then slowly, slowly it changed. I have worked with their son. Their son always was treating me badly ... one day he took a wooden beam and he tried to hit me ... then I went to work with his dad. His dad, I don't know why, he was always swearing at me. Like that, while I was working. I don't know why ... why they were behaving like that? What I have done to deserve it?"

After months of abusive verbal mistreatment, which again is a way to undermine self-identity and the quest for dignity (Hodson 2001), one day the family actually physically assaulted Terir and the case ended up in the hands of the local police and trade union. Terir explained their misbehaviour as a



form of power that the family perceived over him because he was an irregular migrant or 'clandestino':<sup>39</sup>

"Do you know what my problem is? It is that I haven't got the documents. When they were beating me they were thinking: he is a clandestine, he cannot do anything! ... They think clandestine equals animal. I was treated like an animal. Why? We are not people? ... I could never imagine that I could be treated like that ... but they do not have a heart. Do they have feelings? ... Now I do not sleep well anymore. I wake up in the morning because I am talking while sleeping. My friend says that I talk when I sleep ... And then sometimes I scream. Why do I scream? I think I had a [serious] problem ... thank goodness I did not get crazy ... when the police put me inside the car the lady said 'he is a clandestine, send him away' and I said 'I am sorry but first of all if I go back to Tunisia there is my mother there and it is a good thing if I go to die there. But before I want to take back my sweat, the money that I have worked for. Without engagement and without anything. Actually you also ate the money that I gave you for my contract.'" [that was never made].

Terir had a seriously distressing experience. This came across during the interview with several moments of his voice breaking down due to him crying. Hopefully, Terir's story was an isolated case, but the number of people who are in this kind of labour relationship will remain unknown. Terir's life experience represents, powerfully, the condition of exclusion from the citizenship regime and the consequent experience of unprecedented violence. In such conditions, a sense of having a dignifying life in the workplace where he also lived is far from achievable.

Once more, the source of these types of work and life conditions can be found in the discriminatory, inadequate and biased nature of contemporary national citizenship. Rights are recognised to man only as a political member of a nation state affirming the supremacy of sovereign power above human life, which resulted completely controlled by it and that is embodied in this case by the (national) employer. It seems that the major scope of the citizenship is to create 'bare life' outside its regime so that the national state

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<sup>39</sup>'Clandestino' is the legal Italian definition for people that entered the Italian territory without the required documents to live and work in the country. For more information see: <http://www.interno.gov.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/temi/immigrazione/sottotema002.html>

power can be re-affirmed. As noted by Agamben (1998), this implies a deep politicisation of life so that it can be divided between included and protected humans, and excluded and unprotected humans left to isolation, “degradation and annihilation” (Duarte 2005). In this regard, Arendt (1998) pointed out that isolation is the condition of humans whose political life has been destroyed and therefore s/he is made vulnerable to violence. In this status s/he is not recognised anymore as ‘homo faber’ but as ‘animal laborans’. At this stage, isolation becomes loneliness, which is the precondition for the realisation of the totalitarian government, which is concerned with the creation of up-rootedness, which means not have a place in the world recognised by others, and superfluousness, which means not to belong to the world at all (Duarte 2005). The biopolitical function of the contemporary neo-liberal state policies can be identified in the hierarchical implementation of human rights where political rights are considered the key to enter the realm of existence. This gives rise to the dichotomy of ‘protecting’ versus ‘destroying’ the dignity of non-citizen humans, in the continuous need to “redefine the threshold in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside from what is outside” (Agamben 1998, p. 131). In these conditions, not politically recognised people are not able to act as agent, to freely choose among several opportunities and to feel secure about their present and future conditions for themselves and for their families. This jeopardises their ability to achieve well-being and to pursue a life worth living.

Finally, in line with Sklair (2009) I argue that all human rights should be considered as equal significance and the national state’s power should be limited to the role of guarantor of all human rights and distributors of all possible means through which humans can enjoy all their provisions. These provisions range from political entitlements to employment rights and housing and family reunion opportunities for all. This re-conceptualisation of national state citizenship could help to contrast the annihilating power of the informal economy. It also goes hand in hand with a clear perception that

access human rights via political citizenship is unable to inform a social orders based on moral and egalitarian legislations capable to guarantee the freedom(s) of all human fellows and the expression of their dignity.

## 7.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored in more detail, the labour relations of refugees and undocumented migrant workers in the informal agricultural sector of Sicily and how the immigration status highly determined their labour outcomes. Often, these categories of migrant workers were experiencing the uppermost exploitative work situations compared to all research participants working in the informal economy of Sicily. These categories of migrant farm workers went through some severe forms of inequalities and mistreatments. In one extreme case it resulted in an actual physical assault. Furthermore, in the case of undocumented migrants, the lack of any sort of institutional support and access to employment rights and protection were leaving them in a status of complete vulnerability and powerlessness. This 'non-status' as a citizen opened up interesting inferences regarding the interaction between the universality of human dignity and the idiosyncrasy of the citizenship status as route to exercise human rights for citizens of a defined national state. By moving the centrality from universal human dignity to the particularity of rights, mainly political rights, citizenship regimes result discriminatory, cruel and inadequate tool to build a political order informed by a moral and egalitarian legislation able to express the dignity of all human beings. In this regards, Sklair (2009) argues that rather than be considered as indivisible and of equal importance, human rights are more frequently portrayed in hierarchical order (Sklair 2009). Behind this divisive conceptualisation of human rights lays a neoliberal state logic that enforces discriminate forms of access to political and civil rights through citizenship as the main entry door to then access economic and social well-being. This makes economic and social well-being subjected to the level of resources available and lift states from their absolute duty to meet all these

rights (Sklair 2009, p. 86). Furthermore, when this type of citizenship interact with the informal economy, it denies workers dignities in multiple ways. Their precarious, short-lasting labour relations and extremely poor working conditions lived by these people tended to make them perceive their labour experiences as humiliating, excessive and unfair. More specifically, the withholding of payments, labour exploitation and verbal and physical abuses, are all the ingredients that contribute to the mortification of their self-worth and self-respect and ultimately of their dignity as humans.

Therefore, the biopolitical function of the contemporary neo-liberal state policies can be identified in the hierarchical implementation of human rights where political rights are considered the key to enter the realm of existence. In these conditions, not politically recognised people are unable to act as agent, to freely choose among several opportunities and to feel secure about their present and future conditions for themselves and for their families. This jeopardises their ability to achieve well-being, to pursue a life worth living and to fully express their human dignity. Therefore, a better attention to the meaning and worth of all human rights, offers a form of utopian critique that might be considered positive as it stands outside the limitations of national forms of citizenship and points to more inclusive ideas of global citizenship.

## Chapter Height

### Conclusion

The aim of my thesis was to attempt to contrast a prevalent analytical tendency to look at migrants only through an ethnocentric and nationalistic lens (Glick Shiller *et al.* 1992), and to give a clearer perspective of the life's trajectory of my 30 migrant research participants. As my thesis has tried to demonstrate in Chapters Four and Five, migrants cannot be considered as a mere "unit of labour" (Anderson 2000; Kilkey and Merla 2014) with no connections to family or friends and who decided to sell their labour power in the global market space (Anderson 2000). This is because, while states, capitalists and employers are interested in workers, what they receive are people (Anderson 2000, p. 108). Migrants have to be more rightly seen as actors of a dynamic international social process (Castles and Miller 2009) very much embedded in family and household strategies (de Haas 2010b; Stark 1978). Migration is, in fact, a collective action that fosters social change and affects both sending and receiving countries (Castles and Miller 2009, p. 20).

To investigate the relevant aspects of the life of migrant people working in the agricultural sector of Sicily I have developed three main questions followed by two related sub-questions for each. The first set of research questions that my thesis aimed to answer is addressed in Chapter Four. The main aim was to explore the reasons of my research participants to migrate, their expectations towards their migratory experience and how they have re-accommodated their life and gender roles according to the new situation. Taken as a whole, it can be said that family-related reasons have been shown to have a central role as a driving force behind the decision to migrate. Looking at the individual cases, instead, the picture becomes more complicated and very much related to the conditions of the family left behind. In some cases, adult children would migrate even irregularly and underwent great risks to life to guarantee an income to their indigent family

left behind. Meanwhile some other adult children, without a deprived family, would migrate to improve their personal financial conditions for a future personal and family life. For people with children and spouses, the migration choice is strictly related to the economic support of their dependent family in both the sending country and in the receiving society. It is particularly for this group of people that immigration status can seriously undermine their family life and future perspectives. This also confirms the idea that migrants are not a “unit of labour” (Anderson 2000) but people with important family and friendship relations.

Concerning the expectations towards their migratory experience, it can be said that all of my research participants thought to find in an advanced ‘Europe’ plenty of work opportunities to improve the economic conditions for themselves and their family left behind. They thought to find a place where there would be work, protection of rights and where they could prosper as individuals and as family providers.

Another interesting aspect that I explored in Chapter Four is the experience of migrants with children, in both the sending and receiving countries and how they have re-arranged their parenting roles in the new situation. In the transnational parenthood literature a clear distinction has been made between transnational motherhood and transnational fatherhood (Ambrosini 2014; Boccagni 2009; Carling *et al.* 2012; Lutz and Palenga-Möllenberg 2012; Parreñas 2008). Generally, most of the studies which have focused on the difference between transnational parents have agreed that migrant mothers are in charge for the transmission of care, even from a distance, while fathers tend to keep a breadwinner role and be less involved in the transmission of emotional care (Ambrosini 2014; Boccagni 2009; Lutz and Palenga-Möllenberg 2012; Parreñas 2005, 2008). However, while many studies have paid attention to transnational motherhood, far less has been said about fathers from a distance (Kilkey and Merla 2014; Parreñas 2008; Pribilsky 2012). Even my study has confirmed how often parenthood practices are strongly gendered and concur to determine the type of settlement, care

arrangements and labour outcomes that are performed in the receiving country. However, the conceptualisation of gender taken into consideration in this thesis is of a large-scale social structure (Connell 1987), with a very complex, dynamic and multiple nature (Segal 1990; Vasquez del Aguila 2013).

The constructions of concepts such as gender are deeply entrenched in many aspects of a human's life, along with class, race, ethnicity, politics, culture, language, psychology, sexuality and so on (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Sydnie 2007). As a consequence, even concepts such as masculinity and femininity have been considered as socially constructed and intrinsically plural. This can help to explain, for instance, the diverse practices of motherhood and fatherhood among Tunisian and Romanian people. In the case of Tunisian women, for example, childcare is an indissoluble duty of the biological mother, while among Romanian women the tendency to share their childcare with other family members during the period of their migration is very widespread. This wave of migrant women has shown a different way of living the role of a woman as both breadwinner and transnational mother. They are accelerators of the new phenomenon of feminisation of the Sicilian agricultural labour market, mostly independent from male figures and tend to share their childcare with other family members. Finally, in consideration of fatherhood, it can generally be said that fathers of both communities tend to be concerned with their role as family economic provider. However, this can be an over-simplification that does not give enough prominence to the suffering of these people caused by the distance from their loved ones, their self-sacrifice, their attempts to join their family in the sending country or their efforts to visit home at regular intervals. These men, if they are in satisfactory wage conditions and, in the case of Tunisian fathers, with a regular immigration status, tend to visit their family frequently and in accordance with the seasonality of the agricultural sector. This fosters a type of "circular" (Kofman 2004) migration that can be combined with a family life. However, the widespread presence of informal economies or, in any case, the low payments received by most of these

working fathers, tends to complicate the individual situations and it may result in unwanted prolonged periods away from their family members. For the non-European Tunisian workers especially, an irregular immigration status or a refugee status can seriously compromise their chances to visit and/or reunite with their family members in the present and in the future, confirming that structural factors can act upon an individual life, limiting their agency and actions available to them.

A second set of questions was formulated to find out more about the ways my research participants entered into the Italian territory and how they succeeded to interact with its informal labour market. In the intervening time, attention was given to the nature of the labour relations that they have experienced. All of this information can be found in Chapter Five, where I investigated the three main recruitment practices that I came across during my research fieldwork. These were strongly linked to the way migrant agricultural workers access the Italian territory. Through a transnational lens, I have illustrated how social ties between the 'movers' and the 'stayers' do not automatically vanish (Faist 1997) as migrants are actively committed subjects maintaining social, emotional, cultural, economic and even political relationships across countries. This social ongoing process is achieved through networks of relationships in which migrants are embedded (Portes 1999) and that are based on the social capital that each individual already possesses or creates to gain access to new networks. These connections are so powerful that they can be highly influential in both stages: in migration decision making and, later, to get access in the country of destination and even to be – and continue to be – recruited in the informal local labour market.

In the rural area where my study was carried out, migrants could be mostly absorbed into the agricultural sector, where informal labour agreements are extremely widespread. Here, social capital was revealed to be an influential tool to arrange informal recruitment from the sending country, to access the Italian territory with a regular work contract (as in the case of several non-European research participants), and to avoid periods of unemployment due



to the seasonality of this productive sector. Different, instead, was the case of refugee and undocumented migrant workers in that, due to their lack of social capital, lived in a status of absolute uncertainty regarding living and working opportunities and this exposed these workers to even greater risks of labour exploitation.

More specifically, the first recruitment practice discussed was the one pre-arranged in the migrant's sending country through forms of transnational social capital and connections with networks of kin, friends and acquaintances between the two countries. This recruitment type was mostly useful for medium- to large-sized farms that require a constant and lasting labour force. In the cases of both Romanians and Tunisians workers, this type of recruitment did not reveal itself to be the most profitable one, but actually as a particularly unpredictable way to enter the country and to find remunerative and acceptable working and living conditions. Furthermore, this recruitment practice has highlighted the differences in terms of the documentation required and the real migratory costs of the 'migration business' for both European workers and non-European workers.

The second type of recruitment strategy was based on forms of social capital developed locally, particularly by experienced Romanian agricultural workers. In everyday life, holding a European passport and being allowed to reside in the Italian territory without a work contract has, de facto, created favourable conditions for Romanian workers to interact almost undisturbed with the informal economy. The European citizenship status of Romanian workers ensures they have more flexibility of arrangements in the informal economy, more negotiation power with employers regarding working conditions and access to some forms of economical and social protection from the Italian state. It is mainly through the research of the *engagement* positions that Romanians succeed in gaining some working rights, such as unemployment compensation and family allowance from the Italian state even without holding a regular work contract. This is a peculiarity of the Italian agricultural

regulation that allows natives and European workers to access these provisions by simply being registered as a worker on a farm.

At the same time, for employers this new labour force is much easier and cheaper to recruit without an employment contract, lowering their administration costs and legal risks compared to the employment of non-European workers. The *engagement* position is an insufficient juridical condition to regularly stay in Italy for non-European people and that reinforces the “state of exception” (Agamben 2003) of people that are neither politically nor juridically protected, but actually discriminated against. Tunisian workers even after years of living and working in the area still need to rely on the renewal of their work contract to legally reside in the Italian territory and to continue to live as ‘included’ and not as ‘excluded’. This gives the employer a great leeway to use the regular contract as blackmail to exploit the non-European labour force. Overall, even for migrants holding a legal work contract, the official wage was never gained and workers were often forced to pay for their own contract. It is possible to state that in this area migrants are seen by employers as a source of advantageous labour force, exploitable for their pure physical ability to labour, useful for cutting production and administration costs, and as a potential resource for fraudulent economic gain.

Finally, the third kind of recruitment practice which has emerged is the one involving mostly undocumented migrants and refugees living in the area. Both type of migrants have entered the territory in an unauthorised manner and then followed different paths, one looking for the acceptance of their status as refugee and the other disappearing in the territory and usually absorbed in the informal economy. Due to their lack of social capital and for reasons related to their immigration status, these people were usually recruited on a casual basis and for short periods of time, such as casual daily recruitment or during harvesting time in small farms. Overall, the types of work offered through this form of recruitment were the most undignified and dangerous with serious consequences for social, economical and

psychological status of the people involved. This section has also highlighted how undocumented migrants are reduced to a substantial status of “bare life” (Agamben 1998), which is the condition of human subjects who are not protected by the state from unfairness, mistreatment, work injuries or exploitation. They are “depoliticized and without official status and juridical rights” (Lee 2010, p. 57). They also live in an area where the informality of the labour opportunities offered to them on one side contribute to their survival but, on the other side, it works like an exceptional zone or a “camp” (Agamben 1998) where anything can happen to these people but they cannot access any form of human rights’ protection or citizenship provision. These conditions are the prerequisites for the life of *Homo Sacer*, a man that lives biologically but does not exist politically and juridically. As such he can be killed but not sacrificed (Agamben 1998), a man that is included in the juridical order but only in the form of its exclusion from the life of the political community, without juridical status and that, as such, can be killed without it being considered a homicide. In this condition a sense of dignifying life is far from achievable, especially in the highly instrumental and unequal workplace.

Although migrants from the Romanian and Tunisian communities were in different migration statuses and were using different strategies to be recruited in the labour market, the overall majority of them often experienced disrespectful labour relations lacking recognition for their dignity as human beings. It is important to stress that, in the informal economy of Southern Europe, access to citizenship rights is still not a sufficient condition to avoid forms of labour exploitation, such as unpaid overtime, substandard wages, no paid holiday or sick leave. This was demonstrated mostly through the accounts given by newly European citizen research participants. As a consequence, I have tried to investigate if, in a context of informality and precariousness, there are ways of treating people with respect and with recognition of their dignity.

In Chapter Six, instead, I have explored how the factor that most has differentiated the labour outcomes of my research participants and has

affected the most their migration experience was their different immigration status and consequent citizenship entitlements (or lack of them).

This has also had severe consequences for their level of vulnerability to labour exploitation. Immigration laws in fact do not just decide who is welcome in and who is not but they also structure 'the vulnerability of those who enter by assigning them to various categories of precariousness, ranging from illegality through permanent temporariness, transitional temporariness, and permanent residence to citizenship' (Macklin 2010, p. 332).

In this chapter, to better understand how citizenship and immigration status shape the everyday life of migrant people, I first discussed the recent debate about citizenship and human rights and how it has been academically conceptualised in terms of a national or supranational matter. I have also highlighted how this conceptualisation underestimates the contingent nature of citizenship entitlements and its effects on the exercise of basic human rights as family reunion or freedom of movement of migrant people. I then explored the relationship between citizenship and migration status with vulnerability to labour exploitation by systematizing the everyday experiences of my research participants on a imaginary continuum line of exploitation (Shelley 2007).

In this chapter though I only presented the personal experiences of Romanians and regular Tunisian immigrants. This was due to my intention to comparatively analyse the consequences of immigration status and citizenship entitlements for the migrant groups that can be considered in the most 'advantageous' positions. The major result of this comparison is that thanks to their European citizenship status Romanian workers show a higher degree of negotiation power over labour conditions, partial access to formal entitlements through the engagement position and all together more institutional protection in cases of withheld payments or abuse. Whereas regular Tunisian workers tended to be overexploited by their employers in exchange for a regular work contract. Maintaining a regular works contract is

essential for their regular immigration status, they therefore tended to avoid conflict with their employers as so not to risk losing both their regular contract and regular immigration status.

Similar findings are confirmed in the study carried out by Hartman (2008) with Romanians and non-EU workers in Spain where “informal Romanian workers have a greater ability to leave unsatisfactory work situations and move on, to change occupations, and to pursue different strategies to gain working rights” (Hartman 2008, p. 498). This is detrimental for the Tunisian workers in that, even after years of living and working in the area, they still need to rely on the renewal of their work contract to legally reside in the Italian territory and to continue to live as ‘included’ and not as ‘excluded’.

Finally in Chapter Seven, I explored in more detail the labour relations of refugees and undocumented migrant workers in the informal agricultural sector of Sicily and how the immigration status highly determined their labour outcomes. Often, these categories of migrant workers were experiencing the uppermost exploitative work situations compared to all research participants. The precarious, short-lasting labour relations and extremely low payments received by these people tended to make them perceive their labour experiences as humiliating, excessive and unfair. More specifically, these categories of migrant farm workers went through severe forms of inequalities and mistreatments that, in one extreme case, became a physical assault. Furthermore, in the case of undocumented migrants, the lack of any sort of institutional support and access to employment rights and protection left them in a status of complete vulnerability and powerlessness. This ‘non-status’ as a citizen opened up interesting inferences regarding the interaction between the universality of human dignity and the idiosyncrasy of the citizenship status as route to exercise human rights only as citizens of a defined national state. By moving the centrality from universal human dignity to the particularity of rights, particularly political rights, citizenship regimes result in discriminatory, cruel and inadequate tools to build a political order informed by a moral and egalitarian legislation able to guarantee and express

the dignity of all citizens. In this regards, Sklair (2009) argues that rather than be considered as indivisible and of equal importance, human rights are more frequently portrayed in hierarchical order. Behind this divisive conceptualisation of human rights lays a neoliberal state logic that enforces discriminate forms of access to political and civil rights through citizenship as the main access to economic and social well-being. This subjects economic and social well-being to the level of resources available and excuses states from their absolute duty to meet all these rights (Sklair 2009, p.86). The state in the meantime keeps the power to decide who can or cannot access these rights.

This gives rise to the dichotomy of 'protecting' versus 'destroying' the dignity of non-citizen humans in the continuous need to "redefine the threshold in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside from what is outside" (Agamben 1998, p. 131). In these conditions, -politically unrecognised people are not able to act as an independent agents, to freely choose between opportunities and to feel secure about their present and future conditions for themselves and for their families. This jeopardises their ability to achieve well-being and to pursue a life worth living.

I believe that my study makes several theoretical contributions to scholarship. The largest contribution, I believe, is highlighting the importance of the concept of human dignity for a better understanding of the working and living conditions experienced by migrant workers and for a more sensible approach to migration studies, as this concept has been largely neglected (see Chapters Two and Six and Seven). In particular, the area of the research investigating the relation between migration and the informal labour market can gain some useful insights from my study. Based on individual interactions, the informal labour market, in fact, encompasses unlimited types of labour relations with different degrees of human dignity recognition and respect. Improving our understanding of the characteristics of labour relations in establishing a sense of self-worth, self-esteem and respect in working environments could be functional in building a shared idea regarding

concepts such as respect and recognition of migrants' dignity in the workplace. In this vein, my thesis calls for more academic attention to identify the nature of dignified labour relations and to develop a more grounded concept of human dignity helpful in understanding the daily life of migrant workers. This explains why my research is important and how it can be further developed. The existing migration literature, in fact, does not indicate the weight of concepts like recognition and human dignity for decent labour relations. My type of analysis can also be enlarged to any other labour sectors concerned with problematic labour relations between workers and employers. I believe, that migrants are as much a part of the global labour force as any other worker that is facing the consequences of increasingly informal, precarious and flexible labour relations.

A second and correlated contribution of my thesis is the idea that human dignity is conceptualised in terms of 'reason d'être' of human rights. Against the vision of 'human dignity' as a vacuum, empty, intuitive and even dangerous concept to use (see Chapter Two) and together with Habermas (2010), I argue that human dignity is the fundament of all human rights, which function is to express it and take it to mean. Its uniqueness and universality 'grounds the *indivisibility* of all categories of human rights' (Habermas 2010, p. 465). This is why, by contrast, the contemporary idea of citizenship as a vehicle to exercise rights based on nationality and national boundaries represents a dystopia when compared with the universalistic nature of human dignity from which human rights directly derive. By moving the centrality from universal human dignity to the particularity of rights, citizenship regimes are biased and inadequate to build a political order informed by a moral and egalitarian legislation able to guarantee and express the universality of human dignity. Furthermore, a contemporary neo-liberal globalism state approach to human rights favour political and civil rights over social and economic rights. I therefore argue that the contemporary idea of citizenship is a political tool of neo-liberal global states to preserve national biopolitical power over human life which resolves in the creation of

indignifying living conditions for non politically recognised humans. I insist instead that all human rights must be considered of equal significance and a national state's power should be limited to the role of guarantor of all human rights and distributors of all possible means through which humans can enjoy all their provisions ranging from employment rights to housing and family reunion opportunities for all.

A third contribution given by my study is to have tried to explain the informal economy through the Agambian concept of "camp" (see Chapter One, Six and Seven). This is a dimension where the national sovereignty power can act in its biopolitical essence, which is the power to create 'bare life' (zoè), a life that is biologically alive but politically and juridically dead. By stretching the concept of 'camp' developed by Agamben I have interpreted the informal economy, on which all of this studies participating migrants rely, as another realised form of 'camp' where people's rights, particularly the ones related to the employment world, are severely undermined. To work in the informal economy means to not take for granted any of the laws and regulations applying in the formal employment. From working time to regular payments, from sick leave to paid holiday, nothing can be assumed. It is a space where the figure of the employer, by reason of their 'includiness' in the sovereign power, embodies a form of biopolitical power that can decide over numerous aspects of his employees' life, leaving the worker in a state of complete vulnerability and non-protection. The employer can find their justifications to suspend the (employment) law with the main aim to reduce the migrant employee, the excluded from the community, to pure physical life or zoè.

As Agamben was explaining in consideration of the 'camp', it is a space of exception "in which not only the law is completely suspended but fact and law are completely confused" (1998, p. 170). It is a zone of indistinction between "exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer made any sense" (1998, p. 170). The camp has to be understood as the space "that is opened when the



state of exception begins to become the rule” (Agamben 1998, pp. 168-169). In this zone, particularly people in the above-described exceptional state, especially refugees and undocumented migrants, are “so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives” that anything could happen to them (Agamben 1998, p. 171; see also Lee 2010) and they cannot claim any protection (see Chapter Two, Six and Seven).

The fourth and final contribution of my study is to have shed some light over the new and growing phenomenon of arrivals of Romanian people in this rural area of Sicily and to have highlighted how the citizenship status can actually be an advantageous position to interact with local informal economy. The previous and well-known anthropological study carried out by Cole and Booth (2007) in this area preceded the mass entry phenomenon of Romanian people officialised by the 2007 European enlargement.<sup>40</sup> The freedom to live and reside in the Italian territory without the need to hold a regular work contract has given the Romanian workers more flexibility to accept informal work agreements with important consequences for the long-established Tunisian workers and for the general informal labour market, which has registered an evident deterioration of common working conditions. A re-invigorated informal economy during the neo-liberal global time, which favours ‘atypical’ and temporary labour opportunities, increased production costs due to the effects of seed corporations in the area, price fluctuations and the availability of an alternative and regular migrant labour source has increasingly seen the Tunisian workers being pushed out from a sector previously dominated by their presence.

My research is not faultless and presents certain pragmatic and theoretical limitations. Among the most relevant pragmatic limitations of my study there is the small number of accounts from Tunisian women, whom I found particularly difficult to access during the fieldwork. Looking back, I should

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<sup>40</sup> More information available at:  
[http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/enlargement/2004\\_and\\_2007\\_enlargement/romania/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/enlargement/2004_and_2007_enlargement/romania/index_en.htm)

have spent a longer time in the field trying to collect more accounts from this category of research participants, which would have improved my understanding of the differences in terms of family arrangements along gender and community lines. Theoretically, instead, my study lacks a detailed exploration of what dignity means for each of my research participants and what they do to resist their undignifying living and working conditions. Retrospectively I should have asked more questions to deepen and develop further my understanding of this important aspect of the everyday life of people. I should have paid more attention to how dignity differs among the two major communities and if there were differences in terms of age, gender and lifecycle. Unfortunately, the dignity theme was not premeditated and has emerged even more strongly during the writing of the data analysis when most of the interviews had already been carried out.

Therefore, regarding further developments of my research, I think it would be worth exploring more in-depth how migrant workers understand the concept of dignity according to their work experiences but also according to their cultural background and their workplace organisational structure. In 2012 a very interesting study was published by Kristen Lucas, Dongjing Kang and Zhou Li in the *Journal of Business and Ethics* regarding the experiences of the Chinese migrant workforce at Foxconn, which is a Taiwanese multinational company that produces electronics items. In this study a non-Western perception and conceptualisation of dignity at work was presented, very much related to the Chinese cultural context. The study has made some interesting cultural considerations in the theory of dignity and has applied cultural meanings to work. This suggests that it would be extremely interesting to further enlarge the analysis of the concept of dignity in a cross-countries type of analysis that could bring together diverse perceptions, visions and understanding of such a complex and abstract concept that nevertheless is deeply linked to our individual and social prosperity at work and in the society at large. For this reason, in line with the suggestions given by Lucas *et al.* (2012), special attention has to be paid to finding a collective

set of ethical labour principles that can protect workers' dignity across the globe. This is an extremely ambitious task as these ethical labour principles have to be able to balance the stances of universal rights with local endorsement of dignity. I do believe that this task is as ambitious as necessary in the neo-liberal global era.

Although dignity is still a highly-contested concept, there is an urgent need to take it as a central point for the interpretation of the labour relations that are already structured on asymmetrical power positions. I do believe that linking migration studies with issues related to the recognition of human dignity in the informal workplace can be a revealing starting position to improve our understanding of the nature of dignity as a mutual value that prospers within respectful human relations and the importance of recognising individual needs and agency in workplaces.

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## **Appendix 1: Interviews Guide**

### Questions for migrant workers

*Can you tell me something about your life before you have arrived here? (e.g. nationality, work/education, family).*

*Why did you decided to migrate?*

*What sort of expectations did you have about your migration?*

*How and when did you arrive here?*

*Can you describe your trip to me?*

*Are you here with your family or friends? And if not, where are they?*

*Have you got children? If yes, where are they and who is looking after them?*

*What do you do for you family from a distance?*

*How long have you being working in the agricultural sector? And why?*

*What did you do before?*

*How did you find this work position?*

*How many hours do you work per day?*

*Can you describe your daily work routine?*

*How much do you earn per day?*

*How many days a week do you usually work?*

*How long have you been working on this farm?*

*Have you got a contract?*

*Do you negotiate your work conditions? And if yes: how?*

*Do you get any holidays from work?*

*Are they paid?*

*How you would describe the relationship with your employer? Are you friends with them? Do you think they like you? Do you think they respect you?*

*How you would describe the relationship with your colleagues? Are you friends with them? Do you socialise with them after work?*

*Where do you live? What is it like? Do you have any problems there? Are you there with your family or friends?*

*How do you travel to and from your place of work?*

*What do you do in your free time?*

*What do you like and dislike about the work that you do?*

*Have you ever had problems at work? If yes: what kind of problems?*

*What do you do to sort out your problems?*

*What are your future aspirations?*

### **Questions for Farmers:**

*What are the major problems that affect the agricultural sector today in Sicily/Ragusa area?*

*There are any fluctuations of work during the year?*

*Do you have any problems in recruiting local labour?*

*If you could choose, would you prefer to employ migrant or local labour?*

*Why?*

*Do you prefer to employ migrants with certain characteristics? (e.g. nationality, gender, age, regular or irregular etc..)*

*If you would need to, would you recruit an irregular migrant? And why?*

*Do you always recruit the same people or do you prefer to change workers?*

*How long does an average employment period last and why?*

*Who do you think makes a good worker? And why?*

*Do you think irregular migrants are reliable agricultural workers?*

*Do you have any coworkers or assistants that you particularly trust? For instance, helping with the planning of work? If yes, is he a migrant?*

## **Questions for Trade Unionists**

*What are the general attitudes of workers toward the union? How do they see it?*

*How effective is the work of the union in improving the working conditions of workers in this area?*

*How many migrant workers have got a membership with the union?*

*Are some of them agricultural workers?*

*What are the main problems of migrant agricultural workers?*

*What kind of services the union offers to migrants?*

*Between migrant agricultural workers are there any irregular people? If yes, what are the main problems that these people face? Are they different compared to the problems of regular ones?*

*Is irregularity a problem that hinders the representation of the interests of migrants without a legal status? And why?*

*How would you describe the living and working conditions of irregular migrant agricultural workers in Vittoria?*

*What kind of services does the union offer to irregular migrant agricultural workers and what can be done to assist them?*

*What do you think irregular migrant agricultural workers think about the union?*

*What kind of relationship is there between local workers and migrant agriculture workers?*

*Is there any form of open hostility? If yes, could you give me an example?*

*Do you think there is complementarity or competitiveness in the local labour market?*

*What are the main problems affecting farm employers?*

*What kind of services does the union offer to employers?*

*What are the main obstacles that the union encounters in representing the interests of farm employers?*

*What do you think farm employers think about trade unions?*



## **Appendix 2: Migrant research participant biographic information:**

### **Romanian workers**

Sorin, 33, single, arrived in 2007.

Marin, 31, married, father of one, arrived in 2007.

Flaviu, 30, married, arrived in 2007.

Alessandru, 43, divorced, father of two, arrived in 2004.

Dorin, 30, divorced, arrived in 2006.

Andrei, 51, married father of four, arrived in 2006.

Sorina, 25, married, arrived in 2009.

Michaela, 23, married, arrived in 2007.

Donna, 42, single parent of one, arrived in 2004.

Maria, 53, married and mother of one, arrived in 2008.

Silvia, 51, single parent of two, arrived in 1996.

Alina, 36, married and mother of three, arrived in 2007.

### **Tunisian workers**

Mustafa, 56, father of six, arrived 1979.

Omar, 56, father of six, arrived in 1986.

Toufie, 31, father of three, arrived in 2009.

Jamel, 28, single, arrived in 2009.

Farhat, 26, single, arrived in 2007.

Semi, 24, single arrived in 2004.

Miriam, 48, mother of four, arrived in 1996.

Samia, 38, mother of three, arrived in 1995.

### **Refugees workers**

Gadi, 48, Pakistani, father of three, arrived in 2010.

Amid, 30, Algerian, single arrived in 2009.

Aadan,24, Somali, arrived in 2011.

**Undocumented workers**

Fatah, 26, single, arrived in 2008.

Samir, 28, single, arrived in 2003.

Terir, 28, single arrived in 2007.

Amir, 26, single arrived in 2008.

Mohamed, 25, single, arrived in 2011.

Faisal, 36,Algerian father of one, arrived in 2010.