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TRAVAGGIARI A JURNATA

*Investigating day labor inside Sicilian tomatoes
“plastic factories”*

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Introduction

This thesis is the result of three years of PhD training and six months of ethnographic research conducted amongst the daily farmworkers in the province of Ragusa (Sicily). I spent two out of six months being employed within several greenhouses and packinghouses companies, using the traditional qualitative method of participant (covered and uncovered) observation. Then, I strove to “go out” from the field and try to “understand” (*Verstehen*). This thesis is thus the result of this emotional and analytical effort.

The field: la fascia costiera trasformata

La fascia costiera trasformata, roughly translated as the *transformed littoral strip* (or belt), has been the setting of my ethnographic experience. It is an area located in South-eastern Sicily, abutting alongside the coastline for approximately 150 km, from Licata (AG) to Pachino (SR), mainly with the province of Ragusa. Vittoria, where my fieldwork was based, is the core of the “transformed belt”. It is a 63 thousand inhabitant city, hosting the biggest fruit and vegetable market [*Mercato Ortofrutticolo*] at the site of production in Italy. The *pachino* and *cilieginio* tomatoes, as well as the majority of the “no-more-seasonal” vegetables that we are able to find everyday in our supermarkets (at least in Italy) are produced here.

In the last fifty years the area has undergone a major *transformation* indeed. Since mid-1960s, the district has seen a boom in the number of greenhouses built; this has *transformed* both the landscape, and the economic standing of its inhabitants (see Image 1 and 2). With more than 3331 companies, the most of which are small if not very small¹, and its almost 6.000 hectares of Utilized

¹ In this analysis, we consider “very small” the enterprises with a UAA of less than 2 ha; “small” the firms with

Agricultural Area (UAA), constituting alone the 17% of the Italian protected fields, the Sicilian transformed belt is the epitome of widespread economic “development” and high quality production. But what does “development” mean? What do we mean when we refer to “high quality products”? How is the quality as well as the economic value of commodities socially constructed?



Image 1 and 2. Vittoria: the «plastic sea». Photo by Giovanni Battaglia, July 26th 2013

a UAA between 2 and 10 ha; “medium” the companies with a UAA between 10 and 50 ha; “big” the enterprises with more than 50 ha of UAA. On a total amount of 3331 firms registered in the province of Ragusa, 3145 can be considered very small (2317) and small (828) units. For further detail, see Table 1 in the Appendix.

The questions: economy as a social construction, economics as a fabrication

What is at stake here, namely at the core of the sociological analysis, is not just the unmasking of the productive relations generating economic value, but also an attempt to understand broadly how people conceive, shape and undertake their economic lives. The two purposes, namely to understand the economy and the power relations that innervate it at the production site and to understand economic ties embedded within a broader social context, do not actually contradict each other. They thus represent two complementary ends of this ethnographic endeavor. Social relations of production and the social production of value are both the visible result of historical processes materially binding people's lives, processes at the same time constantly re-shaped through individuals' efforts (to support the social order, to accommodate or to subvert it).

The palette of questions driving this thesis is quite broad but above all there is an overall aim: to understand how certain social agreements – which are typically defined in public discourse as defined by power and domination, and even deemed as outright unfair or unjust - are produced, reproduced and naturalized till becoming *normal*; to understand what is deemed as *just* and what is deemed as *unjust* and for whom; to understand how people implicitly agree on what is *fair*, and how their conceptions of *fairness* are collectively defined and, what is most, conventionally *justified*. That is not about individuals' rhetorics. It is about the «cognitive structures» through which ordinary people, as well as social scientists, categorize and organize their worlds (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). I concede that this is a very high theoretical ambition. Let's say that this thesis is a first attempt to provide a contribution in this direction. Throughout the research, I strive to unpack some definitions usually taken for granted. In particular, I chose some ordinary categories and tried to scrutinize their dimensions: what does it mean to *travagghiari a jurnata* [to «work by the day»], as people say in order to define their labor conditions? How do they conceive of their lives, their time, their bodies, their material uncertainties, their future expectations as being bound to day labor? How are *work-places* framed and imagined by daily laborers and by people residing in the area? How are gender, class and ethnicity negotiated daily within the work environment? How are the same categories producing «matrices of domination» (Collins, 1993) within the site of production?

The *spaces* of production: the agricultural supply chain, from fields to supermarkets

I chose to situate my ethnography in a district characterized by the production of fresh vegetables². Intensive protected horticulture, as a phenomenon, began spreading in the area starting in the mid-1960s, when three «ingenious» men introduced a new technique to cultivate the land: the greenhouse.

When tomatoes started to grow up, red and solid, the first three people that experimented the greenhouse hugged each other: they understood that they had won the biggest war, that they gained freedom from misery, simply *embracing the weapons of their work and their tenaciousness*. The news spread everywhere, in Vittoria people understood that it was possible to ask for a loan in order to buy a small strip of land and in this way it started the *miracle* of the “green gold”. It was born the European California. In a short period, the littoral area of south-eastern Sicily, that goes from Licata to Pachino, changed its aspect and *transformed into a huge greenhouses sea, plastered by shining polyethylene films*. It was a huge extension of shining plastic that mirrors the color of a *new era* in the agrarian economy of the territory in the II post-war: the era of the “green gold”, the era of fresh vegetables»³.

The introduction of the greenhouse to local ways of «doing agriculture» (Van der Ploeg, 2009) is indelible in the memories of the locals as a relevant turning point, a watershed between a «new» and an old era of production. This innovation assumes the connotation of a proper «miracle»: as a spell cast over the land, with apparently no effort, the south-eastern coast of Sicily *was transformed* into a «huge extension of shining plastic» (see the photo section). The «miracle» was mainly attributed to resources, such as the sunlight and the soil composition, with which the area is *naturally* endowed, and that «immediately predispose» the land to be fertile and fecund. At the same time, and with the same conviction, men's and women's *active efforts* to transform those natural elements was equally emphasized in the inhabitants' accounts.

Francesco Aiello [former Vittoria's mayor]: «At a certain point farmer started to protect the seedling, creating structures of defense. One of the classic defense structures were the *cannizzati* [protections made with reeds]. A similar goal was attained using the land edge, or the *pale di ficudinna* [the prickly pear leaves]. At a certain point, someone among these producers *viduri a Sanremo sti serri di fiori* [saw in Sanremo these flowers greenhouses]. But, what type of problem did they have to face? The problem was the economic inaccessibility of these tools due to their costs. Shortly after, all of them *discovered* that it's sufficient to use a thin plastic cloth! They *discover* that plastic is producing an effect that people started to call “greenhouse effect” that actually save energy. Protected from the winds the produce was ripe 15, 20 days earlier than the same product in the open fields. *All these agronomic conceptions, that the farmers naturally own*, oriented towards the attainment of a precise goal – namely to produce vegetable in advance – led to the birth of the greenhouse, that is a very simple structure: wooden stakes, chestnut stakes, a very cheap material, *cu stu fogghiu di plastica* [covered with this plastic paper]. It started a *new agrarian process! Farmer from desert created the “green gold”!* [Vittoria, May 10th 2013]

² For a «plunge into the history of inventing and creating “fresh food”», see Freidberg (2009, in Gretel and Sippel, 2014: 5 and 248). See also the Conclusions.

³ Extract from the text *Convegno Syngenta: il mercato ortofrutticolo di Vittoria, problematiche ed opportunità*, written by the son of one of the firsts growers that implemented the greenhouses in the area of Vittoria. When the conference was held [September 20th 2006] he was the director of Vittoria's fruit and vegetables market. The interviewee provide me this text at the moment of our interview [May 29th 2013].

«Embracing the weapons of their work and their tenaciousness», *industrious*⁴ men have thus changed their lot. Since then on, as one of my interlocutors said, «the greenhouse started to be inscribed in people's DNA»⁵, namely it became a part of the territory in such a deep way, as it began to be conceived as something almost *biologically given*.

Once in the field, I thus started my investigation evidently from the greenhouses. I realized quite soon, however, that protected fields were not just isolated workplaces. They were in fact deeply intertwined and connected, from above and from below, with other spaces of production (see in the Appendix a figure roughly reconstructing the supply chain). The seedlings growing in the plastic factories are usually bought from nurseries. Nurseries, in turn, have to buy patented seeds. Several seeds companies, among the very few corporations controlling the market worldwide, have their branches in the transformed strip⁶. In those labs, Italian and foreign breeders are committed to creating and testing new varieties of vegetables, that thereafter are produced in massive quantities abroad⁷. Patented seeds are then sowed and germinated into the nurseries' protected environments. In those places, a great number of female hands «takes care» of them; thanks to «women's dexterity and precision»⁸ seedlings are grafted and prepared before being sold to the greenhouses companies. In the covered fields seedlings are typically transplanted annually only (*campagna lunga*) or sometimes more often (*campagna corta*). Inside greenhouses a workforce composed of mainly male foreign laborers is required to toil for eight or more hours per day, nearly for the entirety of the year, employed in a wide variety of tasks (not only harvesting). Once that the production is completed, the vegetables need to be processed and distributed. A grower, for example, could decide to sell produce directly to a local *commerciante*, a dealer who generally manages a packinghouse devoted

⁴ *Laboriosità* [industriousness] is a recurrent word in the accounts devoted to describe the emergence of a local greenhouses economy. It is apparently in contradiction with the definitions of «miracle» or the expressions such as «the discovering of the green gold» (or «red gold» in other accounts). It actually testifies that a certain economic wellbeing was created thanks to the concrete efforts of numerous people.

⁵ From the interview with Giuseppe Scifo, FLAI-CGIL secretary, Vittoria, March 7th 2013. The FLAI-CGIL (*Federazione Lavoratori AgroIndustria*) is the branch of the biggest Italian union devoted to agro-industrial workers.

⁶ As it is well known, there exists a handful of multinational seeds industries, controlling the seed market worldwide (i.e. Monsanto, based in the US; Du Pont [U.S.], Syngenta [Switzerland], etc.). Several of those have their experimentation sites in the transformed belt. Among them: Seminis (belonging to Monsanto group); Gautiers Sementi (the Sicilian branch of Gautier Semences [FR]), Enza Zaden (NL), Esasem (IT), Southern Seeds (IT), Med Hermes (IT), etc.

⁷ According to one of my informants working for a local seeds company [interviewed Vittoria, April 28th 2013], patented seeds are produced in massive quantities inside laboratories located in foreign countries (such as Cina, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Kenya, etc.). Notwithstanding these *global* origins, as well as the foreign contributions for what concerns high technologies (mainly coming from Israel, U.S. and Netherlands), the seeds corporations are very keen on demonstrating their attachment to the *local* territory. To anchor their product to an alleged «typicalness» and agricultural «tradition», they invent names able to evoke «Sicilianity», such as the aubergine *Bella Vittoria* or the *Montalbano* tomato.

⁸ To describe female labor inside nurseries as well as inside packinghouse, I recurred in this Introduction to a series of gendered stereotypes generally employed in the local context, highlighted through inverted commas (on this topic see ch. V).

to cleaning, wrapping and re-selling processed vegetables. Here, once again, is the «female patience and aesthetic sense» required. Alternatively, the farmer could confer his/her product to the local *Mercato Ortofrutticolo* [fruit and vegetable Market] in which several (male) brokers – *commissionari, mediatori* or *commercianti* – ply their daily activity, negotiating on the prices of the products, in search of good bargains and attempting to eschew frauds. Their work is based on exchanges, barter, trust ties, accountability references and fierce quarrels constituting a proper «moral economy» (Thompson, 1971) able to define – together and above the “economic” and juridical system – what *ought to be done*, and what is considered unacceptable.

During the fieldwork, I attempted to peer into the entire commodity chain, using interviews and the shadowing techniques (see the methodological Appendix). However, for methodological reasons and time concerns, I decided to focus my attention mainly on two types of workplaces that I deemed to be central for what concerns the production of value taking place in the local context, i.e. greenhouses and packinghouses. Even by focusing in these two jobsites, I recognized that they were completely interconnected and highly «dependent» on the entire global agri-food system (Gertel, Sippel, 2014; Colloca, Corrado, 2013: 14-15). Growers (and just partially dealers) depend «backward and forward» on the supply chain. «Backward», as we have seen, since they have to rely on the (almost monopolistic) seeds corporations and phyto-sanitary industry; «forward» since a strong downward pressure on the vegetables prices is constantly exerted by big retailers (in Italian *Grande Distribuzione Organizzata*) and by actors competing at the international and European level⁹.

Francesco Aiello: [Nowadays] it isn't clear what we have to do, how we should behave, how we have to organize in order to face the power of big retailers. They are the new subjects imposing rules that are pirate rules! Rules that are not democratically agreed, rules [imposed] from a position of strength. [...] [For instance] they impose competition [at a global level]! [...] We are importing, for example, *ciliegiino* paid at 36 cent per kilo from Tunisia. How can we resist? For them [the Tunisians] this price could be competitive, while for us it's mortal. [...] Before it was different, the markets were more stable, the rules more humane, more verifiable. Now it's sufficient that *u diritturi di na grande catena* [the director of a big supermarket chain], Auchan – for instance – if s/he doesn't like the product in a given area, s/he can decide to change country or region just through a phone call! Fundamentally the economic crisis we are undergoing is strictly tied to these dynamics, in a situation in which the subjects involved have changed and we didn't realize it immediately [...]. I suggest you to read a document about big retailers realized by the European Parliament, I think in 2003... It seems that it was written by an extremist party, while it's the European Parliament [to denounce the abuses]. [...] *By the way, Europe, non-Europe, national*

⁹ As Gertel and Sippel (2014) recognize, since the 1990s the studies concerning *global value chains* (among the others, Gereffi, Korzeniewicz, 1994), the scholarship devoted to the analysis of *food regimes* (Friedmann, McMichael, 1989) and the contributions dealing with the *power of supermarket* in establishing prices and quality standards have intersected in a prospering interdisciplinary field of research concerning the *agri-food system*. Unfortunately, my thesis does not engage directly with this interesting body of literature, even referring to the contributions already quoted, as well as to other research projects recently conducted in Italy (see e.g. Garrapa, 2015 and Perrotta, 2015b). These more recent works has also the undeniable merit to have crossed the body of literature concerning *agri-food system* with the studies dealing with *migrant mobility and provision of cheap work* in the agricultural labor market (see also Gertel and Sippel, 2014; Colloca, Corrado, 2013).

State, Globalization... but they [the big supermarket chains] are globalized! The person who is going every morning in the countryside is not globalized, he has his feet on the ground, he's there in his small plot of land... You're globalized, but I'm not globalized!

[Vittoria, May 10th 2013]

As also Set Holmes (2013: 52, emphasis added) notes, in his more incisive ethnographic experience in California's farms, the growers encountered in the field were not necessary «wealthy, selfish and unconcerned». Together with Holmes I recognized, in fact, that «the stark reality and precarious future of the farm serve as reminders that the situation is more complex. The corporation of U.S. agriculture [as well as European farming] and the growth of international free markets squeeze growers such that they cannot easily imagine increasing the pay of the pickers or improving the labor camps without bankrupting the farm. *In other word, many of the most powerful inputs into the suffering of farmworkers are structural, not willed by individual agents.* In this case, *structural violence* is enacted by market rule and later channeled by international and domestic racism, classism, sexism and anti-immigrant prejudice». I thus attempted to take into account the structural constraints binding producers (and partially dealers) within the global value chain. Throughout this thesis, however, I mainly concentrated on workers' life stories and everyday experiences, embracing their viewpoint in order to provide a nuanced picture of (day) labor market from within.

The laborers: ethnicity, gender and class at work

So, who are the male and female laborers employed within greenhouses and packinghouses? Since 1960s to the present, the typology of the workforce employed in the sector has consistently changed. In the first period, it was mainly the owner (usually male) and his family (his wife and next of kin) who worked the land. As soon as the wealth generated by the greenhouses favored the beginning of processes of social mobility, the majority of educated young people in Sicily, began to leave dirties and demanding occupations (Cole, Booth, 2007). The disappearing of this workforce was obviated by the hiring of immigrants, initially coming from the interior of Sicily, but then later from abroad. Young Tunisian laborers, mostly male, began arriving in Sicily from the mid-1960s, because of the geographical proximity of the two regions, and thanks to the possibility of finding easy employment in the informal agricultural labor market, without having to obtain formal work or residence permits (Cusumano, 1976; Saitta, Sbraccia, 2003). In the 1980s and 1990s, the number of Tunisians employed as dependent workers continued increasing consistently. Since the end of the 1990s some Tunisian nationals began to take part in the process of production as autonomous

workers, renting the land to set up small firms, or by becoming sharecroppers (as *mezzadri* or *compartecipanti*)¹⁰. More recently, since the beginning of the 2000s, the transformed strip has become a destination for numerous workers coming mostly from Romania. Local statistical sources have registered a marked increase in the number of Romanians in 2007, the year which represented a benchmark, from an irregular into a regular status for a large number of Romanian citizens already present on the Italian territory (due to the fact that their country entered the European Union). The data, although only partially reliable, at our disposal shows that, in recent years (2013) the share of foreign agricultural laborers in the district grew significantly: on a total of approximately 27 thousand people registered as farmworkers to the INPS local offices in the province of Ragusa¹¹, more than 13 thousand are foreigner nationals (i.e. the 49%)¹². As has happened in other historical periods in numerous Italian and Western contexts, also in the labor market under concern in this study, it is possible to register the presence of the phenomena of substitution between the two workforce segments (see ch. V). The predictable (and expected) consequences of these phenomena have been the emergence of a cutthroat labor competition expressed in terms of ethnicity. Labor conditions, in fact, started to become differentiated mainly on the basis of the employees' nationality¹³. The Romanians, the newcomers, at the moment I was conducting the research were asked (and were available) to reside in precarious habitation in the rural areas nearby the greenhouses. In addition, they were hired for lower daily wages compared with Tunisian nationals. In fact, while a Tunisian citizen (usually a man) used to earn on average 30 € per day, a Romanian national (a man or a woman) typically earned around 25 €¹⁴. So, despite being formally entailed to a higher degree of citizenship rights, due to their EU membership,

¹⁰ To have a look at the data concerning the number of foreign agricultural entrepreneurs in the province of Ragusa, see Table 2 in the Appendix. Even if numerically the phenomenon does not seem to be so relevant (i.e. in Vittoria, on 1864 firms owners, only 14 are foreigners), it appears to be worth of investigation for several reasons. First of all, pattern of upward social mobility are not so common among foreign farmworkers in other Italian regions. Secondly, they represent relevant cases in which the «conjugated oppression» based on the overlapping between class and ethnicity (Bourgois, 1988) is actually upset (see ch. V).

¹¹ *The Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale* (INPS) registers the number of employees paying social security taxes as farmworker.

¹² To make an example for what concerns the municipality of Vittoria, foreign workforce, that constituted almost the 20% of the total amount of agricultural workers in 1998, represents the 48,45% in 2013, the 31% of whom are Tunisians and Romanians (our elaborations on INPS data [2014], kindly provided by FLAI-CGIL, Vittoria). See the Appendix for further details concerning farmworkers' nationalities in Vittoria (2000-2011) [Table 3], and farmworkers' nationalities in several municipality of the province of Ragusa, for the years 2012 [Table 4] and 2013 [Table 5]. Last but not least, it is important to make some considerations regarding the reliability of such sources of information. INPS data, in fact, registers the number of workers hired with a regular job contract (usually a fixed-term one). As we are going to see further, the number of farmworkers counted by INPS does not mirror the number of people actually working in this sector, due to the numerous case of undeclared work as well as “fake farmworkers” (see ch.III, par. 5.2).

¹³ Gender, in this specific case, does not seem to affect so much the level of the salaries and labor conditions as national belonging does.

¹⁴ This data concerning salaries refers to the year 2013, in which I conducted my ethnographic research. In the last two years I have been acquainted with the fact that informal wages have been drastically reduced in the overall agricultural sector (see further on).

Romanian nationals seem to experience the harder situations in the labor market. Moreover, the presence of a weaker workers' fringe, caused an overall worsening of working conditions affecting both Tunisian laborers, as well as the numerous Italian farmworkers forced to “come back” to agriculture in a period of economic crisis.

The diffusion of the greenhouse technology produces great consequences, among other things, for what concerns the stabilization on the territory of this foreign workforce. In fact, even if protected agriculture still works in a cyclic way (to sow, to cultivate, to harvest, to clean and prepare to sow again), these cycles appear here to be continuous, almost without any interruption: «*scippi e chanti, scippi e chanti*» [«you eradicate and you sow, you eradicate and you sow»], as people say in Vittoria. This innovation has important effects regarding labor demand, since entrepreneurs are no longer facing the “traditional” need of a “just-in-time” workforce during periods of massive picking, as has happened in other seasonal-work contexts (see further on). In the transformed strip, the amount of labor required is almost constant during the entire year (with a slight reduction in the summertime). For this reason the majority of firms need to have workers on their payroll almost *uninterruptedly*. As we are going to see throughout this thesis, on the one hand, the constant necessity of workforce did not lead towards a stabilization and improvement of laborers' conditions (akin to what is currently happening in several other labor market sector). Yet, on the other hand, it led to a stabilization of this labor force on the territory, since Tunisian and Romanian nationals could potentially look for a job and be employed during every period of the year. The partial statistical data at our disposal are more or less able to provide a preliminary description of these phenomena. To exemplify what I am maintaining, it is possible to find in the Appendix some data concerning the number of foreign inhabitants in the municipality of Vittoria: Tunisian citizens, since the 1990s on, confirmed to be the most numerous among the foreign nationals enrolled in the civic register. Romanian citizens, instead, started to be registered since 2000¹⁵. According to this data, in 2013 there were 1976 Romanian nationals residing in Vittoria, while there were just 18 in 2000. Among them, the majority were women (1061)¹⁶. Ostensibly, this data is quite far from being real, since numerous Romanian citizens do not actually apply for the Italian *residenza*¹⁷. Equally unreliable is the data provided for Tunisian nationals, deemed to be 2150 in 2013 (with only 572

¹⁵ I would like to thank Giuseppe Scifo (FLAI-CGIL, Vittoria), Giovanni Consolino (settore Servizi Sociali, Comune di Vittoria) and the C.E.D. (Servizi demografici e statistici, Comune di Vittoria) for the provision of this data.

¹⁶ Source: civic register of the Municipality of Vittoria, consulted last time on February 28th 2014.

¹⁷ Even if for EU members the *residenza* is not necessary for the issuing of a residence permit, it is still a fundamental document in order to be entitled to several welfare provisions, first of all health care. Living often in the countryside, however, numerous Romanians could not apply for *residenza* since their shacks evidently are not adequate for this purpose, drastically undermining their possibility to access public services.

women): the number encompasses in fact “fake residents¹⁸” and, at the same time, it does not “count” the irregular presences. The statistical information confirm, however, a significant presence of migrants living stably in the small coastline cities¹⁹. Leaving aside worries concerning the reliability of quantitative data, this research hinges entirely on a qualitative perspective aimed at providing a quite nuanced picture of the complexity of the labor market dynamics.

Layout of the thesis: a multi-layered structure

We could compare the structure of the thesis to a set of Matrioska dolls. As regards the theoretical ambitions of each section, every chapter “contains” in itself the following, in a sort of progressive restriction of the analytical focus. The first chapter is evidently the “broadest”. It hinges on an extended body of literature in economic sociology in order to provide a useful «tool kit» to orient the analysis, unraveling several conceptions of the economy. It starts from the dichotomous opposition between a *social-structural* and a *cultural alternative* in the comprehension of the economic realm and soon after it attempts to overcome this fictitious distinction. The chapter then aims to merge these two perspectives in order to understand economic relations as a set of social ties fraught with a dense web of meanings that people mobilize everyday while negotiating their economic lives. This initial section is thus referring to some of the pivotal concepts in economic sociology such as «embeddedness» and «negotiation», more or less inscribed within a micro-sociological constructionist perspective. In order to enrich our tool kit, the chapter is going to take into account also Bourdieu's (soft)-structuralist viewpoint, to become familiar with concepts such as

¹⁸ Thanks to the various accounts collected during the fieldwork, it was possible to register the large pervasiveness of the phenomena of the «purchasing» of job contracts and fake *residenze*, especially taking place among Tunisian migrants who are compelled to apply for issuing or renewal of their residence permit. It is not so uncommon, thus, to meet Tunisian citizens that «have their documents in Vittoria», even if they usually reside in other Italian regions or abroad, where usually it is said to be more difficult to «look for a contract».

¹⁹ As regards migration fluxes in the transformed belt, elaborating on ISTAT data (2008-2013), Caruso and Corrado (2015) state: «*Intorno all'offerta del lavoro agricolo, il dato più sorprendente dal punto di vista demografico è il primato di Acate, un piccolo comune storicamente a forte vocazione agricola e oggi posto al centro del distretto agroindustriale di Vittoria. Qui oltre il 25% della popolazione locale è neo-comunitaria e extracomunitaria, con un salto significativo di quasi il 400%, dai 691 migranti del 2008 ai 2.672 del 2013, con una vera e propria “colonizzazione” etnica della contrada di Marina di Acate che ha portato questo comune ad essere al primo posto nel centro-sud per percentuale di popolazione migrante e al quarto posto a livello nazionale. [...] Anche la vasta disponibilità di alloggi, costruiti sull'onda dell'espansione edilizia legata alle seconde case per la villeggiatura nei decenni passati, ha facilitato il processo di insediamento abitativo della componente migrante. Se la vicina Santa Croce Camerina, registra il medesimo trend di crescita esponenziale della popolazione migrante, avendo in questo caso raggiunto con 2.077 abitanti stranieri ormai circa il 20% della popolazione, nella città capoluogo di provincia invece avviene un aumento molto più contenuto, passando da 2.223 stranieri regolari a 2.950, cioè meno del 5% della popolazione locale*».

«social, cultural and symbolic capital», «habitus» or «economic fields», concepts fundamental to a sociological analysis of economy that is able to consider individuals' dispositions as well as the objective structure of social positions. Last but not least, we will also examine the perspective presented by a group of French scholars that define themselves as the *Economists of Conventions*. Thanks to their contributions, we will bring into our theoretical tool kit concepts such as «agreements», «justifications», «worth» and «fairness», useful for an analysis of the economy that does not pretend to be disembodied or neutral, but recognizes that economic transactions are enacted by situated *moral* individuals.

The second Matrioska's layer proceeds from the field of economic sociology to the current debates in the *sociology of work* and *migrant labor*. Chapter II, III and (partially) IV focus on the pivotal role played by the analytical category of *day labor*. The first question raised is how to investigate day labor. Together with the broad set of tools already provided, here I briefly engage with the debates dealing – on the one hand – with the labor market and life precariousness, and – on the other hand – with the “temporarization” and “seasonalization” of migrant labor. Chapter II is also devoted at anticipating some methodological concerns explaining how I selected my case-studies. Then, the reader is asked to take a plunge directly into the field to explore day labor in concrete situations. Chapter III, hinging on a rich set of examples, attempts to investigate day labor dimensions. The purpose of this chapter is thus to try to provide a nuanced image describing “thickly” what it means to work by the day, being harnessed by physical suffering, material insecurity and future uncertainties. Chapter IV, instead, engages in the purpose of reflecting on the very *spaces* constituting the settings that “host” and shape day labor. The attempt here is to try to elaborate a typology of greenhouse. Thanks to the descriptions provided by laborers as well as by privileged observers, I propose four greenhouse “images”: the “greenhouse-factory” (a metaphor that permeates the entire thesis); the “greenhouse-countryside” that recalls phenomena of domestication of the workplaces; and finally the “greenhouse-hospital” and the “greenhouse-dump”, created mainly thanks to the critical reflections provided by privileged observers, that attempt to raise some important considerations on the conception of agriculture and on the relationship between the greenhouse mode of production and the local context.

Chapter V constitutes the smallest Matrioska: it employs an intersectional pair of lens to scrutinize closely the workplaces. In this sense, it is already encompassed in the preceding sections; at the same time, the other chapters provide the broader context within which this analytical perspective is nestled. The last chapter, thus, argues more specifically how gender, ethnicity and class are constituted daily “from the above” and are performed “from below” within workplaces.

Finally, the Conclusions represents a preliminary attempt to move the focus of this study from

workplaces to public spaces, in order to highlight, within a broader context, what Gertel and Sippel (2014) called *the social costs of eating fresh*.

The thesis ends with a methodological Appendix, that rather than constituting a superfluous section is indeed the fundamental litmus test to understand the aim of this research endeavor. Following the ethnographic tradition, in fact, the Appendix, as a sort of a «confession» (Kunda, 2000), attempts to acknowledge some of the limits of this contribution. But above all, this final section is aimed at explaining the «extra-scientific reasons» motivating such an analytical effort (Whyte, 1943). Lingering in the account of the author's personal experience within the field does not simply provide the validation that the qualitative research necessitates. It provides also a good occasion to question the very power of the “definition of reality” with which the author herself is endowed, acknowledging frankly that she is embroiled in a structure of power relations, so that the “privilege to speak” and “represent” reality could not be equally shared with people, the men and the women, around which this theoretical discourse has been constructed.

Chapter I

Sociological perspectives on the economy

«L'économie politique... est une science abstraite et déductive, qui n'est pas tant occupée à observer la réalité qu'à construire un idéal plus ou moins désirable; parce que l'homme dont parlent les économistes, cet égoïste systématique, n'est qu'un homme de raison artificiel. L'homme que nous connaissons, l'homme réel, est beaucoup plus complexe: il appartient à une époque et à un pays, il vit quelque part, il a une famille, un pays, un croyance religieuse et des idées politiques».

Émile Durkheim, *Course de science sociales*

1. Introduction

When I came back from my fieldwork in Sicily, in September 2013, one of my friends, aware of the fact that I was “pretending” to conduct an investigation in economic sociology, jokingly asked me: «So, in the end, did you meet the *homo economicus* out there?». That was not just an innocent joke. My friend, a sociologist himself, wanted to restate that, when we confront ourselves with the complexity of reality, the disembodied «“men without qualities” whom economists call “individuals” who serve to buttress analyses of rational choices and preferences» (Boltanski, Thévenot, 2006: 1) are hard to be detected. Focusing on their alleged neutrality, moreover, we can easily recognize that these isolated individuals are actually imagined as men, grown up and educated within a capitalist society, and – most probably – white. That is why investigating how the supposed “objectivity” of the economic sphere is actually constructed becomes a critical end in itself (Bourdieu, 2005).

Even though economic sociology presents diverse traditions inside its field, from its beginning and with renewed theoretical strength since mid-1980s, it has raised several criticism towards the main assumptions proposed by mainstream economics and has fostered a very different comprehension of

the economic realm (Smelser, Swedberg, 2005b; Trigilia, 2002a, b). According to Viviana Zelizer (2011: 365, 1st ed. 1988), there is quite large agreement among the scholars in individuating the “mistaken assumptions” of conventional economic models²⁰. These deal, in the first place, with the alleged autonomy of the market, assumed to be a self-subsistent institution, not influenced by extra-economical cultural and social factors. But, as Zelizer states «the market is no longer a safe place to theorize. Its long-standing neutrality is being increasingly violated by scholars from various disciplines who refuse to treat the market as a purely economic institution» (ibidem: 363).

A second array of critics moves toward the direction of questioning the rational choice model on which the economists rely on, as the source of explanation for the individual behaviors. First of all, sociology tries to take the distance from the pure “methodological individualism” proposed by economics, taking as a starting point the assumption that the individual is a social constructed entity, namely s/he is an “actor-in-interaction”, or an “actor-in-society” (Smelser, Swedberg, 2005b). In this perspective, groups, families, social classes and networks represent the privileged dimensions within which looking at how individual interests emerge and are negotiated. So, to explain actors’ behaviors it is fundamental to look at the particular social context that, setting specific bonds and opportunities, constitutes the environment for the interactions (Granovetter, 2000: 351).

Furthermore, as the classical Weberian distinction suggests, it is reductive to assume that social action could be considered rational only in an instrumental and utilitarian sense (*Zweckrational*). In Weber’s terms, action could be also value-oriented, guided by the emotions or motivated by traditions and habits; so, from a sociological perspective, it is hard to postulate the existence of just one type of rationality leading action (Smelser, Swedberg, 2005b; Portes, 2010). The attempt to “correct” this assumption, theorizing that individuals are endowed with a “bounded rationality”, as proposed by Herber Simon, does not represent in itself a sufficient improvement of the neoclassical paradigm. Contrariwise, taking the distances from the mainstream economic discourse, the *Economists of Conventions* (see further on) introduce a compelling perspective, useful to theorize more appropriately on the rational dimension of human beings: they postulate the existence of an “interpretative” form of rationality (not exclusively an utilitarian one), i. e. the individuals’ capability to understand the situation in which they are embedded and to decode other people’s

²⁰ According to the same author, however, economists themselves obviously recognize and often criticize the same assumptions, proposing several argumentations to “correct” the pure neoclassical paradigm, as it is the case – among the others – of behavioral, feminist, organizational and institutional economists (like Douglass North and Oliver Williamson) (ibidem: 384). Also Bourdieu points out that there are no critics to any of the assumptions proposed by neoclassical economics that have not been already raised by an economist him/herself (Bourdieu, 2005:15). This clarification is required in order to avoid any mistaken representations of the economists, naively depicted by sociologists as “rational fools” themselves (Sen, 1977).

action through the adoption of common conventional schemas. This ability “to read” reality – through the production of categories – is at the same time a cognitive but also an evaluative capacity, since it is through an evaluative process that the agent determines what is relevant to be grasped and taken into account (Eymard-Duvernay, *et al.* 2006). Therefore, to consider rationality as the human interpretative capability represents a substantial shift in the conventional economic paradigm.

Among neoclassical economics problematic assumptions, the alleged ahistorical dimension of the discipline has been also harshly criticized. From its founding fathers on (let’s think in particular at Marxist “historical materialism”), sociology’s concern has been to unveil the historical determinants of the economic behaviour. As Bourdieu clearly states, in the “Introduction” to the work that represents his most direct attack against neoclassical economics (*Les structures sociales de l’économie*): «Everything economic science posits as a given, that is, the *range of dispositions of the economic agent* which ground the illusion of the ahistorical universality of the categories and concepts employed by that science, is, in fact, the paradoxical product of a *long collective history, endlessly reproduced in individual histories*, which can be fully accounted only by historical analysis» (2005: 5; see also Bourdieu, 1997: 49).

These observations led sociologists to take into account the way in which social norms and institutions, as well as cultural values and set of meanings influence economic action and vice versa. To put the matter baldly, economic sociologists engaged seriously with the constructed nature of the market and with the social and cultural embeddedness of the economic life. However, it has been just since the 1970s, and especially since the 1980s, that scholars converged on the necessity to investigate the economy as a peculiar but not detached sphere of society. Doing so, they got back to the understanding fostered by “classical” sociologists and political economists – as Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Sombart and Simmel – whose attempt was to provide an analysis of relevant socio-economic phenomena (like the social division of labor, the origins of modern capitalism, the diffusion of money as an homogenizing equivalent), immersing them in their historical and social context. It was during the 1930s that economic sociologists stated to refrain to deal with topic claimed as the specific field of interest of neoclassical economists. An important push in this direction was given by Talcott Parsons’ works (Parsons, 1934; 1935a, b; 1937). According to Stark (2006), Parsons encouraged the emergence of a tacit long-lasting agreement: economists would have studied *value*, while sociologists would have studied *values*. It was also Vilfredo Pareto, among the others, that during the 1960s deepened the borderline between the two disciplines, maintaining that while economics studies “logic action”, sociology focuses on the “non-logic one” (Swedberg, 1990). That is why, with some brilliant exceptions – like Polanyi’s works – for almost

forty years sociology moved its object of investigation away from “pure economic” matters²¹. As Granovetter said, for long time sociologists «have implicitly accepted the presumption of economists that “market processes” are not suitable objects of sociological study because social relations play only a frictional and disruptive role, not a central one, in modern society» (ibidem, 1985: 504). Since mid-1980s, the direction undertaken by sociology had an important detour thanks to what has been defined as the “New Economic Sociology” (NES) turn (Granovetter, 1990; Smelser, Swedberg, 2005b; Trigilia, 2002b). The approach proposed by the NES, as we are going to see in the next paragraph analyzing Granovetter’s contribution, claims the necessity to focus on the embedded nature of the economic actions, giving new legitimacy to sociologists to deal with “economic topics”. At the same time, also within the European side of the academic debate, several sociologists appeared to be ready “to break the Parson’s agreement” (Stark, 2006), electing *value* – and non only *values* – as their matter of concern, and analyzing the processes through which people organize, experience and evaluate reality within a single theoretical frame (Boltanski, Thévenot, 1991). In the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, thus, new efforts to give room and systematize the field gradually emerged²², and new undertakings aimed at building “bridges” between the two disciplines were promoted²³.

Looking more accurately at the sociological side of the debate, the main attempts to limit the “economic imperialism” and to subordinate the conventional market model to a set of external bonds could be broadly resumed in two bunches of orientations, that Zelizer (2011, 1st ed. 1988) defined as the “social-structural alternative” and the “cultural alternative”. In the next paragraphs we are going to look more in detail at these two positions, without the pretension of providing a comprehensive literature review. These two preliminary sections, instead, should be interpreted as a useful premise, in order to introduce some of the theoretical perspectives that this ethnographic work aims at sharing.

Soon after these introductory paragraphs, we are going to present Zelizer’s undertaking to overcome

²¹ In the same period, also Marxist critics started to reproach sociology for not dealing with economic facts (see, among the others, Gouldner, 1970).

²² Look, in particular, at the contributions written by Richard Swedberg (1987) in the monographic issues of *Current Sociology* devoted to “the past and the presence” of the discipline. The same author, together with Neil Smelser, elaborate a quite comprehensive *Handbook of the economic sociology*, published for the first time in 1994 and re-edited in 2005. A more recent and efficiently organized book on the argument is Alejandro Portes’ (2010) *Economic sociology. A systematic enquiring*. Other general introductions to the discipline were published also in Europe (see, among the others, Steiner, 1999 and Trigilia 2002a, b).

²³ See, among the others, the interviews collected by Richard Swedberg (1990, it. ed. 1994) in his relevant book *Economy and sociology*, interviews that are conducted with scholars who contribute consistently to the development of the two disciplines. Among them: Gery Becker, James Coleman, George Akerlof, Harrison White, Mark Granovetter, Oliver Williamson. As we have said, especially in the last few years, it was possible to register the emergence of new contributions aimed at «crossing the borders» between economics and sociology, to highlight their common ambitions and starting points and to reconsider them, in order to shift «from a [pure] market economy to an general theory of human relations» (Eymard-Duvernay *et al.*, 2006: 39; see also Bourdieu, 2005).

this fictional distinction between a structural and a cultural position, proposing what she called a “multiple market” model, namely a theoretical posture oriented towards the necessity to understand the interactions and to investigate the intersectional spaces (“the bridges”) between structural, cultural and economic factors determining action (Zelizer, 2011 1st ed. 1988). Zelizer’s interactionist approach, albeit very useful to provide a compelling analysis of people everyday arrangements in their economic lives, refrains to deal, with deeper concern, with the structural constraints and power relations embedding and delimiting individual negotiation strategies. To soften these possible shortcomings, this thesis attempts to merge Zelizer’s contribution with Bourdieu’s (*semi*)-structuralist approach, in order to take in greater account – thanks to the French sociologist’s perspective – the role played by the economic field in delimiting individuals’ present opportunities and future chances. Thus, in the successive paragraph, we are going to introduce Bourdieu’s contribution to the analysis of the economic behaviours, mainly focusing on the concept of economic field and on the notion of habitus (Bourdieu, 1997; 2005). Introducing Bourdieu’s critical thought is useful to highlight how neoclassical economics constituted itself as a distinctive subject through a dismissal of the historical dimensions of the economic practices. The “objectivity” constructed through these processes has the purpose of trying to “universalize” the principles fostered by the neoliberal agenda and to diffuse them globally. So, it goes Bourdieu’s argument, the alleged neutrality of the economic realm masks actually a precise political (imperialistic) project. That is why to unveil the ethnocentric biases and theoretical fallacies of the economic models represents the first step in order to engage in the undertaking of producing a more accurate social science, concerned about social origins but also about social consequences of economic behaviours in our everyday life. Last but not least, we will consider one of the possible “evolutions” of Bourdieu’s reasoning, concerned especially in exploring the cognitive and evaluative processes that lay behind the economic (and social) action. Putting aside the considerations fostered by the alleged critical sociologists, a group of scholars defining themselves as *Economists of Conventions*, since mid-1980s, have set up an innovative research program whose attempt was to take into account more seriously human beings’ critical capacity, so human ability to understand and evaluate reality and to act according to a collective interpretation of the situations (Boltanski, Thévenot, 1991; 2009). Shifting the site of investigation, thus, Economists of Conventions started to wonder on the conventional criteria put in place by individuals in order to interpret reality and to solve their daily problems of coordination and uncertainty (Eymard-Duvernay, *et al.* 2006). According to their line of reasoning, problems of uncertainty do not depend (as mainstream economics maintains) on the lack of information; they depend, instead, on the presence of a plurality of co-existing orders of *worth* (*grandeur* in French), attributing a meaning to human behaviour. In their seminal work, that

constituted one of the Economics of Conventions' masterpiece, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (1991) individuated the existence of several orders of worth (that they labelled, employing a imaginative metaphor, as “worlds” [*cités*]) according to which the individuals use to *justify* their actions. The concept of *justification*, that is pivotal in Boltanski and Thévenot reasoning, as we will see further on, is going to become an extremely important tool also throughout this thesis, in order to explore the criteria of justice and legitimacy that social actors collectively and publicly elaborate and perform.

All this three perspectives obviously share what Portes (2010) defined as the meta-theoretical assumptions in economic sociology²⁴, albeit they also present some sharp differences among themselves. Throughout the chapter, in fact, the line of argumentation is going to proceed from Zelizer's accurate interactionist perspective, to Bourdieu's “soft” structuralist approach to Boltanski and Thévenot methodological structuralism²⁵: but this undertaking, obviously, presents several contradictions. The aim of the present work it is not to try to reconcile these three different postures, neither to select a single corpus of coherent theories to be employed as the exclusive lighthouse to illuminate the empirical data. The ethnographic exercise, in fact, was useful to experiment how people constantly try to match their set of justifications with their ordinary practices, producing indeed a great amount of stark contradictions. In a parallel way, a social scientist is often required to spend a lot of time trying to match a theoretical frame with a coherent set of empirical findings; but this appears to be a quite hazardous activity, since it could give room to the production of numerous contradictions and inconsistencies. So, the richness of trying to mingle different approaches (that clearly have in common their basic assumptions) is to provide more than one lens through which looking at the multifaceted reality in a more accurate way: while some theoretical concepts could be

²⁴ Following Portes' attempt to systematize the field, it is worth to distinguish between: (1) meta-theoretical assumptions, (2) explanatory mechanisms, (3) strategic sites of inquiring in economic sociology. «The first component establishes the cognitive “lens” through which a particular field sees the world. This lens is neither superior nor inferior to others, it is simply distinct in privileging certain areas of empirical reality as worth investigating and in orienting ways of going about this enterprise» (ibidem: 1). Since meta-theoretical assumptions alone do not provide a sufficient explanation, due to the fact that they appears to be too abstract to stimulate further development in the field, each of the perspectives introduced in the following paragraphs appears to be endowed also with a tool kit «to understand, clarify, and even predict concrete events» (ibidem). Some of these (2) “explanatory mechanisms” are shared with other sociological traditions (like the concepts of social class, social capital, and so on); while other explanations appear to be innovative and original intuitions proposed by the selected authors (for instance, Zelizer's reference to “earmarking practices”, or Boltanski and Thévenot use of the concept of “justifications”, etc.). Last but not least, the ethnographic account reported in the following chapters while provide relevant examples of a strategic (3) “sites of inquiring” in economic sociology.

²⁵ Differently from Bourdieu's dispositional structuralism, Conventionalists' approach could be defined as “methodological structuralism” since their attempt is to individuate the deeper structures of social life, that they defined as “grammars” (Boltanski, Vitale, 2006). Thus, “social life grammars” represent the set of fixed rules necessary to reach agreements, rules that appear to be at the same time prescriptive norms – allowing to achieve an harmonious status within the *cités* –, but also models of shared competences, necessary to the individuals to stipulate any sort of negotiated arrangement (Boltanski, Thévenot, 2006: 66).

useful to highlight specific phenomena or events, some others – at the same time – could be efficaciously employed to spell out other aspects. The chapter presents a first section aimed at providing a brief literature review and introducing some basic concepts useful to have a preliminary approach to the discipline. The second half of the chapter, instead, attempts to compare and contrast some theoretical apparatuses assumed to be pivotal for the comprehension of the economic realm, and tries to introduce some «explanatory mechanisms» that could be useful for the data analysis (Portes, 2010).

2. The social-structural alternative

One of the positions that largely contributes to the elaboration of a theoretical frame for the analysis of the economic action that differs from the one proposed by mainstream economics has been defined as the “social-structural perspective”. The main concern of this group of economic sociologists has been to recognize that, in modern industrial society, economic action is not independent, but appears to be *embedded in structures of social relations*. As stated by Granovetter (1985: 482), the “embeddedness position” refers, in the first place, to the “substantivist” school in economic anthropology (Hann, Hart, 2011), so it directly recalls Polanyi’s works (Polanyi, 1944, 1968, 1977)²⁶; moreover, it takes in great account the idea of “moral economy”, proposed by Edward P. Thompson (1971), developing in this way some intersections with Marxist thought²⁷. However, as noted also by Swedberg and Smelser (2005b: 13), the concept of the “embeddedness” employed by Granovetter and his fellows, differs quite consistently from the way it was initially used by Polanyi. Looking at the economy as the daily variegated activity through which men and women provide their means of livelihood, Polanyi identifies three “forms of integrations” that represent the ways in which the economic system appears to be “absorbed” by the social system: reciprocity, redistribution and market exchange. Reciprocity emerges within groups of peers, and guarantees the existence of relations of mutual obligations, strengthened by exchanges of gifts and

²⁶ Polanyi recognized that, alongside of a “formal” type of the economy (namely the abstract activity, formulated by the economic theory that focuses on how individuals allocate scarce resources) it exists its “substantive” dimension, grounded in reality and not in logic (Hann, Hart, 2011; Trigilia, 2002a). This difference could roughly correspond to the distinction existing in the English language between the words “economics” and “economy”.

²⁷ The notion of “moral economy” proposed by Thompson (1971) assumed a certain relevance in the sociological debate. In a nutshell, the concept of moral economy is the product of numerous anthropological, historical and sociological investigations which highlight that, in the collective life, operate, mainly in an implicit way, several socially legitimized criteria and parameters of justice (and injustice), that regulate and orient individual behaviors, *in an autonomous way* compared to the inner evaluation criteria of the economic realm (Borghi e Vitale, 2006: 22; Mau, 2006).

reciprocated favors. Redistribution, on the other side, is a form of integration according to which goods and services are allocated by a central authority and subdivided within the community (an example could be the modern welfare state). Finally, in the typology of the exchanges led by the market, commodities – produced exclusively in order to be sold – are distributed accordingly to a price-driven reasoning. While during the entire history of humanity the three coexisting economic forms used to be integrated within webs of social ties and norms, in the market economy the institution of the market tends to be self-regulated and detached from other institutions (like kinship or neighborhood relationships). When also labor, land and money (that are deemed to be fictitious commodities, since they are not produced to be sold) tends to be regulated according to market principles, as it is in the market economy, this would lead to the total destruction of society (Polanyi, 1974: 94). But actually, Polanyi continues, the social history of the XIX century appears to be the result of a “double movement”: on the one hand, the global extension of the market principle for what concerns the proper commodities; and on the other hand the emergence of a movement of resistance that tries to limit the preponderance of the market for what concerns the fictitious commodities (ibidem: 98). Thus, in Polanyi’s critic to the market imperialism, the concept of embeddedness assumes a sort of normative acceptance: the self-regulated market should not disappear, but to preserve society, it *should be (re)-embedded* in a net of social ties.

In Granovetter’s seminal work, published in 1985 with the title *Economic action and social structure: the problem of embeddedness*, the meaning of the concept changed consistently, assuming a more descriptive acceptance. In this contribution, that became a masterpiece prompting a new flourishing of studies in economic sociology, Granovetter maintains that it is important to recognize that *all* the economic action *is actually embedded* in social structures. This assertion gave renewed legitimacy to sociologists to deal with the economic phenomena, since the structures that bond the economic relations are – in this perspective – not marginal but central for the analysis. Granovetter’s stance, thus, recognizes the centrality of networks as the explanatory mechanisms concretely leading the social action. In his reflection, he took the distances from the “under-socialized” conception of the individual proposed by the economists, and from the “over-socialized” ideal-person depicted by sociologists²⁸, stating that the two perspectives ironically «have in common a conception of action and decision carried out by atomized actors» (ibidem: 485). Actually, it goes the argument, «actors do not behave or decide as atoms outside a social context, nor do they adhere slavishly to a script written for them by the particular intersection of social categories that they happen to occupy. Their attempts at purposive action are instead

²⁸ When he refers to the “over-socialized” individual represented by sociologists, Granovetter mainly has in mind Parson’s social actor (Triglia, 2002b).

embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations» (ibidem: 487).

This theoretical stance appeared to be actually very fruitful and stimulated a great development of empirical research aiming at demonstrating how individuals produce, buy, sell and consume goods and services relying on quite stable relations of trust and cooperation among themselves. Granovetter himself elaborated this conception of embeddedness on the base of several empirical investigations, aimed at looking at the active role played by networks inside the labor market. In his 1974 book *Getting a Job: a study on contacts and careers*, as well as in his famous 1973 article *The strength of weak ties*, Granovetter's main purpose was to understand and reconstruct the way in which social ties actually influence the encounter between labor demand and supply in situations in which people are looking for a job.

An important development of the socio-structuralist approach in the economic sociology has been the bunch of literature exploring how "social capital" influences the economic relations²⁹. Also among migration scholars the social-structuralist approach and the concept of embeddedness had quite a lot of fortune. Several empirical studies on migration realized in the last thirty years share the assumption that the economic action is socially oriented, and this theoretical lens appear to be useful in order to develop explanatory concepts like «social remittances», «transnational communities», or «ethnic enclaves» (see, among the others, Portes, 1998; 2010; Levitt, 1998; Ambrosini, 2008; 2011). Portes (1998; 2010), for instance, suggests that immigration constitutes an especially appropriate Mertonian «strategic research site» for economic sociology, since it provides very good opportunities for investigating the embeddedness of economic relationships in social situations. In his researches, he broadly concentrates, among the other things, on the role played by «ethnic enclaves and middle man minorities» and by «transnational communities»³⁰ that constitute

²⁹ In the acceptation elaborated by James Coleman, the concept of social capital seems to be in continuity with the conception of networks employed by Granovetter. Coleman's conception, that stresses principally the role of networks and ties, differs quite consistently from other definitions of social capital considered as the whole amount of trust relationships and cooperation existing within an alleged "community", as it is for instance in Putnam's (1993) or Fukuyama's works (1995). Coleman's perspective on this topic differs also from Bourdieu's understanding of social capital (cf. the definition provided by the French sociologist in *Le capital social* (1980), and see the following paragraph dedicated to Bourdieu's analysis). Starting from the idea that social relations could represent an important resource with which the individuals are endowed, several scholars put in question and reconsider the nature of the market, recognizing it as a social constructed entity (Bagnasco, 1988; Mutti, 1998). Some interesting studies, for instance, employed the social capital approach to look at the relational dimension on the production side: the numerous researches dealing with the North-Italian industrial districts represent a famed exemplification of this theoretical posture (see, among the others, Brusco, 1982, 2007; Capecchi, 1989; Trigilia, 2001). Also for what concerns the consumption side, several scholars consider the role of social capital and of "circuits of recognitions" (i.e. intimate or close networks among groups of people) as relevant forces capable to shape economic decisions and to orient toward cooperation (Pizzorno, 1999).

³⁰ Ethnic enclaves are defined as «assemblages of enterprises owned and operated by members of the same cultural/linguistic groups that concentrate in an identifiable geographic area, maintain intense relations with one another, and hire significant numbers of their co-ethnic». Middleman minorities, instead «are groups from the same cultural/linguistic background who specialize in operating commercial activities in downtrodden urban areas, profiting

peculiar types of networks based both on cultural/linguistic and economic complicities. Another bunch of literature that is worth recalling, since a large part of its exponents massively shares the “substantivist” position in the economic analyses and refers to Granovetter’s conception of the embeddedness, is constituted by the sociological and anthropological traditions dealing with the topic of the informal economy (see, among the others, Hart, 1973, 1987; Portes *et al.*, 1989; Ambrosini, 1998; Mingione, Quassoli, 2000; Portes, Haller, 2005; Coletto, 2010).

New Economic Sociology and its later developments represented an important turning point for the discipline, giving new theoretical strength to the empirical studies emerging in sociology and anthropology, and, on the other way around, stimulating further investigations on the field; moreover, they gave new legitimacy to sociologists demonstrating that «not only there is a place for sociologists in the study of the economic life but that their perspective is urgently required there» (Granovetter, 1985: 507). Even recognizing the importance of social-structuralists position, further studies underlined its limits too. The majority of the critics addressed the fact that, together with structural embeddedness, it is worthy to consider also the political, cultural and cognitive embeddedness and to include more connections between the micro and macroeconomic dynamics in the economic life (Zukin, DiMaggio, 1990 in Swedberg, Smelser, 2005b). The political economy’s approach, for instance, focusing particularly on a macro dimension, stresses more the importance of *institutional factors* in orienting the economic dynamics³¹. Another relevant critic to Granovetter’s position is carried out by Viviana Zelizer (2011; 2007a). Even sharing the assumption of the embeddedness of economic life, she firmly maintains that taking into account the social context in the analysis of the economic action is a necessary but not a sufficient task. It is like «“correcting” the economic model by bringing out the noneconomic elements of economic life» (ibidem, 2011: 365, 1st ed. 1988). As Bourdieu buttresses (referring both to Simon’s model of bounded rationality and to Granovetter’s analysis of social networks): «the attempts to “correct” the errors and omissions of a paradigm without challenging the paradigm itself [...] remind me the Tycho Brahe’s heroic efforts to save Ptolemy’s geocentric model from the Copernican revolution» (2005: 2).

Zelizer’s proposal, thus, as we are going to see in the following paragraphs, is to shift completely

from a quasi-monopolistic position given the absence of competitive firms in them» (Portes, 2010: 162). «While ethnic enclaves and middleman minorities call attention to distinct economic activities of foreign-origin groups within receiving societies», the concept of transnational community «calls attention to the multiple social and economic networks [that immigrants] create across space and with places of origin» (ibidem, 197). All these concepts provide relevant empirical examples of the role of networks in the economic life.

³¹ The political economy’s approach, for instance, focusing particularly on a macro dimension, stresses more the importance of *institutional factors* in orienting the economic dynamics. Within this stream, some of the contributions showed several similarities with the NES approach, in particular for what concerns the attention paid on the social determinants orienting the Governments’ behavior in the market sphere (see, for instance, Goldthorpe, 1978, in Trigilia, 2002b).

the focus of the analysis, looking not simply at the social context embedding the economic phenomena, but shedding light on the existing “bridges” and intersections between social, cultural, moral and economic orientations in the everyday life. Exploring how these spheres materially merge and hybridize, she tries to provide a theoretical frame that seems to be more appropriated in order to explain analytically the actual configurations of social action.

Bourdieu’s critics to Granovetter, instead, concern mainly his interactionist perspective (that Zelizer seems rather to share). As we are going to point out, in fact, Bourdieu’s undertaking is not to dismiss the important role played by networks and social context, but to consider also the set of bounds imposed to these forms of interaction by the objective power structures constituting the economic field. In the French sociologist’s words:

«Those who, in order to avoid representation of the economic agent as an egoistic monad [...] remind us, as Mark Granovetter does, that economic action remains embedded in networks of social relations [...], avoid “methodological individualism” only to fall back into the interactionist vision that, ignoring the structural constraint of the field, will (or can) acknowledge only the effected of the conscious and calculated anticipation that each agent may have effects of its action on the other agents (precisely what a theorist of interactionism, like Anselm Strauss, referred to as “awareness context”); or the effect, conceived as “influence,” that “social networks,” other agents, or social norms have on it. These are so many solutions that, eliminating all structural effects and objective power relations, amount to proposing a false supersession of the (itself spurious) alternative between individualism and holism. Though there is no question here of denying the economic efficacy of “networks” (or, better, of social capital) in the functioning of the economic field, the fact remains that the economic practices of agents and the very potency of their “networks,” which a rigorously defined notion of social capital takes into account, depend, first and foremost, on the position these agents occupy in those structured microcosms that are economic fields» (Bourdieu 2005: 198).

3. The cultural alternative

Alongside a social-structuralist approach in economic sociology, developed in order to give room to the role played by social relations in shaping economic behaviors, also a culturalist point of view assumed a certain relevance as a possible alternative posture to understand economic action. The cultural approach to the economy owes quite a lot to a broad anthropological tradition, that since long time have dealt with topics like production, exchange systems and consumption in an interpretative manner, namely framing these processes in terms of meanings and values endorsed by people daily performing them. Malinowski’s account of Trobriand’s systems of *kula*, Boas’s

analysis of *potlatch* rituals in North America, Bohannan and Dalton focus on the separate exchange spheres coexisting in Nigeria, represent all relevant examples, epitomizing the privileged position that “classical” cultural anthropology assigned to the analysis of the economic lives (Hann, Hart, 2011). Even with their intrinsic limits, these pioneering ethnographic accounts helped to document the existence of interstices of “alternative” economic spaces not pervaded by the “market logic”, identified initially outside the Western boundaries, but soon after recognized also within them³². However, since the origin of the discipline on, the role attributed to the anthropologists, their areas of interests, and the very definition of “culture” have radically changed³³. This different awareness gradually led cultural anthropologists, and later on sociologists, to take into consideration and attack directly the hard nutshell of the market economy, questioning its alleged universality and neutrality. The main concern of the cultural position, so, has become to understand the *market as a constructed set of meanings* and to analyze the *role of values* in shaping the economic lives: «the cultural indifferent, timeless market is thus treated as a culturally meaningful and historically variable system of economic exchange» (Zelizer, 2011: 371, 1st ed. 1988). Some empirical examples could be useful to clarify this theoretical posture. In his thick description of the ongoing system of relations characterizing Sefrou’s suq in Morocco, Clifford Geertz noted – among the other things – that «Sefrou bazaaris make a terminological distinction between bargaining to test the waters and bargaining to conclude an exchange, and tend to conduct the two in different places: the first with people with whom they have weak clientship ties, the second with people with whom they have firm ones» (1978: 32). This simple observation has a relevant theoretical implication: people could attribute very different meanings to apparently similar economic actions, like bargaining to purchase a good. In Geertz’s argumentation, to investigate and explain these set of meanings is pivotal in order to describe the specific features of what he defined the “bazaar economy”; similarly, every market situation could be understood as a socially constructed web of meanings. Other interesting contributions go into the direction of investigating the subjective value that individuals attribute to money (see, among the others, Dobb 1994; Carruthers, 2005; Hart, 2005). The majority of these reflections engages - directly or not - with the understanding of the currency commonly fostered by classical sociologists. George Simmel (1900, it. ed. 1984), in particular, in his *Philosophy of money*, dealt widely with this specific argument: according to him, money epitomizes the reduction of quality to quantity occurring in the modern society. Through money, the plurality of

³² As we have seen, during the 1940s, Polanyi’s works – among the others – contributed to bring the anthropological gaze back to the “motherland”, recognizing how (Western) economic history has always been characterized by several forms of integration of the economy within society at large.

³³ For a quite comprehensive reader dealing with the evolution of the concept of culture, see Santoro, Sassatelli (2009).

relations and exchanges could be homogenized, universalized and made impersonal. Also according to Marx, money could represent a “radical leveler”, since in their money form all commodities look alike. For classical sociologists, thus, currency epitomizes somehow the objective and neutral nature of the market; their main apprehension was that through the penetration of money in all the spheres of social life, human relations could be significantly damaged and society could be seriously at risk of commoditization. Contrariwise, what contemporary cultural scholars point out is that, whilst the large diffusion of currency as the universal media to conclude exchanges, the way in which people use, define and attribute value to a certain amount of money is highly variable and subjective. A compelling contribution on this topic is Viviana Zelizer’s book *The social meaning of money*, published in 1994³⁴. In this work, the author analyzes the use of “domestic monies”, namely the role played by monies within the households. She highlights how monies are distinguished inside a family not only for what concerns their quantity, but also according to their quality. First of all, monies appear to be differentiated according to gender, age and social class cleavages. Secondly, they could have different sources and they could be used for completely different purposes. Using empirical data, she contends that, together with progressive changes in gender patterns, also the alleged ownership, the way in which monies have been earmarked, so the very meaning of money, have gradually changed. The amount of funds that the husbands transferred to their wives, for instance, during the 1870s was defined as a “dole”, then it became an “allowance”, before being conceived as a joint property; moreover, it existed also a linguistic distinction between the salary earned by men (usually defined as “real money”) and the one gained by women (often called “pin money”). Together with the different labels used to name a certain amount of money, also the very nature of the gender relation has been changing, denoting a shifting in gender patterns from a more subordinate to a more active presence of women in the economic management of the household. These dynamics, recognized for middle-class people, were completely reversed in the working class families. In these cases, all the household’s members equally participated in earning a salary outside the family unit; then, it was the woman the one in charge of collecting and redistributing the “fair” amount of money to every participant. Zelizer’s socio-historical analysis challenges directly the utilitarian model of market money, introducing new assumptions in order to understand the nature of these “special monies”. She demonstrates that money «also exists outside the sphere of the market and is profoundly shaped by cultural and social structural factors». To be more accurate, she specifies that «culture and social structure set inevitable limits to the

³⁴ Even if it is not possible to consider Zelizer’s approach as being *tout court* “culturalist” (see further on), the example that has been selected here is going to provide some evidences regarding the way in which a cultural posture tends to proceed in the analysis of the social life.

monetization process by introducing profound controls and restrictions on the flow and liquidity of money. Extra-economic factors systematically constrain and shape: (a) the *use* of money, earmarking, for instance, certain monies for specified uses; (b) the *users* of monies, designating different people to handle specified monies; (c) the *allocation* system of each particular money; (d) the *control* of different monies; (e) the *sources* of monies, linking different sources to specified uses» (2011: 101, 1st ed. 1989).

Zelizer's assumptions on the diversified nature of monies is confirmed in a variety of circumstances of our everyday life. In his ethnographic account of the Algerians living in the Milanese neighborhood of Porta Venezia, for instance, Asher Colombo (1998) recognizes the diffusion of similar "practices of earmarking" among people devoted to illegal activities: migrants use to save or invest the salaries earned while working "honestly"; on the contrary, money gained through thefts and frauds could not be saved, but has to be immediately squandered with friends in the neighborhood's streets. Such distinctions, obviously, do not appear to be imposed by alleged rational economic guidelines, but emerge from the cultural and social context in which individuals are embedded.

To provide a last set of examples, it is worth to recall the large amount of scholarships interested in studying the processes of consumption, assuming a culturalist perspective in economic sociology. The field is wide enough to become a proper subset of the discipline in itself: from the neo-Marxist "accusations" of "consumerism", to Miller's evocation of a "material culture", consumption studies mushroomed with a variety of approaches³⁵. Among these ones, some authors distinguished for trying to frame consumption as a symbolic and cultural resource, providing new meanings to an industrial society (Zelizer, 2011: 373, 1st ed. 1988). Their attempt was to «demystify the demand side of economic life» approaching consumption as «eminently social, relational, and active rather than private, atomic or passive» (Appadurai, 1986, *passim*; see also Douglas and Isherwood, 1979). Moreover, some scholars noticed that, in late capitalist society and with great intensity since 1990s, consumers are asked to be not only active, but also and above all, moral and political subjects (Sassatelli, 2006: 219). This bunch of studies, attentive to the proliferation of critical consumerism movements, identify in consumption a powerful arm to express citizen approval or discontent on firm behavior, in order to orient and push companies toward a more responsible attitude. Consumers' attention on environmental problems, on labor rights, on health issues and on global justice, represent all explicit claims to re-embed market within a moral frame. Cultural sociologists, in particular, showed a peculiar sensitivity in understanding these ongoing processes, demonstrating

³⁵ For a more comprehensive review on consumption studies see, among the others, Miller (2001), Zelizer (2005a) and Sassatelli (2007).

how values and ethical orientations strongly shape economic decisions; and demonstrating also how the normative and evaluative dimension actually intermingles with the market realm (see further on).

All in all, culturalist approach swept like a breath of fresh air in the economic sociology. But, even agreeing with this perspective that tries to frame the market as a set of socially-constructed meanings, values, and symbolic aspects, scholars are also aware of the importance to avoid any form of “cultural reductionism”. To give an example, in one of his articles that represents a vehement critic against cultural sociology, Herbert Gans (2012) points out that culturalists have too often underestimated the materialistic³⁶ dimension of the economic life, and have too often privileged an account of reality in which struggles, conflicts or simply meaningless and senseless situations could not find enough room to be dealt with. Thus, he calls for a dismissal of the dichotomy “culture versus structure”, claiming to abandon the binary in favor of just one of the two terms (obviously, in his view, in favor of the structural dimension). Recognizing that the dichotomy is actually a fictional one, the effort in the present work is not to oversimplify the analytical perspective preferring a one-dimensional approach, but to try to understand the complexity of the economic life, employing all the explanatory tools at our disposal. That is why in the next paragraph, we are going to introduce Zelizer’s model of “multiple market”, aiming at keeping social-structural, cultural and moral considerations together within the same analytical frame, in order to provide a multifaceted understanding of the economic action.

4. The “multiple markets” model

«What does explain our everyday economic actions? How and why do we spend, misspend, save, invest, or gamble away our monies? How do we manage to solve our daily puzzling economic dilemmas? Do women and men treat money differently? How do shared meanings and social relations inform people’s economic activities?» (Zelizer, 2011a, *passim*).

While social scientists in their ordinary work tend to separate analytically economic and relational aspects of the social action, in their everyday life people put a lot of efforts in trying to mingle them together in a balanced way, working hard to find the “good matches”, namely the viable combinations of different sets of “good reasons”. Negotiation is a constant process going on

³⁶ In this context, the adjective “materialist” is employed in a Marxist sense.

between parents and their offspring, employers and employees, partners engaged in a relationship, groups of friends. To bargain is obviously a difficult task: people involved in daily confrontations are endowed with diverse amounts of capital and could exert different degrees of power; situations could be characterized by a variable set of bounds and opportunities. Therefore, according to Zelizer, there is no actual motivation to obscure analytically such an incessant relational work occurring in the economic sphere. In her perspective, that she named “connected lives”, the focus is exactly on these connections (or “bridges”) between morality and economy, between cultural set of shared meanings and the market sphere, between intimate ties and the economic realm. In order to introduce her theoretical stance, she starts her argumentation taking the distances from the most common explanations dealing with the market and the relational spheres. She proposes a critique of what she calls the “three fallacies” that use to be quite common in the attempt to explain the economic processes: the “separate spheres” (SS), the “hostile worlds” (HW) and the “nothing but” argument (NB). According to the author, these three positions seem to be equally fallacious. In the first place, it deserves critics the position of an observer interpreting social life as a composition of different spheres (SS), an “economical” one that works according to a rational logic, aiming at the fulfillment of the individual interests; and a “relational” one, assumed to be a realm in which the action is mostly oriented by feeling and solidarity principles. According to this position, to work properly the two spheres ought to be keep separated. Since this is not always the case – a second position argues (HW) – it could happen that these two “detached worlds” influence and corrupt each other. This situation could occur, for instance, when economic reasoning penetrates other spheres of social life. In all these cases – the supporters of the “hostile worlds” maintain – genuine feelings and moral obligations are deeply damaged or set aside by monetary considerations. On the other way around, when social ties or moral concerns affect the economic world, the efficient and rational type of management required by the economic organizations could be put seriously at risk (think, for example, at clientelism, at sexual scandals involving political exponents, and so on). According to a third analytical frame, often employed by scholars, it could be possible to grasp social action hinging on a single explanatory factor. In this perspective, economic activity could be interpreted as “nothing but” (1) a rationally organized environment: this position, as we have seen, is typical of the majority of the economists, but also several sociologists share the same perspective, often showing a worried attitude towards the great pervasiveness of the market logic corrupting social bonds; a “boundless market” is supposed to enlarge progressively tending to occupy all the spheres of social life. Alternatively, economic arrangements could be interpreted as “nothing but” (2) a set of cultural factors, or as “nothing but” (3) power. Let’s think about how sex-work is often conceived, for instance. The exchange between money and sex is frequently conceptualized as an

automatic perpetration of patriarchal power structures or as a direct consequence of cultural representations that orient sexual and economic behavior. Numerous attempts to frame people's economic activities, thus, embrace – explicitly or not – a deterministic perspective, defining monetary exchanges as a rational/cultural/power-driven action.

These three interpretations (SS, HW and NB), Zelizer argues, appear to be fallacious since they are not empirically grounded. While we theoretically keep separated the two spheres (the rational and the relational one), in the everyday life people move deftly and not without difficulties to try to merge them in appropriate ways. Ongoing negotiations run in both directions: from the definition of social ties to the selection of the appropriate economic transaction to be conducted, and from the monetary transaction to the accepted definition of ties. So, on the one hand, the economic actions appear to be highly differentiated according to their underlying set of meanings and relations. On the other hand, relationships assume a different meaning – for people involved and for external observers – also according to their monetary dimension. As Zelizer maintains:

«Our economic actions remain mysterious or may even appear to be irrational until we understand that *they exist within dense webs of meaningful relationship*. When we spend, save, invest, give, loan, share, or donate, it matters whom we are doing it with, for whom, when, and what the meaning of this transaction convey to others. Money we spend or refuse to spend, for instance, often signals which relations matter to us. Economic action, therefore, does not revolve around just our own individual selves but *our relational selves* as well. One cannot predict behavior through individual preferences alone, because people are constantly *negotiating those preferences in their interactions with others*» (2011a: x).

The “connected life” model (aimed at investigating empirically people “good matches”) constitutes Zelizer's frame to analyze small-scale economic activities. Shifting from a micro to a macro dimension, Zelizer's reasoning leads to modify quite substantially the very definition of the market. As we have seen in the previous two paragraphs, she roughly shares the majority of the assumptions proposed by economic sociologists and anthropologists, recognizing the embeddedness and the culturally meaningful nature of the economic life. Contrariwise, she rejects the one-dimensional explanation proposed by “social-structuralist” or by “culturalists” approaches, trying to avoid every type of “reductionism” and “determinism”³⁷. That is why, she positions herself into the field proposing what she calls a “multiple market” model: market should be conceived as an interaction of cultural, structural and economic factors (ibidem: 376, 1st ed. 1988). Going in this direction, her empirical work tends to «examines *how connected people incorporate available culture and interpersonal relations into their daily negotiation of the economic activity*. In doing so, all of us

³⁷ «The matches are by no means *automatic consequences* of cultural understanding or coercion but emerge from incessant bargaining [...]. [However] the bargains involve exercises of power» (Zelizer, 2011a: 160).

incessantly reshape the economy at the small scale and the large» (2011b: 11).

During the last thirty-five years, Zelizer's empirical works dealt with a variety of topics, all embracing this theoretical posture. We briefly outlined already the content of *The social meanings of money* (1994), dealing with the practices of earmarking according to which individuals differentiate uses and meanings attributed to monies inside household. Earlier Zelizer's contributions, instead, concentrate on the valuation of the human life (1979; 1985), raising questions like: could we price human life? How can we put a monetary value on it? Is it legitimate to sell and buy parts of human bodies? According to which shared conventions some goods have to be kept outside the market? And is it always like that? These concerns are not so marginal, since we constantly confront ourselves with this type of issues in our everyday life. There is a variety of situations, that Zelizer explores deeply, in which human life is actually evaluated and sold, and these activities are perfectly legitimate. Life insurances, for instance, establish a price for human life; adoption markets represent an exchange between babies and money (even if, usually, in the form of a donation). It was thanks to the transformation of the conceptions of life and a different definition of childhood that some forms of marketization became widely accepted while some others disappeared. But even if money enters some aspects of human life, this one is not desacralized. Contrariwise, Zelizer concludes, money is ritualized and becomes somehow sacred in the association with these sensitive commodities.

Also the sphere of the intimate ties has been for long time Zelizer's field of interest. In her compelling book *The purchase of intimacy* (2005b) she concentrates on what she defines the "intimate economies". In a series of contributions that dealt with this topic, her attention was directed in trying to solve this contradiction:

«Myth: Economic activity corrupts intimate relations, and intimate relations make economic activity inefficient. Fact: people constantly mingle intimacy and economic activity without corruption» (2011: 171, 1st ed. 2006, italics in the text).

Exploring mainly sexual tinged relationships (but admitting that these assumptions are also valid for what concerns any type of intimate tie), Zelizer looks at how people actually arrange their love and sexual lives intertwining it with monetary considerations, concluding that:

«We all use economic activity to create, maintain, and renegotiate important ties, especially intimate ties, to other people. [...] People devote intense effort and worry to achieving the right match. [...] Not any economic transaction is compatible with any intimate relation. On the contrary, people work hard to find economic arrangements that both confirm their sense of what the relation is about and sustain it» (2011: 178, 1st ed. 2006).

In other contributions, Zelizer engages openly with the second part of the "myth", namely the

assumption that «intimate relations make economic activity inefficient». Studying *Intimacy in the economic organizations* (2009), she demonstrates that the “fact” is not necessary like that. Several empirical researches actually highlight that intimate ties could favor efficiency within the workplaces, since they help to provide a meaning in work, through the sharing of work life experience with other people and through friendship. Social ties within the work environments, moreover, could also provide the basis for a group solidarity and mutual support in the phase of denial of dignity at work (Hodson, 2001, in Zelizer, 2009). So, what is fundamental is to recognize that intimate ties do exist and play an important role inside all the economic organizations, as also the present ethnographic research realized inside greenhouses and packinghouses aims to show. In the last few decades, starting from Hochschild (1983) pioneering work, several scholarships have provided interesting reflections analyzing the ongoing processes of transformation concerning the role attributed to intimate ties and relational work inside workplaces³⁸. While in the industrial society relational labor used to be relegated in the reproductive sphere, in the service economy the situation is quite different: to male and female workers, in fact, is increasingly required to actively use their relational capabilities, in forms and manners properly regulated and defined by the firms’ management. Ties and relationships, in these cases, are recognized to produce an added value, a value that is actually extracted and appropriated by the capitalistic enterprise. To refer to these mechanisms, Hochschild uses the concept of «emotional labor», addressing the frequent cases in which relational work is actually part of the job description. Flight attendants studied by Hochschild (1983), waitresses considered by Paules (1991) and Leidner (1993), shop assistants described by Ehrenreich (2002), call-centre employees, as other sort of frontline service workers appear to be part of what has been defined as an «emotional proletariat³⁹»; this concept is used «to describe these service jobs in which workers exercise little formal power, are often subject to employers’ attempts to monitor and control their interactions, and are required to display friendliness and deference to customers» (Macdonald, Sirianni, 1996: 3 in Wharton, 2009). Among service jobs intermingling economic and relational tasks, care assistants attracted an extraordinary amount of attention, ranging for the sociology of work, to feminist studies, to law and migration scholars (Andall, 2000; Anderson, 2000; Parreñas, 2001; Ehrenreich, Hochschild, 2004; Colombo, Catanzaro 2009; Blackett, 2012; Ambrosini, 2013; 2014).

Apart from being concerned about the social vulnerability of the share of workers employed in this

³⁸ For a literature review on this topic see Berezin, 2009 and Wharton, 2009.

³⁹ This definition represents an emotional-sensitive version of the concept of «service proletariat», generally employed by sociologists of work to refer to these forms of occupations, increasingly relevant, for which not qualified tasks are required (even if workforce employed in this «low level jobs» is often highly qualified). Reyneri (2011), among the others, talks about an increasing number of these «operai dei servizi».

sector, the debate has been concentrated also on the transformation of the very meaning of care, that used to be considered as a “voluntaristic” not-remunerated activity, while it is now commonly intended as a waged type of work. Zelizer (2010), for instance, conceives domestic work as a form of “intimate labor” (cf. also Boris, Parreñas, 2010). She distinguishes among four types of “intimate labor”: (1) unpaid care in intimate settings, (2) unpaid care in economic organizations, (3) paid care in intimate settings and (4) paid care in economic organizations – such as hospitals, kindergartens, and so on. The second and the third forms of care are the more contested ones: unpaid care in economic organizations, as we have seen, is often neglected or expressly “exploited” - in Hochschild’s sense –; the possibility to practice paid care in intimate settings is also highly debated. Its critics, usually endorsing a “hostile worlds” perspective, contend that to remunerate care means to undervalue this type of labor, damaging genuine and authentic voluntary relationships. Its supporters maintain that to push care in the realm of waged labor means to make this type work more “visible”, recognizing its legitimacy. This would provide a stronger motivation for the employees, with a general improvement in the service efficiency. Also in this case, Zelizer proposes to employ a “connected lives” perspective: «the challenge is not to ban economic transactions from care but to create appropriate and equitable economic arrangements for the various kinds of caring relations. Those relations are indeed distinctive and therefore require special forms of contracting, negotiation, and payment» (2011c: 270).

Zelizer application of her “connected lives” or “multiple market” model exemplifies, in various realm, how the worlds – apparently impersonal – of production, consumption, and distribution are actually deeply pervaded and shaped by shared conventions and interpersonal relationships.

The majority of her empirical examples, however, apart from few exceptions (2007b; 2009), refers mainly to topics and areas of interests that mainstream economics usually refrains to deal with. The risk, thus, is to assume that Zelizer’s framework could be more appropriate to investigate the so called “soft economic” spheres (namely, niches animated by women or children, involved in short range, often community-based transactions), that represent simply a residual component of the economic realm. This last one could be an unpleasant misunderstanding. Zelizer’s theoretical stance, indeed, has a broader validity that goes beyond the empirical cases already dealt with in her works. This thesis, thus, attempts to develop her analysis, applying it to specific fields of interests till now too often saddled to mainstream economists and to quantitative sociologists: i.e. labor market, labor processes, global and local value chains. To take Zelizer’s assumptions as a starting point for the analysis, thus, is relevant in order to assume a theoretical posture able to stimulate the emergence of a set of questions relevant to scrutinize several important aspects of people’s economic lives, taking into account both cultural and relational factors intertwining economic

actions. In the next paragraph, dedicated to Bourdieu's analysis, we are also going to deal with several shortcomings derived by Zelizer's interactionist approach.

5. Calling for an economy of economic practices

Within economic sociology, Bourdieu's contribution to the analysis of the economic practices remains an important starting point for what concerns the radical subversion of the theory of action proposed by neoclassical economics and its (political) consequences in the everyday life. Instead of limiting his effort to a critique of the dominant paradigm, in fact, Bourdieu provides an equally strong theory of the economic action, employing a quite broad set of concepts that he has been developing during his entire research activity: the concept of *habitus*, namely the set of individual dispositions that the agents interiorize after a prolonged exposition to the regularities of the economic field; the conception of *social capital*, that is to say the set of actual or potential resources that become available thanks to the possession of a durable net of relations – more or less institutionalized – of interconnection and mutual recognition (Bourdieu, 1980: 2); the concept of *cultural capital*, that is pivotal in order to understand why certain individuals appear to be more or less “capable” to develop specific skills, allowing them to perform certain type of tasks⁴⁰; the concept of *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu, 1979; see also Chicchi, 2003), that assumes an important role in explaining types of exchanges hinged on recognition, reputation and trust (i.e. in the so called “reputational economy”); and the very notion of the *economic field*, namely the set of the objective power structures restricting the agents' space of action into the «space of possibles» open to them.

Thus, as Zelizer does, also Bourdieu bears in mind in his analysis both structural and cultural-symbolic aspects of the economic lives. The main difference is that while in Zelizer's account cultural and social factors appear to be “external” to people (individuals could choose, *depending*

⁴⁰ A brilliant exemplification of the importance played by cultural capital in the economic realm, precisely within the labor market, is provided by Bourgois' analysis of the strategies of “integration” pursued by East Harlem crack dealers that attempt to get a “legal” job into the formal economy (2005). According to Bourgois, people socialized within an «opposing street culture» find numerous difficulties to meet the expectations of the white middle class, that offers to them the “option” to be employed in the lower level of the service sector. For Puerto Rican drug dealers, grown up within a *jibaro* proud culture (i.e. a nostalgic peasants' heritage), it seems to be much more desirable to be employed in working class positions, namely inside factories or in the construction industries, in situations in which their macho-proletariat culture could be appraised and could become a resource to be properly accepted inside workplaces. Contrariwise, being “entrapped” inside the offices or in front line service job, inner city's crack dealers find themselves (and are assumed to be) inadequate to cope with the situation; they thus tend to justify, through a sexist and racist rhetoric the sentiment of individual failure to which they are (structurally) exposed.

on the situations, among a variable set of interpersonal relations and meanings, available in their tool kit), in Bourdieu's understanding, instead, cultural, social and symbolic capital are deemed to be resources with which agents are (more or less) *endowed*. This means that, for the French sociologist the focus of the analysis is not on the regularities characterizing the specific situations, but on regularities determining the unequal redistribution of capital among the economic agents within a certain field. Bourdieu's agents, therefore, differ from the individuals able to orient strategically their actions in order to negotiate "good matches" or to agree on "legitimate" conventions, that contractualists and interactionists naïvely depict; Bourdieu's agents, contrariwise, bearing inscribed in their bodies the practical schemas leading their action (Borghini, Vitale, 2006), have to face the structural pressure exerted on them by the economic field:

«By contrast with the interactionist vision, which knows no other form of social efficacy than the "influence" directly exerted by one [agent] over another through some form of "interaction", the structural vision takes account of effects that occur outside any interaction: the structure of the field defined by the unequal distribution of capital, that is the specific weapons (or strengths), weighs, quite apart from any direct intervention or manipulation, on all the agents engaged in the field; and the worse placed they are within that distribution, the more it restricts the *space of possibles* open to them» (Bourdieu, 2005: 195, italics in the text).

Bourdieu's critiques to the interactionist approach, i.e. that it ignores every structural constraint, is thus developed referring to the specific conception of the economic field⁴¹. The field represents the space created by the agents⁴², space which exists only through the agents that are found within it and that deform the space in their vicinity, conferring a certain structure on it. So each agent undergoes the effects of the field at the same time that it contributes to structure that field. The amount of power associated with every agent inside a field depends on the other entities and on the relations between all these entities, that is to say, on the entire space. Moreover, the force attached to the single agent depends on the *volume and structure of the capital* it possesses in its different forms: financial capital (which is the main condition fostering accumulation and conservation of all the other kinds of capital), cultural, technological, juridical, organizational, commercial, social and symbolic capital (ibidem: 194, italics in the text). Endowed with a different amount of strategic assets, thus, every agent could be more or less powerful, and according to its position it could contribute more or less to the definition of the structure of the field.

[Within the field] «the dominant is the one that occupies a position in the structure

⁴¹ Look also at the quotation cited in the second paragraph of this chapter, concerning Bourdieu's critics to Granovetter's approach.

⁴² In Bourdieu's argumentation, the agents are represented by the firms (that is why in this section it is more accurate to employ the pronoun "it", to refer to the unit constituting the field). Moreover, in Bourdieu's reasoning, also the firms are considered to be site of struggles inside themselves.

such that the structure acts on its behalf. It is through the weight they possess within this structure [...], that the dominant firms exert pressure on the dominated firms and on their strategies: they define the *regularities* and sometimes the *rules* of the game, by imposing the definition of strengths most favourable to their interests and modifying the entire environment of the other firms and the system of constraints that bear on them or the space of possible offered to them» (ibidem: 195, italics in the text).

The field, hence, tends to produce some predictable regularities that the agents acquire in the form of transmissible dispositions (i.e. the “routines”). Moreover, the structure, for its very definition, tends to reproduce itself constantly, since the distribution of assets among its agents defines not only the *current* power relationships, but tends to determine also the *future* chances available to every entity who takes part in the field (through various implicit or explicit mechanisms, such as the economies of scale or others “barriers to entry”).

Such model, that pays attention on the objective power structures orienting individual action, appears to be very different from the interactionist pattern, that define the “space” of the interaction exclusively as a distinctive set of economic arrangements. To provide an example, it is worth to compare Zelizer’s definition of the “circuits of commerce” with Bourdieu’s notion of the economic field. A “circuit of commerce” is, according to Zelizer, «a structure combining its own economic activities, media, accounting system, interpersonal relations, boundaries and meanings that reappear in a wide variety of circumstances» (Zelizer, 2011d: 304). To be more precise, the circuit of commerce is a distinctive set of economic arrangements, like the one existing within a firm, a clique or an household, defined by: «(a) distinctive *social relations* among specific individuals; (b) shared *economic activities* carried on by means of those relations; (c) creation of a common *accounting system* for evaluating economic exchanges, for example, special forms of monies; (d) shared understanding concerning the *meaning* of transaction within the circuit, including their moral valuation and (e) a boundary, separating members of the circuit from nonmembers» and – we can add – (f) a mutual awareness of the participants to be part of a circuit (ibidem)⁴³. To provide an example, we could think about the Italian G.A.S. (*Gruppi d’Acquisto Solidale*, namely Ethical Purchasing Groups), or about the communities contracting collective microloans, or about migrants networks sending remittances as representing peculiar forms of circuits of commerce; but a “circuit” could be identified in other realm too: let’s think about a firm internal labor market, or a

⁴³ The conception of “circuit of commerce” is quite close and somehow encompass the notion of “network” (i.e. the structure of social ties), but it considers also the cultural dimension (namely, it is a cultural sensitive version of network), the particular form of the economic transaction performed and the accounting system employed in the exchange; moreover, it takes into account the negotiation practice and the relational work involved in setting an arrangement. Thus, «thinking about circuit raises questions about meanings and relational work that remain invisible to strictly network analysts» (Zelizer, 2011d: 307).

proper marketplace like a fruit and vegetable Market. Zelizer's idea of circuits could be useful to identify a particular set of meaningful social ties existing among a group of people used by them to organize their economic lives. But what Bourdieu includes in his definition of the economic field (and its subfield) is much broader: every individual behavior and every sort of interpersonal agreement have to be considered within the existence of an influential structure of power relations, a structure that is not just the product of a specific set of arrangements (as a "circuit" is), but that is also the historical result of an unequal distribution of resources.

That is why, differently from the interactionists' "structures", the field is first and foremost a battlefield. In Bourdieu's words:

«The field of forces is also a field of struggles, a socially constructed field of action in which agents equipped with different resources confront each other in order to gain access to exchange and to preserve or transform the currently prevailing relation of force» (ibidem, 2005: 199).

Within the field, the dominants act in order to perpetuate and reinforce their privileged position; being "first movers" they could easily set the initiative, they could shape the style of the game and its rules, and could work in order to maintain the *status quo* or to enlarge their sphere of action. The "challengers", conversely, are constantly engaged in a struggle with the hegemonic firms, fighting to survive, to gain relative positions, to resist or to try to subvert the dominant order that tends to marginalize them. So, the economic field in this representation is not depicted as a locus of consensus. Differently from the Economists of Conventions (see further on) and from the interactionists, Bourdieu conceives economy as a *proper space of conflicts*. The struggle should not necessary materialize between two or more – direct – competitors. Due to the mediation of the field, in fact, it could take the shape of an "indirect conflict" (in Simmel's sense), that is to say that every actor committed in the field appears to be involved in a game against the others, even if it is not motivated by any destructive or competitive purpose (ibidem: 204). The conflict, thus, is conceived as a structural dimension more than a subjective one (Bourgeois, 2005).

The compelling analysis of the dynamic governing the economic field risks to appear, at a first gaze, a simple "readjustment" of a pure structuralist view if we omit to take into consideration, at this point of the discussion, the pivotal role assumed in Bourdieu's argument by the notion of habitus. Bourdieu, in fact, does not call for a structuralist view *tout court*; his undertaking is not to neglect, but to subordinate interactionist description of strategies to a structural analysis of the conditions that delimit the space of possible strategies⁴⁴. Is using the concept of habitus that

⁴⁴ «Overturning entirely the usual image of "structuralism," conceived as a form of "holism" implying adherence to a radical determinism, this vision of action restores a certain free play to agents, without forgetting, however, that decisions are merely choices among possibles, defined, in their limits, by the structure of the field, and that actions owe

Bourdieu spells out the analytical connection existing between the (objective) *positions* that the agents occupy within the field and the (subjective) *dispositions* that they incorporate in the form of capabilities and propensities.

«It is the primary function of the concept of habitus to break with the Cartesian philosophy of consciousness and thereby overcome the disastrous mechanism/finalism alternative or, in other words, the alternative of determination by causes and determination by reasons; or, to put it another way, between so-called methodological individualism and what is sometimes called (among the “individualists”) holism [...]. Insofar as he/she is endowed with a habitus, the social agent is *a collective individual or a collective individuated by the fact of embodying objective structures*. The individual, the subjective, is social and collective. The habitus is socialized subjectivity, a historic transcendental, whose schemes of perception and appreciation (systems of preferences, tastes, etc.) are the product of collective and individual history. Reason (or rationality) is “bounded” not only, as Herbert Simon believes, because the human mind is generically bounded (there is nothing new in that idea), but because it is socially structured and determined, and, as a consequence, limited» (Bourdieu, 2005: 210-211, italics in the text).

Subjectivity, in Bourdieu’s argumentation, plays indeed an important role: through the autonomous principle of the habitus, «linked to a history fraught with a probable future», individuals shape and resist the forces of the field. Their creativity, their agency, their autonomous will, emerging according to their subjective life path, allow them to select and perceive certain stimuli instead of others, to elaborate *reasonable* (and not rational) strategies of action – only partially predictable – , and to make “real” any “probable” situation. In a nutshell, according to Bourdieu’s theory of action, individuals are endowed with a habitus that is determined by a field which they continuously contribute to determine.

Bourdieu’s analysis, therefore, tries to inform with anthropological – or, we can say, ethnographic – sensitivity the comprehension of the economic dynamics. As we have seen, the concept of habitus, as well as the notion of the field, appear to be strongly rooted in a conception of the economy conceived as a deeply historical process. Bourdieu’s effort, thus, is to shed light on the neglected historical dimension of the economic realm, showing how both individual dispositions and objective power structures are actually socially constructed through time⁴⁵. Furthermore, he clarifies

their orientation and effectiveness to the structure of the objective relations between those engaging in them and those who are the objects of those actions» (Bourdieu, 2005: 197).

⁴⁵ «Everything economic science posits as a given, that is, the range of dispositions of the economic agent which ground the illusion of the ahistorical universality of the categories and concepts employed by that science, is, in fact, the paradoxical product of a long collective history, endlessly reproduced in individual histories, which can be fully accounted only by historical analysis: it is because history has inscribed these *concomitantly* in social and cognitive structures, practical patterns of thinking, perception and action, that it has conferred the appearance of natural, universal self-evidence on the institutions economics claim to theorize ahistorically; it has done this by, among other things, the *amnesia of genesis* that is encouraged, in this field as in others, by the immediate accord between the “subjective” and

that the market itself appears to be a product of double social construction: the construction of the demand and the construction of the offer. So, while the economists commit themselves to analyze mathematically the interactions between the offer's and the demand's curves pretending – in this way – to individuate an alleged equilibrium, Bourdieu contends that these analyses are simply partial (and consequently wrong) since they omit to take into consideration, in the first place, how these two segments are socially constructed. Taking as an example the economic transactions constituting the house's market, he demonstrates, for instance, that the request of accommodations is socially produced through the construction of individual (subjective) *dispositions* – i.e., of individual preferences, tastes and expectations – , but also through the influence of a juridical and welfare apparatus, the genesis of whom could be historically traced. Challenging one of the main simplifying assumption of neoclassical economics, he states that «the most basic economic dispositions – needs, preferences, propensities – are not exogenous, that is to say, dependent on a universal human nature [so ahistorical], but *endogenous* and dependent on a history that is the very history of the economic cosmos in which these dispositions are required and rewarded» (Bourdieu, 2005: 8, italics in the text). At the same time, also the offer's segment in an exchange market appears to be socially structured, due to the influence exerted – among the others – by the State and the bank system, and more in general according to the (objective) *position* that the firms occupy within the field (ibidem: 16; 1997: 49).

Conceiving individual preferences as an endogenous element, i.e. as an element determined by the field, means that the economic field imposes to every agent, in different degrees according to his/her position and his/her economic capabilities, not only the reasonable set of “means” and strategies available to reach a purpose; the economic field produces also the very motivation for its ongoing perpetration. For this reason, we could not be surprised if individuals, adhering more or less to theoretical constructions, actually perform reasonable behaviors, similar to the ones suggested by a sort of instrumental-utilitarian logic:

«The reason immanent in the [economic] practices [is originated] in the dispositions acquired through learning processes associated with protracted dealings with the regularities of the field; apart from any conscious calculation, these dispositions are capable of generating behaviors and even anticipations which would be better termed *reasonable* than *rational*» (ibidem: 9, italics in the text).

So, the very purposes motivating reasonable behaviors are historically and socially produced:

the “objective”, between dispositions and positions, between anticipations (or hopes) and opportunities. Against the ahistorical vision of economics, we must, then, reconstitute, on the one end the genesis of the economic dispositions of economic agent and, especially, of their tastes, needs, propensities or aptitudes (for calculation, saving or work itself) and, on the other, the genesis of the economic field itself» (ibidem, 2005: 5, italics in the text).

«The ultimate reason for commitment to work, a career or the pursuit of profit in fact lie beyond or outside calculation and calculating reason in the obscure depths of a historically constituted habitus, which means that, in normal circumstances, one gets up every day to go to work without deliberating on the issue, as indeed one did yesterday and will do tomorrow» (ibidem: 10).

To lose the perception of the historical origins of the economic behaviors generates what Bourdieu calls a “well-founded illusion”: economic field looks apparently objective and rational, since individuals expect it to be like that, and behave according to this set of expectations; they, thus, develop an unbounded faith in the value that is at stake and in the (economic) game itself. But what are the reasons, Bourdieu wonders, motivating the origins of this powerful *illusio*? The alleged neutrality of the economic sphere, kept fictitiously separated from its social origins and from the social consequences of its perpetration – according to Bourdieu – masks explicit political ends. In the first place, the assumed objectivity and universality of the economy convey a proper ethnocentric bias, motivated by a strong imperialistic purpose:

«Only a very particular form of ethnocentrism which assumes the guise of universalism, can lead us to credit economic agents universally with the aptitude for rational economic behavior, thereby making disappear the question of the economic and cultural condition in which this aptitude (here elevated into a norm) is acquired, and the question of what action is indispensable if these conditions are to be universalized» (ibidem: 5).

The only universal principle, he buttresses, is that individuals are not universal: they bear inscribed in their bodies their subjective and collective stories, they are *situated*, i.e. positioned within a field and endowed with different types of resources; they are incorporated into a particular cultural and social context, orienting their behaviors. That is why, during his researches in post-colonial peripheries, Bourdieu's undertaking was to unveil that the lens through which we usually evaluate economic fulfillment of people living in non-Western countries is actually Western's categories and representations. In *Travail et travailleurs en Algérie* (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1963), he shows, for instance, how the notion of waged labor shaped Western imagination of what “labor” is. This form differs quite consistently from the idea of “(social) occupation” diffused in non-capitalist societies. But the Western (and it is possible to add male and middle class [Bourgeois, 2005]) conception of labor has been constructed as universal, ahistorical, apparently neutral and therefore dominant. Using an anthropological sensitivity, what seems clear - and this represents the core of Bourdieu's critical argumentation – is that neoclassical economics (that is “academically” responsible for the detachment of the analysis of the economic sphere from any social setting) is actually nothing else than a mathematical formalization of a neoliberal (imperialistic) political project. «It is from this particular [neoliberal] economy that neoclassical economic theory borrows its fundamental

assumptions, which it formalizes and rationalizes, thereby establishing them as the foundations of a universal model» (ibidem: 10). Moreover, it goes the argument, what happened historically has been a progressive “universalization” (through dominant international economic institutions, like IMF or WTO) of a neoliberal US model. A strong commitment to the ethic of individual responsibility, for instance – that attributes to the individuals and not to the social order any sort of economic failure, like unemployment or poverty – was a proper Western “value” (as Weber argued), emphasized and taken to the extreme by the American society, and then transformed into an alleged universal belief (cf. also Bourgois, 2005). To make a second example, the contemporary enthusiastic celebration of the dynamism and the flexibility of the social order diffused in the US society – Bourdieu denounces – has allowed to frame *social uncertainty*, almost universally as «a positive principle of collective organization, capable of producing more efficient and productive economic agents» (ibidem: 12).

The institution that, according to Bourdieu, plays the most important role in the constant reproduction of the dominant economic order, is the national State.

«The state is the culmination and product of a slow process of accumulation and concentration of different species of capital: a capital of physical force, in the form of the military and the police (which is evoked by Weber’s definition of the state as exercising the “monopoly of legitimate physical violence”); economic capital (which is necessary, among other things, to provide the funding for the physical force); cultural or informational capital, accumulated in the form of statistics, for example, and also in the form of instruments of knowledge endowed with universal validity within the limits of its competence, such as weights, measures, maps or land register; and, lastly symbolic capital. In this way, it is able to exert a determining influence on the way the economic field functions» (ibidem: 12).

The economic field is actually pervaded by the State, that defines its conditions of existence, its rules, and its maintenance; the State influences the market exchanges, contributing to the construction of the demand, through public policy defining consumption patterns, by institutions promoting certain types of socialization shaping individual tastes and preferences, and so on. Furthermore, the State contributes to structure the offer segment in numerous ways: through policies guaranteeing public subsidies to firms and citizens or through the training and managing of the workforce; let’s think in particular about the immigration laws or about the set of laws regulating labor market (like, the rules defining job contracts, workers’ rights and so on). All in all, the State strongly contributes to the production and the reproduction of all the social and economic conditions characterizing its political space of influence⁴⁶. As Bourdieu points out, the economic

⁴⁶ Several empirical analyses of the economic field (or subfield), especially the ones concerning labor market

field, that was initially created within a national State and that used to constitute a unique entity with it, is now undergoing a relevant reshaping, namely it is involved in the well known process (and project) of “globalization”: the political buzz word “*mondialisation*” «*a simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive pseudo-concept* [...] [represents] the process of the unification of the global economic and financial field, that is, the integration of hitherto compartmentalized national economic universes [...] as an inevitable destiny and a political project of universal liberation, as the end-point of a *natural evolution* and the civic and ethical ideal which, in the name of a connection postulated between democracy and the market, promises political emancipation for the people of all countries» (ibidem: 226). To frame globalization as a universal and “natural” process, thus, represents a precise political project serving the dominants’ interests within the international economic field and neglecting the existence of any other possible form of “development” different from the neoliberal order (cf. also Hirsch, 2001; Latouche, 2007).

Bourdieu’s historical and political analysis, strongly connected with his theory of action that we dealt with in this paragraph (based first and foremost on the concept of the economic field and on the notion of habitus), provides additional theoretical hints for an adequate comprehension of the economic actions. As Zelizer does, Bourdieu also bears in mind social, cultural and symbolic elements as crucial dimensions to understand the economic realm. But even recognizing the important role played by subjective creativities and by inter-subjective negotiation processes, he subordinates these forms of interactions to the existence of objective relations of forces, delimiting the individuals’ space of actions. His attempt to unveil the historical determinants of these objective power structures (as well as of the individual dispositions that incorporate such structures) is aimed at highlighting the political orientations of neoclassical economics. Accusing neoclassical economics of being fraught with ethnocentric and neoliberal biases, he calls for a re-embedding of the economic discipline into a broader (and more engaged) social science, able to take into account the social constructed origins of the economic behavior, but also concerned about its social consequences. So, his suggestion is to come back to an economics of the economic practices, where the noun “practice” assumes the double sense of “not purely theoretical”, but also “comfortable”, “useful” for the individuals performing them.

«We must keep clearly in mind that the true object of a real economics of practices is nothing other, in the last analysis, than the economy of the conditions of production and reproduction of the agents and institutions of economic, cultural and social production and reproduction or, in other words, the very object of

conditions, have confirmed Bourdieu’s intuitions on the pivotal role played by the State in shaping the economic realm. The State, in fact, has a strong power of definition, determining what is “legitimate” and what is not within its dominant order, *producing* in this way informality, illegality, precarity, urban marginality (see, among the others, Lautier *et al.* 1992; Saitta, 2011; De Genova, 2002, 2004; Wacquant, 2008).

sociology in its most complete and general definition» (Bourdieu, 2005: 13).

6. The Economics of Conventions

During the second half of the 1980s, a group of sociologists and economists that defined themselves as the *Economists of Conventions* (EC) started to study the importance of the *evaluation criteria* employed by the social actors in order to solve – in a more or less temporary and situated way – the problems of *coordination in situations of uncertainty* in the economic life (Borghi, Vitale, 2006: 7; La Rosa, 2008: 7). According to them, sociology and economics are both interested in explaining the problematic coordination of human conducts, and this represents the aspect on which the two disciplines tend to converge⁴⁷. As several of these scholars argued, in one of the contributions that could represent a sort of programmatic manifesto of this research program⁴⁸, it is important to clarify what EC actually means when it refers to the notion of coordination. The EC openly opposes the definition boosted by mainstream economics that hinges on a methodological individualism. The conception that it develops, instead, highlights mainly the role played by *collective* forms of evaluation and shared definition of conventional criteria deemed to be appropriate to solve disputes (ibidem). These criteria appear to be multiples and immeasurable, and this proliferation, even if limited, causes the situations of uncertainty with which we are forced to cope.

The EC's actor, thus, is assumed to be able to coordinate him/herself with other people, choosing among a variety of highly general conventions available in a specific *situation*. This approach marks a first consistent difference with Bourdieu's argumentations analyzed in the foregoing paragraph. Bourdieu's dispositional habitus theory, in fact, assumes that actors' interpretations of reality tend to be objectified and transformed into determinants inscribed in their bodies, able to lead them in their routinely actions, *independently* from the *situation* in which they find themselves. Contrariwise, the Economists of Conventions move their attention from the agent (and his/her dispositions) to the situations: «The persons whom we follow in their tests are obliged *by the situation* in which they are involved to shift from one mode of adjustment to another, from one measure of worth to another» (Boltanski, Thévenot, 2006: 16). So, Conventionalists tend to employ

⁴⁷ According to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006: 31), the presumed mutual opposition between sociology and economics is actually erroneous, since it mistakenly does not recognize that the two disciplines show «the same basic structure (a conventional higher common principle bringing together particular persons), the same naturalism relying on the same fundamental transformation (of an higher common principle into a positive law), wheatear the explanatory system is based on social phenomena or on market individualism».

⁴⁸ The reference here is to the contribution elaborated by Eymard-Duvernay *et al.* (2006) titled «*Valori, coordinamento e razionalità: il programma di ricerca dell'Economia delle convenzioni*», published in Italian in *Sociologia del Lavoro* n. 104, and first time discussed in the conference «*Conventions et institutions: approfondissements théoriques et contributions au débat politique*» (Paris, December 2013).

a more «pragmatic» and «inductivist» approach to describe people conducts (Boltanski, Vitale, 2006; Borghi, 2008). According to them, the individuals are not fixed in their social identity, but could shift their attitude to act, considering the specific situation in which they perform, and being able to select, each time, the more appropriate set of evaluation criteria (Borghi, Vitale, 2006). A second relevant point that marks a difference between Bourdieu's thought and the Conventionalists' perspective is that the second group of scholars does not concentrate anymore on the "dispositions" inscribed in the actors' bodies, but stresses the role played by the "*dispositives*" (closer to a Foucaultian sensibility), namely the *external objects* that constitute an exterior support to construct and prop up people's categories (ibidem)⁴⁹. Moreover, as Boltanski clearly states in an interview issued to *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia* (Boltanski, Vitale, 2006)⁵⁰, one of the most problematic aspects of Bourdieu's critical sociology, was that it maintains and strengthens the asymmetry existing between the social scientist, who is capable (and is in charge of) stating what is true and what is false, and common people that similarly pretend to assert their opinion about reality. A significant intuition, thus, in this theoretical path, has been to recognize that social scientists and common people are actually endowed with the same instruments and a similar tool kit to interpret reality (Boltanski, Thévenot, 2006: 4). This obvious – but fundamental – reflection oriented Boltanski and his fellows to leave the field of «critical sociology» and to start to practice a «sociology of critical capacity», namely a sociology that takes «critic» as the specific object of its analysis, in order to recognize the normative principles underling the critical activities performed by common people (Boltanski, Thévenot, 2009: 315). This attempt to take seriously into account actors' claims and judgments marks an important detour in the economic sociological thinking (as several relevant traditions have done in other sub-field of the discipline): it reconfigures the relationship between the "subject" and the "objects" of the investigation, blurring the powerful

⁴⁹ Conventionalists' interest goes into the direction of taking into account the importance of *objects*, considered not only in their symbolic or economic value, neither exclusively as means to distinguish oneself from the others being part of a group, but considered in themselves, in their characteristic of defining a concrete situation. Thus, Conventionalists concentrate at the same time on processes of qualification of people and objects (see further on). They try to construct a framework within which the requirement of justice among human beings, and the requirement of fitness among things could be treated with a single set of instruments (Boltanski, Thévenot, 2006).

⁵⁰ Interrogated about his relationship and connections with Bourdieu's works, Luc Boltanski declared: «A first possibility was to connect Bourdieu with Marxist thinking. Bourdieu did not belong to a Marxist tradition and did not know Marx at the beginning of his career. But to realize this connection, it was sufficient to focus the theoretical gaze on the model of domination, on the concept of alienation, and the asymmetry between the abused agents and an omniscient researcher. It means, in other words, to stress the value of the positive science as an unveiling tool to access the truth masked by the process of domination. This was a seductive possibility, since it provides power and optimism. A second option came from Bourdieu's anthropological works, from the logic of practice, from Durkheimian and Weberian heritage. It was the possibility to stress on categorization and on the construction of meaning made by the actors, considering also the hermeneutics and the phenomenology existing in Bourdieu's first works [...]. I was attracted by this second possibility, and not by the first one» (Boltanski, Vitale, 2006: 97).

asymmetry between the sociologist and the society⁵¹. The aim of sociology of critical capacity, thus, is not to formulate judgments, but to concentrate on the actors' «cognitive ability that allows human beings to establish associations among things that count, to identify beings independently of circumstances, and to reach agreement on forms of generality» (Boltanski, Thévenot, 2006: 32)⁵². Among an infinite number of possible associations, Conventionalists concentrate exclusively on the ones that could be *collectively* supported through *justifications*. Imagining a situation of dispute, Conventionalists maintain, individuals' effort tends to go into the direction of individuating a *higher common principle* around which it is possible to converge. This process through which subjective associations start to refer to more abstract categories, so are elevated to a higher level of generality (*monté en généralité*), marks the shift (and the line of continuity) between people's ability to classify and their attitude to judge⁵³, or saying it differently, between the cognitive and the evaluative capacity of human beings. The EC's discourse, so, takes as a starting point this nexus existing between category and evaluation, between cognition and normativity. According to the analysis provided by Borghi and Vitale (2006), this attention to the relation between classification processes and moral norms represents a strong Durkheimian leverage in the Conventionalists' program. In Durkheim's reflection, in fact, the social facts have a twofold soul: they indicate how the world *is*, but also how the world *should be*. So, the category for Durkheim is both cognitive, normative and emotional: it allows the individual to perceive the world and at the same time to decide how to act; it is both the abstract form of a bundle of items but also a procedure to generate knowledge about reality. However, once categories are produced, they crystallize and become "usual", so their processual status appears to be not visible anymore; that is why the actors use to perceive them as "natural", universal and thus necessary. The EC's undertaking, hence, is to shed light on this *normative dimension* existing in the social and economic lives⁵⁴. This does not mean simply to recognize the importance played by values and feelings in orienting individual economic behaviors. As we have seen, in fact, this operation would have provided some more elements for the analysis, but would not have challenged the "hard" nutshell of mainstream economics, characterized by a rational choice model and an individualistic theory of action. Economists of Conventions,

⁵¹ Form a methodological point of view, these reflections appear to be in continuity with the epistemology of science prompted by the ethnographic method.

⁵² This represents an extremely important perspective's shift, that needs however to be deeper scrutinized. This operation, in fact, although compelling, risks to limit the researchers' responsibility, minimizing his/her critical role and political engagement. All these aspects deserve a more complex analysis that is going to be dealt with in the methodological section of this thesis.

⁵³ People's attitude to judge represents also their capacity to formulate opinions about "justice", namely about what is presumed to be "fair" and what is not.

⁵⁴ This last one represents a relevant aspect on which Zelizer's approach and Conventionalists' theory tend to converge.

instead, introduce a specific focus on the processes of evaluation that hinge on an *interpretative form of rationality*. In this acceptance, to take into account a normative dimension does not mean to pay attention exclusively to the role played by the norms in themselves. Conventionalists' reasoning, instead, proceeds a step behind, wondering on what does it mean to follow a rule. From a Wittgensteinian perspective, to adhere to a law means, first and foremost, to interpret it (Borghi, Vitale, 2006). Rules' interpretation, it goes the argument, hinges on evaluation criteria of conventional origins, endowed with a certain amount of social legitimacy. So, the acceptance of values and norms employed by the EC, differs quite a lot from the notion commonly employed by economic sociology, according to which they simply represent individuals' tastes or preferences orienting behavior (Swedberg, 2006). In this framework, instead, people's values and orientations towards a common good are actually deemed to be the bone structure of conventions.

Thus, what does EC mean, even in the very definition of the research program, using the word "convention"? The concept actually encloses several meanings, that epitomize Conventionalists' conception of social action: a "convention", in fact, could represent a habit or a tradition; it could also indicate a sort of socially constructed – thus arbitrary – agreement; or, in the third place, is defined as "conventional" something that is deemed to be artificial, not "natural" (let's think about the expression "conventional agriculture"). According to the definition provided by Borghi and Vitale: «Conventions are collective representations that delimit *a priori* the field of possibilities; in other words, the convention is *an agreement on the relevant features attributed to an object* (a phenomenon, a process, a person, etc.)» (ibidem, 2006: 14, italics in the text). Thus, firstly, a convention is not only an inter-subjective, but properly a public ("collective") agreement⁵⁵: the fact that a convention is recognized and assumes value exclusively in a public sphere is what concretely exemplify the connection existing between the micro and the macro dimension in coordinating the economic behaviors (Wagner, 1999). Secondly, a convention represents a sort of twofold tool, both cognitive and evaluative, employed to *qualify* human beings and objects, namely to attribute them qualities deemed to be relevant. While proceeding with this *operation of qualification* people necessarily agree on *principles of equivalence* that represent the functional definition according to which certain elements are assumed to be pertinent in the resolution of a dispute (Boltanski, Thévenot, 2009). Among the numerous type of agreements, Conventionalists decided to deal with the ones that present the higher level of generality (so the higher social legitimacy), and could be justified. In everyday life, however, the legitimacy of conventional principles is not always at stake;

⁵⁵ This type of conventions that we are taking into consideration clearly differs from the subjective statements produced by a person to define "what it is convenient" (*convenances personnelles*), since the latter epitomize the individual's capability to coordinate him/herself in the intimate and closer space and not in the public sphere (Thévenot, 1990).

in the “natural” situation, in fact, people are not required to provide justifications. That is why Conventionalists look, in particular, at “critical moments”, meant both as “situation of crisis” and as “reflexive occasions”. In these particular moments, the individual “realizes” that is necessary to intervene to modify the situation; s/he “realizes” in the twofold sense of “becoming aware of something” and “making something real”, practically acting. These situations usually cause a dispute, in which people involved are subjected to an *imperative to justify*: who accuses must provide some justifications to maintain his/her critics; similarly, who is accused must justify his/her action to support a defense; on both sides, these justifications have necessary to adapt to some general acceptability standards (Boltanski, Thévenot, 2006; 2009). Looking at these standards, Conventionalists argue, allows thus to understand the process through which a regime of justification is produced and reproduce, but also to scrutinize the space of action that the actors actually have at their disposal to take the distances from an order deemed illegitimate, to contest it, and, eventually to experiment other possibilities (Borghi, 2008; Boltanski, Thévenot 2006). Through their inductive method and their empirical research work⁵⁶, thus, Economists of Conventions individuated some *orders of worth*, according to which people tend to justify their action. In their book that constitutes one of the EC’s masterpieces, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) recognized six orders or justifications that they define as “common worlds”⁵⁷. Each world, i.e. each ideal-typical construction, is characterized by a deep inherent coherence: every *cit * is identified – among the other things – by a *higher common principle*⁵⁸ that provide the possibility to put in order, according to their specific state of worthiness, the subjects and the objects that are part of the that world. We can say, for instance, that according to a higher common principle – for example, fame – the person (or the item) X is more important (s/he/it is worth more) than the person (or the item) Y. In *On Justification. Economies of worth* (2006), Boltanski and Thévenot identified (1) the inspired, (2) the domestic; (3) the fame; (4) the civic; (5) the market; (6) and the industrial worlds; finally, in

⁵⁶ The authors employ a quite peculiar methodology, using, in the first place, the canonical texts of political philosophy to individuate, within these pure theoretical constructions, the highest general principle leading the processes of coordination. At the same time, they attempt to compare these principles to the ones daily employed by common people to solve disputes. To provide empirical founding to their analytical frame, thus, they also refer to practical handbooks, suggesting “appropriate” typologies of behaviours. These selected works are employed as: «grammatical enterprises intended to clarify the fix rules for reaching agreement, that is, both as bodies of prescriptive rules that make it possible to build a harmonious polity and as models of shared *competence* required of persons in order for agreements to be possible. We use these works to develop a model of legitimate order – termed the *polity* model – that spells out the requirements a *higher common principle* must satisfy in order to sustain *justifications*» (Boltanski, Thévenot, 2006: 66, italics in the text).

⁵⁷ The French word, *cit *, seems actually more evocative.

⁵⁸ «*Higher common principle*. The principle of coordination that characterizes a polity is a convention for establishing equivalence among beings. This convention stabilizes and generalizes a form of association. It ensures that beings are *qualified*, qualification being the condition for assessing *objects* as well as *subjects* and for determining the way in which they matter, objectively, and have value beyond any contingencies» (Boltanski, Thévenot, 2006: 141, italics in the text).

Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme (1999), Boltanski and Chiapello individuate also (7) a *cit  par projets*. The inspired world is based on creativity, imagination and grace; the highest state of worthiness, in this case, is attributed to artistes, saints, flaky and fools that are used to act outside of a routinely schema and evaluate their worth not caring about the others' judgment, but reying on their self-esteem. Contrariwise, the world of fame, is based on the evaluation provided by the other human beings that constitute what is called "the public opinion"; the criteria of worth here are, thus, the reputation, the celebrity, the visibility in the public space. This ephemeral state is mainly attribute to famous people, opinion leaders, and so on. The domestic world, instead, is characterized by a feeling of belonging (to a family or a State), is based on the perpetuation of traditions and on the application of the principle of hierarchy and of subordination to the "big" ones' authority. Here, the worthier ones are assumed to be the fathers, the bosses, the kings, who embody the power to control above the subjugated "little" ones. Differently, the civic world could be exemplified through the metaphor of Rousseau's general will; it represents the preeminence of a collective person over the private interests. In this world, citizens are ordered according to their degree of solidarity, egalitarian believes, and attitude to be active and participate in the government of the *res publica*. Last but not least, the market and the industrial worlds are analyzed as two distinct "cities". The market realm is based on the principle of competition for scarce resources, driven by the commodity prizes. Is worth what is presumed to be the object of people's desire, what is attractive and saleable. This not necessary coincides with the state of worth requited in the industrial world that is, instead, led by the principles of efficiency and productivity. These worlds, obviously, do not exist in this "pure" and abstract form; they tend to merge among themselves, constructing compromises or being in conflict. Moreover, they are not static, but they appear to constantly mould their mutual relationship and their relative position of relevance. Furthermore, they are a finite number, but they do not constitute a conclusive array of social interaction models. Boltanski and Chiapello, for instance, in their more recent works (1999; 2002; see also Boltanski, 2005) tend to individuate the emergence of an eighth world, defined as a *cit  par projets*. The new form of capitalism, they contend, is based on a network structure: to be worth each person has to be constantly connected with other people, be able to innovate and to participate in new projects, be flexible, ready to change and to move quickly. Mobility, thus, appears to be one of the resources that determine who (or what) is worth and who is not. People who are not connected, hence, are harshly excluded, being "exclusion" the new buzz word to label the situations of marginality in a world constructed as a net (substituting the ideas of exploitation and social inequality epitomizing injustice in a civic order) (Boltanski, Chiapello, 2002). This inductive model of social interaction proposed initially by Boltanski and Th venot and then extended by Boltanski and Chiapello, evidently does not take into

consideration exclusively the order of justification that belongs to the market realm, as mainstream economics does. Contrariwise, this theoretical categorization individuates several common principles motivating action, apart from the market utilitarian and competitive logic. Although the market is not the only possible world, Thévenot argues – in continuity with the economic sociology founding fathers –, it constitutes the *grandeur* that tends to occupy, with a great amount of symbolic violence, the preeminent position, previously embodied by the civic worth (2006: 97). According to this perspective, for example, all the processes of dismantlement of the welfare state taking place in the great majority of Western countries under the pressure of reducing public spending, appear to be some of the concrete cases that exemplify how the market order attempts to prevail to the detriment of the civic world (see also Chicchi, 2008). To individuate empirically the orders of worth that are constantly reproduced in the social life, thus, could be an extremely useful exercise in order to grasp the ongoing processes that are shaping contemporary society and current capitalist regime⁵⁹. To provide an example, in the late form of capitalism, for instance, Conventionalists individuate a growing presence of the domestic order that tends to contaminate the market world. According to them, the domestic *régime d'engagement* is becoming one of the most common strategy to recruit and organize labor force: this means that employment relationships are often legitimized drawing upon feelings like loyalty, trust, and personal availability. Moreover, framing labor relations in terms of domesticity means – from the employers' side – to develop a paternalistic attitude, and from the workforce's perspective to be pushed to a more docile and reverential behavior (Chicchi, 2008). Thévenot named this form of capitalism as «proximity (*proche*) capitalism», to address an economic regime that is able to produce value from the feelings of belonging and trust usually characterizing the family sphere.

The research program of the Economics of Conventions, even providing a fruitful and compelling paradigm of analysis, shows also some relevant shortcomings and contradictions that is necessary to take into consideration. To illustrate briefly to what I am referring by speaking about the EC's limits, I will rely on an example that hinges on my experience of covered participant observation within a greenhouse company. I was involved in a situation in which several actors inside the workplace were negotiating the “just” amount of their “wage”. The dispute rised between an employer and two employees of different nationalities, each of them earning a different salary. Analyzing one of these episodes, an Economist of Conventions would immediately individuate the *orders of justifications* that tend to legitimize a similar wage differentials that is actually the point of contention: the employer could draw upon an “efficiency” principle, taking into account the diverse

⁵⁹ To have an example of the application of Boltanski, Thévenot and Chiapello theoretical model on a local labour market in the Italian case, see, among the others, La Rosa M., Borghi V. and Chicchi F. (eds.) (2008).

degree of workers' productivity, referring in this case to an industrial order. Alternatively, s/he could call for the overall necessity to reduce the employees' salaries because of the competitive pressure exercised by the higher level of the supply chain, referring in this case to a market typology of worth; the entrepreneur, moreover, could explain the wage differences in term of nationality, assuming citizenship as a indicator of the diverse degrees of "loyalty", using (or abusing) in this way a domestic form of justification. At this point, an external observer could object that what is forced aside, in this line of argumentation, is a more general consideration: whatever type of criterion raised by the employer tends to assume, in this specific situation, a stronger legitimacy, due to the fact the entrepreneur is the one that is endowed with the power of selecting the labor force and of laying down the working conditions (cf. Salais, 2006: 70). In the everyday dispute, indeed, actors are evidently *situated*, and their subjective characteristics (gender, age and class in the first place, but more in general their individual biographies) strongly influence the relative strength of their personal statements. So, to look at the social legitimacy of these statements independently from the subjective features of people supporting them⁶⁰ could appear a quite dangerous operation (Bertolini, 2006). Moreover, to properly interpret the orders of justification employed by the entrepreneur, in this example, it is somehow necessary to be familiar with and to take into account the overall dynamics governing the agricultural supply chains, and to acknowledge both local and global capitalist structure of constrains and opportunities. Dismantling completely the concept of habitus and the notion of the economic field proposed by Bourdieu, EC definitely gained some advantages, allowing us «to penetrate into some interstice of people's critical thinking otherwise not accessible» (Sassatelli, 2010: 656). As we sketched, they dismiss the point of view of an omniscient observer and introduce an inductivist research perspective, that truly concentrates on actors' forms of reasoning; this approach appears to be visibly more pragmatic and seems able to give up with deterministic orientations in the explanation of the actors' choices. However, while achieving these important results, the Economists of Conventions risk to remain "entrapped" within a deprecated methodological individualism, encompassed within an interactionist perspective that underestimates the role played by structural influences in defining the "spaces of possibles" open to each single actor. As Aglietta, among the others, noted, the Conventionalists refrain to focus on the way in which the fundamental structure of forces in the capitalist society deeply influences individuals' economic actions and determines the emergence and the persistence of the conventions (in Chicchi, 2006: 279). At this stage of the argumentation, it

⁶⁰ «It is possible to maintain that a critic or a justification are legitimate in a concrete situation when the person who formulates it is able to support it *independently from the social characteristics attributed to whoever shows up*. The peculiar effect of the legitimacy bond, thus, is that it sets out a process of generalization» (Boltanski, Thévenot, 2009: 315, emphasis added).

seems relevant to take more seriously into account two EC's problematic aspects, deeply tied together: the dimension of power and the alleged individuals' cooperative attitude. One of the critics more often raised toward the EC is that it refrains to represent a proper "sociology of power" (Bertolini, 2006; Chicchi, 2006). Instead of confirming or deny this statement, it is interesting – in my opinion – to try to understand how this objection could contribute to provide new causes for reflection. EC, in a variety of contributions, deals with the issue of power asymmetry and with the concept of authority (see, among the others, Thévenot, 2010). The EC's main aim, however, is to tie together and to associate the notion of power with the one of coordination (Thévenot, 2010: 627). EC, thus, sets apart an idea of power understood as a form of structural domination (like the one prompted by Marxist reflections); it also avoids to engage with a more diffused and individualized notion of power (as the one suggested by Foucault); it encompasses, instead, a conception of "positive" power, interpreted as "power of" and not exclusively as "power on" (closer to concepts like "empowerment" or "capability", albeit purified from their neoliberal drifts). According to the EC, power is the *capability to* coordinate the others and to coordinate *with* the others. Thus, in this understanding, the "power" assumes the shape of an authority able to embezzle the mechanisms of coordination (i.e. positive law, bureaucratic norms, and – with growing interests in a period of economic crisis – evaluation measures). The very tools of national statistical classifications, national and international evaluation instruments, appear to be laid down by an authority (especially, but not exclusively, the one embodied by the State) in charge of controlling the mechanisms of coordination, in a subtle but efficacious way⁶¹. To overcome any type of critics, in fact, the authority tends to be "objectivized", in the twofold sense of being "diffused" on and through things, and of being considered *a priori* legitimate: «The legitimate authority has been shifted and distributed among things, making it difficult to grasp and to criticize it, since it stands out in the name of realism and loses its political visibility. Critical capacity gets stuck since it seems already overcome and deciduous. The reference to objectivity, that often goes along with the invocation of the transparency of information, does not seem to previously satisfy a pivotal necessity of democratic deliberation, making superfluous any further critics» (ibidem, 2010: 644-645)⁶².

⁶¹ On this last point, cf. in particular Desrosières (1998).

⁶² According to Sassatelli (2010: 653): «*Governare vuole dire costruire forme di ordine che siano negoziate e soggettivamente coinvolgenti secondo qualche profilo di ragione, umana e allo stesso tempo salda, «oggettiva» – e quindi al di là dell'umano. E quel che Thévenot si propone di fare con la nozione di investissement de forme è per certi versi fornire alcuni strumenti concettuali per ripercorrere a ritroso la via che porta a tale oggettività, svelarne la costruzione nei meccanismi cognitivi che rendono possibili «paragoni e generalizzazioni», ovvero l'identificazione del mondo, dei suoi elementi e dei suoi automatismi. Il suo obiettivo è, in qualche modo weberianamente, quello di mostrare le «condizioni di accettazione e critica» di una «qualificazione» autorevole.*

The specific role that critical capacity has to assume is to restate that what is conventional is also – by definition – arbitrary and fictitious, so, in this sense, critical capacity should be in charge of unmasking and denouncing the power abuses concerning classification and evaluation, perpetrated by the authority. But the “objective” form assumed by the power weakens deeply the critical voices. Thévenot suggests, for instance, to think about the labels for “organic food” or for “fair traded” goods. Once these evaluative forms of measurement gain legitimacy, it seems quite complex to promote critical argumentation against them. The critical capacity, in fact, could not aim anymore simply at “deconstruction”, as it was in the previous stage of the claim (limiting itself, for instance, to oppose conventional agriculture); critics have to attack the very mechanisms of legitimacy, that is obviously an harder task. As Semi recognizes, «the connection between objectivity and justice, especially social justice, is a sort of wall that is hard to be scratched by the critical capacity» (Semi, 2010b: 658).

A second array of critics to the EC’s paradigm, strictly linked to the previous one, concerns the alleged cooperative attitude shown by individuals. In fact, even if Economists of Conventions in their contributions use to deal with the problematic of *conflicts*, their overall approach tends to underline people’s motivations to reach agreement, at the same time underestimating the fact that these arrangements are often harshly conflicting and that the resolution of dispute could mask strong forms of coercion. In order to clarify Conventionalists’ perspective, it is worth to briefly quote a statement extracted by a contribution written by Christian Bessy that focuses on the conventional nature of labor contracts (2006). The author maintains that: «For what concerns job contracts, we take as a starting point the idea that the format of the written document, signed contextually to the hiring procedures, is not neutral at all, since its form and its content hinge on a precise conception of the labor relationships, an implicit set of rules that tend to define the mutual expectations and that find a validity even outside of the firm’s borders» (ibidem: 146). Moreover, Bessy continues: «*Albeit distinct and antagonists, the interests of the two sides involved in the labor relation hinge on a certain solidarity propitious to cooperation.* This cooperative effort, that make the two sides supportive among themselves, works together with the specific contractual commitments, with the norms or the contractual laws that use to define the pure “formal” obligations» (2006: 146). But, as Conventionalists themselves noticed (Salais, 2006), the very nature of coordination should thoroughly mingle cooperation and conflicts in a dynamical way. However, to consider coordination as processes swinging between situations of conflicts and forms of cooperation, does not dissolve – neither empirically nor theoretically – this problematic tangle. As Chicchi states: «The problem, in fact, is not in our opinion to imagine an articulation of coordination in phases of cooperation and conflict, a situation, to say it baldly, always existing in

every context of social interaction; but rather to analyze coordination for what concerns the structural functions of reproduction, and thus of conservation, of *power* existing within every kind of field» (ibidem: 2006: 281, italics in the text). In a nutshell, the contribution of the EC for what concerns the reflection on power is to try «to unveil the mechanisms that lead to an impasse for the critical capacity» (Thévenot, 2010: 647). So, it is not strictly correct to assert that EC refrains to practice a sociology of power *tout court*. It is more accurate, and in my opinion not less “critical”, to affirm that EC dismisses quite completely a notion of “structural” power, intended as the relations of dominations existing within the economic field. However, the conception of power emerging within the processes of negotiation described by Conventionalists has the advantage of being framed as a form of “power-in-action”, a form of power that is never “positional” but always “relational”, a form of power that is at the same time undergone and performed by common people. On the other way around, EC’s approach could certainly conduct to even more compelling analyses taking more seriously into account the specificities of the agents (first and foremost gender, age, and social class) which are supporting the evaluation criteria in order to solve disputes, individual specificities that could easily epitomize the subjective declination of “structural” forms of oppression (Bourgois, 2005).

7. Conclusive remarks

The main purpose of this chapter has been to familiarize with some of the «meta-theoretical assumptions» and the «explanatory mechanisms» that this thesis aims at sharing (Portes, 2010). In other words, I attempted to make explicit the cognitive lens through which I try to look, in a broader sense, at my field. In this chapter, thus, what was at stake was not the identification of some general theoretical laws, to which the research practice has to be subjugated. The effort here is rather to depict an analytical background – not a coherent or a settled theoretical frame – that could be efficacious to interrogate reality, and could be useful to grasp the key elements of the social processes which we are interested in (Borghi, 2008). Throughout the thesis, I certainly rely on this body of literature, even merging it with other relevant contributions in the sociology of work, in the sociology of migration and gender studies. I do believe in fact that the following (more specific) debates with which I am going to confront in the next chapters, could be fruitfully sharpened and could gain major efficacy by broadening the focus of the discussions in order to encompass a more general analysis on the economic-social action. Throughout this chapter, thus, I attempted to

summarize the main classic and current positions existing within the literature. Without the pretention of been comprehensive, I tried to provide a literature review that considered the social-structural contributions (i.e. the works of Polanyi, Granovetter, Portes, etc.) as well as the cultural alternative (ranging from cultural anthropology to more recent consumption studies). Thereafter, I attempted to show how this distinction between structuralists and culturalists – according to some scholars – is actually a fictitious one. At this point, I decided to rely on the contributions of several sociologist, belonging to the European and American traditions that throughout their work engaged in the endeavor of overcoming such an apparent distinction. The works of Viviana Zelizer, Pierre Bourdieu and the French School of the Economics of Convention appeared to be particularly stimulating. Their contributions influenced the analysis undertook in this thesis in several sense. First of all, as I said, they provide a broader context to frame the analysis of labor market, labor relations, workplace dynamics, gender, ethnicity and class configurations. Secondly, I found them useful in order to enrich the above-mentioned debates with other relevant analytical tools and perspectives. In particular, they have been useful within my work in order to attribute more emphasis to the ongoing processes of *negotiation* that people generally undertake within labor environments. Moreover, they encouraged to take into consideration the ongoing *interplay* existing between the *objective structures* delimiting the individual possibilities (the field), and the subjective capability to exert *creative acts*. Finally, they stimulate to take seriously into account the *regimes of justifications* as a proxy indicating the *cognitive* and *normative* categories through which people understand and “feel” the world. Going in this direction, all these contributions encourage to consider that economic practices are enacted by *situated* (gendered, racialized and class-belonging) individuals, embedded in situations that are “naturalized” through the existence social conventions able to provide shared forms of (moral) legitimation. This thesis, thus, aims at shedding some light on these collective forms of legitimations, in particular those shaping the labor contexts and the workers everyday experiences.

Chapter II

Investigating day labor

Dissi: “La terra è di cu la travagghia,
pigghiati li banneri e li zappuna!”
E prima ancora chi spuntasse l'arba
Ficiru conchi e scavaru fussuna:
Addivintò la terra na tuvagghia,
viva, di carni comu na pirsuna;
e sutta la russia di li banneri
parsi un giganti ogni jurnateri.

Ignazio Buttitta, *Lamentu ppi la morti di Turiddu Carnivali*

1. Why do we speak about “day labor”? Some introductory reflections

Precarious workers, pliant laborers, contingent workforce, seasonal or temporary employees: do all these terms mean the same? And if so, why – throughout this thesis – it is called for the employment of the analytical category of “day labor”?

In the era of «the end of work debate» (Strangleman, 2007), the degradation of labor in the advanced capitalism has been already a widely discussed topic (Beverman, 1974)⁶³. Precarity, actually, has been broadly scrutinized in its several dimensions, considering both the difficulties in

⁶³ The debate on “the end of work”, as it has been defined by Strangleman (2007), was inspired by a Rifkin’s seminal 1996 book bearing the same name that exerted a certain influence among sociologists concentrated on the transformations of labor and its representations. Similar theses have been upheld by Aronowitz and Difazio in the *The Jobless Future* (1994), and by Aronowitz and Cutler (eds.) in *Post-Work: the wages of Cybernation* (1998). Other relevant contributions within the debate came from Bauman (1998), Beck (2000), Gorz (1999), Sennet (1998), and, among the Italian scholars, from Accornero (1997) and Gallino (2003). «Although very different in terms of the scale and scope of their research, this group nonetheless share significant similarities in terms of their findings. There is a common juxtaposition of the importance of work in the past, both at a societal and individual level with the degraded and impoverished nature of current and future employment» (Strangleman, 2007: 83). A sense of nostalgia for permanence at work, thus, is woven with our everyday perception of precarity and uncertainty.

securing jobs and, as a consequence, in securing life projects and trajectories (Butler, 2004; Bourdieu, 1999 *et. al.*; Boltanski, Chiappello, 1999)⁶⁴.

For what concerns the transformations undergone by labor in the post-fordist decades, the academic reflection has undertaken several directions of inquiring (Semenza, 2014). Focusing mainly on labor processes and organizational changes, for instance, numerous scholarships have investigated the decline and transformations occurred within the industrial sector, taking into account (1) the pushes to de-centralize and de-localize production (Blueston, Herrison, 1982; Picchierri, 1986); (2) the shift from a “just-in-case”⁶⁵ (Kenney, Florida, 1993) into a “just-in-time” productive system (Smith, 1997); (3) and the new forms of industrialization emerged mainly in western countries as a consequence of technological and organizational innovations – as it has been the case for the so called Italian “industrial districts” – (Brusco, 1982, 2007; Capecchi, 1989; Trigilia, 2001). Less attention, however, has been devoted to the radical transformation occurred within the agricultural labor processes, even if with some important exceptions (Van der Ploeg, 2008).

Several publications, moreover, engaged in exploring the emergence and the alleged prevailing of the so defined “immaterial economy” performed by “knowledge workers” (Moulier Boutang 2002; Gorz, 2003; Chicchi, Roggero, 2009). Some other scholars also attempted to compare “material” and “immaterial” precarious workers, in order to identify certain common features and patterns characterizing the overall “de-standardized” labor market in the service economies (Paci 2006; Murgia, 2010).

Taking as reference this wide and fruitful body of literature in the sociology of work, this chapter strives to unpack the blanket term of precarity, and to look closer – through its ethnographic gaze – at how precarity concretely configures for a relevant number of male and female laborers that is still bound to dirty and soiling jobs inside what can be named as the “plastic factories” (i.e. the greenhouses)⁶⁶. How do these workers define themselves and thus conceive their work experience?

⁶⁴ We owe mainly to feminist tradition the attitude to extend the border of the investigation, in order to encompass in the sociological analysis not exclusively the transformations straightforwardly connected to the labor market, but also their repercussions on people’s everyday lives, shifting the attention from work precarity to life precariousness (Butler, 2004; Glucksmann, 2005). Through the broader concept of precariousness, thus, scholars try to take in greater account how the proliferation of several typologies of “atypical” job actually tends to produce socially precarious individuals, precarious in their intimate relationships, as well as in their future plans. Throughout this text, however, for stylistic reasons, the two terms are employed almost interchangeably, having in mind – in both cases – the broader meaning.

⁶⁵ In opposition with the current use of the form “just-in-time” to address the Japanese system of *lean production*, Kenney and Florida (1993) coined the term “just-in-case” to address the previous industrial organization, based on the stocks’ accumulation.

⁶⁶ As a minor stream of publication tends to underline, in fact, albeit within the global frame of a terciarized economy, certain enclaves reproducing the “fordist” model of labor do still exist in western countries (Reyneri, 2011; Semenza, 2014). Obviously, as we are going to see widely throughout this thesis, labor process inside these workplaces has undergone several changes, due to the broader transformations in the systems of productions, the increasing internationalization of markets and value chains, the burgeoning “globalization” of workforce, and so on. But, even

Taking into consideration the definition provided by the majority of the laborers met in the field, it was not possible actually to neglect the centrality of “day labor” as a sense-making category. To *work by the day* [*travghhiari a jurnata*], in fact, represents a quite common experience in the greenhouses sector, both in cases of indentured “stable” employment relationships or in circumstances of informal “unstable” jobs (see further on). Just to give some examples: wages are usually calculated *on a daily basis*; the payment of social security contributions (and their correspondent benefits), if existing, are counted *for each worked day*; *to begin to work by the day* represents the first step inside labor market for numerous entrepreneurs that celebrate proudly their upwards mobility paths; farmworkers are sometimes accused *to live “by the day”* [*vivere alla giornata*], namely they are deemed to live hand to mouth, goldbricking and getting by tanks to several expedients. Starting from these quite common experiences and expressions, thus, the category of “day labor” assume undoubtedly a certain relevance for the analysis.

Aside from this straightforward considerations, however, other purely theoretical concerns lead this preliminary choice. Firstly, as we said, it seemed tempting but misleading to group daily workers together with other typologies of atypical employees into the homogeneous category of precarious laborers. As the ethnographic practice suggests, in fact, precariousness is not a consistent phenomenon and could configure very differently, according to the labor market sector we are looking at, and – with renewed strength in periods of economic crisis – to gender, race and class lines. Wacquant (2008), for example, explained very well how work uncertainty could be experienced quite differently by individuals occupying diverse (objective) positions and endowed with diverse (subjective) dispositions inside the economic field: following a still deep-seated “class line”, it goes the argument, an *objective* insecurity suffered by the post-industrial proletariat, is deemed to be woven with a *subjective* uncertainty perceived by the lower middle class fringes. Numerous similar examples are oriented toward explaining how a “color bar” fiercely affects individuals’ participation in the labor market and their subjective sense of precarity (Burawoy, 2014); and even more cases are documented regarding “gender oriented” discriminations inside workplaces and “gendered” feelings of what to be precarious means (Murgia, 2009; Sacchetto, 2013: 18). Hence, even without denying the importance of an overall reflection about the “de-standardized” labor market, this thesis aims at narrowing the focus of analysis in order to look at the specific dimension assumed by precarity in the case of workers affected sometimes by a gendered, quite often a by racist and at large by a class-determined form of precarity in the agricultural sector.

taking into consideration these transformations, it seems still quite common, in several worksites, to be able to track down some of the features that we use to attribute to fordist system of production (e. g. for what concerns work rhythms, piece rates, assembly line mechanisms, etc.) – see also Ritzer, 1993 –.

To speak about “day labor”, however, attempts also to suggest the existence of a certain specificity between the context under analysis and several other studies dealing with agricultural labor markets. The great stream of publications that account for working conditions within the agro-industrial system of production, in fact, usually tends to speak about “seasonal” or “temporary” farmworkers (among the others, cf. Basok, 2000b; 2004; Corrado, Colloca, 2013; Gertel, Sippel, 2014; Rogaly, 2009). Moreover, transposing the element of “temporariness” to the spatial dimension, some scholars use to speak also about “circular” forms of labor (Hellio, 2014; Corrado, 2013; Tarrus, 2002); and, to encompass both a temporal and a spatial dimension, was coined the expression “seasonal circuit”, an idiom that epitomizes the peculiar work experience faced by several temp workers moving with a certain periodicity among diverse agricultural enclaves (Medici Senza Frontiere, 2005: 33; Perrotta, 2013a: 124).

The main merit of this body of literature has been to deal with “temporariness” and “circularity” not as mere descriptive categories (since it was quite straightforward to notice that horticulture – and thus its workforce – is bound to seasonal crop cycles). Its main attempt, thus, has been to employ these dimensions as analytical tools, in order to demonstrate how they have been used to *manage* labor force mobility and employability, generating in this way economic value⁶⁷.

Though being acquainted with this coterminous research perspectives in the sociology of migration, this thesis does not speak about “temp employees” or “trans-territorial workers”, due to the fact that production in the transformed littoral strip is mainly not seasonal. In the greenhouses sector, in fact, crops cycles is almost continuous: «*scippi e cianti, scippi e cianti*», namely «you eradicate and you sow, you eradicate and you sow» as people use to declare. This system of production obviously requires an almost constant amount of labor and thus a “stable” workforce residing in the area⁶⁸. To take into account the differences existing between seasonal and non-seasonal agricultural and employment regimes, the definition of “day labor” appears therefore to be more accurate.

The notion of “day labor” (in Italian *lavoro a giornata*, in Spanish *jornaleros/jornaleras* to refer to “daily laborers”, in French *travail à journée*) has recently started to be systematized also within the academic debate (see also Perrotta, 2015a). Valenzuela, for instance, proposed to employ this category since it could represents an innovative analytical tangle theoretically anchored to studies in globalization, informality, immigration, and nonstandard, contingent employment (2003: 329). He

⁶⁷ The cases of State programs controlling agricultural labor supply represent a clear example of this attempt to *manage* labor force mobility (see ch. V, par. 2.1). Even where mobility has been (apparently) less controlled, due to a greater permeability of both countries’ borders and labor market, however, «*le “migrazioni circolari” sono assunte a modello politico-istituzionale di regolazione delle migrazioni in rapporto alla domanda stagionale*» (Corrado, 2013: 48).

⁶⁸ The adjective stable is referred here to the more or less stable *permanence* in the area, and not to “stable” labor conditions as we are going to see broadly.

used the concept in order to describe daily forms of occupation undertaken especially by migrant informal workers within the urban areas in the U.S., providing a quite straightforward definition: «Day labor mostly signifies men searching for work through informal or open-air markets such as street corners, storefronts, or parking lots, or through formal temp agencies. Men standing informally at curbsides or street corners often refer to themselves as *jornaleros* (Valenzuela 1999) or *esquineros* (Malpica 1996), a direct Spanish translation of day worker or day laborer in the former and in reference to a corner in the latter» (ibidem: 310). Also for Theodor *et al.* day labor is the epitome of the type of *casualized* and *individualized* employment relationship faced mainly by male migrant searching for daily occasions to work inside Western cities (2006: 409, *emphasis added*). The numerous scholarship devoted to these studies (Gill, 2001; Valenzuela 2002, 2003; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2002; Camou, 2009; Theodore *et al.*, 2006; Fine, 2011; Theodore, 2014) identify some of the common features characterizing day labor: (1) workers could be hired for a great variety of activities, usually labor-intensive, demanding and unsafe (as agriculture, constructions, painting, and so on); (2) they commonly face underemployment, since they do not secure work every day; on average, they manage to find a job for two-three days per week, so their income is scanty and uneven; (3) salary assumes the form of a cash payment, that could be paid on a daily basis, but it could also be delayed and – in numerous case – not even doled out; laborers could be paid hourly, daily or sometimes through piece rate and they use to haggle over the wages before accepting the proposal; (4) at the hiring spots, competition is cutthroat, and this fierce struggle to secure the few available offers exacerbates the atomization of laborers, wakening collective strategies to address abuses (Theodore, 2014); (5) lastly, due to the very structure of day labor market, several typologies of intermediation between workers and prospective employers could emerge, both in the form of registered recruitment agencies (Valenzuela, 2003; Perrotta, 2011b), formal “gang masters” (as in UK) or informal *caporali* (Perrotta, 2014b; Perrotta, Azzeruoli, 2015). The attempt, throughout this thesis, is to broaden this definition in order to make it fit with a greater amount of situations in which people define themselves as daily laborers. Analyzing the experiences and the accounts produced by the individuals met in the field, this chapter and the following try to explore what it means for them to work by the day. Drawing on several examples hinged on participant observation inside greenhouses and packinghouses and on the interviews collected in the field, this section aims also at individuating the most relevant features characterizing day labor markets. As we are going to see broadly, in the transformed belt there is a quite ample share of workers that tend to define themselves as “daily laborers”: their situation could range (with a variety of configurations) from cases of totally informal employees, randomly selected in the cities roundabout, to cases of indentured laborers that nevertheless consider themselves as toiling *a*

jornata. As we are going to see in the fourth paragraph, a first commonality between greenhouses and packinghouse daily workers, is their difficulty to exert a control over their own life and work time: even if this problem touches in different manners formal and informal employees, live-in and not live-in workers, in a similar sense they all are supposed to be at the employers' *total disposal* even in their spare time, experiencing great difficulties to «organize their lives». Although very demanding, however, these forms of availability are rarely appreciated and acknowledged as worthy. Secondly, drawing on a wide set of examples and direct experiences, we are going to maintain how deeply day labor affects workers bodies, generating strong physical and mental suffering. This appears to be a straightforward consequence of the unhealthiness of the workplaces; but it seems to be also a result of the unevenness of the physical endeavor that daily workers have to invest, alternated with periods of inactivity. In the sixth paragraph we are going to explore the dimension of material insecurity, dealing in the first place with the constraints generated by scanty and fluctuating salaries. The seventh paragraph, instead, is aimed at providing some hints regarding the condition of material insecurity generated by the absence (or paradoxically the presence) of a work contract. In conclusion, the eighth paragraph is going to deal with daily workers difficulties to plan their future, for what concerns economic investments as well as individual desires and projects.

2. The participant observation inside workplaces: the cases selection

Before exploring day labor's dimensions and their impact on people everyday life, it seems necessary to provide a preliminary description of the observed workplaces. These ethnographic accounts appears as a fundamental introduction to approach the field, namely to get familiar with some of the participants met during this research experience, but also to “breathe” the air of the workplaces and to “feel” their atmosphere through the writer's gaze⁶⁹.

Clearly, the selection of the case-studies was strictly bound, in the first place, to the opportunities emerging in the field. It was, in fact, incredibly difficult to look for a job and being hired within a sector in which the majority of the workforce is mostly male, foreign or, among the Italians, it usually presents a low level of education (Semi, 2010a: 21). Taking the complexity of the situation as a given, however, it was possible to find some chances to frequent worksites, usually arranging previous agreements with the employers (on this point, see also the methodological Appendix). The

⁶⁹ For a more detailed description concerning the access into the field, and for a more general reflection regarding the limits and opportunities of a participant observation inside workplaces see the methodological appendix. The names of the people that take part in these accounts, as well as the names of the companies, are obviously fictitious.

participant observation was conducted inside greenhouses (within three firms) and packinghouses (in only one company, even if it was also realized an attempt to be hired into a second firm). Paradoxically, it was easier to meet employers available to host my colleague and me⁷⁰ for a short period of time inside greenhouses (without any remuneration), due to the higher informality and the alleged lack of controls in the countryside; on the contrary, it was harder to find a temporary job inside packinghouses where the regularity of employment is generally guaranteed.

Aside from field's contingencies, although very strict, it was necessary to select the prospective research sites according to some relevant dimensions, making them relevant to be considered «as a part for a whole» (Cardano, 2011: 49). Within this research, in fact, particular cases have been studied in order to «represent knowledge», namely in order to «show how things works in specific contexts» (Mason 2002, in Cardano, 2011: 72). The cases here presented, thus, have been selected on the base of their *typicalness*, each of them being able to illustrate a specific aspect of the realm to which it belongs. The attempt of the overall work, hence, is to provide a sort of comprehensive picture of the domain under analysis (Cardano, 2011: 73).

To be acquainted with working conditions in the agricultural sector, to look at how work is organized, and to reflect on how gender, class and ethnicity assume a role inside jobsites, I opted to take into consideration several aspects in the procedure of the “typical” case selection. First of all, *firms dimension*. Looking at the data provided by ISTAT (2012), it was possible to realize that the overwhelming majority of the greenhouses companies in the area utilizes an Agricultural Area (UAA) inferior than two hectares, and almost all of them inferior than 10 hectares (see table 1, in the Appendix). This helped in the decision to selected almost exclusively *small and very small firms* to be employed in. As the majority of the key informants suggests, in fact, big companies do not seem to be representative of the dynamic characterizing local labor market for several set of reasons. For what concerns the organization of production, they tend to specialize on high quality crops or plants, relying often on foreign technologies and know-how (as it is the case for numerous nurseries). As regards the products distribution, they usually take part into national and international markets, rarely local ones. Moreover, as far as I get to know during the fieldwork, the labor force

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As I am going to argue wider in the methodological Appendix, this thesis is the result of a research effort, undertaken together with Giuliana Sanò, PhD student in anthropology at the University of Messina. In the Appendix I am going to discuss the pragmatic and the emotional reasons motivating this choice. Moreover, I am going to highlight the implications of our “double presence” in the field, as regards our access and our posture in the contexts observed, considering both the advantages and the disadvantages of this fieldwork experience. I will also provide some additional considerations, concerning the importance of collective forms of research and analysis, able to stimulating fruitful processes of reflexivity.

inside these type of firms is generally hired with regular contracts, higher salaries and almost fixed shifts panning; the probability to meet Italian workers is thus higher⁷¹.

A second fundamental dimension to be considered was the *gendered participation* inside workplaces. Once in the field, in fact, it was possible to notice that the majority of the labor force inside greenhouses was composed by men (with some relevant exceptions, i.e. Romanian women); on the other hand, the biggest share of laborers inside packinghouses were women. This clear-cut distinction suggested a processes of construction of gendered worksites (and, within them, gendered tasks) that seemed interesting to be taken into consideration; that is why both *greenhouses* and *packinghouses* were included in the selection.

Last but not least, I considered as a relevant dimension the *management's and workforce's nationality*. This decision was mainly due to the fact that the area has been characterized by ongoing phenomena of immigration and substitution between Italian and foreign labor force in the last few decades (see the Introduction)⁷². According to the management's and workforce's nationality, it was thus possible to individuate several *configurations* inside workplaces, as the Table 1 shows in detail. For what concerns employers' nationality, it was interesting to notice that a certain share of Tunisian migrants in the area, have started since the 1990s' to rent the land to set up small companies, or opted to be employed as sharecroppers (as *mezzadri* or *compartecipanti*). This phenomenon is quite recent and somehow peculiar within the Italian labor market situation in the agricultural sector; moreover, it usually marks a path of upward social mobility for numerous Tunisian migrants initially employed by the day inside greenhouses⁷³. That is why, even if the number of foreign entrepreneurs is relatively small, it assumed a certain relevance for the analysis. For what concerns workforce's nationality, apart from the consistent presence of foreign laborers, it was unexpected to encounter in the field numerous Italian male and female workers; some of them were forced to come back to agriculture in the current period of economic crisis; some others, instead, as it was the case mainly for women, have seen inside packinghouse one of the few available opportunities in the area. Table 1 represents a rearrangement of a simple methodological tool proposed by Cardano (2011) to systematize the process of cases selection. As it is quite straightforward, configurations 2 and 3 appear to be the most represented in the transformed belt.

⁷¹ These big companies, thus, would represent an "atypical case" (ibidem). Even these cases were not selected to conduct periods of observation, they were nevertheless considered in the overall analysis. In particular, it was possible to realize some interviews inside three local big firms (Centro SEIA [Vittoria], Il Vivaio [Vittoria], Aurora [Pachino]).

⁷² This process appears to be common also in other agricultural enclaves, see in particular De Bonis (2005) and Hellio (2014).

⁷³ Aside from Tunisians, also some Albanian migrants had the opportunity to start up their own firms; contrariwise does not seem to exist a high number of Romanians working autonomously. On this point look at the data provided in the Table 2 in the Appendix, regarding the number of Italian and foreigners (EU citizens and non-EU citizens) managers in the province of Ragusa [source: author's elaboration on ISTAT 2012 data].

Our experience, however, due to the particular circumstances of the field, began with the possibility to work – for an exploratory period – inside a very small firm managed by a Tunisian entrepreneur acquainted with the purpose of our research (configuration 6). The opportunity to investigate a workplace where the employer was a foreigner was in fact definitely attractive and relevant for the research purpose. We thus started to work inside Mohamed’s greenhouses at the beginning of March 2013, initially underestimating the fact that all our workmates were obviously employers’ “fellow countrymen” (*paisani*) and sometimes also kin. For us this aspect had the undoubted advantage that we found ourselves embedded inside a small “bubble” of the alleged Tunisian local “community”, and this definitely helped us to access public and private spaces lived mainly by Tunisians (see further on); but, the other way around, this fact had the enormous disadvantage that we were not able to take part in the “natural” conversations realized inside the greenhouse.

Table 1. Typical cases' selection

		Management	
		ITALIAN	FOREIGN
	ITALIAN	Configuration 1 [Packinghouse: <i>JustTomatoes</i>]	Configuration 4*
Workforce	MIXED	Configuration 2 [Greenhouse: <i>Gurrieri Donnalucata s.r.l.</i> ; Packinghouse: <i>TomatoesArtists</i>]	Configuration 5**
	FOREIGN	Configuration 3 [Greenhouse: <i>SicilSerre</i>]	Configuration 6 [Greenhouse: <i>Kamari Vittoria s.r.l.</i>]

Rearranged from Cardano (2011: 61)

* = No one of these cases resulted in the field

** = Very few cases were detected in the field. It was not conducted there a period of participant observation, although one of the foreign manager was interviewed

That was the main reason why we opted to spend another short period (of two weeks) inside a medium-sized firm, in which workforce was composed of four Italians, an Albanian couple and a Tunisian worker (configuration 2). The different laborer’s mother tongues forced them to communicate in Italian almost all the time, allowing us to take part in the conversations. Moreover, this second choice consented to look closer at the ongoing interplay existing between Italian and migrant laborers, assuring a pivotal role to the “arrangements between the nationalities”. A third occasion to be employed inside a small greenhouse swept like a breath of fresh air almost at the end of my permanence on the field, in June 2013. The occasion to be hired informally for some days was provided by Ahmed, one of my closest friend, met for the first time working inside Mohamed’s

countryside. Ahmed, who was acquainted of the purpose of the research, asked me if I was available to join him to clean a tomatoes' greenhouse after picking, without informing our employer of my main goal. I was enthusiast about this proposal, since it allowed me, even for a very short period of time, to access a workplace were usually labor force is composed entirely by foreigners (configuration 3)⁷⁴.

Entering inside packinghouses, instead, appeared to be a more complex task, since we had to face a higher diffidence by the side of the entrepreneurs, as well as the other workers. Companies managers were mainly worried about the fact that to work into the processing plant we needed to be hired formally, generally refusing our proposal of informal period of unpaid labor. On the other side, employees – mainly young women – perceived our presence as a direct “threat”: being ourselves also two young women, their suspect was that we could have substituted them, an eventuality that was strongly eschewed especially in a periods of labor's shortage. That is why our first attempt to work inside a packinghouse was a total debacle. Nevertheless, the account of this personal failure could result interesting if analyzed through a more general methodological and theoretical perspective (configuration 1). Finally, my colleague and I managed to find a fifteen days' *ingaggio* inside a packinghouse, that used to be a well-known flourishing firm since few years ago, and that is currently undertaking a huge restructuring process, orienting its production towards other market sectors, and, as a consequence, reducing drastically its Italian and foreign labor force (configuration 2).

It is not superfluous to restate that in a labor market in which it was extremely difficult to access for a young and well-educated female researcher, the procedures of cases' selection was necessary leaded by contingencies and thus it underwent several modifications during the fieldwork to adjust rapidly to the variable situation. This does not mean that theoretical considerations were completely left behind, as it was spelled out, since it is self-evident that a researcher is almost able to find what s/he looking for (Cardano, 2011). And what my colleague and I were looking for was the possibility to “enter” inside workplaces and somehow share – even extremely partially – the feeling of “being the new ones⁷⁵”. The patient attention that our workmates devoted to explain us the tasks assigned, introducing us to their daily routines, was incredibly useful, since it conveyed with spontaneity the set of meanings they usually attribute to *their* labor experience. And the genuine openness with which they shared with us their spaces of intimacy, speaking about their current and future worries, asking us «to be attentive» and «to keep in mind their stories», was both for us and for them (I

⁷⁴ On the advantages, the limits, the moral concerns regarding covered participant observation look at the methodological appendix.

⁷⁵ As Goffman states: «The first day you'll see more than you'll ever see again. And you'll see things that you won't see again» (1989: 130).

hope) a curious and intense experiment. The next few pages, aside for transmitting my “first impressions”, are aimed at providing an overall picture of the observed environments, in order allow the reader to become familiar to the social “atmosphere” of the workplaces, and to introduce some of the figures alongside of whom this research experience was conducted. The outset of this chapter is thus devoted to this preliminary descriptive effort.

2.1. *KamariVittoria s.r.l.: from day labor to autonomous work*

The first opportunity to experiment labor inside greenhouses arrived at the beginning of March 2013, when we met Mohamed, a Tunisian man in his fifties, who immediately declared to be available “to help us with our studies”, “allowing” a period of participant observation inside his company.



Image 1. Entering inside a greenhouse. Photo by Giovanni Battaglia [Donnalucata, July 26th 2013]

He was working *a gabella*, namely he was renting the land and managing a very small firm of 12.000 square meters⁷⁶, producing two different varieties of tomatoes (*insalataro* and *cilieginò*). As he immediately told us, he reached this position after several years spent working by the day,

⁷⁶ The unit employed to measure greenhouses surface is generally the square meter. 12.000 m² corresponds to 1,2 ha. To provide an intuitive idea of the firm's dimension consider that, according to our informants, an employer needs, on average, one worker each 4.000 m² of greenhouses' surface.

picking grapes, apples and tomatoes both in the North and in South of Italy. When we asked him to compare his previous and current situation, he explained that in 1984, when he arrived in Vittoria, there was a small number of Tunisian migrants in the city, so it was quite easy to find a job in the greenhouses with a relatively good salary. «You had to work just for eight hours, for a wage up till 80.000 *lire*, and you didn't need to worry about anything else. Now, that I'm working on my own» he said with his strong Sicilian accent «*c'haiu cchiu penseri e cchiu debbiti* [I have more worries and more debts]». However, albeit always complaining for the lack of time and money, he was definitely preferring his current position, stating that «if you work by the day you can't go anywhere! You don't have enough money even to pay your home's bills!».

At half past six, in the fixed morning we met at Mohamed's place with Aida, his wife, who used to join him to "help" in the periods of picking, and Karim, his son in law, partially remunerated for his work inside the firm. «*Oi si travagghia!* [Today you have to work [hard]!]», said our "employer" to motivate us. In the way to the "countryside" – as Mohamed used to call to his workplace – we stopped at a corner to pick up another worker.

Once reached the workplace, for the first time we set foot inside a greenhouse: in the huge tunnel, a black-white plastic cloth, useful to reflect the sunlight and to avoid weed growing, covers entirely the ground; the tomatoes plants, neatly disposed, are tied at the top of the structure with nylon strings, and fixed with some plastic *clips* [rings]; thin black *manichette* [tubes], leaking water and chemical "nourishment" drop by drop, overlay entirely the land surface.



Image 2. Greenhouse in production. Photo by the author [Vittoria, April 29th 2013]

«Tomato is like a child: you have to feed him to grow up», Mohamed explained. He showed us how to deal with the plants that need to be periodically turned around the strings to grow up properly straight and strong, a task that is addressed with the expression *fare la girata*. As soon as I tried to do it myself, he warned me to pay more attention, behaving like a father nicely jealous of his offspring. «During one year», Mohamed explicated, «a greenhouse is always in production. We use to sow in October, and then we have to wait 110 days till tomatoes are ready [*campagna lunga*]. Then we transplant in April and the crop needs 70/75 days to ripen. Then in July or August we plant for the third time and in this case the plants need only 60 days to grow up. Being things like this, the crop cycle is continuous: *scippi e cianti, scippi e cianti* [you eradicate and you sow, you eradicate and you sow]. I actually preferred the traditional way of harvesting; now agriculture it is *more tiring, both for land and for people!*». Apart from the greenhouses, Mohamed property was composed by a canopy, used as a warehouse to store products; a lowly house where his brother used to live and another shack hosting one of the laborers; a sort of “domestic” yard, equipped with a

Tunisian typical oven to cook bread, a garden to grow vegetables and a space to breed some small animals for self-consumption.

As soon as we came closer to the greenhouses where the other laborers had already started to work, it was possible to hear, clearer and clearer, the metallic and rhythmic sound of their scissors. Three Tunisian guys were picking green *insalataro* tomatoes. We greeted and were greeted back with silence. Karim replied just with a smile, being acquainted of the purpose of our presence there; the second guy said «Hi», without stopping his work, while a third one just turned his face showing a rude and puzzled expression.

The guys were collecting tomatoes inside some red *panari* [buckets]; soon after completing a *vasca* [line], they had to pour the tomatoes into some black *casce* [plastic boxes] situated outside the greenhouse, bending with their arms and their trunk out of the greenhouse plastic “wall”. When the boxes were full, Mohamed carried them on his tractor; on the back of the tractor he and his wife began to separate the crops, dividing them into a first, a second and a third category, according to the quality of the products. Without knowing exactly what to do, we started shyly to help them to separate the tomatoes, discovering to be very slow in deciding the “quality level” of the vegetables. On the contrary, Mohamed and Aida were precise and quickly. They immediately recognize and separate the “most beautiful” (the biggest, with the nicest color), that they called *facce* [faces]. When I asked the reason of the name, Mohamed shook his shoulders saying that he learned it from “the Italians” and that he ignored its origin. Our work was strictly organized: we were filling together with Mohamed the first half of the boxes putting inside medium and small-sized tomatoes; then we were passing them to Aida who completed the cases disposing the *facce* in a nice composition since she was designated to care at the “aesthetic” aspects. These boxes were now ready to be sent to the fruits and vegetables market in Vittoria, to be sold at 1€ per kilo for the first selection, 80 cents for the second one.

All the employees were working in a quick and synchronic way, as parts of an assembly-line. At a certain moment another man came to work with us, reaching the workplace later. He was taking the tomatoes on the tractor and making his own boxes in a slow and relaxed manner that clashed with the work rhythm of the other employees. He deliberately was not taking part in the assembly-line, but no one made any comment on his behavior. Later on, we discovered that he was Mohamed elder brother, Ben Ali. At the end of the first two hours, Mohamed was quite satisfied to have collected 84 boxes, 30 more than the previous day.

Few minutes later, we were also asked to be inside the greenhouse, harvesting – this time – *cilieginio* tomato. None of the laborers, included us, was wearing gloves or other protections. «*Chilli russi russi* [Pick just the red ones]!», explains Mohamed curtly, before leaving us to work with the rest of

the team. I started to collect tomatoes in the same line as Aida, asking her suggestions before cutting every tomato bunch. She was accomplishing her task in a calm and precise way, showing enthusiasm for every “beautiful” tomato she was picking [*bellu chistu!*]. Aida spoke a hard-earned Sicilian, (almost no Italian, as her husband), nevertheless the conversation was fluid and pleasant. She spoke about their four children, about her family of origin and their business activities in Tunisia. At a certain point, I was quite curious to turn the conversation back to the jobsite, and I asked her some information about the other members of the team. Chadi, the man with a sweet expression that greeted us at the outset of the working day, was employed by Mohamed since two years and a half. «He has no documents, *meschino* [poor thing], so he can’t go back to Tunisia; there he has two daughters, and he never met the youngest. But after all – she explained – this is a quite common problem among Tunisians. I have a cousin that has been clandestine for 14 years. And now he is marrying a girl from Ragusa to have the Italian citizenship. It costs just 5.000 €, but – continued with spontaneity – they do not need to sleep really together. It’s just a matter of papers!». I was quite amused and at the same time very surprised to notice how fast the intimacy among us grew while working side by side. Soon after, I interrogated Aida about the other laborer who behave so rudely with us during the morning, but she did not know his name, since he had been working with them just for four days. Attracted by his apparent rudeness, I moved to work in his line. «*Ca bbanna, drra bbanna* [one side is yours, the other is mine]» he admonished curtly. His style of work was completely different from Aida’s, for instance. He rushed and was imprecise, putting together tomatoes and leaves, without taking too much care about the “quality” of the output.

Ahmed: So, you’re doing an internship here in the greenhouse!

Valeria: Yes, a sort of..

A.: Thus, you look at how the job looks like, and then you go back home and you write it down, isn’t it?

V.: Yes, it works almost like this..

A.: And so, why couldn’t you stand there and watch without working? Are you fool or what?

V.: Ehm, I thought it would have been very different simply to look or to do things practically!

A.: And do you like it now?

V.: Well, it’s getting harder and harder... here it’s too hot... there are strong “smells” of plants, medicines and “human beings”, I’m not used to them... and my back begins to ache now... but it’s still ok. And you? Do you like this job?

A.: Me?! Are you crazy? Nobody likes this job! You do it just to fill your stomach, for 30 € per day!

V.: And couldn’t you find any other job?

A.: For Tunisians here there is just agriculture!

[Vittoria, March 8th 2013]

«For Tunisians here there is just agriculture!»: a refrain that I used to hear very often. Ahmed was not a rude guy («like a thorn», as Karim described him); he was just embittered for spending his time either in search of a job or toiling in the plastic factories, with no other options, according to

him, to better his lot. He was a 32 year old guy, coming for Gafsa, where he used to work as a glass-maker. He was in Italy since five years, and after a short period of unemployment in his brother's place in Pordenone, he attempted to eke out a living in Vittoria.

V.: How do you get to know Mohamed?

A.: I don't know him. He picked me up in Piazza Senia few days ago. I work some days here some other days there, I don't have a fixed place. I work by the day. I was working in a peppers greenhouse till last week, with an Italian man that paid me 35 € for eight hours. Now I'm working for almost ten hours, earning just 30 €, and I can't even complain about that with no one here, 'cause they all are Mohamed's relatives. I don't like to work for the Arabs!

[Vittoria, March 8th, 2013]

His account of the employer recruitment practices actually corresponds to Mohamed's one. When we asked the entrepreneur how he usually finds his workers, he specified that, aside from two fixed laborers (only one of them with a contract), in the periods of picking he passes by Piazza Senia, "Tunisians'" main square in Vittoria, to hire workers *a giornata*; or eventually he relies on someone else suggestions. Rigorously he hires exclusively his *paisani* [Tunisians fellows].

M.: I ask to the laborer: «*Quantu ti pigghi?* [How much do you want?]. Usually, the wage here is around 30 or 20 € per day, but someone could work also for less money. And then, if he is experienced, I actually give him the amount we previously agreed. *Si un sa mancu teniri 'na rosa di pomodori 'nte manu, mancu 10 € ci dugnu!* [If he is not experienced, he won't even have 10 €!]. You have to be smart to select the workers: it is not convenient, for example, to hire those who are clandestines or those who are just arrived in Vittoria.

V.: And how do you know it?

M.: Here in Vittoria we all know each other. You can recognize who is residing in Sicily since 10 years or the ones who just moved from Tunisia or from the North of Italy.

V.: So, you usually don't hire them with a contract!

M.: No, it is not necessary. Aside if they expressly ask for "this favor", paying their own part of the expense. In that case I can help them, as Italian people also do. [Vittoria, March 3rd, 2013]

In the meanwhile, I could hear Giuliana, who was working side by side with Karim, talking with him about Italian politics, a topic that Karim seemed to master properly. Karim is a 31 year old guy, coming from Sousse, where he was working in a shoe factory. When he was in Tunisia, one of his cousins proposed him to come to Italy, asking for money in exchange of a seasonal (formalized) employment. According to Karim account, when he arrived in Trentino, certain that he had to collect apples, he did not find any employer; moreover, after three months, his seasonal document expired with no possibility of renewal. Thus, he had no other chances aside from moving to Vittoria, where another relative, Mohamed indeed, could give him an informal job. Soon after, Karim married Mohamed's elder daughter, regularizing his document situation, but binding his future to a life and an occupation that he strongly dislikes. He was so fed up with it, that he did not lose the opportunity to ask us to look for a job, since he did not have any spare time to do it.

In the long months of our permanence in Vittoria, both Ahmed and Karim got very close to us, introducing us to numerous others *paisani*, offering their company in several situations and places where Tunisians use to spend time, informing us of things "happening around", and in the case of

Ahmed also attempting to provide occasions to work inside greenhouses; their presence has been, thus, pivotal for our research.

Before leaving the countryside, I interrogated Karim about Chadi's place, situated behind the greenhouses.

K.: It's better for him to stay here, so every morning he is already on the jobsite. The house is ok, supplied with water and electricity; and he can use a bike whenever he wants to reach the city center to shop or do something else.

[Vittoria, March 8th, 2013]

But when I asked him if I could visit the place, he brusquely replied that it was impossible, because «*E' troppu tinta, troppu tinta!*»[it's too ugly!].

At the end of this first working day, Mohamed thanked us treating Giuliana and me several kilos of vegetables that he used to produce for his family. Before leaving, I was really embarrassed to reply to his last question:

M.: *Ti piaccia a vita accussi?* [Do you like this kind of life?]

V.: *Beh, è dura..* [Well, it seems though!]

M.: *E' dura, e sempre senza soldi si!* [Yes, it's tough and you are always without money!]

[Vittoria, March 8th, 2013]

2.2 Gurrieri Firm: a step back to day labor

We started to work for Franco at the beginning of April 2013. He was a quite big producer in Donnalucata, a village that constitutes the ideal eastern “border” of the transformed belt. The Gurrieri s.r.l. is a firm of 40.000 square meters, producing three different varieties of tomatoes (*insalataro*, *ciliegin* and *motechino*). The company was able to send its product directly in the North of Italy or abroad. «Here in Sicily we grow tomato, there in Milan they grow money» Franco used to say ironically. «They left us just labor, and if we are not so careful, also debts». His rhetoric, of being situated in a *land of extraction of raw materials*, whose profits enriched mainly other subjects on the national territory, represents a quite diffuse narrative among the local entrepreneurs. Franco used to hire seven “fixed” workers and, for the periods of picking, he used to employ one or two additional Tunisian laborers. At the beginning of spring 2013, Giuliana and I occupied these two vacant positions without receiving any remuneration. The entire team was very happy to “host” us for a short period, hailing us as a novelty that could break the monotony of their job. Franco introduced us to Mimi, his foreman, asking him to “take care” of us. While explaining our tasks, Mimi briefly accounted for this working life. He has been working for Gurrieri s.r.l. since almost 9 months, but he has been an agricultural worker since already 20 years. His story epitomizes the numerous situations of people hit by the recession in the agricultural sector. In fact, he started to

work with his father, owing the land and the company. Then – he accounted – a huge hailstorm in 2004 destroyed completely their greenhouses, and they did not have enough money to start again with their own production; so – he said sadly – after seven years employed as a truck driver, he came back «working by the day». Also the other Italian members of the team told us similar stories, individuating some significant turning points in their biographies⁷⁷, such as moments in which life changed drastically, and the fate “pushed them back” to day labor. Antonio, for instance, another member of the team, was a 34 year old guy who had to face a similar experience. His father was renting the land and managing a small firm. Antonio started to work with him when he was 15. Then his father got ill and died. Antonio’s family had to dismantle the greenhouses and close the firm. «Now I’m working by the day to repay my loans», he explained. Peppe, instead, a 53 year old man, narrated about a less painful but equally precarious work experience. He used to work as a sharecropper [*mezzadro*], but with that occupation he could not earn a sufficient amount of money to sustain his family. So, he left the agricultural sector for the constructions, where he managed to have a higher salary. He performed several other unskilled jobs, till coming back to agriculture again, working by the day initially picking water melon in a smaller company. At that moment, he was preferring to be employed inside the tomato greenhouses: even if it was less remunerative, at least in Franco’s company the salary used to be paid regularly. It was chatting with them about their past, that I started to grasp one of the numerous meanings that the expression *travagghiari a jornata* tends to assume: my workmates, in fact, even holding a job contract that used to be renewed yearly, tended to refer to their position as “daily workers” in order to underline their downwards social mobility paths.

For Alessandro, instead, “day labor” epitomized a totally different experience. He was the youngest of the team (19 years old), and he left school when he was 14, to start working inside his uncle’s greenhouse. For family reasons, he left this previous jobsite and looked for another employer. At Franco’s firm he had not a job contract at the moment of our fieldwork. That is why he refers to himself as a “daily laborer”, being acquainted that «one day or another» he could be left without a job. His perception of being extremely precarious was not only a “subjective” feeling, since also the other team’s members shared his observations. Peppe, for instance, explained: «Here Alessandro is the first one who is going to be dismissed [*è il primo che salta*], if Franco decides to reduce his labor force».

During our first “training” day inside the company, Peppe introduced me to the only Tunisian member of the team (Yassin, called Gigi), with such a rude statement:

⁷⁷ On this point, see Strauss (1959) and Denzin (1989).

Peppi: *Cu iddru nun ci parlamu!* [We don't talk to him!]

V.: Why?

P.: *Su'na brutta rrazza!* [He is a fucking nigger!]

[Donnalucata, March 18th, 2013]⁷⁸

It was quite surprising for me to hear such a straightforward racist affirmation. I tried to investigate the reasons of his anger, asking – for instance – whether they used to receive a different salary.

Peppi: No, here all of us earn 35 € per day. In addition the firm “pays 102 days”⁷⁹ for each employer, that is the sufficient threshold to apply for unemployment subsidy and family allowances. We are five in my family, so I get around 6 thousand € per year. Also Gigi receives almost the same amount from the Italian social security service, even if his family is in Tunisia! Moreover, he earns more than us, ‘cause he has got a second job: he works in a vineyard twice per week and he is the night watchman of another firm. And then he doesn't pay any rent living in the countryside!

[Donnalucata, April 8th, 2013]

Even if these racist statements appeared to me quite strong, few hours later, after working side by side with Gigi, I was also feeling towards him a certain annoyance. He was working fast and “dirty”, as my companions said, namely he was very imprecise, and with his forced fast rhythm pushed his fellows to keep his pace. He was constantly making annoying jokes or singing for hours the same refrain to disturb the team. He was accused to be the “informer” of the boss, using to tell Franco that «the laborers tend to make too many breaks». These were some of the reasons why he was totally isolated, being his “ethnicity” a stronger argumentation to justify his marginality.

A different type of relationship was existing between the four Italians and the Albanian couple. With their sweet and helpful attitude, they appeared to be an extremely positive presence for the group. Afrim, the energetic man in his sixties, one day during a lunch break, told us his troubled life story, being an undocumented migrant on the Italian territory for several years (since 1994). The moment during which he told us his work experiences and his difficulties to obtain a residence permit turned into one of the funniest and most touching collective situation during our permanence at Franco's firm. Afrim's wife, Wera, an active and sweet woman in her fifties, joined her husband in Italy in 2003; soon after her arrival, they both started to work inside the greenhouses in order to be employed in the same work environment. They have been in Gurrieri's company since seven years. Their experience, together with that of Gigi (eleven years), was the longest among the team members. For the Italians, instead – at the time of our fieldwork – the experience at Gurrieri's have

⁷⁸ This date correspond to our first “training day” in the firm that preceded the period of “employment” in the company [8-21 April 2013].

⁷⁹ It is frequent to use the short form “days” [in Italian *giorni* or *giornate*] to refer to the “daily social security contributions” that should be paid by the firm for each agricultural worker employed. Moreover, expressions like “to pay the days” [*pagare le giornate*], “to declare the days” [*dichiarare le giornate*], “to give the days” [*dare le giornate*] or “to have got the days” [*avere le giornate*] are commonly used with the same meaning.

started more recently (less than one year), indicating that even a medium-sized company like the one observed tends to have a quite high workforce turn over.

Even if it was a “young formed” team, aside from the role of Gigi, the atmosphere within the group was actually very friendly and relaxed, and this helped us to feel “welcomed” in our “new job”, and to spend there a very nice period. When Mimi for the first time spoke with us about the other laborers, he nicely said:

Mimi: Here we are like a family, we use to stay all together, to joke, to chat.. you have to toil, yes, but in this way the working day goes faster.

[Donnalucata, March 18th, 2013]

Their way of behaving among each other, in fact, was fraught with a certain “familiar attitude”: to show closeness, for instance, they used to call each other with “familiar” nicknames, the most common of whom was *cusci*’ [cousin] (Fine, 2009)⁸⁰. Especially towards us (“the new ones”) and towards Alessandro (the youngest of the team), the other workers show a certain *paternalistic* attitude (in the twofold meaning of being protective and – at the same time – feeling in the position of exerting a certain power degree).

When we move into the “new” greenhouse, is mainly Peppe that explains to me the job: we have to take away the *burgi* of the tomato plants, namely that small braches that start for the plant’s fork. At the beginning I almost can’t see the *burgio*; little by little it becomes more and more mechanical to notice them. Peppe teaches me with a lot of patience, without being too pressing, overseeing me softly. He says that this is the type of task that he prefers. He teaches me several curious things: for example, that the plants growing at the bottom, attached to tomato roots are “wild” branches, so they have a different smell; he tells me that the *burgi* we are taking away become proper tomato plants if put them in the ground. At the end, he tells me for a couple of time that I’m doing well: he seems quite proud of me.

[Donnalucata, April 8th, 2013]

Also Wera showed towards all of us a very maternal attitude. With her it was quite easy to create spaces of intimacy, often resting nestled on our legs while working in the lines, to slow down the work rhythm and chat in a friendly manner.

The first working day sounds like a curious experience both for us and for our workmates. Going out of the greenhouse we all had the feeling of getting rid of a “character”; leaving the workplace was like leaving a stage and coming back to our “normal” lives. At the end of the day, Peppe felt free to provide us with some suggestions: «The greenhouse is not the kind of place that fits you, girls. Please, tomorrow do not come! It would be nice to meet you again, but not inside such an

⁸⁰ As G.A. Fine (2009) clearly explains, “nicknames” are one of the most fruitful indicators to be considered, in order to understand the *idioculture*, namely the culture generated through the everyday interactions in the small groups. To analyze the workers’ team in terms of a *small group*, as Fine suggests, could be helpful to individuate how certain cultural constructs, such as gender or ethnicity, are concretely experienced inside the workplace, and not simply generically predicated.

ugly place». «That's not appropriate for a woman», Alessandro added. Before leaving, Wera and Afrim insisted to give us as a present a package of candies: «As if you were our daughters», they said while greeting us.

2.3 SicilSerre: how the day labor "system" usually works

Almost at the end of the fieldwork, in June 2013, another opportunity to carry out some days of work in the greenhouse was offered me by my Tunisian friend, Ahmed, who received from Giovanni, a friendly Vittorian around 60 years old, the request to find another laborer to be employed for a brief period⁸¹.

I met Ahmed, working at Mohamed's greenhouse, where he was employed by the day. On that prior occasion, he and his companions had been informed that my "abnormal" presence in the greenhouse could be due to purposes of study. During this experience, however, neither the employer nor the other workers were aware of the real purposes of my being there. This certainly had an ambivalent effect. On the one hand it permitted me to observe from within the dynamics of negotiation and labor relations, to which, in practice, I took part alongside the other; but on the other hand, unlike the various experiences of participant observation conducted throughout the course of research, during which it was possible to come to an agreement with employers on a more or less long period of stay in the field, in this circumstance I found myself entangled in the dynamics and strict rules of day labor: those who work at the pace decided by the employer remain; those who cannot, remain without a job. Although I already had the opportunity to learn some of the techniques used in this type of agriculture previously, my slowness and my lack of physical endurance, made me completely inadequate for this type of job, and not, as is sometimes claimed, because it was "a man's job" (see ch. V). However, the difficulty of the work and my lack of experience did not allow me to reach a sufficient yield, so each time, at the end of the day, I was in the situation of having to rely much more on my persuasive skills than on my skills as a farmworker, to convince my employer to let me "stay". I therefore had to "gain his confidence" as a worker, as well as an observer, which made it even more difficult to stay in the field. On the research level, this meant

⁸¹ The mechanism of informal recruitment of male and female workers is often by word of mouth. As we have seen, most of the companies of the zone have a small or very small area (i.e. less than two hectares), and therefore need to hire about two or three people. The recruitment is done then usually through networks of friendship, kinship and "community." Rarely does one experience the phenomena of actual illegal hiring, although it was still found to have occurred during the research. Cases of illegal hiring encountered involved mostly citizens of Eastern Europe (Romanians and Bulgarians) and, to a lesser extent, Tunisian migrants. More widespread however is the phenomenon of brokering in exchange of a one-time payment. The situation is very different with regard to the collection of melons in open fields in nearby Ispica, and the harvest of potatoes in the Syracuse area (see Galesi, Mangano, 2010; IRES, 2011).

that interactions in the workplace were observed for a very short period of time, which far and away limited the possibility to analyze these dynamics. Nevertheless the covered participant observation proved to be a key tool for investigating and taking part in some of the dynamics (such as daily wage negotiations and the push and pull of getting oneself hired for the following day)⁸².

It is my first day of work. The appointment was set at 5.30 in Piazza Busacca. I climb in Giovanni's car not without worry. I try to talk as little as possible, as Ahmed advised me to do. The uncle (as Ahmed calls him) asks immediately if I am Romanian. Women of Romanian nationality, in fact, are the only ones that "search" for day work in the Piazza. "No, I am Calabrian", I respond. "Ah, in Calabria you all eat spicy."

[Vittoria, June 10th 2013]

It is the only sentence I wrote down in my diary about that first conversation, the only one Giovanni managed to utter to mask his sense of disorientation at finding himself in the car with a young Italian woman, and «with schooling» (as he'll say to me a little later), rather than a robust Tunisian guy, as he had expected. «Today she's here, ok?» Ahmed said dryly without a reply from the uncle. From that moment on, Giovanni made several assumptions about my presence in the greenhouse, all more or less plausible. From time to time I tried to take advantage of his beliefs and sew around myself the persona he offers (Adler, Adler, 1987; Semi, 2010a): the girlfriend of Ahmed, a friend to whom Ahmed "owed favors", or a person who is taking advantage of a broker, imagining thus Ahmed in the role of *caporale*. As time passes, his suspicions toward me diminish, rendering the climate between us more relaxed, though even now I doubt they have been completely dispelled.

The SicilSerre, where we were informally recruited to work, is a small farm that produces mainly *insalataro* tomatoes and to a lesser extent eggplants. Ahmed, who previously worked in a greenhouse where they grew peppers, investigated the reasons for the choice⁸³. «The pepper» said the uncle «is actually more profitable and requires the input of less labor. The tomato instead is less profitable and requires more work⁸⁴. Yet, while the tomato has a very short production cycle, the pepper is slower. The tomatoes that have just been transplanted [in June] will be collected in August. If you need cash more quickly, therefore, you are forced to plant tomatoes». So most of the

⁸² On the advantages, the disadvantages and the ethic concerns underling a period of covered participant observation see the par. 7 in the methodological Appendix.

⁸³ In my fieldnotes this one is reported as an unusual episode, because generally, in the different contexts observed, it was more common to notice that laborers, especially those forced to work by the day, show little knowledge and little interest in the dynamics of the produce distribution and in the mechanisms governing the supply chain. The most common reply to my questions it was, in fact: «I don't know! Is the boss who is dealing with these things» (see chap. III par. 6.2).

⁸⁴ To be precise, Giovanni is referring to the less expensive varieties of tomato that he used to cultivate. According to the price list produced daily in the Vittoria's fruit and vegetable Market [*mercuriale*], and according to the interviews, it is estimated that the price of tomato can vary between 20 and 90 cents per kilogram for the less expensive varieties, such as the *insalataro* or the *tondo liscio*. The price can vary between 40 cents and 2.30 € for the highest quality of tomato, such as the *datterino* or the *cilieginio* (cherry tomato). Instead, the price of a kilogram of peppers can fluctuate between 25 cents and 1.8 €.

agricultural utilized surface in the district is destined for the cultivation of different varieties of table tomatoes.

During the first day of work in the greenhouse, Giovanni tells me that before us a couple of Romanians were employed in the company, Gabriela, 28, and Petru, 31. They had worked with him for about two years before deciding to return to Romania. «I like the *system* that is here!» he recalled. «The system» consists in the employment of Romanian labor at a salary of 25 € per day, rather than the 30 € usually asked by young Tunisians. «In return» the employer provides a «house» in the country, namely a tool shed or cabin, generally very small, badly isolated – thus either too cold or too hot – often overcrowded, located right in the middle of the greenhouse area. A further advantage of employing Romanian labor, Giovanni explained to me, is that «they usually do not “request” a work contract, whereas the Tunisians do because they need it for their immigration documents». Despite the fact that the “system” is well known and taken for granted in the area, I ask myself why the uncle let his guard down with me – an employee – with this kind of “confidences”. The answer arrived in another conversation in which Giovanni tells me: «Mind you, because you're Italian, you should understand me too. It's not that I'm taking advantage of the situation. You have to understand!»

From the first day we discover that my presence and that of Ahmed in the greenhouse is really precarious. The uncle has already contacted a Romanian worker, Nicola, inviting him to take the place of the previous workers. Giovanni tells me right away that Nicola will live in the country and this will give the employers a number of other advantages in addition to the lower salary mentioned above, such as being able to fix more flexible hours or the availability of a night watchman on his property. Nicola is a Romanian around 40 years old and he had just arrived in Vittoria. Before he worked as a carpenter in Rome. «I earned about 80/100 € per day», he recounted «that yes, that was a good job». He had already worked in the greenhouse some years before, in 2011, and understood the difficulty of the work from which he had tried to escape, but the closure of many construction sites in the capital had brought him South yet again, because his three children at home «were asking for money». Nicola came from Bacau, in Northeast Romania, like many Romanians living in Vittoria.

Repeating the rumor of the town center, Ahmed often reiterated: «In Vittoria there is no work because there is always a Romanian willing to take your place by asking a lower wage». The issue of competition between Tunisian and Romanian workers, in fact, is seen as a very pressing problem particularly for the former. During the period in which we work for Giovanni's business, these competitive pressures take the form of a veritable «contest», as the uncle defined it, between Ahmed and Nicola to decide which of them will be “hired” for an extended period. Although the

participants clearly recognize from the outset the crushing logic of the competitive game that clearly brings a frantic increase in the pace of work, they cannot dispense with it (Burawoy, 1979). The pace of work of the week is therefore marked by a constant scramble to be considered the faster, the better, the more productive worker. The competition draws to an end with the choice on the part of the employer to employ Nicola. Following the latter's refusal to submit to the harsh conditions imposed by the uncle, Giovanni will hire Ahmed for about four months. In the face of a continued delay in payment, even the Tunisian guy will abandon the job and will be replaced by a pair of young Romanians paid, at present, 15 € per day. The events related to the employment of labor by SicilSerre are examples of a relatively widespread dynamic in the local labor market, often characterized, as in this case, by high turnover (especially in the case of small companies that do not formalize the working positions of employees) and a squeeze on wages, which, according to the testimonies collected, appears to be an increasingly common experience in the transformed littoral strip.

2.4 JustTomatoes: precariousness and competition inside a packinghouse

In March 2013, we had our first opportunity to experiment the job inside a packinghouse, with the availability of the prospective employer to be eventually hired later on. JustTomatoes was a small packinghouse, with 16 workers, 4 male and 12 female; all of them were Italian. The manager introduced us to the supervisor saying that we were coming from the University, in search of a sort of internship. The overseer shows us our desks and explains our tasks. We had to pack several types of vegetables (*ciliegi*, aubergines, zucchini) inside small *vaschette* [plastic boxes], and then slot them in bigger *vassoi* or *padelloni* [paper boxes]. The “packing procedures” were organized in a specific way, in order to take into account mainly aesthetic as well as volume considerations. According to the type of crop, we were expected to *fare il cuscino*, *usare il fazzolettino*, *fare lo stirato*, *lavorare la (zucchina) 20 e la 23 separatamente* [to pack the (zucchini) 20 or 23 separately] and so on: all expressions totally unclear for a “new one”. Obviously, no job for the first time is easy to be performed, and even those deemed “unskilled” require numerous competences (Ehrenreich, 2002; Holmes, 2013); so, we should have appeared to our workmates as clumsy and uncomfortable in our positions. Carmela, our team leader, together with the other workers started rudely to laugh at us; Carmela, was also quite verbally aggressive with us: «Have you thought that this was an easy job? Well, actually now you can see that it's not!»; «do they teach you these kind of things at school? Maybe they don't!». All the other employees barely talked to us, but they

loudly spoke among themselves about us, as if we were not there, or if we were not able to understand their language. It was extremely embarrassing. I was also object of a bad misunderstanding. Carmela asked me which university I was attending. I replied that I came from Milan University. Since they supposed that I, myself, came from Milan, a sort of territorial pride strongly rose in them, and I openly became the object of their tough jokes: «Have you ever seen an eggplant in Milan?»; «These tomatoes we are working here are going to be eaten by rich Milanese people». Even if I was going on to repeat in my mind that this was just the expression of a deep anger, nevertheless I was above to cry. Their affirmations were intertwining a mix of class and territorial claims, totally legible and understandable for me in that precise moment, even though I was not prepared to face so much hostility inside a workplace.

And moreover, during the morning shift Franca reached the packinghouse. Franca was a 31 year old Italian employee. She was one of the numerous packinghouses female workers forced to manage their heavy family burden with more than one waged labor. Very often, in fact, being the employment so uneven and low paid (on average 4 € per hour), one unique source of income is not sufficient to afford everyday life. Franca, thus, was enduring random night shifts in another company and more frequently day shifts for JustTomatoes. That day, however, she felt too tired to avoid completely to sleep, and she said to the boss that she was ill, in order to stay at home and rest. Unfortunately, though, she was warned by her colleagues about our presence in the lines and she suddenly showed up, screaming:

Franca: I am out of work for one single day, and you guys, immediately substitute me with these two girls?.

Carmela: No, keep calm, they are here just for “the school”⁸⁵!

F.: The school?! *Io pure c’ho le scuole* [I have been at school too!]

[Donnalucata, March 19th, 2013]

Franca was actually very worried about the eventuality of being dismissed. The frequent turnover is, in fact, the main employees’ fear. The laborers’ aggressive reaction against us epitomizes the high level of perceived insecurity faced by workers who are seriously concerned of losing their job. To be employed in a packinghouse means to be compelled to work on the base of a daily call, for an amount of hours that you generally do not know in advance. In the majority of the small packinghouses, in fact, shifts are usually not planned in advance; the amount of labor required depends on the orders that the company receives daily, and on the quantity of product coming from local growers that is ready “to be worked”. The just-in-time system of production, thus, transfers on laborers the social costs of eating fresh food (Gertel, Sippel, 2014). That is why workers live their

⁸⁵ Their choice to employ the word “school” instead of “University” was actually not casual. It indicates another manner through which the team leader and the laborers attempted to infantilize us.

routines at the mercy of a phone call coming from the packinghouse, asking them to be on the jobsite in 20 minutes, a call that they could also not get for several days⁸⁶. These set of considerations became clearer for us during our experience in TomatoesArtists, the firm that “hosted” my colleague and I for a period of 15 days, almost at the end of our fieldwork. Our negative experience inside JustTomatoes, in fact, affected badly our perception concerning the accessibility of packinghouses; it took quite a lot of time, in fact, to “recover” from the feelings of frustration and anxiety generated by this previous experience, and to look again for a job in that sector. Moreover, numerous entrepreneurs we initially contacted did not agree with the proposal of hiring us “informally” for a sort of internship, as greenhouse employer did without too much concerns. In their case – they usually say – they could not risk to have two laborers inside the shop floor without any labor insurance.

2.5 TomatoesArtists: working at the mercy of a phone call

It was just at mid-June, thus, that we managed to be formally enrolled by TomatoesArtists. Before “trusting” us, our perspective employer, Mario, met my colleague and me several times, during which we conducted a long and articulated interview regarding his personal biography. He depicted himself as a self-made-man, who started to work by the day in his father firm, and was able, through his genuine efforts and his stubbornness, to enlarge the family business till covering a quite big share of the vegetable supply chain. In fact, the company – aside from the packinghouse – was currently encompassing other branches, namely the greenhouses and a channel of distribution (owing a point of sale [*box* or *posteggio*] at the Santa Croce fruit and vegetable market). Moreover, it was also trying to extend its business investing in the clean energy sector, intertwining the new form of revenue with the horticulture: below the surface of the solar panels, in fact, the entrepreneur was planning to start up a cultivation of ornamental plants growing in the shadow. Furthermore, the peculiarity of the firm was that, with its 30 ha of greenhouses, it was the biggest organic producer in Sicily⁸⁷. Scrutinizing the motivations leading the entrepreneurs to embrace the organic methods of production, it was quite straightforward to notice that being competitive on the market was his predominant concern (he was indeed justifying his statements through a *market world's register*); some considerations belonging to the *civic order of worth* were also occasionally raised (Boltanski

⁸⁶ Even working “on call”, as numerous other typology of employees, packinghouse laborers usually do not defined themselves as “on call workers”. This could depend, ostensibly, to the different typology of job contract through which they are hired, namely the farmworkers short term job contract (*Contratto Collettivo Nazionale Operai Agricoli e Florovivaisti, a tempo determinato*).

⁸⁷ The source of this information is the company very website.

and Thèvenot, 2006), whilst environmental and health worries were evidently subordinated to economic profit⁸⁸. During our fieldwork, the company was concretely undertaking this restructuring process, shifting the focus of investment from the agricultural to the energy sector; thus, it was drastically reducing the personnel, passing from around 300 employees inside the packinghouse and the greenhouses to few tens of laborers in both the workplaces. For external observers, thus, the firm «was above to fail». The company cash shortage was evident, even if the owners revenues, coming also from other activities in the touristic and the construction sectors, seem to be nevertheless quite prosperous, albeit fiercely hit by the economic crisis.

Before being employed in TomatoesArtists, we consulted a trade unionist friend who immediately forewarned us: «the boss is a slave-owner [*è uno schiavista*]. We had hundreds of legal action towards that company but with almost no results».

When we entered the first time into the firm, the environment was actually desolate: «it was like an atomic bomb exploded among the lines», Giuliana commented. Very few people were busy inside that huge building, conveying a sense of emptiness and abandonment. Notwithstanding this “atomic day-after landscape”, the other workers (who had been previously informed of our presence to conduct an “internship”) were extremely welcoming, even with some exceptions.

We start to work at 9.15 a.m. We start with the pinto bean. At that time there is no one in the processing lines, except Davide, the packinghouse overseer, and Pavli. Davide is a 30 year old guy. It is quite a long time that he is employed by this packinghouse. While explaining our tasks Davide is extremely available and relaxed; differently from Carmela, the JustTomatoe's supervisor, he doesn't seem obsessed at all to teach us the perfect “technique” to wrap vegetables! He let us work on our own, an attitude that put us immediately at ease.

Pavli is the man in front of me in the line. He starts saying, with a really friendly attitude, that he usually passes by Calabria when traveling to his country. He is Albanian, from Durazzo and he is in Italy since more than ten years.

After almost half an hour arrive also Aleksandra (a 65 year old Polish woman) and Fathima (a 40 year old Tunisian woman). They are both very sweet: as soon as they reach the workplace, they come to introduce to us nicely.

Fathima is from Monastir, and she has already been in Italy for 15 years. In Tunisia she was working in a trousers factory, but she decided to join her husband, who has been in Italy since more than 20 years. During her first period in Sicily, she worked inside the greenhouses that his husband was managing. He was a sharecropper, and she was helping him. Then, since they needed money, she decided to start her own work. At the beginning, she was employed for a period inside a packinghouse. Then, when she became a mother, she had to stop with her job, due to the night shifts and to the fact that, living in the countryside, it was quite difficult to reach the workplace. Then, as soon as they rented a small house in Santa Croce city center, she started to work again, this time inside TomatoesArtist.

Aleksandra is an over-sixty-year-old woman, and she is in Italy together with her husband. She has a 39 year old daughter living in Poland, who, in turn, has tree children. Is quite a long time that Aleksandra doesn't meet them, because during last year she had no money for travelling.

In the lines, there is also an Algerian girl. She is the only one who, as soon as she saw us, seems a bit concerned about our presence. She asks to Fathima in Arabic: “Who are them?”; and Fathima replies in Italian: “*Sono due nuove amiche*” [They are two new friends], attempting to muffle her

⁸⁸ Recorded interviews with Mario on 2nd, 7th and 10th of May 2013. It is thus curious to notice that, throughout the commodity circuit, the set of meanings and added values attached to the organic crops tend to shift drastically from the production to the consumption side.

hateful tone. We immediately explain that we are “doing an internship”, only for 10-15 days, but that we haven't been employed here”. “Of course, cause here there is no job!”, is her bitter answer. When we start to work in the afternoon, soon after the lunch break, other women join the previous group in the plant. Megi and Darjana, among them, join our line. Megi is Pavli's wife, and Darjana is his cousin. They are both smiley and easygoing. Megi introduces to us with two kisses, so I do the same with Darjana. [...]. Darjana is 52 years old. She says that she used to work inside greenhouses helping her husband, who was also a sharecropper. But this was happening almost 10 years before.

[...]

In the meanwhile, a second group is working in a parallel line. We discover quite soon that they are actually employed by our boss brother, and that between the two teams, there is the “informal prescription” to avoid communication among each other! In this second group there are four women: Giovanna, the overseer, is extremely kind with me and Giuli.

[Santa Croce Camerina, June 17th, 2013]

The person who was more talkative and open with us, since our first day in the shop floor, was our foreman, Davide. He was very keen on “introducing” us to the workplace, with a sort of genuine attitude, he was not proud and not even ashamed of the diffuse “wheel and deal” atmosphere.

Davide makes different accounts that presented us the packinghouse as a place characterized by “exchanges” and mutual favors. «Here we always have politicians all around», he says. He lists – without providing a negative judgment – the numerous properties owned by the company's entrepreneurs: the greenhouses firm, the processing plant, a point of sale in Santa Croce fruit and vegetables market, the land that they used to invest into the green energy sector (with the installation of solar panels under which they are planning to produce shadow plants), a famous disco in the seaside area, summerhouses to rent, liberty style villas in Catania city center, and so on and so forth. I ask whether their family was already so rich. And Davide replies that it wasn't. «They grew on their own – he says –. It was thanks to public funding and politicians' help». His way to inform us of this situation is never derogatory or “moralistic”; he provides us a disenchanting picture of a quite diffuse situation that, according to him is the only one leading to economic success.

[Santa Croce Camerina, June 17th 2013]

For Davide, the attitude leading the entrepreneur to be embedded in this sort of “networks” providing mutual “advantages” to their participants was deemed to be quite “natural”:

In general this was his idea of how the world works: favors, political closeness, funding go hand in hand. And so the entrepreneurs are described as “protected” by someone playing a powerful role. «Do you know how many times I received a phone call by the Fiscal Police's chief or by a politician saying: “Davide, tonight I invited some people for dinner. Can you prepare a vegetable box for me”, and, of course, I said yes». This episode, exactly as Davide described it, occurred this afternoon. A well-dressed gentleman enters in the packinghouse and goes to talk to Davide. I ask Darjana who he is, and she replies that she doesn't know. Seeing my curiosity, Davide approaches me and whispers: «That man is a Fiscal Police's colonel and asked for two boxes». [...] Then, once back in the lines, Davide told me that the visitor asked him: «Do you go dancing from time to time? So fine! I'll give you my number so you can enter somewhere without paying».

[Santa Croce Camerina, June 17th, 2013]

In his discourses, he described his employer's attitude as quite typical for “being in Sicily”. The “Sicilianity” was thus the category that he used to frame these type of behaviors.

Davide: Today you are gonna see another example of what Sicily is today. It's gonna come a farmer to take the zucchini that yesterday we discarded for the cows.

Valeria: Is he gonna pay or is he gonna take them for free?

D.: He'll pay 8 boxes and he'll give him 13. In return he always comes back with cheeses and other things... [...] There is also a man from company producing pickles who always comes here to take our waste. Can you imagine how many *caponate* we gain in return for that?

[Santa Croce Camerina, June 18th, 2013]

It is interesting to notice that, within his reasoning, these two episodes appear to be almost contiguous. He does not classify these two phenomena as belonging to two different “realms” (a case of corruption the former, an example of barter the latter). He almost «does not conceive the difference», as I jotted down in my notes. These situations represent, in his frame, the core of what he defines as “Sicilianity”: «this is Sicily today» he often states.

During our first day in the line, we were called by the packinghouse job consultant to sign our contract (see the Appendix). In that occasion, Armando, the white-collar employee, explained us in a detailed manner «how the system works in agriculture» (see further on). We were also informed that our salary would have been 4 € per hour, plus the payment of 2 or 3 days of contributions (for 10 days of work). When we came back on the line, we asked to our workmates how often the firm used to pay them. Fathima burst into laughter and did not reply. The sound of that belly laugh was impressed in my head till the end of our shift, that was at 6 o'clock. It was during the following day – so almost immediately after our arrival – that Megi and Darjana took some time to chat with us soon after our shift. In a wholehearted thoughts flow, they explained that they did not receive any remuneration till the month of September. They were angry and resigned at the same time (see further on). Their situation, moreover, was even exacerbated by a structural shortage of labor during that period, caused by the (actual or induced) firm crisis. Women were called to work for very few hours in each shift, forced to stay at home for several days. In the following days, we found ourselves in this very situation, starting to understand what daily laborers mean with the expression: «you can't organize your life».

Today (Tuesday) we're here waiting that Davide let us know if we have to work or not. It's an occasion to reflect on the extreme flexibility and precariousness typical of this work: you can't organize your own life, your daily life. You're at the mercy of a phone call, that you don't know if and when it's gonna come. And if the phone call arrives, you can't refuse to work, because if you are not available today, probably you'll not be called once again tomorrow. Giuliana and I have already discussed about these aspects when we realized that it was very difficult to arrange some appointments with packinghouse workers. But now it's different, now we are directly living this problem: we're here at home, waiting, without the possibility of doing anything else.

[...]

We wait the entire morning without knowing if we were expected to work or not. At 1 p.m. Davide calls us, asking to be there at the packinghouse in about half an hour. When we arrive (at 1.50 p.m.) all the workers have already started. Fathima, Sahara, Megi, Darjana and Aleksandra are at work. Also Pavli and Davide today are in the lines. We enter in the lines. We work just for two hours and a half and three hours. Then we finish and we clean our working space.

[Santa Croce Camerina, June 18th 2013]

Today (Wednesday) we did not work.

[Santa Croce Camerina, June 19th 2013]

Today (Thursday) no news from the packinghouse.

[Santa Croce Camerina, June 20th 2013]

(Friday) At 10:00 a. m. Davide calls us to go to work. He asks us to be there within half an hour. We try to hurry as much as possible. We reflect on the absurdity of being always available, without any shift schedule, without any fixed time, without knowing if and how long we are expected to work. When we arrive at the packinghouse, we find only Palvi at work.

[Santa Croce Camerina, June 21th 2013]

(Monday) Today was a really bad day, I was very tense and nervous all the day long. We were on tenterhooks waiting for a phone call from the packinghouse. In the meanwhile, we were unable to take any type of decision on what to do in the afternoon. Thus, I started to think that maybe Davide wasn't calling us because he heard the chat we had on Tuesday with Megie and Darjana. While we were speaking, I could see that he was still somewhere between the lines... and I didn't know actually what to do, if continuing the conversation or suspend it for prudence. But the two women were so heartfelt, so pissed, that I could not image to stop their outburst! And, by the way, it was better to become acquainted with that dynamics, even risking of not being called anymore, than ignoring them.

[Santa Croce Camerina, June 24th , 2013]

The fact of becoming extremely suspicious, worried about any conversation held in the workplace, was actually not an isolated episode. Our male and female colleagues were in fact experiencing every day similar feelings of anxiety and mistrust towards each others. The fact of “not being called”, in fact, was very often interpreted by the laborers as the indicator of the existence of a “problem” for what concerns workers behavior.



Image 3. Working in the packinghouse. Photo by the company's website.[Deleted in the open access version]

Chapter III

What does it mean to work by the day?

Si sta come
d'autunno
sugli alberi
le foglie
G. Ungaretti, *L'allegria*

1. Considering the dimensions of day labor

To go through some life stories, intertwined with my personal experiences inside the workplaces, has definitely helped the reader to start understanding what workers in the transformed belt mean when they refer to themselves as “daily laborers”. As we have seen, we are dealing with very different working experiences, according to the degree of formalization of the employment relation (along the continuum *formal-informal*), and the extension of the job period (ranging from *contingent* to *long-term* positions⁸⁹) [see the table below]. Exploring individuals’ work and life trajectories, we got acquainted with some of the different forms assumed by day labor. We took into consideration, for instance, the story of Pavli, that – as the majority of packinghouses workers – holds a job contract, thanks to which he is entitled with certain rights (even if limited), i.e. the agricultural unemployment subsidy. Completely different is the situation of Chadi, who does not enjoy a formalized position, as it happens for many greenhouses laborers, mainly foreigners. The daily worker, moreover, could be someone – like Ahmed – that is compelled to change frequently his/her workplace, being constantly in search of a job; at the opposite side, also laborers that hold a

⁸⁹ Regarding the apparent oxymoron contained in expression “long-term daily workers”, cf. also Smith (1997: 329) that refers to the fact that «companies have multiple categories of temps, such as permanent and casual temporary workers».

relatively “secure” and non casual occupation tend to refer to themselves as “daily workers”, as it is the case for Franco’s employees. Moreover, as we have seen, the contingency of toiling by the day could address trajectories of downwards (as Peppe, Mimi and Antonio) or upwards (as Mohamed and Alessandro) social mobility. Lastly, also remuneration paid to the workers could assume diverse forms (it could be, for instance, an hourly or daily salary) and different amounts (even if never being so high).

Table 2. Forms of day labor: some examples

	<i>Formal</i>	<i>Informal</i>
<i>Contingent</i>	Pavli, Davide Fathima, Aleksandra, Sahara, Darjana, Megi	Ahmed Nicola
<i>Long-term</i>	Karim Mimmi, Peppe, Afrim, Wera, Antonio, Gigi	Chadi Alessandro

The diverse forms of day labor, however, tend to show some similar characteristics, that we will attempt to scrutinize in the following paragraphs. The argumentations elaborated in the next session, draw on several examples that mainly concern the experience of the participant observation, but are also based on the data collected through the interviews and informal conversations realized during the fieldwork.

2. Flexibility and unavailability of work and life time

Pavli: With this type of work, you can’t organize your own life!
[Santa Croce Camerina, Inside TomatoesArtist, June 21th, 2013]

One of the main aspect that bonds the experiences of daily workers inside greenhouses and packinghouses is the *unavailability of their time*. Time managing, in fact, both inside and outside workplaces, is a prerogative that is almost entirely transferred to their employers (Thompson, 1967). As it was previously underlined, in fact, the crop perishability on the one hand, and the consumers pressure to eat fresh food on the other hand, strongly bind intensive agriculture to a just-in-time

system of production, the social cost of whom is usually reversed on waged laborers (Gertel, Sippel, 2014).

As emerged from the previous accounts, for people employed inside packinghouses, the difficulty «to organize their own life» is quite fierce. In the majority of the companies, in fact, shift are not planned in advance, and laborers live constantly at the mercy of a phone call, that could come at whatever time of the day, asking them “to be available” to work⁹⁰.

Serena, a 50 years old woman employed inside a small packinghouse in Vittoria, was really fed up with this system. When I met her, she immediately showed a great interest in participating in my study narrating her working experience. It was quite hard, indeed, to manage to meet each other. For several times, in fact, she was forced to cancel our appointment due to the fact that she was asked to work with very short notification. When finally we were able to conduct our interview in the tranquility of her place, I asked her how the managers organize the shift schedule in their packinghouse, and she replies:

Serena: We don't have any planned shift. We don't know in advance when we will have a day off. It depends on the orders that the packing house receives and on the availability of tomato. Today, for example, there was an order, so we went there at 9 o'clock. But at 9 there was no tomato available to be worked. So we had to come back home and wait till tomorrow. Sometimes the bosses plan the shifts. But each time they choose discretionally who has to be called. You never know if you are on shift and whit whom; they select according to their sympathy and antipathy⁹¹; 4, 5, 10 people, it depends, there is not a stable group. The ones that work less are always the Tunisians.[...] They are called less frequently because they are the ones that usually are not available to wait till the tomatoes' truck arrives. My friend and I, instead, use to wait, even if this idle time is not paid at all! But we use to wait, also because sometime it could happen that the bosses tell you that you are expected to work just for one hour, but then the hours could become two or three. [...] The Tunisians, instead, prefer doing what they like [*si fanno i comodi loro*]. When there is something to do, a two hours shift for example, the company calls those who usually wait, those who *sacrifice themselves* waiting for tomato. They say: “They are always here waiting, *they are at our beck and call* [*sono a nostra completa disposizione*], so we should prefer them”.

[Comiso, interviewee's place, March 22th, 2013]

One day I accompanied Serena to her workplace, and I took part in one of these typical waiting situations. As I jotted down in my note, it really took me aback that the atmosphere outside of the packinghouse, was very relaxed: women were chatting, laughing and enjoying their coffees. No one, aside from me, seemed to be surprised by the fact that they were asked to wait more than 40 minutes before the tomatoes' truck arrived. Actually, they were quite used to burn time before working and so no one thought to complain, become nervous or leave the jobsite.

⁹⁰ We were also informed about the presence of other companies in which the shifts used to be organized in advance, due to a greater amount of product they were able to process.

⁹¹ Following the Economic of Conventions' paradigm, La Rosa *et al.* (2008) describe these types of distortions, that occur quite frequently inside workplaces, as constituting a sort of interference of the “domestic world”, into the “industrial world” that should be based on the principle of “efficiency” (see ch. I, par. 6).

The request to the packinghouse workers (mostly female) to be always ready to work and docile while waiting is radically different from the situation undergone by other typologies of qualified laborers. Very different, for instance, is the position of a doctor: even if being 24 hours available, when required, her/his time is considered precious, is actually overestimated. Contrariwise, a packinghouse laborers' time seems to have no value (either an economic or a symbolic one). As Marco – another of my interlocutors – underlines, this undervaluation of workers' time represents a clear example of «lack of respect» towards people involved in this type of occupation; when I asked him, a young agronomist, to explain me what does he mean when he refers to the phenomenon of the “exploitation” existing inside packinghouses, he was very precise in underling this aspect.

Marco: Let's make an example: the truck with the product that has to be carried, for instance, to Ipercoop [*an Italian retailer*], has to leave at 2 p.m.. Or sometimes trucks have to leave at 2 in the night, so the product has to be prepared inside the boxes for that time. So, you are forced to stay there and work without the possibility to stop till the track is completed. If the truck is not completed there could be some problems. In the packinghouse there is this type of *exploitation*. [...] For exploitation I mean that the bosses control constantly your work, they forbade you to talk, they tell you off even if you go to the toilet, but especially *they don't respect you as a worker* [*non ti rispettano come lavoro*].

[Marina di Acate (Macconi), Inside a bar, March 6th, 2013]

The deeper consequence of this undervaluation of workers' time in their everyday experience is that, with such an uneven form of employment, «you can never organize your life»:

Pavli: The worst aspect of this job, is that *you can never organize your own life*. Yesterday, for instance, I was doing some renovation to my new place, 'cause I rented a new place, and they called me from the packinghouse. I left the things I was doing and I came here. Once, instead, I was in Ragusa [*25 km further form Santa Croce Camerina, where the packinghouse was*] and I had to come here! Another time, I had just finished to work, I reached home and I was having a shower, and they call me to come back here again! But I was here just five minutes before!

[Santa Croce Camerina, inside TomatoesArtists, June 26th, 2013]

In situations like the ones we are dealing with, in which workers feel constantly under the threat of losing their jobs, the necessity to “be always available” become either more pressing. As Darjana told me, given the situation of uncertainty undergone by workers' at TomatoesArtists, it was not possible for them to refuse to reach the workplace:

Darjana: You have to show up in any case, even if they ask you to work just for ten minutes. In that cases you spend more money for the gasoline than the amount you earn for working. But you can't say “no”, because this would mean that tomorrow there would be no more job for you.

[Santa Croce Camerina, Inside TomatoesArtists, June 17th, 2013]

However, it is not the flexibility of the amount of working hours that is seen as a problem in itself, as I will try to argument. During my period at TomatoesArtists, in fact, in several occasions the topic of discussion with my fellow workers was the downsizing and decline of their company. In their narrations, they tend to refer to their current labor situation operating a sort of juxtaposition with a “mythical past” in which their packinghouse used to hire around one hundred laborers,

compelled to work with accelerated rhythms. In that period, they were asked to work almost uninterruptedly, also without any planned schedule. Fathima, for instance, recalls a typical working day: in the morning they were in the shop floor between 8 a. m. and 0.30 p.m., with just 10 minutes break. In the afternoon they used to be in the line from 1.10 till 6 p.m., sometimes with no pause; and then, after a short break at 6 p.m., they quite often used to continue to work till 2 or 3 a. m. in the night. As Fathima says, when they finished their shift in the middle of the night, for some of the women it used to be a problem to come back home on foot. Among the men, moreover, there were the ones that used to toil inside the greenhouses during the day and came to the packinghouse for the night shift. They were all overworking, under pressure and with few breaks: there were «more work, more control and more money», they say. This situation, in which the availability to work at any time was also required, is nevertheless described as an idyllic one compared with the current level of instability.

Undoubtedly, employment in the firm under concern has undergone profound changes in the last few years, but it is important to place this shift within social, cultural, geographical and historical contexts to be understood. As Strangleman (2007) noticed, in fact, very often in the workers' narratives it exists a mythical "golden age of labor" that contrast with the current period of degradation of work⁹². Discussions of work and change are then often marked by a sense of loss, or even nostalgia for past stability. According to Strangleman, to deal with this narratives, «we need a more subtle account of nostalgia, one that distinguishes between an uncritical idealization of the past and more complex and reflective accounts. [...] As Davis (1979) noted nostalgia tells us more about our current concerns than it ever does about our past. Equally, nostalgia is in part an attempt to make sense of the fragmentary present by its juxtaposition with a seemingly stable, intelligible past» (ibidem: 94). Strangleman distinguished between a simple, reflective and interpretive nostalgia: «At the *simple* level nostalgia is the largely unexamined belief that 'things were simply better in the past'. In second order, *reflective* nostalgia, a person does more than sentimentalize about the past, they begin to raise questions about truth claims. Finally, in the realm of *interpretative* nostalgia the emotion itself is rendered problematic. The actor will seek to objectify the nostalgia they feel» (ibidem: 94-95, emphasis in the original text). Using these accounts about "the golden age of labor" as a litmus test to understand the sense attributed by laborers to their present, is thus clear that it is not the mere flexibility of the working hours that is seen as problematic; it is, instead, the intertwining between uneven labor, unstable revenues and threats of unemployment characterizing their current situations that make them speak about their present

⁹² In his investigation regarding British railways' workers, as in numerous others examples that he collected, in fact, he could notice a similar approach, i.e. a constant refrain that "things were in decline".

experiences as being even more degraded and fragmented than before. This pushes them to have the feeling that they «need to take advantage [*approfittare*] of every five minutes of work» as Sandra, a young packinghouse manager, explained to me.

Also for workers employed inside greenhouses, it is fundamental to show availability and flexibility to work. In particular, people that are forced to search for a casual employment on a daily basis have to be able to «take every occasion» [*cogliere l'occasione*], and should be «ready» to accomplish any extra-work «to enjoy the possibility» of being picked up also in the following days. Ahmed's working experiences, that I came to know during the period of my permanence in the field, epitomizes the situation faced by numerous daily laborers bind by the necessity to “use whatever occasion” to earn some money. When workers – like Ahmed did – refuses to be “available” for every type of proposal (regarding the amount salary, the number of hours inside the greenhouses, or, more in general, the working conditions), it is not so easy for them to find an alternative job.

Few weeks before we met, in March 2013, Ahmed had worked for around five days for a peppers producer, with a salary of 35 € per day for 8 hours of work. Then, he worked at Mohamed's, being paid 30 € for 9-10 working hours. After a couple of weeks of unemployment, Ahmed found an informal job in the construction sector. He worked as a bricklayer for two weeks, agreeing on a salary of 300 €, an amount that he has actually never received, since his boss disappeared without providing any payment. In May he was asked again to work for the previous peppers' firm; this time, however, his employer proposed him to be hired for the same salary (35€), but for 15 hours per day. Ahmed, so, refused⁹³. At the end of May he was part of a team enrolled to “clean the vineyards” [*pulire l'uva*] in the near village of Mazzarrone, hired – this time – for 25 € per day. According to his account, he could not stand this workplace, since the owner put them really under pressure, overseeing their task continuously and complaining all the day long. The second day, after few hours of working, he gave up, convincing also his team-mates to leave the site. At mid-June he found a job at SicilSerre, even knowing since the beginning that his position there was really precarious. After one week of work, he asked the employer to have a day off, because of a serious physical pain. The reply he received was instead a dismissal. Few weeks later, the “uncle” contacted him back because of a shortage of workforce. At that point, Ahmed spent in SicilSerre four months, before deciding that he could not stand that working conditions, namely living in the countryside

⁹³ At the beginning of May, I met Ahmed close to the town council, with other two Tunisian guys. «Where are you going?», I asked him, curious about the fact that it was not the first time that I met him in that area. «I go with them to apply for the *residenza*. They need to have a fake one to provide an address for their documents, and they are going to use mine. It's 250 € for each of them!», he explained laughing to inform me about his businesses and his revenues.

and being employed in the greenhouse just for few days per week, without the possibility to look for a second or an alternative job during the idle time. In November 2013, due to this unpleasant situation, he moved back to Gafsa, his hometown, where he is currently living.

As Ahmed's biography epitomizes, when workers are not immediately available to accept the type of proposal similar to the ones that he received, the entrepreneurs tend to consider them as almost "incapable" to keep a job; so, it goes the argument, it is "their fault" whether they are laid off or unemployed. One example of this type of attitude was provided during my first day at SicilSerre. In that occasion, the uncle was trying to contact on the phone Nicola, the Romanian man that was supposed to move to live and work in the firm. Nicola was not picking the phone, because, as he said later on, he was sleeping. But, according to the uncle, he was not supposed to sleep during his day off! The employer started yelling that, if Nicola was not answering at the phone immediately, he was going to throw away his luggage from his prospective "house" in the greenhouses. «I already dislike this Romanian» he said «he is too relaxed for this kind of job!».

Even people hired inside greenhouses permanently, both in formal and informal positions, are often asked to be at the "employer disposal" uninterruptedly. Very often, for instance, the work inside greenhouse do not stop during festivities. This is partially due to crop cycle and perishability of products. At the same time, however, this decision seems to be strongly connected to entrepreneurs' expectations to manage their workers time (even the spare one). In fact, it is not accidental that these types of requests are more often addressed towards migrants laborers – compared to the Italian ones –, towards whom employers tend to show less hesitation in interfering in their private life. Even at Gurrieri's firm, for instance, a company that demonstrated to be quite concerned about working conditions, the Albanian couple was asked to be at work during the festivities (e.g. on Sunday, or at Easter). Sometimes even the entire team was demanded to be at work (as it was the case, during the period of my staying, for the Easter Monday); however this requirement was more common in the case of Afrim and Wera, since, as Franco used to say, «they asked» him to be there. According to Lorina, instead, a Romanian friend residing in Vittoria's countryside, she and her husband could not avoid to access the greenhouses even on the weekends, due to the fact that the other couple employed in the same firm «ask to be at work every day»; so, Lori and Patriciu were equally not expected to rest [*«non va bene stare a casa!»*, they say, i.e. «it is not convenient to have a day off»].

Especially for laborers living inside the firms, as it was the case for many male and female Romanian workers, the bosses usually do not show too many concerns about interfering with their private life. As it is quite common also for several other typologies of live-in laborers, employees'

working-time, hence, tends to extend at detriment of their life-time, with a progressive shrinking of the latter. Moreover, workers' domestic spaces – their bedrooms, their kitchens, their toilets – tend to lose their capability of being indeed “domestic”, namely safe, private, cozy and restful places, within which their inhabitants could manage their own time (Sacchetto and Andrijasevic, 2015). Drawing on some examples, it could become clearer what I am claiming. Camila, a Romanian woman with whom I spent several time in the countryside, told me that Mr. Battaglia, her boss, used to ask her to clean his office when she was not toiling inside the greenhouses. As it is quite straightforward, this request slight mask a strong gender component, with a male boss openly exerting his power over the life-time (and the body) of his female foreign employee. The same woman reported also that in the firm where she was previously employed, her former boss used to enter her place, waking her up at 5. 30 in the morning:

Camila: While you were drinking your coffee, while you had such a sleepy face, while you were still yawning... he used to come: “*Buongiorno, buongiorno!* Let's go to work”. And I was there, completely bewildered.

[Vittoria's countryside, c/da Alcerito, June 26th, 2013]

As a consequence of the impossibility «to organize their own life» due mainly to the working time fluctuation, formal and informal laborers employed inside greenhouses and packinghouse declare to experience numerous difficulties even to organize and enjoy their spare time. Alessandro, the 19 years old guy met at Franco's firm, for instance, was naively asking me: «Does it happen to you that you don't know what to do when you finish to work? Very often when I come back home I really don't know what to do!» This strong affirmation, even not generalizable, is symptomatic of a more diffuse feeling of expropriation of their life time perceived by several daily laborers.

3. Physical and mental suffering

Ahmed: *Quando lavori, sei stanco.. quando non lavori cervello stanco..* [When you work, you get tired... when you don't work, your brain gets tired!]

[Vittoria, Piazza Senia, July 27th, 2013]

Another consideration regarding day labor – especially for what concerns greenhouses employees – has to do with labor process organization and the work rhythms: the fact of being hired on a daily basis, inside greenhouses, could be also understood a dispositive deliberately used by the employers to speed up work rhythms and increase levels of productivity. This is mainly due to the fact that the laborer gets to know whether s/he is going to be employed or not just at the end of each working day; so s/he usually puts a great effort in the attempt to impress the employer, working as fast as

s/he can and showing the maximum level of resistance to the physical endeavor, in order to have the possibility of being eventually selected in the following days. This aspect assumed for me a certain relevance while I was working at SicilSerre together with Ahmed. Due to the fact that the employer openly expressed disapproval for my presence in the firm since the beginning of our relation, I already knew that I had the possibility to work in the company just for few days. My approach to work, thus, was quite relaxed compared with the one showed by Ahmed⁹⁴. In his case, in fact, since he did not know in advance if he would be asked to work or not the next day, he was pushing his body like a machine, in order to reach the level of productivity expected from our boss (that tended to control it quite strictly). Moreover, often reproaching my spontaneous behavior conveying tiredness, Ahmed explained me that his attitude was to never show any kind of physical weakness in front of the boss, in order look appropriate for the assigned tasks [*«Mai farsi vedere piccoli di fronte al padrone!»*]. However, both for me and for Ahmed, the job was actually physically destroying:

I'm going to tape-record the field notes of these last days, 'cause I feel that I don't have any residual physical energy to write. That's why I decided to use the recorder, since I have neither the time nor the physical strength to write. I'm exhausted: I feel destroyed, I feel a lingering pain in all my muscles, in my back and in my knees, an overall malaise. But this not just my problem: also Ahmed is enduring the same type of pains. The fact of experiencing together this physical suffering is somehow bringing us closer, it's binding us, and it's making me feel even more part of this context [...]. The fact of working occasionally, day by day, and not as fixed employers (like in Franco's firm), makes it impossible to get used to the physical endeavor that this work entails. And moreover, to undergone these conditions, namely this condition of repetitiveness of the job, is freaking me out. I mean, one of the positive aspects of the greenhouses' work is that it could be a quite various one. Greenhouses are big enough to allow the employer to vary the assignments, so that a person could alternate moments in which s/he has to assume uncomfortable positions with situations in which his/her body could rest and work more comfortably. Instead, I'm freaking out with the employers' obsession "to complete", "to complete the line", "to complete the *capannone*", to complete with the same task. Because of this obsession, we have worked the whole day, bent on our legs, with our bottoms laying almost on the ground, for the task that is called *brocculiare*, that is, to remove the part of the tomato's plant that crops up from the bifurcation between the leaf and the stem. Since the plants were really small, close to the ground, we had to stay all the time totally bent on our legs and knees, so it was terrible for me! I'm suffering much more then in my previous experiences! Yes, cause after being "employed" in Franco's greenhouse, my muscles were actually tired, especially after the picking of the *insalataro* tomato, but now it's different, now I can't neither move! And for Ahmed it's the same! Bound to day labor, to occasional employment, he could never get used to the required physical endeavor, he could never be "trained" enough; every time, in every new firm, also for him is like starting again, his body has to get used again and again. So everything becomes really unbearable: an unbearable pain, an unbearable everyday life⁹⁵.
[Vittoria, June 14th, 2013]

⁹⁴ Of course, the differences between our approaches at work, depended strongly also on others deeper motivations, the argumentation of whom can be found in the methodological Appendix.

⁹⁵ These types of reflections could be seen in continuity with that wide body of literature that from Wacquant on, could be defined as *carnal ethnography*, in order to indicate the research that reflects upon the body of the ethnographer (Wacquant, 2005), or – more in general – as *embodied ethnography*. To exemplify what embodied anthropology means, Set Holmes writes: «The body is not something that "I have" or that "I use" to find data; rather, "I am" my body, and my body "itself/myself" produces field data. In my own fieldwork my bodily experience lent valuable insights into social suffering, power hierarchies, and the implications of the field work relationship. It was not only my eyes and ears that collected valuable field observations but also the back of my neck as cold rain seeped down the inside of my farm-issues rain gear; my sore knees, hips and lower back from bending over all day in strawberry fields; my acid stomach

As I jotted down in my notes, on my body, as well as on Ahmed's one, work seemed to produce a similar destroying effects, since no one of us was used to endure this type of effort *every day*. In this sense, contingent day labor affects workers' bodies differently and even more harshly compared with other "stable" heavy occupations: working occasionally bodies have no time to get used to the physical endeavor and so appear to be never "trained" enough to work⁹⁶. Thus, albeit employees could show a complete "availability" to toil, even at a rapid pace, is not so obvious that their bodies are actually "prepared" to sustain such a high work load. While laborers' intentionality (shaped and oriented by their material necessity) pushes to increase the work rhythms – in fact – their bodies instead «naturally struggle to resist» (Sheper-Huges, 2004: 285):

It was around 10 o' clock in the evening. Ahmed joined us in our place. He seemed to be quite nervous. He said that I couldn't work the next day, that he didn't want to work, because his face looked tired and slim:« I can't neither look at my image in the mirror, I'm too ugly». [...] He went on complaining that he couldn't work in this way, 'cause that job was a shitty one. [...] He asked us to sleep in our place, he was too tired to go back home – he said – and his place was too far. [...] Dinging the night, his moaning woke me up. I was awake almost all the night long: he never stopped to moan! At 5 o' clock he woke up and he called his boss saying that he couldn't go to work. The employer called him back to forewarn him that "he has understood is game": according to Giovanni, Ahmed was not going to the greenhouse since I was not employed anymore. Ahmed said "no", that he couldn't, that he had too much pain in a foot, that he was tired, that he needed to rest, that he would have gone to work the next day. The boss replied firmly that there was no more job for him the next day.

[Vittoria, June 14th, 2013]

Thus, the effort of the day laborer is to try to discipline his/her own body inside the workplaces, as the unique manner to keep his/her casual occupation providing income. The body, hence, is one of the few resource (maybe the unique one) on which the contingent worker can resort⁹⁷. The jobsites, thus, appear as a sort of "stages" in which bodies have to perform as being strong, portably and capable to overwork.

On the other side, however, the spaces where laborers usually spend their spare time, do not constitute a "backstage". Also in front of the (male) peers' gaze, in fact, the body has to *perform* as being healthy and portably, concealing the physical hardship caused by the tough working conditions, hardships that – paradoxically – used to be often experienced by numerous *paisani*. In the collective space where Tunisians used to spend time in Vittoria (Piazza Senia) Ahmed, for

showing signs of stress before a day of racing against the clock to keep my picking job; [...] These were several ways in which my body offered important field notes on social suffering. Without paying attention to my bodily experience, I would have missed out on much of the valuable data about the everyday lives of migrant laborers» (Holmes, 2013: 34-34).

⁹⁶ The other way around, during our experience at Gurrieri s.r.l., we noticed that the entire team – even the elder components – used to be quite "trained" to endure the physical effort, since they were used to keep certain work rhythms every day.

⁹⁷ That is also why "seniority", perceived as an extreme form of weakness, constitutes such a relevant problem for daily farmworkers. For what concerns discrimination addressed towards elder migrants, a topic still in demand, see Bürkner, 2012: 187.

instance, was ridiculed for the clumsy position assumed while walking motivated by his muscles' pain. In a space that was connoted mainly as a male (and "macho") context, Ahmed, thus, risked to appear weak and subjugated.

Yesterday night Ahmed arrived in our place terribly upset. On the one hand, he felt like this because he was tired and he was suffering for the lingering pain in his muscles. But I think that he was also upset because of another situation. In fact, he went on saying that other people were making fun of him because of his job. «Other Tunisians» – he said – but also other people from Vittoria. He nervously simulated the situation: «They looked at me, laughing "ahahah"». According to him, they were laughing at his funny and clumsy way to walk, with the legs a bit apart, as we are both walking in these days. I got from that conversation that other people, maybe other Tunisians spending time in Piazza Senia, or the other guys with whom he is living inside that squatted place, were teasing him. [...] He had that expression that he usually assumes when he is really tired, he looks mean and not so clear headed. And while he was complaining («this is a shitty job! I don't wanna do it!») he seemed to be evidently affected by the other people's gaze. And in fact he said: «I went back to the street today, after four days in which I was not showing up. And everyone was looking at me: "Ohohoh! So? Have you been working? Why are you doing such a shitty job?"». Hence, the impression is that he has been actually criticized and taunted for the fact of feeling physically ill. [...] It seems that he needed to relax a bit, not simply from the physical endeavor, but also from the stress of being embedded in a social context that was teasing and marginalizing him for his evident weakness.

[Vittoria, June 14th, 2013]

To summarize, thus, the effects produced by the agricultural work on laborers' bodies appear to be largely hidden towards the employers: in front of the (Italian) bosses, male (foreign) physiques ought to be constructed as strong, portly and capable to overwork [*«Mai farsi vedere piccoli di fronte al padrone»*]. At the same time, also in front of the *paisani* and workers-mates the consequences of tough working conditions should be largely concealed. For Ahmed and his fellows, in fact, it was quite common to think that a worker' body has to eschew the "public gaze". While being employed inside SicilSerre, for instance, I had several times this perception. When we used to finish to work, for example, Ahmed never wanted to pass by Piazza Senia to reach his place, since he was "ashamed" to show – from his clothing and his tiredness – that he was coming back from the greenhouse. Once, instead, I proposed him to shoot a small video in our workplace; in that case, he was very confident to speak about general labor conditions, but without being focused by the camera, with the justification that he felt ugly and dirty, and that he was ashamed «to be seen by my friends»⁹⁸.

It is just inside intimate spaces, constituting a sort of "backstage", that worker "felt free" to describe their bodies as "ugly", "dirty", "rough" and even "painful". Due to the evidence of being a(n Italian) women, it took quite a lot of time for me to find myself involved in these type of setting and in these circumstances in which (male) laborers "felt free" to speak about their bodies. It was just working side by side, I think, that it was possible to create (at least partially) this kind of intimacy

⁹⁸ I had, instead, exactly the opposite reaction: to show to my informants, my friends, my prospective employers and other laborers that "I was also toiling, and not of simply looking" it was actually a reason to be proud in the public space.

with Ahmed. Our conversations at work were so much concentrated on our bodies (how do we feel, what we were able to do or not, etc.) that his “macho” attitude, even neither disappearing, tended to be lowered down considerably. In that circumstances, I also found myself to be extremely spontaneous in complaining about my physical pains without putting so much effort in the attempt of constructing myself as being a “super woman”⁹⁹. Inside these very few available spaces of intimacy and lowering of gender barriers, it was possible to grasp the perception that farmworkers had of their *valueless* bodies: in that cases, there was very few room for sentiments like “self-esteem” or “pride” to be employed in agriculture. A sort of “shame” and “regret” for being enrolled inside greenhouses was actually pervasive.

Ahmed, for instance, with me and Giuliana, was constantly depicting his body as “ugly” and “clumsy”, as it emerges from the previous field note’s excerpts. The other way around, his conception of “beauty” seems to be the opposite: a beautiful body is the body of someone who do not to toil in order to live.

It’s a Sunday night, and we are having dinner at Taoufik restaurant. At a certain point, Ahmed takes out of his wallet two of his passport photos, describing them in this way: «In the first one my face was bright and relaxed, in the second it looks angry and gloomy». And he says: «I took the former before working inside the greenhouses; the latter second one after working inside the greenhouses». I ask him to give me as a present one of the two; he chooses the “beautiful” one.

[Vittoria, Via Roma, June 2nd, 2013]

Today Ahmed phoned me. His voice was tired and stressed while proving me an account of his daily life, still working and leaving inside SicilSerre. «I saw your picture on Facebook», he said «and I thought you turned into a really beautiful girl during this summer time! I saw you there, smiling with your friends... now your face looks more relaxed, you look smiling. Of course you look beautiful, you are not working anymore! Instead when you were working with me inside the greenhouse you looked ugly! Always dirty and tired!». And then he said «I’m also very ugly right now, I can’t neither look at my face into the mirror».

[Bologna, October 20th 2013]

The importance attributed to maintain a sort of minimum “aesthetic standard”, to strive to look attractive, tends to be even more explicit for female greenhouses and packinghouses¹⁰⁰ laborers. Even in situations in which they were experiencing the hardest working and living conditions (as it was the case for numerous Romanian greenhouses employees) it could be generally perceived a subtle attention to care about their own bodies. I was actually positively surprised, for instance, to notice this attitude in several of my Romanian girlfriends: after ten hours of work, they used to be well dressed, wearing nice necklaces and earrings, or slightly made up, even if spending the majority of the time in the same countryside in which they used to work. To take care of their

⁹⁹ I had this reaction mostly in Franco’s firm, where I attempted to show, through my (female) body, that, *even if* I was a woman, I could stand high physical workload.

¹⁰⁰ Some of the packinghouses laborers’, for instance, told us that they tend to leave – on purpose – a hair’s look sticking out of their hairnets, that constitute a compulsory part of their work’s uniform. Even risking to lose their fifteen minutes’ break, they attempt to undertake this small act of resistance *on* and *through* their body.

bodies could clearly represent their attempt to resist to the overall degradation and alienation caused by their labor; a power of reaction, thus, that take place *on* and *through* their bodies, considered as one of the few inalienable properties available to them.

As I tried to point out, this “aesthetic value” for male and female farmworkers assumes different connotations: in the case of male employees, “beauty” often equates physical strength and capacity to resist to the high workloads; in their narratives, thus, it seems to be not appropriate to show themselves (in a public stage) as “ugly” and “painful”. In the female realm, “beauty” often equates physically attractiveness *notwithstanding* the high workloads; namely, to strive to be “beautiful” simply means to attempt to resist the degradation and the brutalization of everyday life. That is why female “physical strength” assumes often the form of “coquetry”, usually performed with the awareness of being part of a mostly male social environment. As Martina Cvajner (2011; 2012) noted for what concerns foreign home assistant (*badanti*), especially for women relegated to lowly and reviled social occupations, their dressing code often tend to be flashy, and sometimes even tacky, conveying their attempt to resist to a form of labor that strongly makes inconspicuous and unembellished their everyday live (often also jeopardizing their intimate spheres).



Image 4. Safety conditions inside workplaces. The sign states: “Entry is forbidden. Danger of death!”. Photo realized by Giovanni Battaglia [Donnalucata, July 26th, 2013]

However, even if strongly masked or slightly concealed, farmworkers' body is first and foremost a body that is suffering and experiencing pain (Décosse, 2008a, b; Holmes 2013). During our informal chats, in the "backstage" of their places in the countryside, in fact, conversations with workers (especially with Romanian female laborers) concentrated numerous times on health issues¹⁰¹. At the end of the working day, it was actually very common that laborers spent several hours to complain about a deep pain in their back or in their knees, in their legs or in their shoulders¹⁰². Being exposed to such tough conditions, these type of muscles and articulations problems are, in fact, ordinary. Moreover, inside the greenhouses, workers are exposed to several other kind of diseases. It was possible to register numerous of these testimonies, attending a local surgery addressed to foreign workers, obviously very much frequented by greenhouse and packinghouse laborers.

Doctor Orudgeva: The most common type of diseases that affects people employed inside greenhouses regards the breathing apparatus, due mainly to the unhealthiness of the places where they work and live. Inside greenhouses is too humid and the amount of pesticide used for the plants, often sprayed without any protection, constitutes an effective danger for people's health. Moreover, many farmworkers suffer for contact dermatitis: very few of them use gloves or shirt with long sleeves, and in the summer time men tend to work with the bare-chested, 'cause it's extremely hot; so it's quite common that they suffer for these type of skin problem. And then... hernias are quite common, inguinal hernias, caused for the position assumed and the loads carried while working... back and knees and legs pains, as you can image...

[Vittoria, foreign citizens surgery, May 5th 2013]

It was thanks the presence of Doctor Orudgeva, a Russian women in her fifties, that Giuliana and I started to spend time inside the Vittoria's public surgery, mostly addressed to irregular foreign citizens, as she explained, but usually attended also by many other migrants¹⁰³. As we could expect, the overwhelming majority of the foreigners visiting the doctor was denouncing injuries, diseases or ailments connected to their working conditions inside greenhouses. Another part of the assiduous patients, however, used to come regularly, even if not affected – or slightly affected – by (physical) health problems. They generally declare to suffer for frequent headaches or to be often assailed by

¹⁰¹ Also Set Holmes (2013) states that the Triqui (Mexican) migrants working in the field in the U. S. , among which he conducted his ethnography, tend to speak about their labor experience usually in terms of *suffrimiento* (suffering).

¹⁰² This statement, at a first blush, seems to contradict what I just maintained, namely that (male) workers tend to not show their physical weakness. That attitude seems to be quite common in male and peers social environment (as the "Tunisians" public spaces) or in contexts where it is necessary to perform as being "strong" (as it happens in front of the employers). More in general, however, (especially inside the homeplaces and in gender-mixed environments) complains about physical suffering are quite common. In the attempt to "formalize" and "analyze" these considerations, these two attitudes seems to be contradictory; in everyday life, however, people are able to perform both of them according to the setting and the circumstances without any apparent schizophrenia. Looking from this perspective, their positions and their narratives does not seem to be static and neither strictly coherent, and they appear to be able to switch often among different linguistic repertoires and practices (on this aspect see Swidler, 2001).

¹⁰³ The surgery was in charge of providing S.T.P. card (*Straniero Temporaneamente Presente*) for foreign non-communitarian irregular migrants, and E.N.I. card (*Europeo Non Iscritto*) for EU members. However, according to Doctor Orudgeva's testimony, the ambulatory was attended also from many regular Tunisian migrants, due to the fact that numerous of them tend to not access a general practitioner [*medico di base*].

an overall sense of weakness and malaises. Not surprisingly, the majority of them used to be underemployed or employed on a daily basis inside greenhouses. Abdellaj, an Algerian man in his forties who used to come quite often to visit Doctor Orudgeva, one day confided to us his personal considerations regarding his overall health situation, taking into account his “physical” health as well as his “mental” distress.

Abdellaj: I have very often a quite strong headache. I think it usually comes... ‘cause I’m thinking too much! Yes, I’m thinking all the time at what I have to do... [...] When I came here in Italy I wanted to study... at that time I had the dream of becoming an engineer. But then, when I looked for a job to pay for the University, I realized that there was nothing to do in Sicily: here, for us, there is just agriculture! Now I’m working by the day – sometimes here, another time there – and of course I completely abandoned the idea of studying. But I’m always thinking, thinking about what can I do...that’s maybe the reason why my head pains».

[Vittoria, foreign citizen surgery, June 26th, 2013]

According to Nancy Scheper-Huges, *«nei sistemi sociali caratterizzati da una situazione di ineguaglianza istituzionalizzata (sia in termini di genere, razza, classe che in quelli di gerarchie di casta), sensazioni di oppressione, frustrazione e rabbia sommersa sono sentimenti personali e sociali comuni, sebbene spesso vietati»* [2004: 285]. According to the anthropologist, when rage, frustration, dissatisfaction and other socio-political contradictions are expressed through the body the risk is that these expressions of discontent are actually “treated” as disease and “absorbed” within the previous “normal” social order. Not surprisingly, in fact, listening at Abdellaj complaining, the reaction of Doctor Orudgeva, that used to be genuinely concerned about her patients health situation, was to prescribe some generic medicaments to treat the malaise (as pain killers or similar drugs). *«Nelle mura della clinica,[so] il disgusto, il biasimo per se stessi prendono il posto della rabbia di classe, e le implicazioni politiche dell’afflizione vengono nascoste. Si perde così la possibilità di utilizzare il disagio corporeo per generare una critica radicale dell’ordine sociale»* (Scheper- Huges, 2004: 290).

The experience of distress suffered by Abdellaj is quite often shared by several others laborers forced to search for a job on a daily basis and undergoing bouts of frequent unemployment. Usually they tend to indicate these set of physical and mental symptoms with the evocative expression *la testa gira sempre* [«my head is always “turning around”»]. This sentence clearly encompasses a twofold meaning: on the one hand, as in a sort of exemplifying metonymy, the “head” represent a part of the entire body, forced to move and to “turn” frenziedly among several recruitment places in order to look for a job; so, in this sense, the “head” – like the entire body – is desperately “turning around”. On the other hand, the expression indicates the feeling of (embodied) pain suffered by people constantly in search of an employment, being quite close to the Italian expression *mi gira la testa* (namely, I feel dizzy). More in general, the frequent mention to the fact that *la testa gira* is an

indicator of the high level of psychological stress undergone by daily laborers, a form of sufferance that become fierce in situation of persistent unemployment.

Ahmed: I'm happy to work, so I can actually rest. Yes, I can rest! Of course I'm tired, but at least when I'm at work I can relax! When I'm in Piazza Senia, instead, I never have a mental break, the "head is always turning", thinking at what to do and where to go. When I'm not working my brain gets tired [«*Quando non lavoro... cervello stanco!*»].

[Vittoria, Piazza Senia, July 27th, 2013]

4. Material insecurity: the salary

[*We interrogated Armando, the TomatoesArtists job consultant, about our pay slip*] and he said that they were not ready yet; he said that we should have passed by the packinghouse to sign the pay slip and to take our money during the following days. Being things like this, we said that maybe, since we were living quite far and we were on hurry to leave Sicily, it was not so important to have that money, because it was actually a paltry sum. And he firmly restates: «No, you must come, that's unquestionable! Every Euro gained through a tough job is "sacrosanct"! Even if the salary would have been of just 3€, *I would really appreciate [io ci tengo]* the fact that you come to take that 3€».

[Santa Croce Camerina, inside TomatoesArtists, July 23th, 2013]

The sentence I reported was pronounced by the TomatoesArtists' job consultant [*consulente del lavoro*] when my colleague and I interrogated him concerning our salaries. Our request to receive a compensation in that case was deemed to be "legitimate", due to the alleged "deep value" attributed to the employees' remuneration. Ironically, however, while the Armando's rhetoric went into the direction of stressing the importance of compensating workers' effort with a congruous wage, in practice he perfectly knew that his company has not been paying its laborers for already nine months.

Together with the unavailability of time and the consequences inscribed in the very workers' body, a third relevant aspect characterizing day labor is, thus, the high level of material insecurity faced by people subject to such a regime. For "material insecurity", within this context, we specifically mean the unavailability or the uneven availability of a labor income. In this paragraph the attempt is to scrutinize this quite general concern, exploring the implications¹⁰⁴ that generates on people's everyday life.

Generally speaking, as we said widely, the income earned by greenhouses and packinghouses employees is quite low. According the Collective Farmworkers Contract of the Province of Ragusa (*Contratto Provinciale Operai Agricoli e Florovivaisti di Ragusa*)¹⁰⁵, the day rate of an agricultural

¹⁰⁴ For what concerns future implication, see in particular the par. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Available at: <http://www.consulentidellavororagusa.it/public/immagini/ragusaCPL-2012-2015-tabelle.pdf>
The last *Contratto Provinciale* has been signed on January 1st 2012 till December 31st 2015.

worker is calculated to be 54,10€, for 6,30 working hours during 6 days, that means an hourly wage of 8,30€. The level of the wages daily negotiated in the transformed littoral strip, however, is consistently lower. Taking into account the information collected in the field, between January and July 2013, it is possible to state that the payment of one day inside the greenhouses could generally range from 10 to 40€, for an amount of hours per day that could vary from 8 till 10. In the majority of the cases, a Romanian (male or female) worker – as we have seen in the SicilSerre’s situation – is hired for 20 or 25€ per day; a Tunisian (generally male) employee, instead, is normally enrolled for 25 or 30€ (as it was possible to highlight following Ahmed’s personal labor trajectory); Italian workforce, on the other hand, could often “enjoy” a higher salary, reaching usually the 35 or 40€ per day – as it was the case in Gurrieri’s firm –. For what concerns packinghouses, the situation is not less problematic. A (usually female) laborer is remunerated, on average less than 4,50€ per hour: in fact, we registered several cases in which the salary reached the 4€ per hour, and very few cases in which it goes up till the 5€. At the moment in which this thesis is being written, moreover, it seems that the overall level of the salaries is undergoing an additional downward pressure. While greenhouses employees, in an increasing number, are forced to accept a daily salary of 15€ per day, an equally fierce wage reduction is currently occurring inside packinghouses’ companies, where – according to our informants – the average wages reached now the 3/3,50€ per hour. Moreover, in at least one case, we were informed about a situation of introduction of piecework as the form of remuneration. According to Serena, almost one year after we interviewed her, the salary regime in her packinghouse radically changed:

Serena: In that firm right now they introduce piecework: each *cartone* [paper box], containing ten tomato *vaschette* [plastic trays] of 500 gr. , is paid 0,30 cents.

V.: How long does it take to prepare a *cartone*?

S.: If you are rapid and tomato is good, it takes maximum five minutes. But if tomato sucks it can take also fifteen minutes. The average should be almost fifteen *cartoni* per hour [*to reach the previous amount of 4,5 € per hour*]. But if you pretend speediness in processing vegetables, you could not pretend quality! And in that place, they, indeed, pretend both¹⁰⁶!

[Bologna, February 5th, 2015]

As it is spotlighted in this conversation, piecework inside packinghouses not only forces to speed up work rhythms, but it also externalizes for the company the risk of buying “bad tomato”; in this way,

¹⁰⁶ When we interviewed Serana, in March 2013, she made a bitter comment concerning the topic of the (fixed) salary per hour, saying: «I’m able to prepare a *cartone* every five minute, so in one hour I could make 12/13 boxes. There are other laborers that produce just 6/7 boxes... and we do protest, because all of us have the same salary!» [Comiso, March 11th, 2013].

«if tomato sucks», this practically represents a problem for the very laborers that – as a direct consequence – undergo a salary reduction¹⁰⁷.

The fact that the “real” level of remunerations does not correspond with the one established through the National and Provincial contract, obviously implies that the amounts received by the workers are not secured through any form of written agreement. Said it differently, the pay slip usually registers a totally different amount compared with the sum actually perceived by the workers.

Serena: However, the contract does not indicate the salary's amount¹⁰⁸. To know it, you should look at the pay slip. But then the amount written on the pay slip is in any case different from the one we are actually entitled to. Because, obviously, the firm *gives* us 102 unemployment day: it's like working with a part-time occupation. That's because you should result at least partially unemployed, otherwise how can you benefit of an “unemployment subsidy”? Practically, since the employers give you 8/9 days [*of contributions*] in one month, then they have to match the amount of the salary formally written on the pay slip with the days of contributions actually declared to INPS. So it happens that in one month I took 400 €, while on the pay slip they wrote 700 €, or the other way around. Do you get it? So, it changes, the real wage changes, compared with the one written on the pay slip. And overtime, obviously, is not considered at all.

[Vittoria, outside of the interviewee's jobsite, March 11th, 2013]

This practically implies that, even for workers employed with a formal contract, the level of remuneration is almost never stable or secure. Inside packinghouses it could vary according to the shift schedule (rarely notified in advance) and according to the number of effective worked hours, an amount that – each month – could be really changeable.

For what concerns laborers hired with a formal contract inside greenhouses, the salary level is also quite uneven; the entrepreneurs, in that case, can avoid having workers on their payrolls whenever they are not strictly necessary for the crop production. It is not so obvious for (formal) greenhouse laborers to work on a constant basis. This was the reason why Wera, one of the Gurrieri's employees, in order to justify her argumentation according to which Franco was a «good boss», explained me that his attitude was «to call them to work, even when there was not so much to do, even simply to clean the plants [*per togliere anche qualche “burgiune”*]». The possibility to work constantly, clearly, assumed for the team's members a considerable importance, since it assured to them a fixed salary, an “advantage” that few daily farmworkers could enjoy.

The scanty labor income, associated with its *unevenness*, represents evidently a relevant issue for daily laborers. That is why, in order to improve their material condition – at least in situations of long-term relationship – one of their attempt is often to call for a fixed salary, even if a lower one.

¹⁰⁷ For what concerns the application of piecework in the Italian seasonal agriculture see, in particular, Perrotta (2013a). For what concerns “classical” studies on piece rate, instead, it is possible to refer mainly to Dobb (1965) and to Foa (1976).

¹⁰⁸ The farmworkers' contract (see a facsimile in the Appendix) indicates the *alleged* working days for each single laborers; it does not contain, thus, the number of the *actual* worked days, that have to be declared quarterly at INPS. For this reason, the contract does not contain any indication for what concerns the monthly remuneration.

Davide, our foreman in TomatoesArtist, was often complaining about the difficulties to getting by without a previously established wage's amount. His role in the packinghouse was actually pivotal: he was connecting the “world” of production, with the “world” of distribution, namely he represents a sort of joining link along the supply chain. This means that Davide had to be acquainted with the level of production available inside the greenhouses, and with the crops demand and their prices in the marketplaces (retailers' platform and the local and national fruit and vegetables markets). He explained us that, whether he «wants to work as a [simple] team supervisor», he needed to be an «active seller» and launch the products on the market. For him, the working hours, thus, depended on his ability as a broker, even if this was not his alleged task. To attempt to improve his situation, Davide, thus, planned to claim to the company to be remunerated with a fixed salary, even if potentially lower.

As I attempted to show, both in cases of indentured and not indentured labor relationship, even with some differences, the amount of wage earned appears to be the result of the constant *processes of negotiation* occurring everyday between the employers and the employees.

4.1. The salary amount: what is deemed a “fair” wage?

Before starting the workday in the greenhouse usually you agree on the pay. Yesterday, both Ahmed and I received 30 €. Given the constant complaints of Giovanni about my poor performance, it is quite clear that today will not be the same. As we prepare to enter the greenhouse, sharpening knives and cleaning scissors, Giovanni asks me what I think should be the *fair wage* for each of us. «Well, I think Ahmed should be paid about 45/50 € per day for this job...» «Nooo, what does that have to do with it? We always start at 30 €. If Ahmed is *worth* 30 €, *how much are you worth?*» It is clear where he wants to go. I'm too slow, *I am worth less* than Ahmed. Today I will take 25 € as pay. «Is that okay for you?». Rhetorical question. Upon entering the greenhouse, I am really annoyed at this fall in wages, although it is not totally unexpected. Ahmed feels guilty for not having «defended» me, for «not having behaved like a man», as he puts it. «So today work for 25 €!» he advises me.

[Vittoria, inside SicilSerre, June 11th 2013]

As we said, farmworkers' wages often appear to be the (uneven) results of everyday processes of bargaining inside workplaces, and this seems to be the case both in situation of partially formalized that in circumstances of totally informal labor. The informality of labor relations, however, gives even more room to forms of negotiations, the stake of whom is not only the identification of a “fair” wage, but also the very definition of the *value* attribute to *labor*. That is why it assumes a certain relevance to wonder: what is deemed a “fair” wage? What is the *just* form of payment? How do people agree on the *fair* price of work? What are the determinants of wages, or rather on the basis of which elements do we attribute a *value* to the work performance? What *conception of justice* is at the basis of an agreement on the daily wage? By what mechanisms of negotiation can we agree

upon on a regular basis to set pay? Is decision-making power solely in the hands of the employer, or are there are more complex forms of everyday bargaining? Questioning oneself on the concept of fair pay thus goes in the direction of bringing the normative horizon of the action to the center of economic analysis. In addition, to asking oneself how the price of labor is determined – which we will do a little later – the question is then what conception of justice individuals develop and reproduce collectively to conventionally establish the appropriateness of the payment (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006). Often informal agricultural work in the province of Ragusa is based on daily wage negotiations. Since the levels of conventional wages are far lower than those laid down in Collective Agreements, such unwritten agreements need to be repeatedly justified in the manner meant by Conventionalists. In the course of daily negotiations “it is agreed”, thus, on pay, justifying intersubjectively the agreement. Conceptions of justice and the conventions that arise are therefore constantly redefined and reshaped through daily negotiations where not only the monetary value of wages are at stake (Favereau, 2006). As Favereau argues in fact, the wage is the result of a series of intersubjective conventions and not just a meeting, in the abstract, between the demand and supply of labor. Although the salary is present in the form of a price, its amount depends on the application of a large number of institutional and social rules. Upon closer examination, therefore, salaries are not prices, but are *rules* (ibidem: 111). This brings us to question the socio-cultural determinants and conventions that define the *value of work*¹⁰⁹.

A prime example, as feminist literature has brought to light, concerns so-called *emotional labor* (Hochschild, 1983; Berezin, 2009; Wharton, 2009). If until a few decades ago, relational and emotional work in general (emotion work) was considered the prerogative of the reproductive sphere, in the service economy the opposite is increasingly true, namely that male and female employees are asked more and more often, in the workplace, use of their relational skills, carefully regulated within the capitalist enterprise (in fact we talk about such processes defining them as feminization of labor and/or *emotional labor* itself, where emotional work is to be prescribed, and “paid”). It is equally true, however, that in some sectors, despite the considerable importance attributed to emotion work, this kind of labor – even deemed essential – is formally neglected, and generally not remunerated in terms of salary. This ambivalence concerning to relational and emotional work was for me quite evident inside SicilSerre¹¹⁰. Ahmed, for example, continued

¹⁰⁹ The debate about the value of work, which finds its initial formulation in classical political economy and economic sociology (from Karl Marx to Georg Simmel to Werner Sombart), has been widely incorporated into the reflection on the production of value in cognitive capitalism (for further references see, among others, Chicchi and Roggero, 2009).

¹¹⁰ Within this paragraph, I mainly hinge on example referring to my experience of covered participant observation inside SicilSerre (see cap II, par. 2.3), since that was for me the only occasion in which I directly take part in the daily negotiations concerning the fair amount of salary.

telling me that, for the first time since he began living in Vittoria, which was about three years, the opportunity to work together with a friend for a few days made this sacrifice much “lighter”. As was also evident during other work experiences in the greenhouses, the possibility to “have a chat”, escaping the routine of manual work, was highly appreciated by the workers. Gurrieri’s team, for instance, tends to refer to Giuliana and me as the «two girls bringing a breath of fresh air» to the monotony of their work days. When we went to visit them after our period as employees, they referred to the fact that they were missing the possibility to chat together while working, in order to eschew the dullness of the greenhouse situation.

On the other hand however, the producers demonstrated less sympathy for this practice considered a source of distraction and a reduction in pace. Conversations during work hours thus became a source of tension between the needs of production and relational needs.

Giovanni: I’m thinking something. Now let’s do this [*laughs*]. I’m just kidding now, ah, Valè!
Tomorrow you put yourself to work near where you’re running out to throw the clips, alone!

Valeria: Nooo!

G: [*Laughs*] Even better turn on the radio!

V: I sang Vasco Rossi all day today!

G: Stay up next to us, ah, come on! Stay next to us! If you don’t talk you can stay next to us! If you talk I’ll send you down to talk with the radio!

V: But [the workday] never goes by if one doesn’t talk!

G: Ah, it’s true, it never goes by! No, but tell you the truth, you’re right... but, today we didn’t say anything, completely, nor to Ahmed did I say, ‘how are you?’, nor to the Romanian... nothing! And the work was beautiful!

Ahmed: Yes, always without speaking!

G: Without speaking, quiet quiet ... tichitichitichitichi ... [*simulates the speed of the work rate*]. Because I said: “*ca’ un n’a parrare nuddru, am’a travagliare tipo fabbrica*” [here no one should talk, we have to work like in the factory].

[Vittoria, June 13th 2013]

During moments of rest, even Giovanni seemed to appreciate my presence. On the first day, during the lunch break we played cards and the instrument of the game certainly was an excellent form of relaxation for everyone. When the next day Giovanni reduced my pay from 30 to 25 €, as I mentioned, Ahmed told me, in a taxed tone, «don’t play cards with him anymore!» as if to wish him the reduction of a little “pleasure.” Relational work, emotional, caring, usually done by women both outside and inside the work environment, though undeniably required and significant in terms of productivity, in this context seemed not to be counted in terms of salary.

In greenhouse work, other considerations also remain conventionally outside a quantitative type of accounting. As Ahmed pointed out to me, the earnings of the day, for example, do not depend on the type of task performed. The fatigue and toughness of particular tasks, in fact, are not taken into account – unfairly in his opinion – at the moment in which we agree on pay, as can be seen from this passage extracted from my fieldnotes.

In the afternoon we begin throwing out the tomato plants from the greenhouse. [*This is one of the*

tasks of cleaning the greenhouse which takes place at the end of picking. When the plants are dry, they are cut, weeded, grouped in small heaps and gradually thrown out of the greenhouse. It is one of the tasks commonly considered among the most tiring work in the greenhouse]. Initially Ahmed is inside the greenhouse and passes me the plants that I take and throw out. At first for me it isn't a too difficult task, because staying out at least has the advantage of not suffering from the heat of the greenhouse. The tomato plants, however, are very very dry, so they completely scrape your arms, so much so that, going forward, every time we take the plants in hand, both he and I, we continue to scratch ourselves and feel a sharp burn. At one point, I realize my neck is completely red and irritated, as well as my arms! They are completely full of scratches and cuts! In this difficult moment Ahmed says: "This is a really dirty job! It's the worst that can be done in the greenhouse! It's a dirty job! And to do this work we should get at least 40 €!" At that moment I don't have a clear response, I say only: "So why do we get 30 €?", "Because there is no work, understand?", he concludes exasperated.

[Vittoria, June 11th 2013]

Even the uncle agrees it is a tiring job. In fact he affirms:

The heavy work like *scippare 'u pummaruoru* [snatching up tomatoes] I let the others do, to tell you the truth. The light and fast work I'll put myself in also!

[Vittoria, June 13th 2013]

Despite this statement the employer does not provide a higher salary for this task. For Giovanni, as for many other employers, in fact, the value of pay is determined first of all, as we saw, by the reiteration of the "system": 30 € for a Tunisian laborer, 25 € for a Romanian worker. The "naturalization" of this payment method brings out at least two significant elements for analysis. First, as we have seen, the lower wages paid to citizens of Romanian nationality is often associated with a stay of the latter in accommodation provided by the employers: the productive and reproductive sphere are intertwined, therefore, in the definition of an agreement on wage levels. Secondly, the element of national origin takes on a considerable influence, as it is instrumentally used both as a discriminating condition in order to impose differentiated wage and working hours and as a device to stimulate a competitive attitude between the different components of the labor force (see ch. V, par. 2.2). As a form of justification for this choice the uncle says:

The Romanians are a bit slower, I already know, they are more relaxed! And Tunisians instead are not, they are more alert!

[Vittoria, June 13th 2013]

This essentialist and racist rhetoric that combines skills and individual attitudes with national origins (according to which, for example, Indians would be skilled in the care of cattle, Albanians well suited to pruning work, migrants from sub-Saharan Africa fast pickers, and so on) is widespread in the labor market, not only in agriculture (Ambrosini, 2011: 287; 2013: 143). They also arise often in continuity and justify policies of the "racialization" of labor put in place with the aim of using national origin as a device for management of the workforce (Hellio, 2014; Preibisch and Binford, 2007; De Bonis, 2005) [see ch. V].

In setting the pay, ultimately, what matters for the entrepreneur is the speed and productivity of the worker. As we have said concerning Mohamed's recruitment strategies, it is not rare to meet

entrepreneurs that – set a price at the moment of arranging a daily enrollment – then disregard that agreement when remunerating the worker. In such cases, the employer has no difficulty justifying their arbitrary decision by using a “principle of efficiency.” Toniou, for instance, an Albanian entrepreneur in his forties, declared the salary he typically provides to his workforce varies consistently. On his team for instance, Italian laborers are paid, on average, 30 € per day; the Romanians usually 25 €. However, the labor price is “adjusted” according to their capabilities: «If I pick someone that is not good enough, I pay no more than 20 €»¹¹¹.

Within Sicilserre, whether working alongside us or being personally absent, and not employing any worker with monitoring tasks, Giovanni rigidly controls our work time. A laborer must strictly carry out a certain amount of work he has established for a given time interval (see further on). He repeated often that even though he «does not watch us», he knows how much work we should have done. His form of control over the timing and productivity is stringent. Given my difficulty in keeping up with the pace he set, my daily pay is progressively reduced (first 30, then 25, then 20 €). To the decreasing wage Ahmed tells me:

Ahmed: It's better for you! This way you can work for 25 €!

[Vittoria, June 12th 2013]

According to Ahmed, then, despite the definition of a labor price, or perhaps against the imposition of a lower price, the strategy to use is a reduction in the speed of production. Several times during the day Ahmed reminds me to «work more slowly». A first form of resistance is therefore in carrying out the inverse operation to the determination of wages, or to define a work rate *from* the monetary value that the entrepreneur establishes as fixed (cf. Perrotta, 2011a). Once again, therefore, it is evident that the agreement reached on the amount of pay is not exclusively of a numerical-quantitative type, but refers to a set of conventions on productivity, on time, on the forms of control and so on (Favereau, 2006; Salais, 2006). The process of assignment of the monetary value of the salary is based, hence, on a series of agreements that refer to gender, nationality, physical fatigue, the concept of productivity and so on. The negotiation on wages becomes thus a place dedicated to the meeting-clash of conventional principles.

One of the most significant moments during the week of participant observation carried out at SicilSerre involved pay bargaining between the employer and the two laborers. The long conversation I report took place following the «contest» the two workers were forced to undergo, at the end of which the employer would opt for a single employee only. The outcome of the «challenge», namely rather the decision to employ both albeit with different wages and working hours, denotes even more that the creation of the competitive *frame* constitutes a device to intensify

¹¹¹ Vittoria, in the interviewee's firm, June 1st 2013.

the pace of work and to justify the application of differentiated rules between the two “competitors.”

Giovanni: I want to speak clearly once and for all. Compared to the work I do, what you did [*referring to Nicola*], and what he did [*referring to Ahmed*]... you all are less than me. That is let's say, I do three *filagni* [tomato rows], and you all do, you [N.] two and he [A.] two and a half - a little bit more. [*He pauses, as if to give greater solemnity to the things he is going to say*]. Now the money... How much do you think? 30 €? 30 €! What do you say? 25 €? 25 €! But the work, you must do at least what I do. So, I made a calculation: 8 hours of work are not enough for you to do the work I do. And the same for him. You, to equal the work I do, you should do 10 hours a day to stay here. He has to do 9 hours of work, because he is a little bit faster. If that's okay for you, okay. If it's not okay [*makes a sign with his hand to indicate that he can go away*]... *amici eramu e amici restammu* [we were friends and we can remain friends]. This is the discussion. It's a fast job. If it's not good for you there's nothing I can do about it.

Nicola: Let's try to do 10 hours... because it's the first day after two years in the greenhouse. Maybe for a time I can work for 10 hours, then we'll see.

G: In what sense “then we'll see”? I don't understand!

N.: If you don't agree, I'll leave! You can't go crazy because I can't be like you.

G: You don't want to go crazy?

N.: I don't way to make you go crazy. For now 10 hours is better.

G: Better 10 hours?

N.: Because I am not fast. *It's right*. Because I still have problems.

G: Right? [*triumphantly*]

N.: *Right!*

[...]

G: But, wait, let's clarify another small detail. It's not that because you do 10 hours, you have to go even slower and not do as much as I do. *A capitu u fattu?* [*understand?*] Maybe you say: ‘Since I work 10 hours, I'll go slower still’ and not do what I do in four hours! That's no good either!

N.: That's right!

G: Right? All right!

[Vittoria, June 13th 2013]

The principle of equivalence¹¹² introduced by Giovanni, namely the need for workers to maintain the same pace of his work, is absolutely arbitrary, but nonetheless is agreed to on its legitimacy. Since I did not consciously take part in the previous conversation, the uncle reaffirms shortly thereafter his idea of what is an appropriate yardstick.

Giovanni: Mind you, because you're Italian, you must also understand me. It's not that I'm taking advantage of the situation. You understand? *But I do a calculation based on myself*. If I do two *filagni*, and you do one, you're half as much as me. If I go to work, as Ahmed does, and someone says to me, ‘how much do you want a day?’ I tell him: ‘40 €’, so to speak, I have to do a job for 40 €, fast, for what it is. That is, *it's a mathematical thing*.

[Vittoria, June 13th 2013]

An arbitrary principle is built discursively as objective («*it's a mathematical thing*»), elevating it in generality (Boltanski, Thevenot, 2006) and subtracting in this way the possibility of criticism (Thevenot, 2010). The idea of justice and its relative justification (based on the principle of equivalence in productivity among workers and respect for a standardized work rate¹¹³) are called

¹¹² In the lexicon of the Economics of Conventions, the principle of equivalence means that which allows the coordination of actions, enabling comparisons and generalizations (Thevenot, 2010).

¹¹³ The type of piecework more commonly used as a form of payment in seasonal agriculture provides remuneration of the amount produced during predetermined working hours. The mechanism proposed by Giovanni

upon to vigorously support a definition of unfair wages and working hours. In the negotiations concerning the amount of the fair wage, the varying degrees of power and the various forms of capital (economic, social and cultural) with which individuals have been equipped, thus, come into play, influencing the definition of the price. The decision-making power of the entrepreneur, in a highly informal and precarious labor market like the agricultural one, is therefore particularly stringent in determining the conventional value of pay. In this last fieldnotes excerpt, which brings us back to the episode of day wage reduction previously discussed, such considerations are revisited.

I say to Giovanni, “All right, let’s do this: 35 € for Ahmed and 25 for me”. He replied: “Ah, but for me it’s the same cost! You’re clever as a Romanian”. We begin work with the knowledge that my work *should be worth* 25 €, that of Ahmed 30. It’s clear that my livelihood does not actually depend on that pay, but even so, I cannot suppress a strong sense of annoyance and anger. I work with much less desire, feel more the fatigue, I do not want to be there, I do not want to work, I don’t want *because Giovanni has reduced my pay* fundamentally. Ahmed at the time felt a kind of guilt towards me. He repeated several times during the day: “I’m sorry not to have done anything to convince the uncle to give you more. I haven’t behaved like a man.” *It was clear however that in that situation Ahmed had no bargaining power. It was clear that prices were established by the uncle, and that we could accept or refuse to work, but we could not have in any way negotiated the pay. That was the situation.*

[Vittoria, June 11th 2013]

4.2. *The salary deferral*

JULY 12th 2013:

We are in our car with Lori and Patriciu. Lori started to speak about the fact that Mr. Battaglia, their boss [*il principale*], has not paid them yet. She explains that he usually keeps an “account” [*conto*] – as Lori refers to it – for every single worker. When laborers work for him, he writes down the number of “days” that they have been employed. Every week, he doles them out around 100 € – for each couple –, the necessary amount to do the shopping, and that’s it. The necessary amount to survive. When some of them claim to have the entire amount, he says that he has no money, that they «have to wait» and «be patient»... when he is going «to sell the eggplant», it goes the argument, then *maybe* he is going to give them some money. In general, however, he is always complaining about the misery of his life [*piange miseria*]. Lori tells me, as an example, the story of Dorina, one of her friend and workmates, who has asked Battaglia her money, since she needs to go back to Romania. She has asked «the bill» [*il conto*] – as they call it – last month; he owes her around 2 thousand €. Now she is not working anymore, simply waiting for that money. At a certain point he provided 500 €, and told her to get prepared and buy whatever she needs to leave to Romania. She did it. And she is still waiting, with her luggage and the foodstuff ready.

No one of them, of course, could take the risk to leave his/her workplace without having all their money. The risk is, obviously, to come back from Romania and have no proof to ask for them. Lori is extremely pissed off, and this time she seems really determined not to accept neither one Euro from him, till he repays the entire debt. She cannot receive just a «small pin money», she says! It is not sustainable for her anymore! She wants her money to visit her loved ones in Romania. Then she is planning to come back to Vittoria and start her new job with tranquility. She already asked Battaglia for her money some weeks ago, when she notified to the greenhouses’ overseer [*il*

establishes, instead, the amount of work to do given a certain fixed wage, by varying the time taken to produce it. This formula – which seems curiously unified with the logic of project contracts (Boltanski, 2005) – is used by the farmer to keep the daily cost of work constant, in the same way as payment based on the number of ‘crates’ of product picked (for more see Perrotta, 2013a: 132).

massaro] that she could not work anymore, because she felt a strong pain in her foot: «Give me money, and I'll go to Romania to have the surgery and when I recover, I'll come back to work». «And what about Patriciu?», asked the foreman. «Of course he'll come with me!». [...] As soon as she said so, the *massaro* went to their room to forewarn them that they have to leave the place. Obviously, she has no doubt about the fact that she is not going to do it.

[Vittoria's countryside, c/da Alcerito, July 12th, 2013]

JULY 17th 2013:

At around 4 o'clock, we meet to go to the supermarket. Lori comes with Aziz [*her Tunisian neighbor*]. Patriciu, instead, is not coming, 'cause he prefers to be stuck in front of Battaglia's office's door. All of them have been there the entire morning, they say, since around 10 o'clock. Battaglia Sr., told them that they had to wait for his son to come. He gave them his phone number. Battaglia Jr. has picked the phone just once during the morning, since he didn't recognize the number, and then he was switched it off. [...].

As soon as we come back in the countryside, Patriciu calls Lori to inform her that a car has just arrived in front of the office. We go there all together. Patriciu is extremely nervous, he drinks a hot beer in one long sip, and so it starts sweating. Dorina is there with her Tunisian partner. They do not come closer to introduce to us. When we arrive, Battaglia Sr. is saying to the workers: «What do you want? I can't do anything for you!». In the meanwhile, there is a white car coming. Maybe he's Battaglia Jr. The atmosphere is fraught with edginess. Patriciu tells us that someone from the Battaglia's family has told him, during the morning: «Ah, man, you are wearing a shirt! I have no money to buy a shirt for me, as you did!». Patriciu is really pissed off. He repeats all the time: «Ah, Italia! Ah, Italia!». Giuliana cannot stand him so long, and says: «Patriciu, please, every time you pronounce this sentence, it's like a stab for me». Instead, I don't feel wounded. I just feels that's not a matter of nationalities. I say so.

Dorina, also extremely pissed off, says to Battaglia that if he doesn't pay them, she'll take a gas cylinder and burn the entire place. Lori, in the meanwhile, is threatening the employer saying that she's going to call the police. «Of course, you can call them! Place call them!», says the man in the white car running away with arrogance. [...] For sure no one has any confidence in the police. However, their discourses neither convey mistrust or worries against them. It is interesting for me to notice that no one is neither thinking to call the trade union! But while the entire group is entrenched behind Battaglia's door, I try to call Bernadetta [*a FLAI-CGIL's employee*], to ask information about the procedure that they usually follow in these cases, to hypothesize that's the better thing to do. She says that she usually speaks with Peppe [*the secretary*] who then tries to talk directly to the employer, to check if it is available to find any form of conciliation. If he doesn't answer, then they usually proceed through the *Ispettorato del lavoro* to start a legal action: «But proceeding directly through the *Ispettorato* is almost useless» she says «you don't get anything and it takes really a lot of time. Usually, it's better to push the employer to give workers' money straightaway». Peppe, however, is on holiday till next week. In the meanwhile, if they are urgently in need of money or foodstuff, Bernadette suggests that they can intervene to provide them. I pick off the phone thanking her. I come back to the group, and I try to suggest Lori, being very very careful, the trade union's option among the ones available. [...]

[Soon after, Giuliana and I leave the office's door, moving to Aziz's place. In the meanwhile the other people remain sat in front of the office]. When they come back, almost one hour later, they say that they spoke at the phone with Battaglia Jr., who declares to be in Catania, and says that he's going to give them money tomorrow. «Lori, believe me!» he apparently asks.

[Vittoria's countryside, c/da Alcerito, July 17th, 2013]

JULY 18th 2013:

[Aziz invited me, Giuliana, Lori, Patriciu, and other workmates, in this "place" to celebrate the Ramadan evening all together]. Needless to say, Battaglia is one of the main topic of our conversation. Every new person enters the place, asks immediately Lori if Battaglia has showed up. Every time that Lori repeats the same refrain, she gets nervous and changes expression. She is waiting, of course, and if their money does not arrive before Saturday, they have to wait till next week to take the bus to Romania. Some of the workers were commenting that the situation in the firm was not like that in the previous year. Camila and Constantin, for instance, have been

knowing Battaglia since five years. Also Niculina commented: «At the beginning Battaglia was not like this... at the beginning he was paying on time. He has started for the last year to pay the workers just when someone of them decides to go to Romania. In the meanwhile, he provides just few money for foodstuff». [...]. Dorina has been waiting since two months before receiving the 2.000 € Battaglia owes her. Lori has been waiting since three weeks her 1.200 €. Everyone is suggesting her not to leave her house before he provides the entire amount. She obviously agrees, and even if she has found another place and another job she is not leaving Battaglia's countryside. [...]. Lori also says that everyone has recommended her not to call the police, 'cause they are "Battaglia's friend" and they will not do anything for them. Giuliana, at that point, suggests to speak with a trade unionists. Lori: «But they told me that the union cannot do anything!». Giuliana: «Well, maybe not, but certainly more than what we can do alone. Peppe, our friend, works really well and at least he could have some power to make pressure on the boss». Obviously, the fact that Lori and Patriciu have already found another working and living arrangement somewhere else, make them feeling free to think about every possible alternative (i.e. the trade union or the police) to ask their money back. And, as a consequence, Giuli and I feel more comfortable to provide this sort of suggestions.

[Vittoria's countryside, c/da Alcerito, July 18th, 2013]

JULY 27th 2013:

I have spoken at the phone with Lorina. I was worried for her [...]. She was very happy! Finally she has picked her money from Battaglia! He gave her the entire amount minus 200 €, that he promises to send to Romania. She obviously considers them lost. Tomorrow she will take the bus to go back home.

[Vittoria, July 27th, 2013]

The company we are dealing with, in this account, is one of the numerous of the medium and small-sized firms in the area, employing entirely foreign workforce, and perpetrating what the SicilSerre's owner defined as the «ongoing recruitment system». The fundamental aspect making particularly convenient for the employer to reiterate such a "system", together with the evident opportunity of reducing labor cost, is the possibility to *postpone workforce's payments* – a situation that can occur for several months or till the end of the crop productive cycles (namely, as Battaglia says in this account, «till the eggplant has been sold»). Also Bernadette Di Giacomo and Emanuele Bellassai, engaged in the attempt to contrast labor and sexual exploitation in Vittoria's countryside¹¹⁴, confirm the pervasiveness of this situation: the wage deferment constitutes the most common form of remuneration for what concerns informal, long-term and live-in greenhouses employees. In most cases they are Romanian citizens who moved to Italy quite often as a couple¹¹⁵. For what concerns laborers' migration strategies, in fact, working as a couple has the doubtless advantage to be capable

¹¹⁴ Bernadetta is an employee of FLAI-CGIL (Vittoria), Emanuele works for the Coeoperative Proxima (Ragusa). These two organizations, since July 2012, have both committed to a social project, named *Solidal tranfert*, aimed at providing advocacy for what concerns migrants' labor and sexual exploitation (on this topic see Toscano, 2013). Giuliana and I are extremely thankful to Bernadette, Emanuele and Peppe since they welcomed several times our company during their tours in the countryside.

¹¹⁵ Even if, being remunerated at the end of the employment relationship is less frequent for people non-residing in the countryside, several Tunisian workers living in the city center have also to undergo delays – or even thefts – of their salaries. Ahmed, for instance, is often complaining about the fact that his employers repeat always the same refrain: «[I'll pay you] Tomorrow, tomorrow». While we were working in SicilSerre, he had a prompt reaction once that Giovanni gives us our money before the end of the working day: «This is a good boss!», he says, «that's fair. No one does it, never ever. They always say: "tomorrow, tomorrow". And what do I eat today if you pay me tomorrow?».

to “transfer back home” compressively a higher amount of money (Perrotta, 2015a: 200). On the other hand, with regards to the employer’s perspective, in a context in which working and private lives tend to coincide, enrolling a couple could constitute a strategy that allows to exploit labor division inherent to each family group¹¹⁶. Moreover, employing a couple could lower down the overall workers’ pressure to receive their salaries on a constant basis. Differently from single workers, who require an almost steady income to sustain with regularity their families back home, in fact, a couple’s migratory project could be slightly different. Although they also send remittances to their relatives back home, in fact, they appear to be more oriented towards the purpose of saving a quite sufficient amount of money in order to come back in their country of origins «as soon as possible». The (compulsory) decision to reduce consumption to its bare bones – avoiding, for instance, every type of leisure activities – allows them to reach this goal even earlier (Piore, 1979)¹¹⁷.

In any case, when the situation of payments’ delay becomes really unbearable, as it was accounted in the previous extracts, one of the few laborers’ options consists in leaving their work and home place, in search of better employment opportunities¹¹⁸. Lorina's and Petru's frequent transfers in various firms, for instance, exemplify this type of strategy: they left Battaglia at the end of July 2013, and after one month spent in Romania they started to work for another company, thanks to the intermediation of a couple of Romanian friends. They kept this job for less than six month and then, since the new employer was – yet again – not paying them, they moved to another “countryside” (keeping with the former boss a credit of several hundreds of Euros). When I came to visit them in June 2014, they have just moved in a “new place”. At the moment I am writing, instead, I have been informed that they used not to receive any remuneration even in latter case, and for that reason – this time – they contacted the local trade union to attempt to obtain at least part of their salaries. Thus, the agricultural companies characterized by the irregularity of payments (like Battaglia’s) tend to have an extremely high turnover, that however does not seem to affect too much the greenhouses productivity.

¹¹⁶ I owe this reflection, that I consider as strongly appropriate, to Lucio Castracani (University of Montreal), who noticed these aspects, in comparison with the Canadian situation where these types of informal arrangements appear to be less frequent.

¹¹⁷ In this sense, Ambrosini (1998) speaks about the potential *higher availability* of migrant labor's supply to accept informal type of works (or, in this cases, to accept salaries deferral): their intent to work in Italy maybe for a limited period (together with other elements defining an uncertain situation) could explain migrants «higher availability» to undergo these type of hardship at work. Moreover, the imaginary related to the fact that informal work is just a temporary step before attaining more stable and socially evaluated positions explains migrants’ attitude to remain embroiled in the informal labor market, at least at the beginning at their migratory experience.

¹¹⁸ The option of contacting the institution in charge of controlling labor regularity or deputed to defend workers’ rights in very few cases is considered as viable, as it was possible to understand through the former extracts.

The payments deferral, as it is straightforward, has some deep implications for what concerns the symbolic value attributed to workers daily efforts and to agricultural labor in general; but, first and foremost, it strictly binds workers material conditions. The situation of cash unevenness, in fact, imposes numerous limitations to laborers' power to decide autonomously about their current and future expenses. The lack and irregularity of material resources, in fact, affects people everyday consumption opportunities, and it prevents also the possibility of planning future investments (like, for instance, renting a place downtown, or buying a car), that would reduce workers' dependence on their employers or on other informal intermediaries. Moreover, being things like this, people *freedom of movement* is constantly at stake. Living in the countryside without a private means of transport, in fact, the majority of laborers is forced to rely on informal drivers to reach the downtown for current necessities (going to the supermarket or to the doctor, to the trade union or to the seaside). A route from Vittoria's countryside to the city center generally costs around 10 €. Hence, having at their disposal such a small budget every week (usually 100 € for two people), countryside's inhabitants are forced to limit the occasions to move out of their workplaces (since, even if they *own* the required sum, they usually lack the cash to «pay a car» to drive them).

Moreover, as we have seen through the Lorina's story, the money unavailability does not allow actually numerous people to come back to their countries of origins, both for short periods or definitively. Thus, notwithstanding the alleged freedom of movement Romanian citizens could enjoy on the European territory, in fact leaving Italy is not so easy for them. This conclusion differs from the observations reported in several researches dealing with migrant labor in the agricultural sector (Corrado, 2013; Perrotta, 2015a: 200-201)¹¹⁹. According to some scholars, in fact, the non-deportability of eastern European citizens (cf. De Genova, 2002; 2004) and the informal labor relationship they usually maintain could account for their greater mobility on the Italian and European territory compared with other foreign workers. For what concerns the Romanian daily laborers I met, instead, their alleged right of circulation on the EU area appeared to be actually at odds with the concrete possibility to practically exert it. What it was possible to perceive spending time in Vittoria's countryside, on the contrary, was an overall feeling of being *trapped* in the same

¹¹⁹ Cf., for instance, Perrotta's analysis: «If Romanians ever feel that the wages they can earn in this area are too low, they move elsewhere to look for other work. Their most powerful and profitable form of resistance is their mobility within Europe, their ability to “escape”. As a result, they rarely get involved in disputes about wage levels and labor management. [Non- communitarian migrants], on the other hand, are often “trapped” in this area, partly because of the economic crisis» (2015a: 200-201). Paradoxically, compared with Romanian nationals, Tunisian citizens – even undergoing a stricter migratory regime and enjoying less rights – appear to be much more mobile, often traveling between Tunisia and Sicily and frequently leaving in-between. As it is straightforward, in fact, while a return ticket (by boat) to Tunisia costs only – on average – 80 €, a single bus ride from Vittoria to Romania, costs around 400 € for a couple.

country and in the same firm¹²⁰, “waiting”, together with money, the concrete possibility to “leave”, that has to be generously doled out by the bosses. Harnesses in a sort of vicious circle, moreover, while “waiting” workers often continue to toil in order to not burn their time; obviously, the more they work, the more they accumulate in their *conti*, the less is likely they will receive the entire amounts immediately. In these cases, the employers seem to perform the role of “border keepers”, concretely preventing or providing people freedom of movement. These feelings of oppression and stagnation generated by salaries deferral, moreover, have been deeply accentuated by the current economic crisis¹²¹ (cf. also Semenzin, 2013).

The use to postpone payments, moreover, represents also a source of fierce symbolic violence perpetrated towards migrant laborers (Bourgois, 2005). In the first place, in fact, it conveys a deep “infantilization” of the immigrant workers. The employee seems to be treated like a child on which his/her parents exert an implicit power of determination through the doling out of a weekly “pin money”; in a quite similar way, the possibility to decide autonomously when, how and with whom to spend their money is somehow precluded to daily laborer. The amounts owed by the *principali*, thus, very often tend to lose the characteristics usually attribute to a proper *salary*. A *salary* is considered, first and foremost, a worker’s fundamental *right*. As things stand, it has to be provided straightaway. At odds, the way in which day labor is remunerated constantly force employees to “beg for their *money*”. The *money* (or the “*conto*”), differently from the *salary*, could be delivered (or extinguished) whenever the employer has it at his disposal. The linguistic distinction between a *salary* and the (generic) *money transfer*, thus, is not fortuitous¹²². It conveys a clear analytical distinction between two different *types* of money, according to the different ways through which they are doled out and according to employers’ and employees’ mutual expectations (Zelizer, 1989). Secondly, the set of justifications provided by the entrepreneurs to account for the existence of this «system» actually implies, in the majority of the cases, an ongoing process of “inferiorization” of migrant workforce, realized through the laborers’ “razialization”. To exemplify what I am maintaining, I have selected an extract of an interview conducted with Stefano, a tomatoes producer, who takes part in an Association protesting at a local and national level for the situation undergone by the Italian agriculture. I discussed with Stefano about his attitude to keep workers’

¹²⁰ Regarding this particular “side effect”, several scholars started to speak about *unfree labor*, in order to take some distances from “classical” Marxist tradition that frames waged work as a “free” exchange of labor power with a salary (cf., among the others, Fudge and Strauss, 2013).

¹²¹ Aleksandra, one of my mates in TomatoesArtists, was deeply suffering for her impossibility to visit Poland, due to the lack of money notwithstanding her constant endeavor inside the packinghouse.

¹²² It was not fortuitous, indeed, that in the previous fieldnotes I wrote, since I was totally immersed in the field own slang, I was using the generic form *money* (as people were also doing) and not the precise reference to a salary or a wages.

money till the very last minute when laborers' ask for them before going back to their countries of origins. The set of motivations provided by my interlocutor are reported below:

Valeria: Do laborers prefer to be paid per month, or week, or...?

Stefano: according to their needs, there isn't one single way... for example, there is the case of the man who doesn't want to bring money back home and says: «Give me just 50 € per week for foodstuff, and then, please, keep on my behalf the rest of the money till the end of year».

V.: Why they don't want to bring money back home?

S.: *Because they are afraid that someone could steal their money [si scantano che ci rubano i soldi]! 'cause between them they steal each other... [chè fra di loro si rubano]!* These are the ones who come here to work! Those who come here just to be on vacation they will rightly earn 25 € and burn 30... there are also these kind of guys here! 'Cause there are those who are regular with their documents and there are those... and there are those who are *clandestines*...

V.: So, does it work through a deposit?

S.: Practically, you decide a certain amount [to be doled out weekly], and then when the laborer needs more money he can come to take them...

V.: Do you operated actually as a bank?

S.: Not properly as a bank, because this is their money. *We are so kind that we just keep them on their behalf [noi ci facciamo i comodi che ce li teniamo]*. Because, for example, *they kill each other like dogs, they kill each other!* We know, for instance, that there is the man who settles for the sum that you provide, and he says: «At the end of the month you should give me money, so I can send the remittance to my loved ones». And then there are those for whom money is not sufficient in any case and they fritter it away directly here in Italy... *they start drinking, they start doing... eh... These kind of things do happen!*

[Vittoria, inside the place where the Association in which the interviewee takes part organized a public protest, March 11th, 2013]

The motivations provided by Stefano to account for the naturalized system of payments', even being quite extreme, appear to formulate in a coarser manner a creeping racist attitude quite diffuse towards migrant laborers. In this barefaced discourse, in fact, Stefano actually conveys the common idea according to which workers *are not capable to save* money on their own. The employers' help is thus considered as fundamental in order to assist laborers in *the purpose of saving* («*ci facciamo i loro comodi*»). Stefano offers two types of justifications to account for the employees' alleged difficulty to save: they cannot keep their money because they are under the risk of theft committed by their metes and *paisani* (framing laborers as "victims"). Alternatively, they are not able to "resist" to the temptation of wasting it for alcoholic drinking or other "frivolous" purposes (framing laborers as "deviant"). The workers' image conveyed through these words is thus brutal: like the Conrad's "savages"¹²³, in the course of this discourse, laborers are compared to cruel and instinctive "animals" (they behave «like dogs»), acting under an irrational impulse of hunger or rage. They don't seem to be bound to any moral or positive law («they kill each other», «they steal their fellows' money»). Moreover, they show perverted conducts, *being* and *behaving* like "deviants" («they are *clandestine*» and «they usually *get drunk*»). When migrant laborers demonstrate such violent attitude and such warped life-styles, their presence on the Italian territory is somehow not "tolerated" anymore. Our interlocutor, in fact, distinguishes, in his discourse, between two groups:

¹²³

I refer to the Joseph Conrad's masterpiece *Heart of darkness*.

the “good migrants” (i.e. the ones that «are here to work hard» and to «send money back to their countries of origins»); and the bad migrants (e.g., the ones that are «here to have a holiday», earning money just to “waste” them). The “bad” migrant laborers’ seem to be not endowed with the *western* and *middle class* capability to *save* money, and this justifies the fact that their employers demonstrate a “supportive attitude” towards them, keeping their salaries till their decision to come back to their countries of origin¹²⁴.

In order to conclude, I report here a few more considerations jotted down in my notes on this very argument. They are indeed fraught with the emotions experienced in the field, that constitute actually the primary form of understanding and classification, and therefore represent – in my opinion – a relevant added value to conclude the analysis conducted throughout this paragraph:

This vulgar and almost feudal behavior deprives people of their spending autonomy and their everyday life management. Even more, like in Battaglia's firm, when obtaining workers own money becomes so difficult, as begging for their savings. [...] In our conversations with some employers, they have talked about this habit of “keeping” the laborers money. They tend to say that workers “use” them as a sort of bank to hold their savings as they have no other place nor safe residence to put them. This seems to be a “favor” offered by the employers to their employees, as if an indicator of the trust established between them. Listening Battaglia’s laborers, instead, this is just the umpteen abuse towards them. «Not only I pay you little but also I do not give you everything at once. I pay you just the amount that is sufficient for you daily needs. I succeed to reduce your consumption to a minimum. I constantly give you an impression of having the need of working. I constantly give you the hope you can take possession of all your savings one day or another. While you are waiting for this moment, I ask you to work for me».

[Vittoria, July 12th 2013]

4.3. *And when a salary is not perceived?*

Marian: «*Il lavoro c'è, sono i soldi che non ci sono!*» [«There is a lot of work... but there isn't money!»]

[Vittoria's countryside, July 12th 2013]

¹²⁴ In order to compare the image of migrant laborers to that of the *colonial subjects* see, among the others, Mezzadra (2008). For the sake of completeness it is possible to state that, the other way around – even if very partially – among the workers I met, several conducts are similar to the ones denounced in the previous interview's extract. The cases of thefts, deceptions or frauds that migrant laborers perpetrate towards their fellows or *paisani* are not so rare. However, there is not any actual reason to suppose that foreigners have to show more virtuous behaviors compared to their Italian counterparts. Moreover, there is no actual reason to think that foreigners have to act in respect of an alleged “communitarian solidarity”. Communitarian belongings, obviously, could be used as a resource or could be experienced as a disadvantage (cf., for instance, Azzeruoli [2014] for what concerns the role of family and “communitarian” linkages in promoting migrant exploitation. See also Perrotta [2014b] concerning the role played by informal brokers in the South of Italy, often belonging to the same country of origins as their team mates). Furthermore, I was quite surprised by the large sums spend by my friends – mainly Romanians – for alcoholic consumptions notwithstanding their low budgets. However, placing ourselves in the Bourgeois's perspective while investigating the everyday life of crack dealers (2005), it seems somehow necessary to frame individual choices (even the “deviant” ones), within a broader analysis of the structural determinants leading to such behaviors. In the case of Romanian laborers, for instance, affected by labor and social marginalization, enjoying alcoholic “parties” was one of the few available possibility to resist the monotony, the isolation and degradation characterizing their everyday life.

It was several time spotlighted that, among farmworkers and entrepreneur, it exists a general disposition to consider greenhouses and packinghouses employments as a soiling and degrading form of labor. Taking these considerations as a given, they tend to recognize that this kind of “dirty” jobs are usually accepted «just to have some money». The first time I met Ahmed inside Mohamed’s greenhouse, for instance, he immediately pointed out that «no one could like this job! This is a job that you accept to do just to fill your stomach [*è un lavoro che si fa solo per fame!*]». In the same fashion, Sandra – the packinghouse manager we have already met throughout this account –, while informing me about a spontaneous strike that took place in her firm, she told me: «The female workers organize that riots ‘cause I delayed their salaries... but actually they were right! This is not a pleasant job! You don’t come here to have a nice time, you come here just to have your money!». *Salary*, thus, apparently constitutes the unique *motivation* pushing workers to toil¹²⁵. But are things really like this? Could we restrict to the wage the set of motivations pushing daily laborers to be employed in such degrading occupations? Or are there other considerations? The necessity to understand *what else*, beside the salaries, pushed laborers to work emerged while being employed for TomatoesArties. As we have seen in the outset of this chapter, in fact, TomatoesArtist employees were not receiving any remuneration for their efforts. Differently from the case of Romanian live-in workers we dealt with in the previous paragraph, for whom the situation of lack of salaries tended to be temporary, in the case of TomatoesArtist packinghouse the laborers do not have almost *any expectation* to receive their money back. At the moment of our arrival in the firm (in June 2013), in fact, the shop floor laborers had been working without any remuneration since September 2012 (namely for around ten month, if we exclude a lump sum of 700 € doled out to them for Christmas festivities). Moreover, since the company was thought to be above to declare bankrupt, workers did not expected to be entitled to any type of refund for their daily presence in the lines. Among them, the ones that attempted to proceed through the local trade unions to prosecute their employers, on the one hand, were “wasting” their time and money since the trade unions were not able to solve the situation, and, on the other hand, were undergoing the risk to be ostracized by other local packinghouses eventually being informed about their conduct. The case we are dealing with, even if it could not be considered as the most “typical” to represent the local labor marker situation, seems however to be pivotal in order to shed light on several dynamics that usually take place also in situations in which a salary – even basic and uneven – continues to exists. The questions I attempt to set forth here appear to be quite similar to the ones

¹²⁵ In the classical Marxist tradition, moreover, the *salary* represents an indicator of the existence of a *free exchange* between the worker that as a *free individual* can dispose of his labor power as his own commodity and could sell it to the employer, since s/he has no other commodity for sale. Without the presence of a salary this form of exchange could not be considered anymore as a “free” one.

rose by Michael Burawoy at the beginning of his ethnographic experience inside the Allied's Corporation (1979). Subverting the perspective of his contemporaneous industrial sociologists – aimed at understanding how (and why) people in the shop floor try to reduce the output – Burawoy was actually trying to understand which were the set of external conditions and inner motivations pushing workers to toil so hard as they do, collaborating openly to increment firm's profit and to reproduce their own exploitation. At the outset of *Manufacturing Consent*, Burawoy wonders [1979: XI]:

«Why do works work as hard as they do? [...] why should workers push themselves to advance the interest of the company? Why cooperate with and sometimes exceed the expectations of those “people upstairs” who “will not do anything to squeeze another piece out of you”? But it wasn't long before I too was braking my back to make out, to make the quota, to discover a new angle, and to run two job at ones – risking life and limbs for that extra piece. What was driving me to increase Allied's profit? Why was I actively practicing in the intensification of my own exploitation and even losing my temper when I couldn't? That is the problem I pose».

In the same fashion, thus, we are trying to understand here which kind of motivations are pushing people to wake up every morning and cope with their tough routines even without receiving any direct monetary compensation. In the first place, it is straightforward to consider that labor market in South Eastern Sicily is characterized by high levels of unemployment and underemployment “forcing” workers (both Italian and foreigners) to – somehow – accept the “few available opportunities”. Aside from the fact that labor demand is slack, however, there are actually several other factors making the labor offer segment quite *rigid* and quite *slow* to react to the lack of payments. Even in the case of TomatoesArtists, for instance, laborers narrated that they faced diverse problems in their attempt to look for another job¹²⁶. Some of the laborers, for example, depend on one of their workmate to reach the jobsite, and could not think to look for another employment without a private means of transport (that not so many of them own). As Magi and Fathima explain me, for instance:

Megi: I told to Pavli to don't worry about me if he wants to look for another job... but if he quits [*in TomatoesArtist*], I also have to quits, cause I have no other way to come here. And I have no other way to reach any workplace without a car, actually... I can't not even go around and search for a new job without a car.

[Santa Croce Camerina, Inside TomatoesArtists, June 18th 2013]

Fathima: It takes 40 minutes to come here on foot from Santa Croce... and this is one of the closest jobsite. Where do I go without a car? In the packinghouse, they usually call you and ask you to be in the lines in ten minutes... How can I be on time without a car?

¹²⁶

Cf., on this topic, also the experience narrated by Ehrenreich (2002) and Holmes (2013).

To look for another job often means to find other complex ways to rearrange an entire life (from what concern the place to live, or the everyday forms of transportation used). In the most difficult circumstances, as we have seen, workers are also living inside their companies and this fact strongly prevent them to leave their jobs if they have no other shelters to repair.

The feeling of having “no alternatives” (being it actual or simply perceived) does not represent the workers' situation as a whole. On the contrary, several of my mates at TomatoesArtist do not seem to consider themselves as persons «with no alternatives». Davide, for example, represents one of these cases. After several years employed in the processing plant, he had acquired a certain amount of competences in his position. Moreover, as it was possible to understand through his discourse, he also accumulated a certain amount of social capital. He was not lacking economic capital neither, due to his wife professional stability. As he was explaining to me and Giuliana, thus, he could easily turn into an autonomous workers in the agricultural sector. In fact, he was actually managing his own greenhouses' company, cultivating vegetables that he was facilitated to sell thanks to the networks that he created through his position at TomatoesArtists. In the meanwhile, his wife used to be stably employed inside a firm that was supposed to be quite often in search of workers, providing good type of jobs. More then ones, thus, he let us thinking that, whether he would like – he could have quite easily access to other alternative occupations. However he *did not change is job*. Why, thus, did he *choose* to work for TomatoesArtists? In a long chat we had with him after our “period of training” in the packinghouse, he explained us some of his motivations:

We were discussing, once again, with Davide and Pavli the fact that they don't have been paid for so long. Davide states that, together with Pavli, he was one of the few workers that assumed a “soft” attitude towards the managers, never asking them to have his money back for quite a lot of time. «At the beginning», he says, «it wasn't such a big deal, 'cause both of us had some savings... it was like keeping money inside a bank: we knew they must pay us at a certain moment». Right now his bosses owe him around 8 thousand Euros. «On the one hand», he says, «I don't wanna leave this workplace 'cause I'm worried that if I go away I'll lose all my money. On the other hand, I keep on being here exclusively for the *ingaggio* [hiring]¹²⁷. In the agricultural sector», he continues, «*the employment subsidies* are extremely important! Let's consider my situation, for example: I have a daughter and I receive around 2/3 thousand euros per year, that's not such an irrelevant sum! I know several people, for example, that decided to pay the house mortgage once per year in August, directly cash! So, the unemployment [benefit] is important!». Thus, for sure, public subsidies constitute a deterrent for everyone to leave the job. Somehow, they allow workers to... survive, to be able to have some “rescuing” money. So even if agricultural workers are largely under-paid, unemployment subsidies allow them – in a certain sense – to keep afloat. «I could work on my own since the day after tomorrow, if I'd like!» states Davide, «but actually I don't wanna do it right now». He explains to us that he is currently managing his own greenhouses, and that he has a friend that asked him to start a small company together in which Davide should eventually oversee the packinghouse. «But I don't know if it's convenient for me to leave this place», he wonders. «Aside from unemployment, I have other advantages here. Do you think that I've ever bought any products for my greenhouses? No, of course! There are so many things that I

¹²⁷ The *ingaggio*, together with several days of contributions, allows the farmworker to apply for the unemployment subsidy (see further on).

simply take from the company... there is an entire system thanks to which you don't spend any extra money being here... Do you get it?».

[Santa Croce Camerina, inside TomatoesArtist, July 23th 2013]

This discourse highlights straightforwardly the pivotal role played by the *agricultural unemployment subsidy* as a deterrent to leave the jobsite¹²⁸. The consideration made explicit by Davide in this field-note extract tended to be shared also by the other TomatoesArtists' workers. For the majority of them, in fact, the possibility of receiving a public benefit, even not earning a steady labor income, radically held down the option of dismissing their job. These mechanisms were totally intelligible from the management's perspective. The entrepreneur, thus, tends to actively use the unemployment subsidy as a tool to reduce the labor costs and at the same time to bind laborers to the workplace. To provide an example, it is worth to recall the fact that in the year preceding our participant observation, the laborers' salaries were reduced from 4,30 to 4 € per hour, while the number of daily contributions assured to them in order to apply for the unemployment benefit was increased from 51 to 102 days. Clearly the possibility to get a higher social benefit prevented the workers from leaving their jobs, and supply the company with a higher bargaining power.

The ethnographic analysis, thus, highlights that it is not completely true that the employees tend to consider themselves as totally deprived of any *possibility to choose* among a variety of options; these options, however, appear to be defined by the entire socio-economic field and by a structural set of constraints and opportunities, by which the individuals feel to be bound (Bourdieu, 1997; 2005). We could thus understand the choice made by Davide and by the other laborers as an active *decision* to keep on working – even without a salary –, albeit not an entirely *free* one. These considerations lead our analysis to deal directly with a topic that represents the core of the studies on labor relationship: namely, the analytical distinction existing between *free* and *unfree labor*. While the classical Marxist tradition postulates the existence of a sharp distinction between the *free wage labor* and the *slavery*, in the reality of the workplaces these categories appear to be much more fluid and intertwined. Together with Marcel Van Der Linden (2008), thus, it is possible to maintain that between the condition of a *free wage worker*¹²⁹ and the situation of a *slave* there exist several intermediate forms of labor. According to Van Der Linden, «wage laborers are often less “free” than the classical view suggests. Employers have often restricted their employees' freedom to leave in situation of labor scarcity» (2008: 23). An employee, it goes Van Der Linden's argument, can be tied to an employer in many ways. Among the expedients used by the managers to restrict

¹²⁸ For what concerns the national legislation and the most common uses of the agricultural unemployment subsidies in the local context look at the next paragraph.

¹²⁹ Namely, the alleged free individual selling his/her labor power in exchange of a salary.

laborers' freedom and bind them to a workplace¹³⁰, he clearly mentions the «*social security provisions and other special benefit*» [2008: 24, emphasis in the text]. Inside the packinghouse that we have observed, these mechanisms were clearly at work: the fact of not receiving a salary was actually compensated by the possibility to access a public benefit thanks to the firm's intermediation (as it was clearly stated in the Davide's account). Moreover, the company provided to its workers several other added advantages that somehow "bind" laborers to the workplace reducing their necessities to seek for another job. To supply the employees with the unsold products, for instance, is a typical practice in all the agro-industrial companies, and it was also extremely common in TomatoesArtists¹³¹. Moreover, as we have seen through the ethnographic account (par. 2.5), the firm authorizes the employees to take and "exchange" the unsold crops. Workers, for instance, have the possibility to barter the zucchini surplus with a local cattle farmer who, in turn, provides them with dairy products; or, alternatively, they generally exchange the vegetable stocks with a local charity association that in turn supply them with other foodstuff collected in the area. These examples represent some of the side-advantages motivating employees' decision to keep on working without a salary; at the same time, following Van Der Linden's analysis, they all constitute dispositives deliberately uses by the management to establish a constitutively less "free" employer-employee relationship.

The life and working experience endured by Sahara, a 28 year old Algerian girl, could represent an additional example to demonstrate how the relationship between employer and employees is often not limited to the exchange of money for labor power. Sahara, in fact, was working in TomatoesArtist packinghouse since several years, while her husband was simultaneously employed by the same firm inside the greenhouses. Sahara and her husband were renting a place in the city center owned by the same TomatoesArtists's manager for 300 € per month. This sum was actually automatically subtracted by their salaries. In their cases, even not receiving a wage, they were compelled to work in order to replay their loan with the house owner, namely with their very boss¹³².

In this paragraph I tried to provide evidences of how labor power could be tied to workplaces not exclusively in return for a wage. Other additional consideration, in fact, (e.g. the presence of a public subsidy, the existence of several side-advantages, etc.) could be at stake when people *decide*

¹³⁰ According to the author, the other ways to "tie" an employee could be: (1) debt bondage; (2) indentured labor; (3) physical compulsion and (4) finally, social and economic connections. For further details, see Van Der Linden (2008: 24).

¹³¹ Several among my interviewees mention the possibility to receive part of the surplus crop from the firm as an important – material – supplement for their nourishment.

¹³² The situation of Sahara, however, differs from the cases of live-in Romanian farmworkers, since the Algerian girl is actually paying a (significant) rent to her employer, to repay whom she is somehow compelled to work.

to go on working with scanty and delayed wages or even without earning any income. There would be no need to say that, also in these cases workers do not stop to strive for their salaries and to practice forms of resistance inside their workplaces. In the next paragraph, thus, I am going to provide some of these examples.

4.4. *Working without a salary: everyday forms of resistance and violence inside the workplaces*

Ahmed: That Italian [the boss] attempts always to not avoid paying me. I had to lock him and his car inside the firm and to threaten him brutally to have my money!

[Piazza Senia, June 3rd 2013]

The cases in which the salary is often delayed or it is totally absent represent some of the situations that more frequently provide occasions of disagreement, quarrels, protests and even episodes of verbal and physical violence emerging between employers and employees. In the case of disputes concerning the level of the wages, workers usually tend to develop several practices allowing them to improve their material conditions when their main source of income is lacking. Inside greenhouses and packinghouses, for instance, is common to assist to small “theft”. In the majority of these cases, to take some of the goods produced or processed without any direct permission, aside from providing fresh food for the workers and their families, has also the explicit purpose of damaging the company. This hilarious episode occurred in TomatoesArtists could provide a good example:

While we are completing the last boxes, Fathima suggests me to carry home some fresh beans... I'm a bit ashamed to accept her proposal, as well as to refuse it. I thus ask: «Are you also going to take some of them at home?». Fathima says yes. So, we take firstly Giuliana's rucksack to fill it with beans, trying not to be “discovered” by Davide. Then Fathima puts the fresh beans in her bag too, grabbing them rapidly as if she was stealing them. In the meanwhile, I ask her if taking some goods could create problems with Davide. «If he says something... fuck him!», concludes Fathima, railing against Davide that is passing by in that very moment. Few minutes later, Davide himself takes a beans' box on his shoulder, and addressed to us says: «Can you see, girls? This is the proper way to carry home some of the beans!».

[Santa Croce Camerina, inside TomatoesArtists, June 18th 2013]

As James Scott already suggested, thefts perpetrated by workers in order to take revenge and damage their companies constitute one of the most diffuse «weapon of the weak» (1985: XVI)¹³³.

Aside from foodstuff, laborers often opt for stealing objects that meet some of their basic needs: this

¹³³ On this topic, Saitta (2015) writes: «*Furti ai danni dei padroni, pratiche non cooperative, sabotaggi, menzogne, discorsi segreti e, in generale, l'impiego di quello che potremmo chiamare il “repertorio del danno”, da praticarsi preferibilmente in modo occulto e, eccezionalmente, in modo manifesto (attraverso la rivolta o la jacquerie), erano allora come in parte oggi, sia nelle campagne che nella città, le forme di opposizione politica più comuni tra i “marginali”. Queste pratiche costituivano infatti l’“infrapolitico dei senza potere” (Scott, 1990, XIII): erano cioè dei modi di opposizione alla potenza degli agrari, considerata enorme, inscalfabile e, in fondo, naturale. Una forza cioè che non poteva essere combattuta, tranne rare eccezioni e momenti, che a viso coperto e, per quanto possibile, invisibilmente*».

was the case of Camila – for instance – who, exasperated by the continuous deferral of her salary, went to her boss place to take a gas cylinder, declaring to her *principale* that she urgently needed it because she was almost freezing in her shack; or, alternatively, laborers could try to steal “luxury” items, with the purpose of selling them to have immediate cash, or simply to damage their counterpart: Ahmed, for example, after a long period of disagreement with the boss concerning his salary, decided to leave SicilSerre (actually not communicating his decision to the employer but simply “escaping” the workplace¹³⁴); before leaving the firm, he stole from the “house” where he was residing (inside the company) a good branded television and some expensive tools used to work the land, being then very proud of this decision. In the great stream of publication in the sociology of work and especially in *workplace studies*, scholars tend to interpret these frequent episodes as *concealed* forms of resistance¹³⁵. Hollander and Einwohner (2004: 544), among the others, present an intuitive typology that could be useful to conceptualize the acts of resistance emerging in the jobsites. They conceptualize the possible forms of resistance, according to the *intents* of the actors (namely, it is considered whether or not a certain act is meant to be a damage against the firm for the individuals performing it); and according to the *recognition* of the action (namely, it is considered whether an action is recognized as a form resistance by its target or by an external observer). Following Hollander and Einwohner's typology, we can thus identify the cases of small theft inside the agri-food companies as examples of *cover resistance*: for what concerns laborers' intentionality, they openly declare to practice them to damage the firms; on the other side, for what concerns the possibility of recognition, the employers (i.e. the target) do not conceive the small thefts as a direct acts of resistance (at least, they are considered as an extra evidence to demonstrate the employees' “deviant” conducts); finally, an external observer – in this case the researcher – could identify them as hidden tactics performed by the workers to exert their individual agency.

In other circumstances, resistance inside greenhouses and packinghouses could be *overt*. Cases of individual or collective struggles to claims for salaries are extremely common in the workplaces, even difficult to be detected by external observers, like media or public authorities. Ahmed, for instance, used to practice certain type of strategies to claim for his salary, just like when he locked his boss inside his property in the countryside till he agreed to give him the owed wage. Episodes of collective *overt* resistance inside workplaces could also occur (the “strike” in the packinghouse previously accounted by Sandra represents one of these examples); in very few cases, however, the

¹³⁴ Cf. Mezzadra (2006).

¹³⁵ A good review on the numerous scholarships concerning forms of resistance (non limited to the analysis of the workplaces, but also encompassing it) is provided by Hollander and Einwohner (2004) and by Saitta (2015).

collective *workplace conflicts* become an issue widely debated in the public sphere (on this point, cf. Perrotta, 2014a). Moreover, in a sector like agriculture, strongly characterized by the presence of migrant laborers, farmworkers public struggles tend to be framed more often as “riots” or “revolt” and not as proper “labor conflict”; this allows to construct foreign workers' uprisings as the unexpected explosion of (irrational) “tumults”, and not as properly organized forms of protest aimed at denouncing the unjust labor conditions¹³⁶. In the last few years, in Italy, very few cases have been recognized (by the participants and the observers) as proper workplace conflicts and defined as farmworkers' strikes, none of them however based in the transformed belt¹³⁷.

It is quite difficult, however, that people bounded to day labor are able to “organize” themselves as well as it happens in other labor market sectors. According to Rogaly, «spending shorter periods of time working together than settled workers, and living in temporary accommodation, mean fewer possibility for developing the kind of camaraderie and class-based antagonism» necessary for the organization of proper farmworker unions or structured protests (Rogaly, 2009: 1981). In the workplaces where salaries are delayed or totally absent, however, disputes and clashes among employers and employees appear to be quite frequent. The level of physical and verbal violence between them is generally quite high. Inside TomatoesArtists, for instance, struggles for wages used to be a daily matter of concern. The overall relationship between the workers and the company's white collars was extremely tense and edgy. I report here two episodes having the potentiality to demonstrate vividly the high level of frustration generated by the situation of working everyday without a salary; under such circumstances, whatever occasion experienced by the laborers to confront directly with the firm's managers turned often into (physically or symbolically) violent conflicts, being violence the last possibility on which laborers could resort.

Davide told us an episode, apparently happened in the packinghouse, involving Darjana's husband. Practically, Darjana went in her boss' office, to complain harshly since he owed her a lot of money. The employer, as usual, behave totally arrogantly, saying that he had no money, and that he would not pay her, and advised her eventually to go to a lawyer. So Darjana went back home and told this story to her husband. Thus, her husband showed up in her boss office and said: «Do you owe this

¹³⁶ In Italy, for example, it is well-known the case of the Rosarno “revolt”, occurred in January 2010. In that circumstances, the denounce of the long-lasting situation of labor and social marginality faced by immigrant (“African”) workers assumed the shape of a violent uprising (Devitt, 2012; Di Bartolo, 2013; Colloca, 2013). Similar episodes occurred all over Europe and in other Western countries (see, among the others, Checa – 2001 – and Caruso – 2015 – dealing with the El Ejido's racist clashes started in February 2000 – in Almeria, Spain – ; and Lanna - 2008 - for Castelvolturno episodes – Italy –). In other circumstances, instead, migrant struggles against unfair life and labor conditions assumed the form of a proper “organized” protest (see the following note).

¹³⁷ The most famous example was the strike realized by tomatoes' pickers in Nardò, in the summer 2011 (see VV. AA., 2012; Sagnet, 2012; Perrotta, Sacchetto, 2012). In October 2010, in Caserta and nearby areas, daily workers realized the so called “roundabout strike” [*sciopero delle rotonde*] (see, among the others, Caruso 2015). Few months ago, another strike was carried on by Sikh migrants working inside the cowsheds in the Province of Larina (see Omizzolo, 2014). More recently, instead, news papers and blogs are providing information about a huge protest organized by the agricultural *jornaleros* in San Quintin (among the others, Aragón, 2015).

money to my wife? Why aren't you going to give her what she is entitled to?». He screamed a lot. He went there brandishing a knife and saying: «Listen, in Albania we don't have any lawyer... but we have butchers and we have other people working with knives...». And he was quite serious. And Davide concluded: «Darjana's husband is a very good guy... he has just killed few people in his life...».

[...]

Another episode that we were told regarded Armando, the job consultant. There was a worker that went to his office to ask for money bringing half bottle of gasoline – this episode actually epitomizes the level of people's desperation. And Armando, as a reply, was so nasty that, teasing her, started to say: «Ah, didn't you have enough money to fill it completely?». And she, completely pissed off, replied: «Is that I need just half of it to burn you, man!».

[Santa Croce Cameraica, inside TomatoesArtists, July 23th 2013]

These two cases exemplify the high level of physiological suffering experienced by daily laborers, a deep rage that lead them to attempt such extreme and desperate acts. This so high level of tension, obviously, strikes back towards the company level of productivity, as Pavli and Davide clearly recognize in this conversation:

Actually both Pavli and Davide say: «This doesn't make any sense, because if you don't pay the workers, the firm will face heavy retaliations. First of all, there will be some problems 'cause laborers will continue to threaten you violently». So the first problem is going to be the insecurity for the managers, the continuous threats towards them. They account that one of the boss' car recently disappeared. Secondly, there is the risk that workers commit small thefts. They can steal vehicles, tools, and so on. And then, more in general, if no one is working well, the company is affected badly in its productivity.

[Santa Croce Cameraica, inside TomatoesArtists, July 23th, 2013]

5. Material insecurity: the job contract

Even profusely acknowledging that the labor market nowadays is pervaded by a deep and generalized precarity, and that “standard” jobs tend to disappear in favor of an increase in “atypical” forms of occupation, our idea of what “labor” *is* seems to be still fraught with our conception of what “labor” *ought to be*. And what labor *ought to be* (albeit assuming different meanings according to gender patterns or subjective life paths) is – more or less – a *long-term, indentured* occupation. Our idea of a *secure* job, in fact, is first and foremost the idea of a *formalized* (and thus somehow *protected*) type of occupation. This is the reason why, in analyzing labor relationships, *work contract* still assume a central role. Numerous academic publications in sociology of work, as well as our everyday experience, however, confirm that a contract does not constitute *per se* synonymous of a more guaranteed position compared to the case in which a proper formalization does not exist. In the previous pages, aimed at exploring some of the dimensions characterizing day labor, we scrutinized both formal and informal work situations and we attempted to show that, even with several differences, they tend to share some common features, such as unevenness and uncertainty.

All in all, thus, in accordance with the large majority of publications in the sociology of work, also this investigation recognizes that it is not possible to rely on the equation “formal labor” = stability and better working condition *versus* “informal labor” = instability and exploitation. Very often, instead, it is through written work contracts that tough and insecure labor conditions are legitimized and normalized. We dealt profusely, for instance, with the experiences of packinghouse workers, hired with a formal contract but equally working for a scanty salary and living at the mercy of a phone call, due to the just-in-time system of production implemented by their companies.

Let’s now take into consideration other types of formalizations concerning agricultural labor that try to “normalize” casual forms of work. They represent some of the cases useful to exemplify that the commodification of labor power within industrial agriculture could assume several shapes, and is not limited to the dichotomies formal/informal, salaried/autonomous (Van Der Linden, 2008).

According to labor law, the long-term contract [*contratto a tempo indeterminato*] in agriculture do exist; during the fieldwork, however, it was not possible to find any of these cases¹³⁸. Counter-intuitively, this was not due to the form of production that – as I said – is almost not seasonal anymore. The most diffuse type of contract in the transformed belt is the fixed-term one [*contratto a tempo determinato*]; the typology of the temporary agreement is said to be “preferred” (both by the employers and employees) since it provides the possibility to receive, on an annual basis, an unemployment benefit addressed to agricultural seasonal workers. Before dealing with the fixed-term contracts (as we are going to do in the next paragraphs), this paragraph aims to look at the other typologies of contracts employed within the agricultural sector, i.e. the *contratto di compartecipazione* [association as a participant] and the *prestazione di lavoro occasionale accessorio* [provisions of optional labor] (e. g. the “vouchers”).

Let's start with the “association as a participant” [*associazione in partecipazione*, most commonly defined as *contratto di compartecipazione*], a quite diffuse juridical form through which subordinate labor relationships could be indentured. Generally speaking, this type of contracts tend to be used within the retail chains in franchising. Its application in the agricultural sector, according to some of my interlocutor, is a «Sicilian peculiarity»¹³⁹. According to the Italian Civil Code, in these cases the entrepreneur attributes to the “associate” a share of participation to the revenue of the company in exchange for a specific contribution which may consist in a percentage of the initial investment or, more frequently, in labor power. The majority of these situations do not differ so much from a depended work relationship existing between an Italian employer providing all the

¹³⁸ This form of contract is sometimes used to hire salaried workers inside cowsheds, or in very big estates. Generally speaking however, it is not very common.

¹³⁹ Interview with the *Ispettore del lavoro* M. di Rosa, Ragusa, 2/5/2013.

fixed assets (namely the land, the machines, transportation) plus the economic capital, and his associates (generally Italians, Tunisians and in some case Albanians) providing exclusively their labor power. The associate's remuneration should be calculated as half of the company annual revenue; however, very few among the *compartecipanti* actually take part in the company management and have a concrete idea about its "real" profit¹⁴⁰. Let's have a look now at the definition provided by Giuseppe Scifo, the secretary of Vittoria's FLAI-CGIL, when we ask him to outline the configuration of this institution:

We ask to Peppe to explain what the contract of *compartecipazione* actually is. He explicates that it is a very peculiar way to indenture labor relationships, typical of this area. He defines it as a "Sicilian anomaly"¹⁴¹. Initially – he says – it was hailed as a positive result, because the *compartecipante* [the associate] in some respects is a kind of self-employed. Unlike the sharecropper, however, s/he is not a proper autonomous laborer, s/he a quasi-subordinate worker [*para-subordinato*]. That explains why an associate is entitled to receive the unemployment public subsidy. This one is not calculated according to the number of worked day (as usually) but on the basis of the hectares cultivated. According to the regulation, each 1.000 meter of cultivated land is considered to be equal to 20/30 days of contribution. Usually an associate "manages" approximately 4-5.000 hectares of greenhouses that correspond to the 102 days necessary to apply for the unemployment benefit. We ask to Peppe which are the most frequent disputes concerning these types of arrangements. Peppe explains that quite often the associate has not real access to the firm bookkeeping; in these cases, it could happen that the land owner (i.e. the "employer") does not declare the actual yields. On the other side, the employer could complain about the fact that his/her associate demonstrates to be unproductive or not prudent enough with the overall expenses. In short, the disputes relate mainly to the fact that «according to boss the latter has always been the worst season, while for the *compartecipante* it has always been a very productive year».

[Vittoria, inside the FLAI-CGIL office, May 14th 2013]

The trade unionist provides a quite nuanced picture, describing a type of employment that differs for the autonomous work, since the *compartecipante* is entitled with some of the protection attributed to the salaried worker; but at the same time, the associate shares some of the risk undertaken by the company where s/he is employed (i.e. in case of a «bad season»). Fouad, a Tunisian *compartecipante* in his fifties, describes his labor in a quite enthusiastic way. He appreciates the possibility to be *free*, and organize autonomously his time (at odds with the experiences generally undergone by daily workers); moreover, he is satisfied with his annual income, that is deemed to be consistent and quite stable, allowing him and his family to plan long term investments. Nevertheless, since he is not working as an autonomous laborer, he feels somehow to be *in-between*¹⁴².

¹⁴⁰ The cases of *compartecipazione* do not differ consistently from the numerous cases of people employed as "cooperative associates" [*soci di cooperative*] in several labor market's sector (from education to cleaning, from health care to agriculture). At the moment I was conducting the research, the practical uses of this institution were matter of debate, since the labor reform discussed at that time (the so called *riforma Fornero*) was trying to limit its applications. At the moment I am writing this thesis, instead, a new labor reform (known as the Renzi Government's *Jobs Act*) prevented the use of this form of contract when the employee's contribution to the company is limited to labor power.

¹⁴¹ It is interesting to note that, on the contrary, the *Ispettore del lavoro* M. Di Rosa defines the same institution as a «Sicilian peculiarity» [2/5/2013], expressing a sort of proud for its existence.

¹⁴² Interview with Fouad, Comiso, May 8th 2013. The juridical definition of this typology of labor (considered to

This fieldnote extract, instead, refers to an interview that Giuliana and I made with a tomato producer, Mr. Sicilia, to whom we asked to explain how he generally manages his labor force.

[Mr. Sicilia is driving us in his truck to take a look at his greenhouses company]. On our way, we ask him how many waged workers he has. «None», he says, explaining that – on the contrary – his company has *compartecipanti*, namely associates. He explain to us how it works: in a nutshell, he provides capital, and they provide labor. Aside from owing the land, he also owns the means of transport, so he is in charge of carrying the vegetables to the marketplace. At the beginning of the crops' season, both the owners and the associates pay half amount of the expenses in advance (to buy tools, fertilizers...). At the end of the season, they share equally the revenues. We thus ask why he prefers this type of contract rather than hiring waged laborers. He replies that he owns greenhouses in several areas, so he couldn't control workers' job. In this way, he doesn't need to put any effort to control, since it's in the laborers' own interest to have a higher production. The *compartecipanti*, in turn, can hire other employees. He doesn't know how they are usually recruited and if they are paid by the day. Someone, he says, his helped by his wife.

He has ten associates (six Tunisians and four Italians). The Tunisians working with him usually live in the same countryside. He seems to be very happy about this type of workforce organization. He stresses several times that his company is very productive since he trains his associates as being a «Formula One's Team» [...]. The first greenhouses we visit is close of Mr. Sicilia's place. Attached to his house, in a small countryside house, live some of the Tunisians who work with him, that he defines «his associates» [*i miei soci*]. When we arrive there, the Tunisian men are having their lunch break. Mr. Sicilia invites them to hurry up, since at four o'clock he'll be back to take the tomatoes that need to be carried to the market; so for that time they are supposed to finish to pick. [...] In the second greenhouses area, there are two Tunisian men living in a small house close to their workplace. Mr. Sicilia asks them to water a peppermint plant in front of the greenhouses, in such a way that clearly marks “who is the boss” there. One of the laborers sketches a wry smile.

[Scoglitti, April 29th 2013]

In this last example, the living and working conditions undergone by Mr. Sicilia's associates actually seem to be not so different from the conditions faced by (short or long) term informal greenhouses laborers, residing in the countryside and requested to work with a more or less rigid schedule. Comparing and contrasting these different examples, and following Van Der Linden analysis, we could define this typology of work as «an *intermediate* form between wage labor and self-employment». In these cases, in fact, workers somehow *borrow* their means of production from their employers (2008: 25, emphasis added)¹⁴³.

Another way through which agricultural contingent employments could be formalized (and thus normalized) is through the so called *optional labor contracts* [*prestazione di lavoro occasionale accessorio*], currently well-known as “voucher”. This type of provision was introduced in Italy in 2003, through the Biagi reform (L. February 14th 2003, N.30) and was initially prevented for the agricultural sector. Its main aim was to try to formalize all those occasional tasks that are unlikely to

be *lavoro parasubordinato*) seems actually to mirror this *in-between* sociological category.

¹⁴³ In his attempt to make the traditional categories more fluid, and to explain how the labor power commodification under capitalist regimes could undertake different forms, and does not configure exclusively as a “free” sale of labor, Van Der Linder defines as “intermediate” all the forms of labor in which workers *borrow* their means of production from their employers, as it is, for instance, with rickshaw drivers in China, or silver miners in Mexico, etc.

be indentured (and thus taxed) through a proper contract. The risk, however, is that this type of “light” formalization could be fraudulently (but easily) extended to numerous other circumstances, just to mask a proper subordinate labor relationship.

Peppe Scifo: The Minister Sacconi has invented this voucher system to remunerate occasional labor within a maximum of [laughter] 5.000 €...

Valeria: That is a very high limit!

P.: Yes, that's very high! In agriculture 5.000 € corresponds to the remuneration of 102 days. If the employer pays the employee – especially the immigrant employee – with one of these vouchers valid for a certain amount of hours, but then he uses it to remunerate the double of the hours [formally registered], how can we intervene in that situation¹⁴⁴? Thanks to various demonstrations, initially we achieved the goal of limiting the use of the vouchers, so that they could not be employed in the agricultural sector. In a document promulgated the 18th February 2013 concerning undeclared labor, the Monti's government extended the possibility to use the voucher [as a form of remuneration] also in the agricultural sector¹⁴⁵.

[Victoria, March 7th 2013]

The meaning of providing an *optional* type of labor is obviously a debated matter. I report here an interesting excerpt of transcription of a conference, organized by the Job Consultants' Association of the Province of Ragusa [*Ordine dei Consulenti del lavoro della Provincia di Ragusa*] to discuss about the new types of contracts in the agricultural sector, soon after the Fornero's reform¹⁴⁶. In the following extract, the two «law's technicians» [*tecnicisti del diritto*], as they define themselves, are questioning the very law's terminology. In their opinion, in fact, the label that the juridical norm attributes to labor (defining it as “optional”, *accessorio*) not only describes but even prescribes how labor *ought to be*. In their discourse, thus, they acknowledge both the descriptive but also the *performative* power intrinsic in the juridical provisions, seriously jeopardizing the possibility to be employed with a more “typical” form of contract.

M. Di Rosa: *Lavoro accessorio* [optional labor]: that was [another] good idea [*ironically*]! ‘*Na vota* [once upon a time], 30 years ago, labor was considered either autonomous or dependent. In my job *a mia m'hannu 'maratu* [I was taught] to distinguish if I was in front of an autonomous or a dependent labor relationship. Now, they came up with so many other redundant categories! Maybe it's because the society [changed], maybe because of the labor market hardships... but however, the *lavoro accessorio*... from a certain point of view, is a good idea, to collect contributions from a bigger target [*of taxpayers*] that before used to slip away... let's think about gardeners, for instance. [*He starts reading the text of the law*]: «An optional type of labor is meant to exist in cases of provision of a task, that should to be merely occasional, and that should not generate an income higher than 5.000 €...»

¹⁴⁴ The voucher suspends the power of inspection generally attributed to the *Direzione Provinciale del Lavoro (ex-Ispettorato)*. This means that when a worker is remunerated through vouchers the Inspectors can only certify the regular presence of the vouchers, but they can not proceed controlling the actual labor conditions in the workplace.

¹⁴⁵ When this investigation was conducted (January-July 2013), it was non possible to identified some examples concerning this type of formalization of the agricultural work, because the possibility of extending the use of vouchers to horticulture has been enforced too recently. The labor reform realized by Renzi's government has slightly modified the subject, extending till a maximum of 7.000 € the sum that each single laborer could receive through a voucher, and establishing also a threshold of 2.000 € that can be provided by each employer.

¹⁴⁶ *I nuovi contratti di lavoro dopo la Riforma Fornero Legge 28/6/2012 n. 92: certificazione dei contratti, Conciliazione e Arbitrato presso le Commissioni dei Consulenti del lavoro*, Vittoria, April 27th 2013. The Conference was organized by the *Ordine dei consulenti del lavoro, consiglio provinciale di Ragusa*, during the AGREM exhibition [*Fiera dell'agroalimentare*], held at the EMAIA exhibition center.

R. Cassarino [*Interrupting form the public*]: May I be provocative? May I ask a question? It's exactly since July 2012 [*the date of Fornero's reform*] that I'm puzzled about this definition [*sulla la terminologia "accessorio"*]: what does it mean "optional labor"? [*In the Law's text*] we can find the definition of the "occasional" labor, and then at the art. 70 [*of d.lgs 276/03*] we can find the definition of the "occasional optional labor" [*lavoro occasionale accessorio*][...]. So, therefore, since I am a law technician, I wonder: this type of labor constitutes an "option" to what else [*questo lavoro è accessorio a che cosa*]? [...] Today that everything has become "occasional", what is expected to be the function of the "optional" work? Does it worth less? I don't think so.

M. D. R.: They named it like this!

R. C.: And I think it's wrong! Because if we define labor as an "optional", then it seems that there is something "optional" to another thing, which is however a type of labor that is no longer existing [*referring – maybe – to "standard" labor*].

[Vittoria, EMAIA exhibition center, Conference op. cit., 1st intervention: M. Di Rosa, Ispettore del lavoro; 2nd intervention: R. Cassarino, Presidente Consiglio Provinciale Ordine Cdl Ragusa, April 27th 2013]

This paragraph – aimed at clarifying the different possibilities to formalize agricultural employments – attempted to stimulate several reflections, constituting a sort of necessary premise for the analysis of informal agricultural labor markets. In the first place, I am striving to question the conceptions that tend to equate (directly or implicitly) formality in the labor market with stable and guaranteed positions, framing – at odds – informality as the realm of exploitation and uncertainty. It is quite straightforward – but even not redundant – to notice that formal daily workers in agriculture (as in many other sectors) could undergo degraded and demanding labor conditions quite often similar to those faced by numerous other informal workers. In all that situations, the presence of a written work contract often tends to naturalize, normalize and even mask unfair and exploitative labor conditions. This could be the case for what concerns packinghouse employees and greenhouse *compartecipanti*, but also for people hired as cooperative associates in agriculture (cf. Claudon and Rouan, 2013)¹⁴⁷.

This preliminary consideration allows us to approach informality abandoning, since the beginning, the *dualistic* distinction between the formal and the informal realm (Hart, 1973, 1987; Bagnasco, 1986). Informality, on the contrary, has to be considered as widely intertwined and even *functional* to the formal economic system, by which it is itself *produced* (Portes and Sassen-Koob, 1987: 56; Portes *et al.*, 1989; Portes and Haller, 2005)¹⁴⁸.

For the sake of framing these theoretical considerations within an empirical context, we are going to deal, in the next paragraphs, with the topic of informality in the transformed belt. As we have seen,

¹⁴⁷ For what concerns agriculture, cf., among the others, a reportage conducted in Piedmont (in the Province of Asti), one of the richest regions in the North of Italy, that denounced how the majority of grape pickers hired in the area was recruited through (foreigner and Italian) cooperatives, their associates gain the same amount of money and endure similar living conditions akin to numerous informal farmworkers in the South of Italy (cf. The report provided by the French farmer association *Confederation Paysanne* at the web page:

http://www.assorurale.it/files/report_missione_fine_agosto_2013.pdf; cf. also Claudon and Rouan, 2013)

¹⁴⁸ On this topic, see also Mingione and Quassoli, 2000; Ambrosini, 1998; Bellanca 2008; Coletto, 2010; Saitta, 2011; 2013a.

to the largest number of greenhouse and packinghouse workers, a seasonal job contract is generally provided (see the facsimile in the Appendix). Thus, in the majority of the cases, a job contract do exists, even if its content quite often differs from the real workplace agreements: the amount of wages formally declared does not correspond generally to the sum really perceived; the amount of daily contribution paid by the firm for each laborer is almost always inferior than the actual number of worked days, etc. We are hence in front of vague and undefined labor status, that in Italy is generally defined as “gray” labor [*lavoro grigio*] (cf. Reyneri, 2002). Ruth and Anderson (2007), in order to overcome the legal/illegal dichotomy in the analysis of the migrants' position in the labor market, introduced the concept of compliance; as a consequence, they define as *semi-compliance* all these set of relationships between employers and employees that, even not conforming to the law provisions, are not perceived as “illegal” behaviors¹⁴⁹. It is thus possible to say that labor situations characterized by semi-compliance represent the greatest majority of the cases in the transformed littoral strips.

Notwithstanding the prevalence of these kind of semi-formal relationships, several other workers, especially those searching day by day a casual employment, tend to be enrolled inside the greenhouses without any contract. The other way around, paradoxically, it is possible to register also numerous cases in which a contract exists but it does not represent the formalization of a “real” ongoing labor relationship. This actual separation between “the labor” and “the contract” is going to be the topic of the following paragraphs.

5.1. *What precedes the provision of a work contract? Trust and “patronage” relationships*

Today I spoke with Lorina. She told me that fortunately she found another job thanks to some of her Romanian friends. She went with Patriciu to take a look at their new place and she said that this “house” was definitely better than her previous one, bigger, with a nicer kitchen and a better toilet. The other couple – that Lorina knows since they were in Romania – is also going to live with them. She seemed happy!

Valeria: And how much are you going to earn per day?

Lorina: Eh, yet again 25 €...

V.: And is he going to provide you a contract?

L.: For the time being, I don't think so... initially we have to start working for him, so he can trust us. Let's start and then let's see!

She gave me a quite “obvious” answer, although it let me puzzled.

[Vittoria, July 10th 2013]

Before starting to analyze how informality concretely configures in the transformed belt, let's move a step behind: what does precede the institution of a job contract? Which type of mechanisms

¹⁴⁹ The authors employ the concept of semi-compliance mainly to refer to laborers legal status (i.e. to indicate people non authorized or partially authorized to work that tend to be employed *notwithstanding* legal impediments). I adopt this term with a slightly different meaning, to account for the labor conditions (i.e. concerning the continuum formal/informal) affecting migrants.

underline the decision of issuing (or not) a contract? The conversation held with Lorina shed light on an important evidence: the job contract is not a *prerequisite* for working, as it ought to be according to the Italian legislation. To have a contract is something that may occur, if and only if, a strong bond based on *trust* emerges, little by little, between the employer and the employee. Worker's reliability and trustworthiness, hence, are meant to be two among the most important qualities enabling an employer to provide a contract to his/her employees. Taking this argumentation at face value, in the majority of the cases it is deemed to be "normal" that a contract might be signed when a labor relationship is already established. Therefore, the formal agreement usually does not mark the actual beginning of a labor tie: it more often symbolizes the strengthening of a pre-existent work relation, being the confirmation of the long-lasting informal conventions arranged between the employer and the employee. It confirms, in fact, laborer's and entrepreneur's mutual expectations that several unwritten "rules" (regarding wages, working times and rhythms, level of productivity, forms of control and attempts of defections, etc.) are going to be followed inside the workplaces (on this topic see Bessy, 2006).

Inspired by the suggestions provided by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), it could be interesting to undertake an analysis of the narratives used to *justify* the issuing (or the denial) of a job contract (see ch. I, par. 6). It is thus possible to identify the presence of at least two *orders of worth* accounting for the presence of a formal agreement – among which one of the two is drastically predominant. The language used to justify the provision of a job contract, in fact, is generally afferent to the *domestic domain*. The domestic world, according to Boltanski and Thévenot, is based on the perpetuation of the *principle of hierarchy*, i. e. is based on the subordination of the subjugated (the "little" ones) – in our case the employees – to the authority of the "big" ones – in our case the bosses –. In our situation, in fact, the contract is said to be «*granted*» or «*doled out* by the firm» («è concesso» «è dato dall'azienda»); in very few cases it is considered as a form of «bargaining» or «mutual agreement» between the employer and the employee. The domestic world – the world of the *concession* – seems thus to be the predominant order of worth to justify the issuing of a formal contract. Often, however, these argumentations appear to be merged with some of the concerns typical of the *industrial word*; in these circumstances a job contract is said to be provided just for *efficient* workers. Notwithstanding the presence of some of these worries coming from the industrial domain, however, it seems that the laborer's efficiency and ability to work are more frequently subordinated to his/her "good will" and "correct behavior":

Karim: To obtain an *ingaggio* [i.e. to be formally hired] you ought to be an *honest person*, you have to show to your employer that you have a *good behavior*.

V.: So, to have or not the *ingaggio* depends on your behavior...

K.: Yes, your behavior is the first thing!

[Vittoria, inside the interviewee's place, March 3rd, 2013]

Contrariwise, the justifications that refer to the *civic world* – namely the narratives that frame a contract as a juridical instrument to protect worker-citizen rights, within a general discourse that evaluate equality and social justice – are almost completely absent, aside from trade unionists perspectives. In the majority of the cases, in fact, to «keep the agreements» [*mantenere i patti*], often arranged «orally» [*a voce*], is deemed to be more important compared to the moral obligation to respect workers (and even human being) rights. This attitude seems to be quite diffuse among the employers, but also among some of the migrants rights supporters:

Father Florian: [*Imagining a hypothetical conversation with an employer*] I get really pissed, because I am a person who has worked informally, I am used to work informally. *If you can't provide me a contract, I accept [lo accetto], but I can't accept that you don't pay me and that you don't give what you have promised.* I don't claim to have any Christmas bonus, either vacations, or something else, but *you must give me all we agreed.* While this is not happening. [...] [*Accounting of one of his meeting with an employer occurred to support some workers*]. I didn't come here to say that you have to give a contract to all your workers. I'm here to say: to this family you have promised that they could send their children to school, so you must do it! You have promised to pay 25 € per day, they must have 25 €! You have promised them a house, and they must have that house! Right now, they don't have the house, the children don't go to school... and this is not a fair treatment! [...] In most cases, *beyond the papers* [i.e. the formal contracts] everyone knows the agreement: 25 € per day if you work, if you don't work you are not paid at all. No vacations, nothing else... but if you have worked you should have 25 € per day! This is the agreement, and you know that at the end of the month you'll have that money... *then papers [document] is something that the employer manages on its own,* you don't think about them either! I believe that the majority of the workers have never seen a pay slip, or signed anything.

[Vittoria, inside a café, May 14th 2013]

The two orders of worth permeating the domestic and the industrial worlds, thus, represent the most common form of justification accounting for the presence (or the absence) of a job contract. The merging of the realm of the *domestic intimacy* with that of the *industrial efficiency* is quite evident in the situations in which the employer and the employees behave as being part of the same “family”¹⁵⁰. In Gurrieri s.r.l., for instance, we could frequently recognize this type of behavior. Franco, in fact, was quite often expressing considerations addressing his employees as being “his offspring”. Once, for instance, he was jokingly asking to some of them:

Franco: Who is the person who is proving the monthly payment for your car?

Afrim: You are, Franco, you are the person!

Franco: And who is paying for your son's University?

Pepe: You are, Franco, you are paying!

[Donnalucata, Inside Gurrieri s.r.l., July 26th 2013]

Also from the workers' viewpoint, Franco, that epitomized the figure of the “good boss”, was often said to behave «like a father»:

Pepe: Claudio [*the firm's previous overseer*] was *like a son* for Franco. He used to go to Franco to

¹⁵⁰ On this point, cf. also the situation of caregivers who tend to be «familiarized», namely involved in para-familiar relations, and thus harnessed in a net of personal ties protecting and at the same time binding them to their employers (Ambrosini, 2013: 170-183).

ask for money every week [*and then he used to spend them for gambling or drinking*]. Franco has no problem to give us part of our wage in advance, he says that it's in any case our money. But with Claudio... he couldn't stand him anymore. And that's why he dismissed him.

[Donnalucata, Inside Gurrieri s.r.l., April 9th, 2013]

Since we are acting within the realm of a domestic world, Claudio's foolish behavior provides thus an appropriate justification for his layoff: it seems somehow necessary for him to be "educated" by the boss.

Last but not least, the domestic bond seems to be even more evident when we are in front of a labor relationship taking place between an Italian employer and a foreign employee. For people migrating for reason of work, as it is well-known, the possibility to apply for a residence permit depends on the existence of a job contract. Numerous migrants reaching Italy in the 1990s and in the beginning of the 2000s faced an experience of irregular permanence on the Italian territory, before they could regularize their position through a periodic *sanatoria* (amnesty) or *decreto flussi* (quota system). In that cases, thus, for foreign citizens the relationship existing with the person that «for the first time issued the documents» become extremely meaningful. The other way around, the decision to regularize the migrant worker's position within the labor market symbolizes, from the employer's perspective, that he is fully «trusting» and «respecting» the laborer. The relationship between an employer and a foreign employee – especially if the boss has been the «first one» who «made the document» – is thus fraught with a high symbolic value, that overcome other considerations based on efficiency. Franco's case provides again some good examples on this point. The strong relation of mutual trust existing between him and Gigi, the Tunisian 40 year old employee, could be the epitome of these types of ties. The man's real name was Yassin, but since several years Franco named him Gigi, as all of us was calling him (somehow "baptizing" him on the Italian territory). Within the team, Gigi was very unpopular, due to his nasty character but also to his inefficient way to work. I was often wondering why Franco was not so worried about this situation. When I openly asked to the other members of the team why their boss did not decide to intervene, "blaming" or even dismissing Gigi, the other workers explained that it would have been «almost impossible», since Franco «made – for the first time – Gigi's documents». Their relationship, thus, demonstrated to be solid enough to overlook these aspects: the considerations to hire him seem thus to overcome any matter of efficiency. But Gigi does not represent an isolated case. Also Afrim – the Albanian man working in the same team –, while describing his migratory experience, crossing the border irregularly for several times and facing numerous hardships during his work trajectory, was often mentioning the figure of his previous passed away boss, who «helped him to make his documents,

and to *allow* his wife to come from Albania». Don Lillo¹⁵¹, thus, was sketched in Afrim's memory as a benevolent magnate caring about his workers. He was a person toward whom the Albanian man demonstrated an endless gratitude, a tie that resulted to be stronger (and at the same time constitute the base) than their labor relationship.

Being entitled with the possibility to provide laborers with their right to reside and work legally on the Italian territory, thus, bosses are able to exert a twofold power¹⁵²: behaving as “good fathers” they usually care genuinely about their protégées; at the same time, endowed with their economic and moral authority, they could ask laborers to endure tough labor conditions. According also to Morice (1999) and Décosse (2013) the *debt* – not simply economic but indeed moral – represents one of the pivotal mechanisms to control migrant mobility and labor. «*Es muy común que el trabajador vea la contratación como un favor que le está haciendo el patrón, lo que permite a éste manejar la relación de empleo de manera paternalista, es decir alternando el castigo y el favor. [...] La deuda, el paternalismo, las obligaciones y lealtades familiares... son elementos que se refuerzan la explotación de los trabajadores*» (Décosse, 2013: 118-119). In the domestic-paternalistic world, exploitation and care appear thus to be two sides of a same coin.

5.2. *The gap between “labor” and “the contract”*: exploring the formal-informal continuum

Ahmed: «I came to Italy with a contract and with documents, not like those clandestines coming by the sea, and arriving in Lampedusa» [using a derogatory acceptation]

V.: «But what is the difference between you and the ones that you called “clandestines”?»

A.: «I have got a contract!»

V.: «Yes, but you bought it! So, what is the difference between being without documents and buying a fake contract?»

A.: «This contract is not properly fake. The Questura glanced at it, sent it to the Italian consulate in Tunisia, then they issued a proper visa to enter the Italian territory. (...) I've been in Italy since five years, and I've always had my documents. Once I bought a contract that cost 400 €, then another one for which I paid 200 €, then 200, and then 400 € again. And my job has always been off the books! And when I say to my employer that I need a contract, he says that that's almost impossible. That's how it goes!»

[Scoglitti's seaside, July 20th 2013]

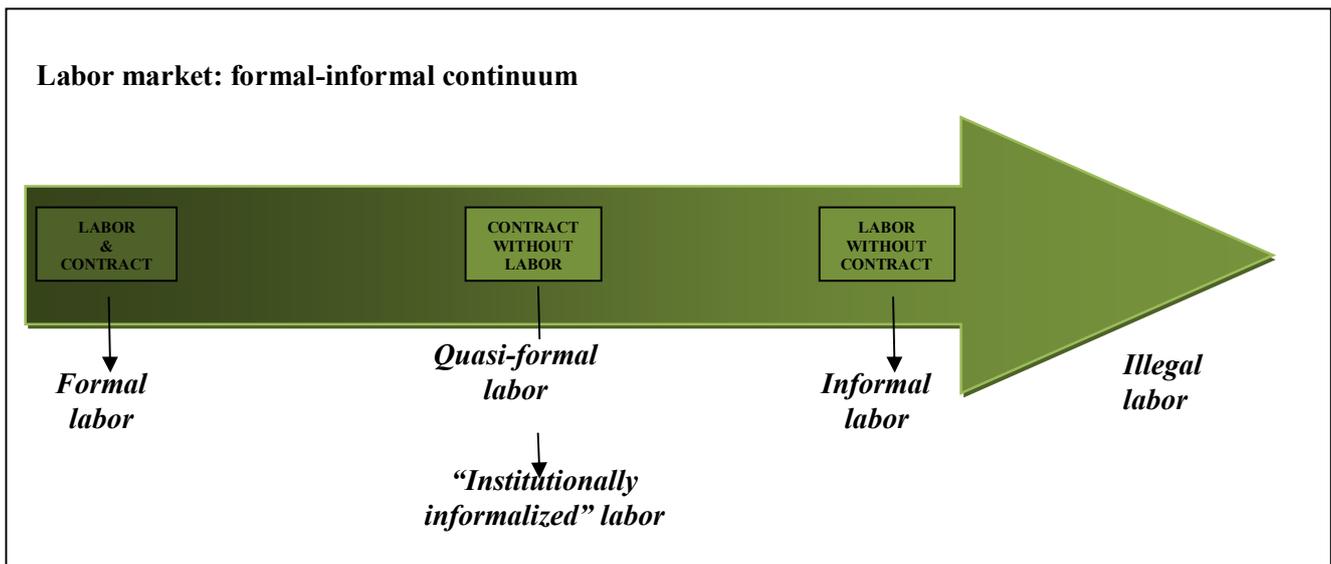
To account for the diverse shapes assumed by informality in the agricultural labor market in the transformed belt we could start from a straightforward consideration: “labor” and “contract” could take place also separately. Saying it differently, it could exist an employment relationship to which

¹⁵¹ The epithet “Don” is still quite used in Sicily, especially within certain social segments, to show a reverential appreciation for a person that is deemed to be morally and culturally (and often professionally and economically) “superior”.

¹⁵² Akin to what concerns the provision of a salary – that is able to prevent workers' mobility – also the possibility to guarantee a residence permit constitutes a relevant power with which the employer is endowed by the law.

does not necessarily correspond a formal contract, and, the other way around, it could exist a registered contract to which does not necessarily correspond a “real” labor relation. As Ahmed says, in fact, to have a contract does not mean to have an employment, and to find an employment does not imply necessarily the existence of a juridical formalization of that relationship.

In between, it is possible to detect a wide range of situations that we can define as quasi-formal, implying the existence of regularly registered job contracts, to whom does not correspond necessarily the amount of daily contributions to which the worker is entitled.



In almost all these situations, however, is a set of informal agreements (concerning the “fair” wages, the amount of working hours, the level of productivity, etc.) and not the written contract that strictly bind employers and employees inside the jobsites. The purpose here is not to deny the pivotal role played by the work contract. The aim, however, is to prompt the analysis to encompass evidences on how contracts are practically *used* (i. e. imagined, promised, bought, respected) in the everyday life. Thus, merely for the sake of analytical distinction, in the following section we are going to take into consideration several typologies of employment relationships, all of them included with a continuum between formal and informal labor. Needless to say, the borders among these categories appear actually to be extremely blurred – or even not existing – in the everyday life. Collecting workers’ stories, it is possible to individuate a great variety of situations that ranges from (1) the completely undeclared positions of daily randomly selected employees; (2) to partially formalized employment relations; (3) to situation with only a fictitious contract, (4) till the presence of illegal

forms of labor. In the next paragraphs we are going to make some roughly analytical distinctions among these different possibilities inside the agricultural (and the contiguous) labor market.

5.2.1. *Informal labor*

The high degree of informality in the agricultural labor market in Italy has been for long time a topic of concern (Mottura, Pugliese, 1975; Pugliese, 1984)¹⁵³. Even if it is not possible to provide a proper measure of the size of the phenomenon¹⁵⁴, earlier as well as more recent ethnographic accounts show its large pervasiveness in different forms and dimensions, both in the North and the South of Italy. Hitherto, the overwhelming majority of the scholars concentrates on investigating informality with southern Italian agriculture, where the situation has been considered for a long time as more problematic (see, among the others, the issue 3/2012 of *Mondi Migranti* edited by Cortese and Spanò; see also, Perrotta, Sacchetto, 2012; Colloca, Corrado, 2013). However, in the last few year, are emerging some interesting research projects concentrated on the North of Italy (Brovia, 2014; Claudon and Rouan, 2013), together with some other studies aimed at comparing both the contexts of production (Perrotta, 2013b; Perrotta, Azzeruoli, 2014; 2015).

In the case-study I dealt with, the situations of totally undeclared labor do exists, especially for migrant workers, even if they do not seem to constitute the majority of the cases. Aside from the companies' obvious conveniences, some scholars suggest also to take into consideration the peculiarities of the migrant labor supply, considering that foreign workforces appear to be “more available” than other segments to be employed informally (Ambrosini, 1998). This is mainly due to the fact that immigrants' occupational opportunities in Italy are quite shrink, till the point of becoming extremely tight in some local context, where informality is perceived as one of the few possibilities for “racialized” subjects. Moreover their intent to work in Italy maybe for a limited period, could stimulate the emergence of a «predatory predisposition» towards their workplaces (Perrotta, 2008), that pushes to pay less attention to the employment relation stability; finally, the uncertainty to be entitled to certain social provision (i.e. a pension treatment) together with the conviction that informal employment is just an initial step in the migratory experience, could

¹⁵³ More in general, the field of study dealing the topic of the informal economy is enormously broad, starting from the first attempts to define (and measure) the phenomenon (ILO, 1972; 2002; Hart, 1973; 1987) to further readers and research projects aimed at systematizing the field (Bagnasco, 1986; Portes *et al.* 1989; Ambrosini, 1998; Mingione, Quassoli, 2000; Portes, Haller, 2005; Coletto 2010) till the most recent analyses (Saitta, 2013a; Saitta *et. al.*, 2013).

¹⁵⁴ According to estimates made by ISTAT (2008), the primary sector in Italy is characterized by the highest incidence of irregular unit of labor employed, compared with the others economic sectors: in 2008, for instance, the irregularity rate in agriculture was supposed to be equal to 24,5%, several percentages higher than the irregularity rate estimated for services (13,7%), and for the industrial sector (6,2%).

constitute other elements to explain migrants' «availability» to be hired informally (Ambrosini, 1998).

If we come back to Table 2 (par. 3), we can see that daily workers usually face diverse regimes of informality. *Contingent employees* (i.e. commonly foreign workers in search of a casual employment on a daily basis, that are randomly selected at the curbside or are recruited by word of mouth) generally cannot rely on a work contract. Also *long-term employees*, however, often undergo total informal labor relationship. Paradoxically, it seems to be more common for Romanian migrants to be harnessed by this type of situations. Their more recent migratory experience, together with the fact that they do not need a formal contract to apply for a residence permit (being EU's members) are some of the reasons that could partially explain this phenomenon. For Tunisian citizens, on the other side, the situation is much more complex, due to immigration law requirements. Some of them could be not entitled to have a job contract due to their irregular position on the Italian territory and their impossibility to regularize (we have already seen, for instance, the example of Chadi, who has been employed by Mohamed since two years but without any contract). The majority of Tunisian migrants, however, is compelled to demonstrate to possess a job contract in order to apply or renew the residence permit issued for the purpose of labor. Since it is not easy to find a formalized employment, however, they are often forced to buy a fictitious work contract, in order to reside legally on the Italian territory. At the same time, they are also forced to toil informally inside another firm, as we are going to see in the next paragraphs.

5.2.2. *Quasi-formal labor: «in the agricultural sector it works like this...»*

Together with undeclared and partially declared forms of labor, in the agricultural sector we can thus register a diffuse presence of what has been defined as «*irregular institutionalized labor*» (Avola *et al.*, 2005: 205). With this expression Avola and his fellows describe a phenomenon that in Italy is widely known as the case of “fake farmworkers” [*falsi braccianti*]. As we are going to see, in fact, the possibility to enjoy an unemployment benefit for people involved in the agricultural system of production, as a consequence of the payment of a certain amount of daily contributions to the *National Social Insurance Institute* (INPS), stimulates the emergence of several distortive phenomena: not formalized – actual – employment relations, thus, coexist with indentured – “fake” – hiring.

To understand how the unemployment regime is actually manipulated, it is necessary, in the first place, to outline briefly the juridical provisions concerning the agricultural subsidies. To reconstruct

the normative frame regarding the regime of unemployment benefits we have to refer, in particular, to the Law n. 24/2007 (art. 1, cc. 55-57) and to some of the INPS¹⁵⁵ messages on this topic (M. n. 365/2000; M. n. 8253/2009). According to these texts, an unemployed farmworker could receive a benefit if s/he is registered in the nominative lists in the territorial INPS' office for at least two years, and could certify the payment of 102 days of social security contributions over the last two years¹⁵⁶. Once obtained the rights of contributory seniority, every year the laborer needs to be hired for 51 days which is the minimum requisite to apply for the unemployment subsidy, up to a maximum of 180 days. Moreover, as it happens for the other typology of dependent employees, farmworkers could apply also for family allowances, a means tested benefit whose amount depends on income and household composition. For agricultural workers INPS specified that: «for workers registered within the nominative lists for more than 101 days, family allowances are paid for the entire year; while workers that were employed for less than 101 days have the possibility to receive family allowances for a number of days equal to the total amount of contributions paid to INPS»¹⁵⁷. Even if family allowances are usually guaranteed to dependent workers when household members reside habitually on the Italian territory, in the case of EU's members and for Tunisian citizens this limitation does not apply¹⁵⁸. We are actually dealing with pretty generous social transfers from INPS to the agricultural workers and their families¹⁵⁹, the burden of which is mainly sustained by the general public tax system (Ferrera, 2006: 127). This typology of public benefit without any doubt constitutes an important form of social protection against the risk of unemployment, and moreover a relevant mean of livelihood, necessary to increment the effectively scanty labor income earned by migrant workers in the agricultural sector¹⁶⁰.

In order to provide a picture of how the social security regulations are implemented in the transformed littoral belt, it is worth to quote the words of the job consultant [*consulente del lavoro*], employed by TomatoesArtist; before hiring us, he explained in details the firm's "legitimate" behavior regarding job contracts' discipline:

¹⁵⁵ INPS is the acronym for the *Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale* (National Social Insurance Institute).

¹⁵⁶ The replacement rate of the benefit is equal to 40% of the previous wage, and it is paid for an amount of days corresponding to the number of days of registrations as a farmworker within the INPS' listS.

¹⁵⁷ Message n. 8253/2009.

¹⁵⁸ As INPS clarified (msg. N. 365/2000), these exceptions to the general rule are due to specific International Conventions signed between Italy and other Governments.

¹⁵⁹ The total amount of the benefit received by an unemployed farmworker once per year could vary consistently according to the number of social security contributions and the number of the dependent household members. However, to give a concrete idea, according to the data collected, we could approximate that a single worker, with 102 days, is receiving a benefit of around 2.000 € per year. A worker, with 102 days, with four dependent household members could receive around 6.000 € per year.

¹⁶⁰ Moreover, other scholars suggest to look at the unemployment subsidies in the primary sector as one of the means promoted by the Governments to reduce or prevent farmworkers' riots and organized wage struggles (Recio Martinez, 2011; Caruso, 2015).

Armando: Now I'm going to tell you how the *system* works in agriculture: within the agricultural sector there exists a job contract on the basis of which we "declare a certain amount of days". In our packinghouse, for example, we register 51, 78 or 102 days. These are different thresholds. Usually, for instance, you work for a month, but we pay your contributions just for 8 or 9 days in that month. As soon as you reach 51 days' threshold in one year, and you collect 51 more days in the following year, you get the well-known agricultural unemployment subsidy. *Firms usually do like this, it is convenient both for the employer and the employee. You can ask around, go wherever you want, in all the companies it works like this.* In an entire year, you usually work for 320/330 days, you are paid for 330 days [*undeclared*], but you have just 102 daily contributions, because if you exceed the 180 days' threshold, you do not get any unemployment benefit. Do you get it? [...] Now, in your situation even if you have no other goals [*i.e. even if you will not apply for the unemployment benefit*], we have to hire you, in any case, because *it's mandated by the law!* [...] Therefore, *with the agricultural contracts it works like this, not because this is our will, but because it works like this!*

[Santa Croce Camerina, inside TomatoesArtists, June 17th 2013]

One of the first elements we can underline is that our interlocutor here talks not exclusively on behalf of his own firm, but he attempts to describe an entire *system*, considering certain specificities attributed to the local agricultural sector. Moreover, he seems to be not reticent at all to explain that what his company is perpetrating is a systematic evasion of contributions that should be daily paid to INPS, whose amount is not so irrelevant. His way of being totally confident in his role, an attitude that it was possible to notice in the large majority of the firms managers and agricultural workers interviewed, let us think that we are in front of a "naturalization" and "legitimization" of an "irregularity" that just few of the social actors on the territory (i.e. the trade unionists) perceive as "illegal", since it clearly bypasses State regulations. The role played by State norms, however, is not so irrelevant. Some aspects are deemed to be legally binding (as the necessity to formally hire workers in the packinghouses) some others are not (as the requirement to pay daily contributions), due also to the State attitude towards these "accepted" forms of informality that the normative apparatus itself tends to stimulate. Throughout this discourse, the State is also constructed as the (implicit) "enemy" against whom workers and entrepreneurs could jointly play (the *system* is said to be «convenient both for the employer and the employee», implicitly at the detriment of the public system). So, according to the naturalized "dominant position" (Hall, 1980), this *system* is deemed to be the most "convenient" way to implement labor laws. These set of informal arrangements are obviously used by the entrepreneurs to reduce the labor cost in several sense. In the first place, they directly "save" the amount of money they should invest in paying regularly workers' contributions. In the majority of the cases, in fact, they use to "pay a certain amount of days" that allows the worker to reach the threshold sufficient to have access to public subsidies.

Stefano: To take – rightly – the so called unemployment [subsidy] you need to get to 102 days. With 102 days *our Italian state, gives them, doles them out* in July 2800 €! *Do you understand it?!* *The Italian state give them [such a sum]!* For each person... then – rightly – if you have children and wife you'll have family allowances. [...] When a person comes to me to look for a job, I say to him: "Listen, I'll give you 100 days for the entire year"... because then – rightly – you *need to explain to these people who don't understand our language so well* [how the things work]... for

example, I'm clear when I speak with them, I say: "Listen, I'll give you nine days per month. If you work with me for 12 months during one year, you'll have 102 days. If you work just one month I can't give you 102 days, but I'll give you – rightly – nine days for that month". There are those who reply: "All right, all right", since they need to work and then they go to the trade union. That's because even if we – rightly – give them 9 days per month, you are not following the regulations [*short pause*] because you are formally asked to give them all the days that they worked [i.e. to pay their contributions for each workers day]. You are asked to give them 26 day per month, that's how it is! There are some foolish people that can go to the trade union or to the police. But it's not so frequent... it usually happens if there is an inspection in the firm.

[Vittoria, inside the place where the Association in which the interviewee takes part organized a public protest, March 11th 2013]

The 102 days threshold appears to be the most common parameter, even if there are numerous cases of firms "paying" even less "days", sometimes proposing to the laborers forms of mixed contribution¹⁶¹. As Floriu, a Romanian worker we met in Vittoria's countryside told us:

Floriu: In this job position I am irregular now. But my boss proposed me to be hired with a regular contract since the next year. He said that he is eventually going "to pay" for me 51 days, and he said: «If you want to have more daily contributions, you have to pay them on your own». I could consider, for example, to reach the 102 threshold. It is good, isn't it?

[Vittoria's countryside, April 30th 2013]

Aside from a direct reduction of the labor costs, employer could also indirectly negotiate, both at the individual firm level as well as at the national level, a reduction of the workers' hourly wage. In fact, proposing a higher amount of daily contributions, the managers put their workers in the condition of being more available to accept lower salaries, since all of them know that a higher public subsidy is going to replace the amount of income lacking as a consequence of a wage reduction. The case we dealt with in ch. II, par. 2.5 regarding TomatoesArtists, constitutes a clarifying example of what I am maintaining. In that occasion, as we have said, workers explained us that during the previous year their salaries were reduced from 4, 30 to 4 € per hour, while the number of daily contributions assured to them was increased from 51 to 102 days. Clearly the possibility to get a higher social benefit prevented them from leaving their jobs. Finally, since in the pay slip it is declared that a worker is hired, for instance, only for 102 days per year (even if the employee is at firms disposal for the entire period), and since the manager does not remunerate the worker with a fixed salary per month but with a daily or hourly wage, the entrepreneur can avoid having workers on the payroll when demand is slack.

Due to the specific way in which the unemployment subsidy is transferred to farmworkers (i.e. in the form of a "benefit", issued once per year, as a sort of dole "granted"¹⁶² by the firms and not as a

¹⁶¹ This was also the case of Karim inside Mohamed's firms. For the sake of completeness, however, I have to specify that we registered also some cases of firms paying regularly all the daily social security taxes to their workers, even if they were an extremely small number.

¹⁶² In Italian, the expression used underlines that it is the firm that *doles out* [*dà* = gives] the contributions. The terminology employed is quite similar to the language used to speak about the issuing of a job contract (see the previous

compensation of a worker's right¹⁶³) this money is habitually considered as an “extra” budget, available for “extra” purpose (to repay a loan or to afford a house's mortgage, to buy a car or to come back to the country of origin)¹⁶⁴. When «unemployment arrives» (this is a common expression) «that's an holiday!». Differently from the daily salary, thus, this form of subsidy is rarely perceived as the monetization of a proper laborer's right, especially for what concerns entrepreneurs' perspective. «It is not fair», it often goes the argument, that agricultural laborers have the possibility to receive this sort of benefit «without working» and «while earning at the same time a daily remuneration»:

Armando [*the TomatoesArtists' job consultant*]: We are talking about people that get an unemployment benefit of around 7/8.000 €, plus they work the entire year and get their salary, so they earn more than us and we bust our asses all the year long! I have laborers that use to work here for two months and then they go to Tunisia when the unemployment subsidy arrives. They have – like – five, six children and they get 12.000 € [with emphasis]¹⁶⁵. Now the law is slightly changing... I hope so, because, really, in this way it is not fair!

[Santa Croce Camerina, inside TomatoesArtists, June 17th 2013]

The other way around, we are interested to know what is supposed to be “convenient” from the agricultural workers' viewpoint. In their accounts, it is generally considered “fair” that the employers guarantee to pay the amount of daily contributions necessary to reach the minimum threshold to get the unemployment subsidy. However, when this conventional agreement – establishing a “fair” benchmark– is not respected, laborers and their advocates could resort to a different idea of “legality”, calling for a proper application of the legislation. In this text extracted from my fieldnotes, for instance, I jotted down the account of an episode that I experienced while frequenting a local trade union office. In this occasion I was attending a colloquium between the trade unionist and a middle aged couple of Romanian agricultural workers.

The trade unionist asked what kind of problem the workers have had in their workplace. «The employer doesn't want to pay for all the contributions!», said the man. The trade unionist, thus, very prudently suggested: «Have you talked to him? 'cause given this situation, why don't you... propose him to “move” the days to the same person, I mean... why doesn't he pay all the amount of days to one of you, so at least one of you could apply for the unemployment subsidy?». «Of course we did!» specified the couple «but he said that he couldn't, 'cause *it's illegal!*». «So, what can I say? I can suggest you to denounce him, 'cause normally it's your right to have all the days that you worked! Then we will evaluate if you can or not apply for the unemployment benefit... but if you worked for 200 days you should be paid for 200 days, and not for 102! This is how it should work in principle!». «They perfectly know it!» explained the man, using sometimes a peculiar Sicilian slang «they know, but they don't wanna do it! *They are too legal* [ironically], *too legal!*». The trade unionist, interrupting: «Then you should ask for all the days! So you are *more legal* than them!». Just now, while writing down this conversation, I have the impression that it

paragraph).

¹⁶³ This form of subsidy in the transformed belt is frequently not perceived as a proper compensation for periods of shortage of labor, since usually workers are not actually unemployed. They are instead hired inside greenhouses and packinghouses without any interruption for almost the entire year.

¹⁶⁴ On the qualitative distinction and the different set of meanings assumed by money, according – in this case – on their source of production, see Zelizer, 1989.

¹⁶⁵ To have an idea of the estimated amount of the unemployment benefits see note 159.

was really interesting to notice how blurred, in this context, was the border between what is deemed to be “legal” and “illegal”, and by whom. The trade unionist considers this situation “legal”, since he suggests to “move” the days from a worker to another, just to regain a right to which the laborers’ are both entitled! The employer, instead, who is acting “illegally” avoiding to write down [*non segnando*] the days, then appeals to his own notion of “legality” to justify that he can’t “move” the days. The workers are available to accept the overall system and to receive only the amount of days necessary to apply for the subsidy, but when this minimum threshold is not guaranteed anymore, they thus also reject the conventional agreement, calling for the restoration of “legality”, a term that in this case refers directly to laws’ prescriptions».

[Vittoria, Trade Union office, January 24th, 2013]

The way in which the trade unionist in this situation interprets the corpus of laws epitomizes, in Hall’s terms, his *negotiated* posture (1980). He is totally acquainted with the «dominant decoding code» and tries to move within that frame in order to regain, no matter what, a right to which laborers are entitled to. Nevertheless, he also openly engages with the dominant discourse challenging the entrepreneurs’ idea of “legality”, resorting in this case to the normative texts. The negotiated version of the dominant ideology is thus shot through with contradictions that in certain occasions are brought to full visibility (Hall, 1980: 127). Here, for example, I reported an extract of a wholehearted intervention pronounced by the Vittoria FLAI-CGIL secretary in an assembly held with Tunisian workers. In this case, the trade unionist strongly underlines how fraught with ambiguities is the dominant discourse, that is worried exclusively about frauds perpetrated by agricultural waged laborers, and that systematically tends to neglect farmers “illegal” behaviors.

Peppe Scifo: Regarding INPS, there is an[other] issue that for us is really relevant. We often read in the newspapers’ headlines, written very big [*bellu ranni*]: “individuated fake agricultural workers, while stealing unemployment benefit without working, or being employed somewhere else”. It’s true! It’s definitely true [*that the phenomenon exists*]! We totally agree that INPS’ office – and not exclusively INPS – has to prosecute this type of frauds. However, in our trade unions, every day, at least twice or three times per day, we receive people that come to denounce the fact that they worked but they didn’t have all the daily contributions paid. For all these people there is neither one line in the newspapers! So, when does INPS actually steps forward and really takes a look in the countryside to consider all that cases in which there is a worker that is working without the days? (...) We declare that there are, in the province of Ragusa, more than 20 thousand “days” evaded every year! And all this evasion of contributions is to the detriment of labor, to the detriment of laborers! That seems to be more relevant than the existence of “fake farmworkers”!

[Vittoria, June 14th 2013]

5.2.3 “Institutionally informalized” labor: the case of “fake agricultural workers”

Ciccio: «In the province of Ragusa there is a phenomenon regarding many migrants: here you can “buy the days”. Who doesn’t work or works as a dealer, for instance, couldn’t reside in the Italian territory and for this reason s/he buys some days, because the residence permit depends on the job contract»

V.: «Who are usually the contracts’ sellers?»

C.: «The Italians, Italian entrepreneurs, in complicity with the Tunisians. For example, you may need 10 or 20 days and so you buy them»

V.: «And how much do the contracts cost?»

C.: «If you want to be correct, as I do, 10 days could cost 250 €. I have got the INPS’ list with the regular prices of the days [*for the firms*]. If, however, you want to take advantage of someone, 10

days could cost around 500 €. If someone, at the end of the year, has been paid for 80/90 days [*by the employer*] and s/he needs just 20 more days [*to reach the 102 threshold*], what can s/he do? Does s/he lose the unemployment subsidy? No, s/he is going to pay the days on her/his own and get the unemployment benefit. In these cases, 10 days could cost 500 €, but even 1.000 €»

[Vittoria, inside the interviewee's kiosk, June 1st, 2013]

Spending time in Piazza Senia, “Tunisians' main square” in Vittoria, it is quite common to hear conversations on this topic: «How many days have you bought this year? How much did you pay? Did you find a job contract? Yes, it's fake, but *Questura* never checks».

Trovare un contratto [to «find a contract»] is the main concern for a Tunisian young man, especially if he has been residing in Vittoria since few years and if he has not a sufficient amount of saving to invest in setting up his own activity. As it has been said, in fact, the possibility to receive or renew a residence permit depends – for the majority of the cases – on the presence of a work contract. Since it is almost impossible to find a “formal” occupation or to face periods of unemployment, numerous people are forced to buy a contract thus avoiding to become irregular on the Italian territory. As several of our interlocutors told us, there is a quite fixed “price list” prescribing the “appropriate” cost of agricultural contracts, depending on the number of social security contributions that the “fake farmworker” attempts to collect. To receive 51 days, the migrant is usually required to make a payment of 800 €; for 102 days it is necessary to invest the double amount, namely 1.600 €; if the migrant does not have the availability of such a relevant sum, in order to fulfill immigration law obligations, s/he could be interested in buying a contract [*l'ingaggio*] together with 20 or 10 days (respectively for 400 or 200 €), without becoming entitled, in this case, to the unemployment benefit. Ahmed, for instance, complains very often about the fact that he has not enough money to invest in the unemployment benefit. Aziz, one of his best friend that is living in Padua and once in a while comes to Vittoria to renew his residence permit, has also to cope with the same problem: he works informally in Veneto and he needs a contract to stay in Italy. Samir explained us that also in Lyons, where he lives and is employed as a painter, it is possible to buy contracts; but in Vittoria – he said – it is easier and is cheaper because there are more people (both Tunisians and Italians) owing an agricultural firm available to do «this favor»¹⁶⁶, and this is the reason why he has also opted for this solution. In the period of our fieldwork, we collected numerous similar stories. I met Néjib, for example, on a bus travelling to Rome, where he was going to stop before reaching Nice, where he resides and works. He was very surprised to discover that I was aware of «how Tunisians in Vittoria usually

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To provide a contract, in fact, is not always a form of speculation; in some cases, it could sincerely constitute “a favor”. Sometimes (even if not always) this could be the case in situations of kinship, or, for example, in occasions when the person who supplies the document is someone that openly or implicitly, is ready to “disobey” the immigration law requirements, appealing to a higher (human) right to move freely.

get by»; «That's our *system!*» he states «We are astute!». He considers himself a lucky guy, since he is not compelled to stay in Vittoria to work: «Vittoria is like a prison», he says, «here you can exclusively work in agriculture. That's why, when I come to my uncle's place, like this time, just to renew my documents, I always feel that I want to escape immediately! I tried, but I don't wanna work anymore in agriculture».

The majority of the migrants we met was not so “lucky” to be able to eschew this dull and soiling job. As a form of resistance, to improve their marginal position in the labor market and in the local social environment, they thus develop several “legitimate” strategies to make their ends meet. Their *oppositional* decoding code (Hall, 1980) is thus strategic: to buy a contract could be an inevitable choice (to fulfill a legal requirement), and at the same time it could be a proper advantage, since it provides the possibility to receive a conspicuous public subsidy.

Collecting the fragments of several other personal biographies could be useful to understand under what circumstances certain strategies are considered “legitimate”. The stories of aged migrants could represent a significant example. According to our interlocutors, a certain number of old Tunisian men, that experienced Italian system for several years, and accumulated a high level of social capital on the territory, opted for living the entire year (in Sicily or in Tunisia) with the amount of money provided by INPS as the unique source of income. I report some of my field-notes and an excerpt from an informal conversation held on this topic with a Tunisian trade unionist:

We were in a small restaurant managed by a middle-age Tunisian man. We were eating with Ahmed and we invited an old man, in his sixties, to join us. We started chatting with him. When we left the place I asked Ahmed what was the man doing for a living. «He has got *ingaggio* » alluding that he was fictitiously hired somewhere. «All the old Tunisian men usually do like that». It was curious to notice that Ahmed considered the *ingaggio* as a proper form of occupation, since it directly produces an income».

[Vittoria, Via Roma, June 2nd 2013]

Semi: The phenomenon of the “fake farmworkers” among Tunisian laborers is actually problematic. But if they do not have any other feasible alternative to earn some money, what should they do? To give an example, let's take into consideration Tunisian old men: they couldn't toil anymore inside greenhouses as daily workers. Here there are a lot of younger and more active guys! And so, what do they do for a living? How do they live here? How could they send money back home? So they continue to pay contributions on their own, waiting till they reach the age of retirement and meanwhile get public subsidies. We cannot speak about the phenomenon of “fake farmworkers” without taking into consideration their subjective motivations.

[Vittoria, inside a bar, June 1st 2013]

At this point, it is relevant to understand: who are those legitimated to “cheat” the Italian State? Does ethnicity define different roles for different kinds of “fake farmworkers”? As it was possible to figure out on the field, both Tunisian and Italian laborers (for dissimilar set of reasons and from diverse positions) deem somehow “legitimate” to trade with *ingaggi* and contributions. To be more precise, the distortive use of agricultural unemployment benefit largely pre-exist the migrants'

participation in the Italian agricultural labor market (cf. Elia, 1995: 19; Viale, 1997: 202; De Bonis, 2005: 162; Lagala, 2005). Hitherto, moreover, in the majority of the areas characterized by a consistent presence of agricultural production – mainly in the South of Italy – the phenomenon of “fake farmworkers” is still mostly an “Italian” *affaire*. The investigation demonstrates, however, that the situation is progressively changing and that both Italian and migrant laborers could (or could not) be able to move deftly among strict regulations, shrink welfare resources and lax implementations of the legislation, to try to improve their position (very often marginal) inside the labor market.

To make a further example, referring to how Italian farmers tend to utilize social security provisions, I report an extract of a conversation, held in a bar in Vittoria’s main square; the talking point was the “abuses” perpetrated by brokers and traders at the local fruit and vegetable market, when at a certain moment an olive oil producer buttressed:

Pasquale: Here they all complain, but they are the first ones who commit irregularities! Here every firm is “abusive”!

V.: What do you mean with “abusive”?

P.: Oh, it’s obvious: here everyone who has an agricultural firm registers it in his wife’s name¹⁶⁷ to be able to write down his own name on the INPS’ list and get the unemployment benefit.

[At the same time, another man at the other side of the table is arguing with his loud voice, shouting against the brokers working at the general markets that, according to him, pretend to keep the products’ prizes very low].

P.: What are you shouting about? You are the first one who is cheating like them! For example, you have registered your firm in your younger son’s name and you perceive subsidies as if you were a dependent agricultural worker.

Giorgio: You are a stupid, you don’t get the point! I need to do so, since I miss just few year of contribution to get retired and get a pension!

[Vittoria, inside a bar, May 5th 2013]

Within this discourse, Italian “fake farmworkers” are defined as people committing an “abuse”. Frequently, however, these type of “abuses” are framed as “legitimate”, since they are perpetrated at detriment of a State that is considered unable to protect and guarantee social and economic rights of its citizens¹⁶⁸.

Implicitly, however, the legitimacy to act within the dominant- hegemonic order is often attributed exclusively to Italian nationals. When foreign workers attempt to eke out a living through public allowances, their Italian counterpart does not often appreciate their behavior. The most common

¹⁶⁷ It would be also interesting to investigate how gender plays a role in defining who is legitimated to be “fake farmworkers”. As it appears in this example, it is quite diffuse the case of entrepreneurs that register their firms’ in their wives’ name in order to get the unemployment benefit (namely, men are somehow more legitimated to act in a fraudulent way). But it is also quite common to have situations in which husbands use to pay contributions on the behalf of their wives. In this case, however, the unemployment subsidy is perceived a form of dole granted by a man to a woman, and in this form it assumes a certain legitimacy.

¹⁶⁸ This legitimization is closely connected with the sentiment of distrust and the feelings of oppression and marginalization that inhabitants of the South of Italy – and not only them – often show against the “central authority” (on this point, cf. Pitzalis and Zerilli, 2013).

discourses on this topic, for example, tend to underline that to provide foreigners with these benefits «is a waste of national resources», since «this amount of money flow away, and is not spent on the Italian territory». Moreover, it is quite diffuse the rhetoric according to which Tunisians have numerous daughters and sons leaving abroad in order to receive a higher family allowance («they use to have up to ten children»), even if this is not so relevant according to the legislation¹⁶⁹. Hence, an act that is connoted as a form of “astuteness” if it is realized by an Italian person, appears to be judged as a “fraud” if is a foreigner who is performing it. Another fieldnote excerpt clearly illustrates this ambiguity.

During the morning shift at the packinghouse, Davide and Pavli and I are working on the same line. Davide, is working behind me. He is usually very talkative with us, and generally likes to give us a lot of details regarding the dynamics of the workplace, since we're the “new ones” here. Due to his higher position, he doesn't care at all to be heard while talking about the other workers in the team. So, he starts saying with his loud voice: «Fortunately we are almost in July. July is a nice month for foreigners, since they take a lot of money, thanks to the agricultural unemployment subsidy and the family allowances». Pavli, who is working in front of me, replies quickly to this sarcastic statement, saying: «What do you mean? You are also going to receive the same amount of money, aren't you?». «Yes, I am», Davide answers, a bit upset, «I simply mean that you, guys, with that money could go on holidays in your home countries, while I'm always here doing almost nothing!».

[Santa Croce Camerina, inside TomatoesArtists, June 17th 2013]

In this situation, even if the two employees perceive the same amount of unemployment benefit, since they work in the same place with the same typology of contract, the foreman tends to consider himself as the “most legitimate” to obtain the subsidy due to his “Italianity”, contesting his colleague's right to do the same. For the Italian workers, thus, ethnicity could represent a useful element in order to strengthen the justness of their argumentation.

In the last few pages, we have scrutinized how several configurations of informality concretely emerge, through the ongoing interplay existing between the State, the entrepreneurs and the Italian and migrant laborers. We depicted how employers, employees and their advocates shape the legislation in their everyday life, engaging in strategic relationships with the State, in order to gain a certain amount of profit, or simply to get by. Through the example of Tunisian “fake farmworkers”, in particular, we tried to shed light on some of the concrete strategies put in place by migrant laborers: they consider “legitimate” to invest “informally” to become “legal” on the Italian territory, and at the same time they gain the “entitlement” to the unemployment benefit. Before concluding our reflection on the topic of informality, however, I would like to come back to the definition provided at the outset of the previous paragraph to introduce the case of *falsi braccianti*, i.e. the

¹⁶⁹ Actually, according to the International Agreement defining the welfare provision between Italy and Tunisia, it is possible to count till the fourth child in order to increment the amount of family allowance to whom the applicant is entitled to.

definition of *irregular institutionalized labor* [*lavoro irregolare istituzionalizzato*]. Avola and his colleagues used this expression in order to buttress how the welfare system somehow tends to *institutionalize*, namely *legitimize* a certain informal arrangement. Avola *et al.*, in fact, state: «For seasonal agricultural workers, the possibility to enjoy a generous unemployment benefit *continues to facilitate collusive agreements* between employers and employees, that allow the firms to reduce the labor costs, declaring only the number of working days necessary for the agricultural workers to access to public subsidies, hiring irregularly the employees for the rest of the period» (Avola *et al.*, 2005: 245). This thesis, instead, attempts to provide an additional analytical perspective to look at these phenomena. The example of migrant “fake agricultural workers”, harnessed both by labor and immigration laws, become – in fact – paradigmatic, since it highlights that the State (embodied by its institutions) not only is *obliging* toward a certain informal system, but work actively to *produce it*. If we consider the unemployment benefit's regime together with other tax provisions established for the agricultural sector, the picture appears to be even clearer. Let's provide an additional example. As several informants explained us, in the agricultural sector every company is compelled to declare to INPS the number of days in which the laborer worked in the firm every three months. This allows the companies to avoid or nullify every type of control realized by the authority in charge of preventing labor irregularities. In case of inspection, in fact, it is quite easy for a company to demonstrate the presence of the job contract (i.e. the *ingaggio*), having then the sufficient amount of time to provide the regular declaration to INPS. In Peppe Scifo's explanation these mechanisms appear to be clearer:

Peppe Scifo: [In agriculture] *there is a system that is made on purpose to be uncontrolled*, because here the farmers have exerted always – I mean – an enormous political influence, and so... there is a system that, historically, *is made on purpose to avoid controls, to avoid transparency*. There's a loose system, that I would say *that facilitates informal labor, and facilitates all these forms of... – let's say – underdevelopment*

Valeria: How does it work? What do you mean when you say that “it facilitates informality”?

P.: Well, farming, unlike the other sectors, it works like this: you hire a laborer and you say that you'll hire him or her temporary, with a short-term contracts for seasonal workers, “assuming” that s/he is gonna work for 100 days per year, 50, 60, from January to July, for example. Then, what is the underlining idea? That in the agricultural sector you can not completely foresee if there are or not the proper conditions to work in the fields... tomorrow is hailing, today is windy... you don't know exactly how many days a worker is going to be effectively employed. But here for us this is not the case, because agriculture is protected, so either it rains or it doesn't rain [it doesn't change so much].[...] According to the regulation, the company is obliged to declare [and pay the contributions] for each worked day after three months, with the well-know “quarterly declarations” [*dichiarazioni trimestrali*]. To provide an example: the quarter that we are concluding right now (i.e. January-February-March) is going to be declared within the 20th of April. In that occasion, you are going to say that Valeria, for instance, had worked in January for 3 days, in February for 9, and so on. While in the other labor market sector there is now a single payroll [*il libro unico delle presenze*], in agriculture it doesn't exist. Here after four months you are allowed to say: “Valeria has worked 3 days in January, 9 days in February, and 5 in March”. How can the worker prove that it's not true? If an Inspector come for checking, s/he just need to know that the employee is formally hired [*ingaggiato*], but s/he could not control anything else. The firm actually knows that, if an inspection arrives, thereafter it has to declare the right information... but

quite long time later. It's a system that is made in this way on purpose.

[Vittoria, inside FLAI-CGIL's office, March 7th 2013]

What happens in the transformed littoral strip is that this normative frame seems to facilitate a high recourse to partially-undeclared labor and to encourage processes of informalization of the labor market. Informality thus is not simply acknowledged by the institutions, but – more ostensibly – directly produced by them. This is the reason why it seems possible to speak about a *formal production of informality*. Saying it differently, slightly modifying Avola *et al.* expression, we can thus talk about a diffuse presence of *institutionally informalized labor* (on this topic, cf. also, Lautier *et al.* 1992; Saitta, 2011; De Genova, 2002, 2004; Wacquant, 2008).

5.2.4. *Illegal labor*

We are in the kiosk held by Ciccio, the Vittoria freelance reporter, chatting as usual about local politics. At a certain point a Tunisian man jumps in. Ciccio explains to us that he is a habitu  of the kiosk, since he comes to buy goods (towels, female bags, backpacks, etc.) to sell them in Tunisia, in his home town on the Mediterranean coast, close to the luxury hotels. In the way back from Tunisia to Italy he says that he usually bring cigarettes, that he has paid 0,60 cents and resells at 3,5  per package. He is very amusing while telling that he generally puts them in his car, covering cigarettes with a layer of cous cous' packages: «Cigarettes and above cous cous, cigarettes and above cous cous». In the last few days, he is already the third or fourth person accounting us about his trading activities between Italian and Tunisia. Sometimes what they buy and sell are “legal” products (i.e. clothes, electrical appliances, etc.). Other times their business is actually a form of contraband (e.g. cigarettes). What is possible to observe is the extreme fluidity with which people shift from day labor in agriculture to other forms of casual activities (small trade, smuggling, drug dealing...) to make up their low wages.

[Vittoria, Ciccio's kiosk, June 1st, 2013]

Numerous of the biographies we collected convey similar stories, stories of people who are not (or not exclusively) daily farmworkers developing concrete strategies to escape from the situation of marginality to which agricultural labor market attempts to relegate them. They thus tend to elaborate several tactics that often range from small trades to proper illegal business. I report, as an example, an excerpt of a conversation held with Abdul, one of the Tunisian dealer, with whom we talked about these practices. We met Abdul during one of our first days in Piazza Senia. He told us that he used to work in the greenhouse but that it was too hard. So, he decided to become a trader between Italy and Tunisia¹⁷⁰. After some times his Tunisian friends informed us that the type of good he was trading was obviously... illegal drug. When we held this conversation in one of the most popular bars in Vittoria – together with other friends – we already knew his occupation. We thus took the opportunity to ask him some direct questions:

¹⁷⁰

First encounter with Abdul, Vittoria, Piazza Senia, March 4th 2013.

[*Abdul is speaking about his trading job*].

Giuliana: Aren't the Moroccans those used to trade?

Ahmed: Moroccans tend to trade with stalls, in open air markets or in the streets.

Abdul: Moroccans usually trade counterfeit goods. For example, if this brand is "Nastro Azzurro", they trade "Nostro Azzurro".

Ah.: There are people that usually buy China manufactured shoes, then they put a brand (such as "Nike") and they sell it for a lot of money...

Ab.: While Tunisians don't do that! Tunisians trade second hand goods, but it's good stuff, always good stuff!

V.: Do you also trade cigarettes?

Ab.: For sure! Here a carton costs 50 €, in Tunisia it costs 10 €. But this is not illegal! You just avoid to pay the import duties, the tax amount...

V.: And to whom you usually sell them?

Ab.: To Tunisians, but also to Italians...

Federica: And how do they know that you have them?

Ab.: Oh, they know it, of course they know it! And not just the Tunisians [*are involved in this type of trades*!]! Even Romanians now do this job! They bring a lot of cigarettes! If in Tunisia a carton costs 10 €, in Romania it costs 5 €... even less.

F.: And how do you manage with the customs officials?

Ab.: [*Laughing*] You have to pay. But not "officially" [*he makes a gesture as to mean "under-the-table"*]... in Arabic we say "you have to put the oil in the gears"... and then you can see how the machine runs! If you pay, you see how much you run! "I'll give you something..." [*and he makes a gesture simulating to put some money in someone else pocket*]. [...]

V.: And what about your friend Mohamed? [*we met Mohamed and his partner in March. Mohamed told us that he was also a trader*].

Ab.: Now he is in Tunisia, but he will be back soon...

V.: And what about his partner?

Ab.: She works a lot. He never works. But the thing is that she works every day and she earns 1.000€ per month. He is burning his time for a month, and then he earns 2.000 € in one single day!

[Vittoria, inside a bar, June 25th 2013]

Abdul reviled agriculture quite often during our conversations, defining it as a «too dirty job» [*«è un lavoro troppo sporco»*]. Dealing was for him a practical way to escape, to earn more money, to gain a better social position among his *paisani*, actually running a not so high risk. Also Hussein, the Algerian Piazza Manin cigarettes' smuggler, provided me similar considerations; adding also the fact that he was «not expecting» to be picked up anymore as a daily worker inside greenhouses due to his seniority. Several among our Tunisian young friends dreamed about «saving some money, buying a car and starting to trade between Italy and Tunisia» to improve their material conditions. On the one hand, this aspiration could be seen in continuity with previous jobs they had in their home countries¹⁷¹; on the other hand, this option seems to be one of their few concrete chances to give up with agriculture and maybe to engage with a better (even more edgy) work experience. These considerations give us the opportunity to grasp the extreme fluidity (both in the access and in the exit) of formal, informal and illegal labor market: analyzing daily workers' individual biographies, the employment in the agricultural sector appears to be several times woven with other

¹⁷¹ On this point cf. Colombo (2002) who speaks about the practice of *trabendo* diffused among the Algerian citizens. According to Colombo, the Algerian migrants used to ply their trade in their home countries, as well as in the country of emigration, reproducing these forms of exchanges also inside Milanese neighborhood.

experiences of occasional work inside other (formal, informal or even illegal) sectors of the labor market.

As we have seen in the previous paragraph, in order to reside legally on the Italian territory, several people among informal trades or drug dealers tend to buy a “fake” farmworker contract, together with a certain amount of days that allow them to apply for the unemployment benefit. This peculiar act, i.e. the purchase of a work contract, that prevents Tunisian migrants to become irregular and provides also a sort of annual allowance, conveys several meanings that is interesting to take into consideration. It subverts, in fact, the classical process of commodification of labor, occurring inside the capitalist regimes. According to the traditional Marxist analysis, in fact, the owner – that is also the bearer – of the labor force, is compelled to sell it to the owner of the means of production in exchange of a salary. The situations of workers who “purchase” their contracts symbolically invert this order of things: through the possibility of “buying a contract”, workers actually “re-gain” the property of their labor, purchasing *de facto* “labor” in the shape of a proper commodity. The re-appropriation of their work allows them to *free* their time from the necessity to be employed in the agricultural sector, namely from the obligation to sell their labor power. They thus have at their disposal *their own labor force*, to be spend in the sector of the labor market that they actually deem to be more appropriate (according to income, working conditions and symbolic status attained). This phenomenon, thus, represents a clear example of migrants’ active effort to “escape” the subordinate position in which a segregated labor market attempts to relegate them¹⁷².

6. A daily model of existence: *campare alla giornata* coping with future uncertainties

Karim: *Lavorando a giornata non si va da nessuna parte...* [Being employed by the day you can go nowhere!]

[Vittoria, inside the interlocutor’s place, March 3rd 2013]

Which are daily laborers’ future perspectives? How daily workers attempt to provide a sense to their precarious future trajectories? And, in turn, how are they able to attribute meanings to their everyday life considering their uncertain future?

As Karim sharply points out commenting his life and labor situation, being bound to work by the day it is extremely difficult to imagine any possible future. Planning the future, in fact, is a posture that we tend to assume when (implicitly or not) we acknowledge to be endowed with the possibility

¹⁷² I owe this reflection to Giuliana Sanò who, together with me, presented this intuition at the BSA *Work, Employment and Society* Conference, in Warwick, September 3-5th 2013.

to control and thus (eventually shape) it. Working on a daily basis, instead, future is something that is impossible to foresee and modify. The capability to formulate ambitions and expectations appears thus drastically damaged. Saying it in Appadurai's words, daily workers, affected by labor and life instability, do not «wait that», but «wait for» their future (2014: 172).

However, to think about their future is a continuous concern for day laborers. Future is often imagined as a space of *freedom*, at odd with a present experienced as a place of constrains. Future is also imagined in a *far away place*, at odds with a present lived often in a hostile foreign country.

One of the aspects that could stimulate a reflection about daily laborers' perception of their future, is how they arrange their (individual or collective) economic strategy. In particular, what could be interesting to investigate – for what concerns future perspectives – is the conception that daily workers have about “saving”. On the one hand, due to the volatile income, the “capability to save” is considered an important and enhanced *virtue* in cases of people forced to face frequent periods of unemployment or underemployments. On the other hand, however, wages unevenness could also generate impossibility or unwillingness to define a proper economic project based on savings. Daily workers, in fact, could not plan their current and future expenses with great advance, since they usually are not in the position to “select” the better “option” to consume, but compelled to choose the immediate affordable one. So, as we are going to argument throughout this paragraph, the income unevenness, actually, does not always stimulate a process of saving; on the contrary, the middle class attitude to save (and eventually invest) is not automatically diffused among low income workers.

In order to reflect on daily laborers future perspective, it could also be worth to investigate their viable patterns of mobility. Aside from personal experience of upward and downward social mobility, many of them share the perception of feeling «static»: «working by the day you can go nowhere» [*non si va da nessuna parte*]. Moreover, being employed in the agricultural sector lowers down the (social) expectations to assume peculiar skills. While laboring, workers do not have the perception that they are increasing their personal expertise. This, even more, narrows their perception to be able to give up with agriculture.

All in all, thus, the picture portraying daily workers' dreams and expectations seems often to be a gloomy and dark one.

6.1. *Saving as a “concern”, as “virtue”, or as a “limit”*

To work by the day, as we already said, strongly affect laborers' material conditions. The

impossibility to hold a secure job as a steady source of income makes it difficult to plan future economic strategies. While working, thus, the laborer is somehow forced to foresee (short or quite long) periods of unemployment or underemployment; this is the reason why s/he often tends to reduce the current expenses at their bare bones, and save a certain amount of money, to whom is assigned a pivotal “cushioning function”. The ability to save, hence, is a constant *concern*, since it appears to be fundamental for daily laborers in order to prevent strong economic hardships. As Alessandro, the 19 year old guy working informally for Gurrieri s.r.l., was maintaining: «I usually put aside some money, so if I don't work for a period, I have no worries».

Alessandro this morning is extremely talkative, notwithstanding I think that he should have been really tired. Looking at him, in his black hoodie, I realize that – actually – he seems really young. I ask him how was his previous night, since I knew he had to meet his girlfriend. He tells me that at the end they couldn't meet, because as soon as he finished his work in the greenhouse, he went to work in a packinghouse managed by one of his friends. He says that his *compare* called him since he needed some help... «And what do you do? Do you refuse to go? Of course not! Labor is labor, and it's money!». So, thanks to this excuse, we begin talking about money. [...] He says that he prefers to work, in order to have his own money, so he doesn't have to ask for loans and then give them back. «Almost the entire amount that I earn, I manage to put it aside». [...] He prefers to save, he says. And, from time to time, he likes to buy some expensive goods (e.g. technological devices). He states that it's always better to have some savings: «In August, for instance, the firm closed for one week, but I had no problem 'cause I had some money aside, so I was ok. It was a week of holidays for me». «To save» [*mettere da parte*], as he says, becomes, thus, fundamental, since he can't know in advance when and if he is going to work or not.

[Donnalucata, April 13th 2013]

The process of saving become, in some accounts, extremely enhanced, being commonly framed as a *high moral value*, as an indispensable *virtue*. Who is able to save, in turn, is framed as someone practicing a “moral behavior”, being socially appreciated – like an ascetic – for his/her thrifty and frugal conduct. The expectation to be able to save is felt even more strongly if the laborer is not Italian. Economic migrants, in fact, “justify” their presence in a foreign country for the purpose of working in order to save and send money to their loved ones at home. The incapability (more often the concrete impossibility) of the migrant laborer to attain this goal generates a strong suffering in the person engaged in this attempt. To exemplify what I am maintaining, I quote here a troubled testimony provided by Father Florian, a Romanian priest, residing in Italy since several years, that reflects on his personal migratory experience taken as a basis for comparison with one of his compatriot's story.

Father Florian: There was a guy among us who had a wife and four children at home. He used to eat the stuff he took from Caritas: potatoes and milk. I've never seen him buying an ice cream, I've never seen him buying a coffee, nothing! Because he used to put aside all that he could, 'cause his dream was to go back! So, if you said to him: “Let's go out to eat a pizza... let's go out to play...”. [*He would have replied*] “Every time you go out you spend money. Since my purpose is to save, to put aside... This already creates a block in me! It's like betraying, it's like saying: I'm here having fun while my loved ones are suffering”. So this is what happens in people's mind! It's hard! It is just when the family comes here in Italy and is again united, then [foreign] people feel free to act, because then no one is betraying no one... but till that moment people suffer psychological hardships that are not easy to overcome.

Similarly, from some of the employers' viewpoint, one of the (few) legitimate reasons that apparently justify the presence of migrants on the Italian territory is their “duty” to work, save and then – if possible – go back to their countries of origin. We already came across the rude rhetoric adopted by Stefano, one of the tomato producer we spoke with during the fieldwork; and we already discussed his statement fraught with racism and classism. In this extract, indeed, his attempt is to exalt one of his employees' behavior, deemed “appropriate” and “morally valuable”.

Stefano: During the previous years, in the 1990s, there were two young Tunisian guys who were no foolish [*con la testa a posto*][*among his employees*]. Every day I bought for them something to eat. One of them used to spend 3.000 *lire* per day, 3000 *lire* per day [*with emphasis*]! He earned 30.000 *lire*, so he had every day 27.000 *lire* aside. I mean, he didn't take them! For example, when he decided that he needed something or he wanted to go back home, we met for 10 minutes, we agreed about the sum, and I gave him the amount I owed. He put them inside an envelope, closed it accurately, and carried it away! He didn't spend anything! He ate every day – every single day, girls, it was impressive! – two tuna's cans of 70 g , 200/300 g of bread a can of 500 ml can of coke, and that's it! [...]. *He was like a horse, a horse... he was a horse!* Every day he was eating in that way... tuna, bread and tomatoes. But within two years he built a villa in his place in Tunisia [*a casa sua, in Tunisa – underling that it should be Tunisia his alleged “home”*], within two years working in Italy he managed to build a villa, do you understand? This happened during the 1990s. He was living alone, he had no one, he was staying alone the majority of his time. Occasionally on Saturdays or Sundays, he went to Vittoria [*namely in the city center*] to visit his cousins... [*raising his voice*] for half an hour maaaximun [*lowering his voice*], and then he was back again in the countryside. These are the types of people who come here to work! During the two or three years that he worked with me, I have never seen him drunk, never ever... He was never drinking... *cumu s'avia de 'mpriacare? cà coca cola?*[How should he get drunk? With coke?]. He came here to Italy, *to do sacrifices for his family*, and that's it! I mean, *he came here in Italy to earn some money, to bring them home, not to fritter them away here in Italy!*

[Vittoria, inside the place where the Association in which the interviewee takes part organized a public protest, March 11th 2013]

Stefano's and Father Florian's accounts share a common feature: they both present the capability to save as a morally prescribed “value”. Nevertheless, I gradually realized that some of the people I met shared an idea of earning and spending that differs from this common “middle class” path. Also other researches, focused on different contexts, but equally dealing with lower income workers, confirm this preliminary intuitions (Colombo, 2002; Bourgois, 2005)¹⁷³. When income is uneven, very often the way of spending it becomes also uneven and does not conform to the deemed “normal” and “legitimate” order, that constructs saving as a virtue. The unavailability of money, followed by sudden periods of cash accessibility, does not necessary push towards “moderate” purchase patterns; the constant jerks, indeed, could also undermine individual capacity (and will) to plan. Everyday consumption practices, thus, could constitute one of the indicators of this attitude.

¹⁷³ According to Colombo (2002), the Algerian pickpockets plying this practice in Porta Venezia, used to squander with their fellows great sums of money every night, distinguishing among money earned while working (and thus saved), and money gained through thefts and frauds (and thus frittered away).

On this topic I am going to provide two clarifying examples: the first excerpt of my fieldnotes concerns Ahmed's attitude to use his money. Since I spend with him several hours per day we used to discuss a lot about when, how and with whom we tend to spend our money.

This issue [*of earning an unsteady salary*] affects a lot his consumption attitudes, his overall economic strategies. Last night, for example, he said that he frittered away 40 €: «I gain 30 € and I spend 40€!». To spend more than what is usually earned... I find it a quite peculiar behaviour... So, basically, yesterday night he spent more than a day rate at work. He told me that he spent 5€ “to eat well, a pasta or something good”. Then 5€ for a phone card. Then he bought a new pair of trousers at the Chinese shop.. so, let's say that he spend 10 €, maybe 20. Then he bought a watch in Ciccio's kiosk as a present for his father in Tunisia... [...] And that's how he frittered away more money than he earned. In these last days we spent a lot of time together [*working in SicilSerre during the day, and going out in the night*], and we frequently discussed about money – since we had to share the amount we earned, we went to do the shopping together – the topic of money became quite central in our conversations. The other day, holding a sort of check wallet, with around 100€ in it, he complained: «This money for me is nothing, I burn it immediately, for me it's nothing!».

[Vittoria, June 14th 2013]

The second episode reports of an account provided during a dinner at Camilla's place in the greenhouses. We were discussing all together about how dangerous is to drive a bike in the Vittoria countryside.

In that circumstances, they tell us the story of Madalina's brother, who was killed while driving a bike during the night on that nearby road [*Madalina was a Romanian woman met the previous night, working in a firm in close proximity*]. The insurance paid them 270 thousand Euros for that terrible accident. Valeria: «Whaaaaat? 270 thousand Euro is a huge sum!!» «For sure», Camina and Constantin reply «but they were three brothers, so they had 90 thousand Euros each». V.: «Yes, but also 90 thousand Euros is a huge sum... why is she still working in the countryside?!» Camila and Constantin: «90 thousand Euros, actually, is not such a huge amount. In one single day she spent 10 thousand Euros! That's true, we saw the bills... she bought a motorbike, a plasma screen for her place in Romania, jewellery... she gave as a present a lot of money to a “poor woman” living here... That was a girl arrived here in that period, but she couldn't do this job, she wasn't able to do anything, and she was neither capable to learn how to do [*she has a sort of mental handicap*]... so, Battaglia laid her off immediately. But she has four little children in Romania and she didn't know how to do. So, Madalina gave her 500 Euros: “Take them... you're a poor woman!”. Co.: [*commenting about the “poor woman's” situation, and not at all about Madalina consumption behavior*]«But what's the point in having all these children if you then can't support them?».

[Vittoria, July 17th 2013]

Earning by the day, thus, seems somehow to affect the ways in which money is conceived. The situation of daily laborers appears to differ, for instance, from the situation of people working autonomously, as land renters or as sharecroppers (in our field mainly *compartecipanti*). In those circumstances the horizon to calculate the revenue and, consequently, the period to plan consumption choices is usually the “year” [*l'annata*]. For “associates”, for example, income varies according to the annual production, and this form of earning clearly shapes their way of using their money, reasoning about their purchasing not on a daily but on an yearly basis. To be even more precise, in that case is the crop cycle duration (called informally “*la campagna*”) that actually delimits the span for planning. The situation of Fouad's family, for example, follows this pattern (see par. 5). When Fouad spoke about his income, he referred to the entire amount earned in one

year, even if he is paid by his employer-associate once per month. Furthermore, he and his wife told us that there were putting aside money to buy a house, and to attain this goal they decided to avoid traveling to Tunisia in the next summer. Their horizon seemed, thus, to be much broader, not constrained by day by day necessities and day by day forms of consumption.

6.2. *Feeling an “unskilled” farmworker*

Mohamed: *Cu avi cerbellu, ‘mara subitu* [who has got a good “brain” is going to learn fast]
[Vittoria, inside KamariVittoria s.r.l., March 5th 2013]

As Barbara Ehrenreich (2002) declares, after her full immersion in the American working poors’ lives, no type of job is actually non-skilled, neither the occupations that at first blush seem to be easy to perform (see also Holmes, 2013). Every workplace, in fact, conceals a set of inner dynamics, formal and informal rules, technical languages that each laborer has to learn before s/he becomes completely comfortable in the situation; every task requires particular abilities and skills before it is properly commanded. In agriculture, for instance, we have seen that bodies should be trained enough to endure the physical endeavor; eyes ought to get used to the precise color of the tomato ready to be picked; hands and legs need to be quick and coordinated; ears have to develop the fundamental ability to keep attention to the work rhythm, spelled out by the sound of the mates’ scissors (cf. Bruni, Gherardi, 2007). In order to be hired as a farmworker, thus, it is necessary to develop specific abilities and competences. The perception that both daily laborers and external observers tend to convey, instead, is that to be employed as a waged worker inside greenhouses and packinghouses (so, with no responsibility for what concerns vegetable production and commercialization) you do not need *any* type of previous knowledge or skill. *Cu avi cerbellu, ‘mara subitu* [who has got a good “brain” is going to learn fast], said to me Mohamed at the end of my first working day, in order to underline that this type of job is not so difficult to be commanded.

Thanking this consideration as a given, farmworkers usually have the feeling to be unable to move to any other sector [*«non si va da nessuna parte»*], with few exceptions constituted by other alleged “unskilled” occupations. Alessandro, for instance, the youngest farmworker I have met, does not express any desire to perform a specific labor: «Whatever kind of job» he used to say «for me it’s ok! The only important thing is to have a job!». While speaking about future plans and desires, however, he seemed to be quite aware of the fact that the adverb “whatever”, in his case, could

concretely assume a narrow range of meanings. He acknowledged, in fact, that with the amount of experience gained in agriculture, he could not aspire to other very different typologies of occupation. Also Antonio tended often to disqualify, to my eyes, the competence he assumed in this sector. I used to interrogate him quite often about the crop commercialization in the local fruit and vegetable markets, and I discovered that he was really acquainted with the mechanisms underlying the food supply chain. When I was trying to investigate more deeply on this topic, however, he attempted to dissuade me, saying sheepishly that he does not know anything about these aspects, since Franco was the only person who was caring about product commercialization. All the things he knew – he “attempted to justify” – were due to the competence assumed during his previous work, when he was employed with his father in their own (rented) firm.

6.3. *Upward and downward trajectories: fragmented social mobility patterns*

Peppe: «*I giovani di oggi non vogliono più fare questo lavoro...*» [nowadays, young people don't want to do this job anymore].

Alessandro: «*Io cca sugnu!*» [Ehi, here I am!]

[Donnalucata, April 12th 2013]

The conception of greenhouse work conveyed by laborers, thus, seems to be quite close to the overall social representation of the agricultural labor. People employed inside greenhouses, in fact, often have the feeling to *be deeply stuck* in the lowest stage of the social ladder. Some of them declare to have the ambition to become autonomous laborers, working as *compartecipanti* or renting the land on their own. This pattern of upward social mobility is not so uncommon indeed. Numerous among the employers that we met affirm to have started “working by the day”. The expression «to start from day labor» (*ho cominciato a giornata*), namely “to start from the bottom”, actually is used to stress their entrepreneurial capacity, and to indicate their sense of pride to be self-made men (and extremely rarely women).

Together with this upward mobility trajectories, on the field it was also common to come across stories of people that underwent situations of downward social mobility. In a period characterized by a fierce economic crisis, as the current one is, several among the laborers we encounter (especially among the Italians), declared to have been *forced to “come back to day labor”*. I already reported some of these cases in the previous pages. Antonio, Peppe and Mimi, for instance, employed by Gurrieri s.r.l., defined themselves as “daily workers”: using this precise expression, they were actually underlining their situation of social demotion. In all their cases, in fact, they were working autonomously in the previous year, but for several reasons (unexpected accidents or

planned calculation) they had to give up with their previous activities. To define themselves as “daily workers” in Gurrieri's – in a situation in which they hold a stable job and enjoy a more or less fixed salary – mainly indicates that it was quite hard for them to accept to be “fallen down”, occupying now a worst social position. In the current period of economic crisis, that affected agricultural sector even before (and more deeply) than other branches, the «fear of falling» for a certain number of Sicilian small entrepreneurs was not just a “fear” (Ehrenreich, 1989). It became, indeed, a concrete reality. Numerous of them were simply abandoning their greenhouses. Some other, instead, started to rent them out¹⁷⁴. An interesting example is the firm held by Toniu. Toniu was an ambitious Albanian entrepreneur in his forties who – together with another associate – at the moment of our interview¹⁷⁵ was renting a total amount of 75.000 m² of greenhouse (employing 15 people). Toniu rented the land from a Sicilian man that could not afford to manage his company; the land owner – at the moment of our visit in the firm – was actually employed by the day inside Toniu's company.

Differently from their Italian mates, when speaking about their future expectations and possibility of social mobility, foreign workers quite often tend to imagine themselves occupying a better position in their countries of origin. Their expectations of social mobility, if any, are rarely imagined in Italy, especially in Sicily where the situation of the labor market is deemed to be highly segregated. Compelled to work by the day for low salaries in the countryside, however, these goals very often appear to be difficult to attain and often postponed for quite long periods. This was the case, for instance for Adrian and Ionita, a young Romanian couple (respectively 28 and 22 years old) who came to Italy in order to save some money to be able to marry and set up a family in Romania. Initially, they expected to spend just one or two years in Italy. At the moment we met them (in June 2013) they have been employed stably without any contract for two years, earning 20€ per day. At the moment I am writing this thesis they are still hired by the same firm, and still dreaming one day to go back to Romania to get married and set up a family.

Not always, however, to go back to the country of origin represents a fulfillment. Ahmed, for instance, through his experience as a daily worker was not able to save any money. When he decided to go back to Tunisia, since the labor market situation in the transformed strip was unbearable, he felt actually to “have failed” his migratory project.

In this last paragraph, I tried to sketch a picture concerning workers aspirations and expectations to “move out” of day labor, and their frustrations and worries for being stuck in that very situation. As

¹⁷⁴ According to Peppe Scifo, for instance, in the majority of the agricultural company there has been recently a shifting from the land ownership to the land rental.

¹⁷⁵ Vittoria, June, 1st, 2013.

in cases of people involved in other labor market sectors, these labor *trajectories* seem to be almost not linear. It is difficult, thus, to image any sort of progressive “carrier” in nowadays (agricultural) labor market (Murgia, 2010). To work by the day in agriculture could be the first step to enter labor market, but also people’s last hope in a period of economic recession; it could represent a temporary situation, or a circumstance in which people are actually entrapped. In all these cases, however, future uncertainties represent, at large, a reason of concern. This set of constraints, that seriously limit (and sometimes impede) people's possibility to plan (and dream) their lives, seem hence to harness individuals to a *daily model of existence*. *Campare alla giornata*, thus, as some of our informants said, become a general and generalized experience.

7. Conclusive remarks: day labor between Power and Subjectivity

This chapter aimed at analyzing how everyday existence of people bound to day labor concretely configures, drawing on the biographies of greenhouse and packinghouse workers met on the field, woven with (and framed by) the researcher subjective experiences. We looked at the various forms of day labor, along the formal-informal and casual-long term dimension¹⁷⁶, and we tried to explore both its material and symbolic aspects. We used day labor as a pivotal interpretative category in a twofold sense: on the one end, the effort was to frame it as *dispositive*, actively used by the employers in order to manage a labor force that is *made* docile and pliant. On the other hand, the purpose was to show how daily workers struggle to shape their everyday existence *through* labor, re-appropriating of their *possibility to choose and dream*, given certain structural and normative constrains. So we tried to understand how, inside jobsites, workers subjectivity strives to emerges, through constant exercises of individual *agency* and through collective moments of *resistance*. Moving within this frame, however, I perfectly acknowledge that this analysis undertakes the risk of remaining embedded within the dichotomy Power/Subject that pervades the entire labor process debate (on this point cf. Commisso, 2004). I do not find easy, actually, trying to overcome this constitutive oppositional binary, acquainted with the fact that the researcher’s theoretical lens, themselves, appear to be shaped within the broader discourses on *labor, power, control, subjectivity*, etc. undertaking an endless struggle to intertwine all these different concerns. Within this chapter, the attempt, strongly supported by the ethnographic effort, was indeed to try to let the

¹⁷⁶ As I tried to explain, these concepts do not represent the two components of a dichotomy but the two poles of a continuum.

complexity of reality emerge. A complexity of everyday life that is itself fraught with evident contradictions and that undergoes pressures driving in different directions.

Chapter IV

Entering the “plastic factories”

Perché non c'è carcere senza i suoi spiragli. E così, anche nel sistema che pretende di utilizzare fin le minime frazioni di tempo, si giunge a scoprire che con una certa organizzazione dei propri gesti c'è il momento in cui ci s'apre davanti una meravigliosa vacanza di qualche secondo, tanto da fare tre passi per conto proprio avanti e indietro, o grattarsi la pancia, o cantarellare «Pò, pò, pò...» e, se il capo-officina non è lì a dar noia, c'è il tempo, tra un'operazione e l'altra, di dire due parole ad un collega.

Italo Calvino, *La gallina di reparto*

1. Framing laborers' everyday life inside workplaces

In the previous chapter, we attempted mainly to uncover how day labor concretely affects people everyday life (considering both its material and symbolic dimensions). Thus, we dealt mostly with day laborers' biographies, their daily practices inside workplaces, the set of narratives they produce to account for their experiences, and the array of justifications motivating the behaviors they deemed legitimate. In this chapter, instead, the attempt is to reflect on the very *spaces* where day labor takes place, and on the relations existing between the *workers* and the *workplaces* and between the *workplaces* and the (broader) *territory*. In particular, we are going to deal with the physical space of the *greenhouse*, that indubitably constitutes the core of the transformed belt's economic system, and represents also the very peculiarity of the strip's landscape.

The following paragraphs attempt to systematize the “images” of the greenhouses usually conveyed by our informants. The first two images, in particular, propose an understanding of jobsite *from the inside*. What agricultural labor means, in fact, is largely mirrored on how the (work)place is conceived. There is a huge and clear-cut difference, for instance, among the perception of “being employed inside a greenhouse” and the feeling of “working in the countryside”. The second two

paragraphs, instead, attempt to look at the workplaces *form the outside*, to try to encompass the external context into the reflection.

This chapter, thus, is aiming at taking into consideration these diverse images: (1) the greenhouse-factory; (2) the greenhouse-countryside; (3) the greenhouse-hospital; (4) the greenhouse-dump. They represent the most diffused among the numerous ways to conceive the workplaces emerged in the field, and thus surely the most relevant for our analysis. Each of these ideal-typical constructions encloses in itself, and somehow attempts to explain, certain dynamics taking place inside the work environments and the local context. To frame the greenhouses as a “plastic factory”, for instance, means – within this context – to spotlight how the dimensions of *power* and *control* are concretely excreted over the agricultural labor force. In this “realm”, when we describe how labor is organized (namely, assuming the form of an assembly-line, being segmented, and so on) we are looking at how the employers attempt *to manage* (through control and consent) workers' mindful bodies. The other way around, under the category of “greenhouse-countryside”, we will try to encompass and give room to all the processes through which workers become familiar with their routines, are able to handle them, and thus start actually *to live their workplaces* (Breviglieri, 2006). All these phenomena of *domestication* having place inside the greenhouses appear to be the result of the processes through which laborers attach meanings to their everyday spaces of work (and life). Given the situation of Sicilian countryside, the set of meanings attributed to workplaces assume also a clear “multicultural” connotation, namely jobsites tend to convey (and concretely reshape) elements of workers' “ethnicity” (Colombo, Semi, 2007)¹⁷⁷.

When we shift to the third image, the “greenhouse-hospital”, we are actually trying to account for the descriptions usually provided by the agricultural “technicians”, that tend to frame the place where protected cultivations are realized as a space that constitutes a watershed between a “traditional” and a “modern” form of agriculture¹⁷⁸. In their views, however, protected agriculture is hailed as an “innovation” *in continuity* (and not in opposition) with the traditional techniques.

With this image we are gradually “moving out” of the workplaces, to set the basis of a discourse that encompass wider concerns, related not only to the specific jobsites, but, more in general, to the use of technologies and the relationship between human beings and land. But it is thanks to the fourth image (the “greenhouse-dump”) that we are almost definitely “leaving” the workplaces to broader

¹⁷⁷ Evidently, spaces are also “gendered”. For an analysis of the ways in which *male* and *female* working places are constructed, look at the following chapter.

¹⁷⁸ The adjective “traditional” is generally employed to make a distinction between “open-air” and “greenhouses agriculture” (the second one, thus, is implicitly perceived a more “modern” form of agriculture). The adjective “conventional”, instead, is used to mark a difference with the “organic” production. It is interesting to notice – in this case – the twofold meaning assumed by the word “conventional”: as being something “not natural” but “constructed”; but also as being something that “for a convention, a tradition” has been always reproduced in that way, becoming the “most natural” way to cultivate.

our gaze towards the entire territory hosting them. This last (more critical) image, in fact, tries to stir up the contradictions existing between the idyllic idea of a “countryside” (and, as a consequence, of a traditional way of farming) and the greenhouses extensions (namely, the spatialization of a market-led system of production). If the previous ideal-type (“greenhouse-hospital”) seeks to provide a image of a *scientific*, thus rationalized and more efficient, type of production, this last image, instead, frames protected cultivations as a process providing negative effects for the environment and the human beings at large.

These last two images, thus, are helpful to highlight the different sets of meanings that people tend to attribute to the adjective “transformed” in this area indeed identified as the “transformed littoral strip” [*fascia costiera trasformata*]. For those who frame agriculture in general, and greenhouses in particular, as the visible materialization of a period of economic progress, the adjective “transformed” tends to assume a positive connotation. In their case, the littoral belt’s landscape could be even described as “beautiful” and “pleasant”, as we have seen in the Introduction. On the contrary, for those who do not reside in the area, for people that do not take an active part (but mostly undergo) the “economic development”, or for the ones concerned about the long-term consequences of an invasive form of agriculture the world “transformed” tends to become a synonymous of “spoiled” and “polluted”.

This chapter, thus, attempts to account for these sometimes mutually exclusive and sometimes interpenetrating greenhouses images.

2. The “greenhouse-factory”: *Manufacturing consent in the tomatoes’ picking*

Traditional agriculture is highly different from the industrial sector in relation to labor process organization inside workplaces. In open-field cultivations, in fact, the amount of labor required, the growth rate of the plants, the possibility to pick up vegetables through machines or with bare hands, etc. do vary consistently, according to several exogenous variables (*in primis* weather conditions), that the farmer cannot always control. It appears thus quite hard for the grower to be able to manage and organize “scientifically” all the phases of the productive process. Contrariwise, compared to traditional agriculture, protected cultivations present an incredible advantage: they are, in fact, highly *predictable*. By conditioning the meteorological elements, by the use of patented seeds, by the massive employment of chemicals and pesticides, almost all the aspects of the crops production

appear to be the expected consequences of the human action. For what concerns labor process organization, this basically means that every task inside a greenhouse could be “scientifically” planned, in the same way as it occurs inside a factory. Not very differently from fordist and taylorist shop floors, thus, work inside greenhouses is highly segmented, routinized, repetitive and fast. From sociology of work perspective, the presence of enclaves of taylorist forms of labor organization within the alleged service economy is actually not surprising at all (see also Ngai, *et al.*). As, among the others, Renata Semanza noticed:

«L’egemonia del modello di specializzazione flessibile delle imprese nell’economia moderna, consiste nel fatto che esse non hanno considerato il permanere di forme di divisione del lavoro di tipo taylorista e di aree e settori in cui il lavoro fordista è sopravvissuto.[...] A questo riguardo Ritzer (1993), facendo riferimento alle tecniche manageriali e ai processi lavorativi delle catene dei fast-food, introduce il concetto di “mcdonaldization” del lavoro per indicare che la semplificazione e la ripetitività dei compiti, accompagnate da un rigido controllo del lavoro, sono gli aspetti tipici delle grandi imprese fordiste, trasposti nelle società dei servizi» (2014: 65).

What is new, thus, in the “plastic factories” compared with traditional fordist factories for what concerns the organization of the labor process? At first blush, the answer could be: not so much. But do farmworkers perceive themselves as factory laborers? These second answer is indeed more contradictory. According to Peppe and Antonio, for instance, «inside the factories there is more control, you can’t slow down the work rhythms. In the countryside, instead, you might stop to smoke a cigarette». Needless to say, I have never seen none of them actually feeling “free” to stop and enjoy their cigarettes during the working hours.

2.1. *Control inside workplaces*

*[We went with Serena to her packinghouse to take a look at the workplace. We were waiting with her and other colleagues outside of the processing plant, for around 40 minutes before the tomatoes’ truck arrived. When the product was ready, an alarm rung and the women moved rapidly inside the lines]. It was a quite impressive scene, I remember it really vividly: all the 50 women, after one hour of waiting, enter massively inside the packinghouse, moving all together to occupy their places in the processing lines. A voice screams: «Good morning!»; and the women reply all together: «Good morning!». Soon after that, Alfredo, the overseer, walking up and down in the lines, starts to cry aloud some instructions. Inevitably, the situation recalls a *military training*, also (or maybe especially) for people with no experience of workplaces, as I am¹⁷⁹. However, I find the circumstance tremendously appalling. As soon as she enters in her workspace [*banchetto*], Serena, who so far was extremely attentive and talkative with us – as well as Monica, her colleague – does not even turn her head to say «Hi» while working.*

[Vittoria, March 11th, 2013]

¹⁷⁹ This episode recalls also the very famous scene of Elio Petri’s movie *La classe operaia va in paradiso* (1971), representing workers entering massively inside a huge factory’s building as soon as its gate were open.

Packinghouses, obviously, do not differ so much from traditional (fordist) factories. The assembly-line (usually female) workers, dressed up with a uniform and a hairnet cap, are generally supervised by an overseer (that could be a man or a woman). So, commonly the firms employ a person with the assignment of controlling the other laborers [*il/la responsabile del magazzino*]. In that cases, in fact, due also to the particular spatial disposition, within the lines is actually quite easy to exert a (visual) monitoring over the entire staff. Moreover, the workers' productivity (namely the quantity of pieces produced at a certain time) and the quality of boxes realized, is also accurately checked. Each single worker is effortlessly controlled, even in the less technologically-advanced companies, through the use of a simple piece of paper indicating a number; each number obviously corresponds to the single laborer and has to be put in the boxes ready to be sold. This basic system consents to make traceable the person who processed the products in cases of objections from the buyers, while allowing also to check individually employees' working rhythm and the quality of their labor.

Inside greenhouse, instead, the constant monitoring of workers' productivity is not so easy to be realized, due also to spatial considerations. According to the firm's size, usually, employers elaborate different methods to control the labor force. In the smallest units, generally the same boss (or one of his relatives) works inside the greenhouse and supervises the labor force (as it was in SicilSerre or in Kamari s.r.l.). In medium-sized firms, instead, the employer (even not working directly in the fields) tends to come often to oversee the team. Franco, for instance, used to be quite present in his company, even trying to "conceal" his presence with the twofold purpose of not looking so oppressive, and in the meanwhile reproducing a "panopticon" effect. When, at the beginning of our employment relationship, I tried to investigate about his attitude towards the workforce control, he said:

V.: Are you usually here during the morning [*in a café that he owns*]?

F.: No, usually at this time I'm going around in the greenhouses... almost every morning I go around to check [*faccio un giro di controllo*]...

V.: And what do you check?

F.: No... just because... tomatoes need to be checked. I usually go around once or twice per day. Possibly once in the morning, between 8 and 9 o'clock, and another time in the afternoon.

[Donnalucata, inside the café owned by the interviewee, March 18th, 2013]

While working in the firm, instead, we realized that he actually used to come to visit the workplace more frequently:

In the practice of *spampinamento* [*defoliation*] there are not so many "risks". One of the few damage that is possible to produce to the plant is to cut accidentally a small tomatoes bunch [*grappolino*] instead of the leaf. Today, when it happened to me for the first time, I was uncertain on what to do. So, quite embarrassed, I asked suggestion to Wera, showing here the tomatoes bunch. She, thus, explained to me discreetly that what I could do, in this case, is to bury it into the ground, between the two lines of tomatoes' plants. In this way, she explained, if Franco passes by, he can't see the damage. Another risk while *si spampina* is to cut completely the plant stem. Today,

it happened to Giuliana, so that the plant fell clumsily over her. As soon as she found herself in this situation, promptly indeed, Franco showed up, for the third time during the day. How is it possible that he had such a “perfect timing”?! Antonio actually suggested that «probably, he was already there! He didn’t show up, but he was controlling from a long distance». The other workers, in fact, say that he tends to do it occasionally: he leaves the car far away and comes closer to the greenhouse on foot, without being heard and seen, to control if laborers are effectively at work. In this occasion, I mean, in this third visit during the day, I didn't realized that he was there [*Giuliana informed me about this when we were already back home*].

[Donnalucata, April 11th, 2013]

As his workers usually know, hence, Franco generally tried to “hide” when he came to control the labor inside the greenhouse. In another conversation I held with him, he declared to me openly that he often has this type of approach.

During the morning, Franco arrives [*for the second time*] around 11 o' clock to supervise the tomatoes' picking. I decide have a break to chat briefly with him [...]. On that occasion, he told me the story of Wera's sister, a woman that for a short period was also employed in the firm. He said that he dismissed her «'cause she was too often goldbricking, and she was not behaving honestly» with him. He discovered her attitude since – he said – he used to arrive on the sly inside the greenhouse. And once it happened that he saw her sat in a shadow, resting for quite long time. When he showed up, she run at work. So, he said «this is not a correct behavior: she was not resting, she was trying to con me!».

[Donnalucata, April 16th, 2013]

Obviously, this attitude seriously limits workers possibility to feel “free” to have a break. Suspecting the arrival of the boss, they usually tend to rest for few seconds, remaining crouched on their legs within the tomato lines, not going outside of the greenhouse, neither for breathing fresh air for a few minutes. While working with Mohamed, for instance, I jotted down:

During the afternoon, Ahmed complains more than once for his back pain. I invite him to have a break but he makes me realize that he can't. Actually, nobody is controlling how much and how we are working (Mohamed is running errands in the city center right now, he said). But still, to have a break does not seem to be a possibility we can enjoy. Rather, as a way to rest, you can slow down the pace, or either stop for resting between two tomato lines. In doing so, Chadi is really hilarious. At 11.35 a.m. he stops working [*the lunch break should be at 12 o'clock*], burning time in quite useless tasks, such as moving boxes from one place to another, and so on and so forth. Or eventually pretending to be bossy with us! In fact, when Mohamed is not there, he actually “plays” as a foreman, going around to supervise (or pretending to supervise) our work. At a certain point, for instance, he stuck in front of our row and tells to Ahmed, in Arabic, that we have to collect only the tomatoes that are really ripe. Amhed translates for me his instructions. From his position, however, it is almost impossible for Chadi to look inside our box. So, he actually doesn't know what type of tomatoes we are picking. He is saying so just to show us that, in some way, he is the “boss”! Notwithstanding this ostentation of “authority”, precision and seriousness he works slowly and he tries to avoid every heavy load... his way of resisting the tough labor!

[Vittoria, March 13th, 2013]

In the case of big firms, it is quite common that the company employs worker with the precise task of supervising the other laborers, without being directly involved in the production. In the following account, Marco, a young agronomist who uses to be hired inside greenhouses, defined this figure a *caporale* [a gang master].

Marco: It was at Piombo, one of the biggest company here in the area. It produced tomatoes, potatoes, and so on. In that case, the firm worked through *caporalato*. I mean, when you were

employed there, you had your team, and your team's leader. As far as I know, for the accounts that I received and for what I could see with my eyes – I was working there for three months – you could not even go to the toilet in that place!

V.: How do you know that people who were there overseeing were *caporali*?

M.: Because you could see a man sat on a tractor, who looked at forty people working, supervising a team, I mean... and other teams with other foremen looking at them... There was one person who was the very *caporale*, this was his role. He was stuck there and used to control if everyone was working or not. And in that firm it was even forbidden to talk... inside the greenhouse you couldn't talk!

[Vittoria, inside the interviewee's car, March 6th, 2013]

Even if Marco, in this account, employs the word “*caporale*”, what he was actually maintaining is that each team had a supervisor who used to control laborers quite strictly. Thus, it seems now worth to make some distinctions between the task of overseeing a team, and the role generally undertaken by the “classical” *caporali* in the agricultural sector. Several observers, in fact, (and among them numerous journalists, trade unionists and members of the institutions) tend to define as *caporalato* whatever type of phenomenon concerning labor exploitation or control. The figure of *caporale*, indeed, has to do mainly with workforce *intermediation* (namely, active recruitment and organization of laborers' teams) (Perrotta, 2014b: 193)¹⁸⁰. In the transformed littoral strip, even if there are several examples of illicit workforce intermediation¹⁸¹, the cases of “classical” *caporalato* tend to be not so frequent as in other southern Italian agricultural contexts. In open-field seasonal agriculture, in fact, gang masters usually play a pivotal role, assuming the function of intermediating among two distinct (social) worlds, employers and employees. As it is well-known, they recruit and organize small and medium-sized teams (among five and twenty-five workers), driving them to the field, often providing foodstuff and shelter, in exchange of a compensation that is calculated per each box of collected products¹⁸², plus a fixed sum for the daily transportation (5 € per person). In that situations, *caporali* have also the fundamental function of *controlling* the teams (few times through the use of violence, more often indirectly, since that they represent one of the few possibilities to find a job in a

¹⁸⁰ To provide a juridical definition of this phenomenon – in order to complete the sociological one – we should refer to the Italian Penal Code. Since August 2011, the Penal Code, in fact, have introduced the crime of *caporalato*, that before was considered as an administrative illicit act. The art. 603-bis describes with these words the crime of *intermediazione illecita e sfruttamento del lavoro*: «Salvo che il fatto costituisca più grave reato, chiunque svolga un'attività organizzata di intermediazione, reclutando manodopera o organizzandone l'attività lavorativa caratterizzata da sfruttamento, mediante violenza, minaccia, o intimidazione, approfittando dello stato di bisogno o di necessità dei lavoratori, è punito con la reclusione da cinque a otto anni e con la multa da 1.000 a 2.000 euro per ciascun lavoratore reclutato». While in the Italian normative system *caporalato* is defined as a penal crime, in other European and Western countries the phenomenon has been “legalized”, providing the possibility to practice it formally, as a regular autonomous activity (i. e. in the US the occupation of the *labor contractor* is regulated by the law since the 1960s; while in the UK, *caporalato* was legalized in 2004, through the *Gang master Licensing Act*).

¹⁸¹ It is quite diffuse, for instance, the practice of *una tantum* intermediation, namely the cases of casual or professional brokers that provide labor for farmworkers in search of a new occupation. In that cases, the “costumer” has to pay a certain amount of money that, in 2013, used to be around 100 €, or alternatively s/he has to “compensate” the intermediary with his/her first salary. Cases of jobs' selling are quite frequent also in other labor market sectors: cf. among the others, Mazzacurati (2005) for what concerns care-givers, and Azzeruoli (2014) regarding milk providers working in the Pianura Padana cowsheds.

¹⁸² It is usually around 0,50 and 1,50 € for each *cassone*.

segregated labor market), preventing in this way phenomena of deception or protest. In the transformed strip, as we said widely, the situation is quite different: recruitment and control are more often realized by the same employer, especially in the majority of the small firms. In medium-sized or big companies, as we said, could often exist someone who is employed with the function of supervising the other team-mates (a figure that numerous farmworkers tend to define as the *massaro*). Throughout the research, however, it was possible to become acquainted with some phenomena constituting examples of the “classical” form of *caporalato*, as I reported in these two extracts:

Yesterday I decided to be direct, and I addressed to Ahmed a precise question about the existence of *caporalato* in the area. At the beginning, it seemed that he didn't understand this word. So, I explained that in Calabria, where I come from, there are some people that usually organize workers' team, that drive them to the field, and take their money without working. Once understood, he said yes, that these kind of people do exist also in Vittoria. There is a Bulgarian man, he told us, that goes around in Piazza Senia, asking if someone wants to work by the day cleaning the vineyards. The Bulgarian gets 40 € from the “Italian”, but then he pays the farmworkers 25 € per day. He doesn't work in the fields, he is just a supervisor. Moreover, he doesn't drive laborers at work, they have to go there with their own car.

[...]

Today, instead, Ahmed told me that the police received an anonymous call from someone who denounced the business of the Bulgarian *caporale*. He was apparently suspecting that I made the phone call! I said “no”, but I think that I didn't believe me! He went on saying that the Bulgarian was “checked”. What does it mean? Was he just stopped or arrested by the police? Ahmed didn't know the end of the story. However, the fact that the Bulgarian man was actually controlled (so that police at least attempted to intervene in this circumstance), as well as the fact that someone called the police station to denounce this episode, let me think that, differently from other areas, the *caporalato* here, even existing, it is a more limited phenomenon.

[Vittoria, May 31st, 2013]

Father Florian: Unfortunately, I was acquainted with a situation that took place inside a big firm employing numerous people through the system of *caporalato*. In that case, the gang master was not working, he was simply organizing the laborers, driving them with a small van, where the land's owner needed them. He was payed with a daily wage by the employer... and moreover, he was taking from 5 to 7 € to bring people to their workplaces [...]. I became acquainted with this situation, because a person that I knew, belonging to my same confession in Romania, was somehow conned by these people. They told him: “Don't worry, come here with your children, they will go to school. You will earn 25 € per day, you will have a place to stay and whatever you need”. Once in Italy, his family has been dumped in an abandoned house. The shack where they were living was created with nylon cloths and pieces of wood... there was an old well to take water, but there were no toilets, and nothing else... mice running around... the children – poor things – they were all the time alone, all the day long, while their parents were working. [...] The entire group was composed of 50 people, employed by two Romanian *caporali* [...] And the firm that was using this organization was a quite big one! The bosses in that case could not control workers directly, so they chose the *caporalato* system, instead of simply employing an overseer. They preferred *caporalato* 'cause, of course... people then were obliged to accept whatever condition they imposed.

[Vittoria, inside a bar in the city center, May 14th, 2013]

Also when my colleague and I were looking for a job, we “contacted” – through Ahmed – two Tunisian men that proposed themselves as intermediaries for a firm in a nearby village. Unfortunately for the very purpose of the research, in that occasion, we were not “brave” enough to

accept to be hired¹⁸³.

Ahmed proposed to me and Giuli to work “cleaning the grape” in Mazzarrone. He said that there were two Tunisians “looking for” some people to create a harvesting crew. At the beginning it seemed that they were proposing a wage of 40 € per person; then Ahmed specified that it would have been of 30 € for women, and 40 for men¹⁸⁴. Giuliana and I agreed to meet the two guys to discuss this possibility. We met in the Vittoria's city park. Ahmed forewarned us not to be scared even if they had such «an ugly face». We waited for ages. When the two men finally arrived, they seemed actually two ugly mugs! They were both stinking of alcohol. One of them said to Ahmed, speaking in Sicilian: «*Chissi dui su?* [Are these the two workers?]», with a strong derogatory tone. Maybe we were not the “kind” of girls they were expecting to meet. They said that we should have been five in a team, and that it would have been our task to find the other three people to form a crew. They mentioned that our job should consist in processing grape inside a packinghouse. When we said that we had never done such a work before, they reassured that this was not a problem, 'cause «if someone has got a good brain, s/he's going to learn fast». We asked about the wage. One guy replied promptly: «50 €!»; the other one «30 €!». They were evidently two *caporali*... maybe the “Italian” employer pays 50 € per worker [*per day*] and they pinch 10 € from a man, and 20 from a woman. This was our initial thought... The three of us quickly evaluated that the situation was too edgy to risk. Fortunately, Ahmed and Giuliana exchanged a wink. Giuli said that she cannot, 'cause she had to go back to Messina for a while. They simulated a quarrel among them: Ahmed strongly blamed Giuliana 'cause she didn't say it in advance. Giuliana replayed that she was just informed about that... etc, etc...The two guys assisted astonished to the short play. Immediately they became extremely hungry... they were actually mad with Ahmed! They shouted at him asking what was the fucking reason for which he required them to come, so! And then they went away rapidly. Soon after, while me and Giuli were making several suppositions about these two guys, Ahmed was keeping silent! He just said that he really didn't hope to meet them never ever in Piazza Senia. Considering their reaction, he was actually quite scared.

[Vittoria, city center park, June 10th 2013]

Inside greenhouses, it could happen also that the employer do not *need* to invest any time or money with the purpose of controlling directly his labor force. As we tried to sketch throughout the previous chapter, several other dispositives are indeed at work allowing the employers to have a quite strict control on the overall level of labor force's productivity¹⁸⁵. While working in SicilSerre, for instance, Giovanni was often leaving the jobsite and he was not employing, or assigning to one of us the task of controlling. However, he was rigidly defining our timing, in a way that produces a strict control on our level of productivity. According to him, in fact, each single farmworker had to be able to realize a certain workload within a given time, a time span that he established in advance:

Giovanni: Let's consider that one single person to “tie tomato” has to make 500 square meters per day, that means two *capannoni* and a half, for each single person...

Nicola: [*Interrupting*] Per day? That's impossible!

G: No, no, no, no, *it must be possible!*

G: Hitherto, we have done five *capannoni*, and three *caselle*. That means, that we have done five *capannoni* the three of us during half a day. That's right? This means that tomorrow, inevitably, undoubtedly, with no doubt, absolutely with no doubt, we should make five *capannoni* during the

¹⁸³ That circumstance, however, was for us extremely significant to understand the pivotal role played by *emotions* and *feelings* in conducting and ethnographic work (for further consideration, look at the methodological appendix).

¹⁸⁴ This was the only situation – actually – in which we were informed about a salary differentiation among men and women.

¹⁸⁵ In chapter II, I suggested indeed that day labor in itself could constitute a dispositive useful to keep under control and increment consistently workers' level of productivity.

morning and five during the afternoon, that means ten. Even if Valeria makes just one single *capannone*, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, tomorrow I think we should complete the job. I mean, *we must complete it!*

[Vittoria, inside SicilSerre, June 13th, 2013]

He used to repeat quite often that, even if he was not looking at us, he perfectly knew the amount of labor we should have done in a certain time span. The way in which he controlled our timing and our level of productivity was thus extremely stern. As we said in the previous chapter (par. 4.1), moreover, he attempted to anchor working rhythms and level of productivity to the day rate, in a way that allowed him to justify as legitimate the imposition of different salaries to each single laborer. The negotiation (and the blackmail) concerning the wages' amount, thus, could also represent an indirect form of control that heavily harness the employees (as it used to be piecework in the classical fordist-taylorist workplaces). Other set of dispositives that my colleague and I noticed while employed inside greenhouses, assume also a certain relevance to attain the purpose of controlling workforce while speeding up work rhythms and increasing levels of productivity.

2.2. *Work rhythms, labor segmentation and assembly-line organization*

Generally speaking, work rhythms inside greenhouse tend to be quite *frenetic*. When the boss is also working in covered fields or he has a foremen on his payroll, obviously he or his supervisor are those who set the pace.

When the employer hires workers on a daily basis, instead, as we have seen, the very mechanism of being employed by the day generates an increment of work rhythm: since the laborer does not know whether s/he is going to be enrolled the next day, s/he has to impress his/her prospective employer, being rapid and precise.

Inside the firms in which the team works for the great majority of the time without a supervisor, laborers tend to agree conventionally among themselves to keep a constant and not too speed pace. As Domenico Perrotta (2011a) accounted for what concerned people working with him in the construction sectors, also my work-mates inside the greenhouse warned me quite often to slow down the rhythms («*Piano, piano*» [slowly, slowly] they used to repeat quite frequently). The capability of «avoiding to exceed» [*sapersi risparmiare*] (Bidet, 2001 in Breviglieri 2006) is – in fact – a proper competence that needs to be learned – individually as well as collectively. On the basis of this “principle”, to be able to define a collective rhythm for a team is thus fundamental. When this is not possible, the harmony of the work environment appears to be seriously at risk. This was the case inside Gurrieri s.r.l. where the Tunisian man, Gigi, was trying constantly to be the “fastest”, forcing

somehow the other members to keep more or less his rhythm; however, the competitive “game” he attempted to activate (see further on) (Burawoy, 1979) was simply ignored by the other workers, that do not engage in it. In turn, instead, the other team-mates tend to ignore and marginalize him, who remained «*solo come cane*», as Wera repeated frequently (distorting the Italian expression to be lonely “as a dog”, and so proving her statement with a strong derogatory meaning).

In order to accelerate production, almost in every work environment, labor is managed in a proper scientific way. Even without the presence of any type of machinery used in this space of production, body movements tend to be organized in a way that clearly recall the *assembly-line* structure. To reproduce the assembly-line cadence, every body-machine has to be employed in a specific, very precise and very short task, that has to be reproduced, exactly in the same way, for a considerable number of times. Inside the greenhouse, it is thus possible to notice that work is decomposed in *small segments*, each of them assigned to a single worker. The annotations I took in my fieldnotes to describe the division of labor inside Mohamed’s greenhouse during my first working day, clearly describe these processes taking place inside the “plastic factory”.

[*At that moment*] Three Tunisian guys were picking green *insalataro* tomatoes. The guys were collecting tomatoes inside some red *panari* [buckets]; soon after completing a *vasca* [line], they had to pour the tomatoes into some black *casce* [plastic boxes] situated outside the greenhouse, bending with their arms and their trunk out of plastic enclosure. When the boxes were full, Mohamed carried them on his tractor. On the back of the tractor he and his wife, started to separate the crops, dividing them into a first, a second and a third category, according to the quality of the products. We started helping them to separate the tomatoes. [...] Our work was strictly organized: me, Giuliana and Mohamed were filling the first half of the boxes putting inside medium and small-sized tomatoes; then we were passing them to Aida that completed the cases disposing the *facce* in a nice composition, since she was designated to take care of the “aesthetic” aspects.

[Vittoria, March 5th, 2013]

In that moment, for me and Giuliana, two external observers, it was quite straightforward to conceive and conceptualize that type of labor organization as something very close to a factory’s assembly-line (in fact, in the following lines I was writing «*all the employees were working in a quick and synchronic way, as being part of an assembly-line*»). Not very differently from a factory, thus, labor appears to be segmented into specific tasks that have to be accomplished continuously and in a rapid way. It is interesting to notice, however, that differently from a proper shop floor, the tasks here were not homogeneously assigned. Aida’s main job, for instance, was to take care of the “aesthetic aspect” of the vegetable compositions; *care* and *aesthetic sense*, in fact, constitute two pivotal elements legitimating the women’s presence inside a male workplace – aside from being a less heavy assignment – (see cap V). Another element that allows us to grasp the underling (and binding) structure of the work organization was the presence of Ben Ali, Mohamed elder brother. Due to his “privileged” position of non-dependent worker, Ben Ali was deliberately choosing to remain outside of the assembly line.

At a certain moment another man came to work with us, reaching the workplace later. He was taking the tomatoes on the tractor and making his own boxes in a slow and relaxed manner, that clashed with the *frenetic work rhythm* of the other employees. No one made any comment on his behavior. Later on, we discovered that he was Mohamed elder brother, Ben Ali.

[Vittoria, March 5th, 2013]

Ben Ali's relaxed attitude gave even more prominence to the «frenetic rhythms» to which the other salaried laborers are implicitly subjected. With his posture, he shed light on the fact that his body does not need to be “disciplined” (because of his kinship with Mohamed and his elder age). His role out of the assembly-line, thus, clearly marks his positional difference compared to other people working in the same place.

The high segmentation of the tasks and the repetitiveness of the job was an aspect that was possible to experience in all the workplaces observed during the fieldwork. An episode, occurred while working in SicilSerre, epitomizes in my memory the *monotony* and the *high segmentation* of the greenhouse labor. One day, in fact, I was asked to accomplish an extremely simple and effortless task: to distribute small black rings (named *clips*) on the total surface of a big greenhouse. At the same time, Ahmed, Nicola and Giovanni were using that rings to tie the tomatoes plants to a string, that was then fixed to an upper pillar. When I started, the assignment seemed so incredibly easy that I was quite happy to have such a “privilege”¹⁸⁶. However, after the first hour, my muscles were in any case paining under the pressure of reproducing the same simple movement for such a considerable number of times. Moreover, the *repetitiveness* of this simple obligation was making me working faster and faster, in order to finish this task and move to another job. Unfortunately, I had to continue for all the five hours of the morning shift with the same assignment, working isolated from other employees, with no possibility of talking to eschew the monotony of that occupation. Repetitiveness, thus, is one of the mechanisms that clearly facilitates an increase in speed of the actions. That is why, even if the labor inside a greenhouse could be very variegated, it is organized so that each movement (i.e. each task) is repeated for an elevate number of times, till reaching an *automatism*, before assigning a new task to the workers.

Moreover, repetitiveness obviously stimulate *alienation*. In my case, it stimulates a curious form of “aware alienation”: while busy in distributing rings (and with no possibility to talk to no one of my mates), I was actually wondering why, during that very moment, I was not able to grasp any single thought: «How is it possible that I'm losing so much time without thinking, damn!», I was amusingly complaining to myself. To avoid monotony (and to shut up my inner voice pushing to “think about whatsoever”) I recalled the suggestion provided to me by Ahmed the previous day, when, to let the

¹⁸⁶ Of course, I obtained this “privileged” since I was the only woman working there, endowed with less experience and less physical endurance.

time elapsing and forget tiredness, he proposed me to sing. Singing, undoubtedly, confirmed its role as a powerful tool to infuse strength in arms and legs aching from work. Both enjoyed as solitary experience, or a collective moment (as it happened more than once in Gurrieri's firm) to sing lightened the workload and alleviated body sufferance, creating a space of intimacy and amusement, within the rigidity of the work environments¹⁸⁷.

2.3. *Disciplining labor through the body's posture*

As in a fordist-taylorist shop floors, thus, inside the plastic "factories" the repetitiveness of the assembly-line organization allows to increment the working speed and, as a consequence, the levels of productivity. Inside greenhouses, moreover, considering the absence of any external machinery used to produce, day laborers' bodies assumed a pivotal function to attain this goal. The posture adopted while working, thus, could be used as a dispositive to discipline laborers' bodies and produce an acceleration of their work rhythms. The following extract (that refers to the observation inside Gurrieri's firm) pays attention on these only apparently secondary aspects:

Today, for the first time, we have *spampinato*. Initially it did not seem a difficult or a tiring task, gradually as time went on and the pace intensified, however, I started thinking that it wasn't true. This type of work, unlike the others, involves the body in all its complexity. So, while the upper limbs are committed to cut the leaves, the lower ends must remain bent, never rest on the floor, so you can quickly move from one plant to another. Among them, the workers, jokingly call this posture the "rabbit position". Soon after the first hour, the pain in my knees was becoming unbearable, I instinctively took a different position from the others, much more comfortable.

To them, my posture must seem funny and, in fact, they kept me under observation and started nicely teasing me. The laughter triggered by my eccentric posture, provided me an opportunity to reflect on why something like this, for me decidedly secondary, could assume such an essential meaning. The answer to my question invariably came from Antonio. He told me that taking that new position, different from the conventional, I was likely to slow down the work rhythms and then he added: «To work quickly, you have to be uncomfortable!». The irrational discomfort of that work acquired a sense, then, also for me. Only assuming a position of this kind it is possible, in fact, to reach a certain *mechanicalness of the movements* and maintain, at the same time, a *constant speed*. Coming back home, I went on thinking at the body of my workmates, and I imagined a body bound to its own movements, imprisoned in the mold of its own parts, and sadly bowed to its function as a working machine.

[Donnalucata, April 11th, 2013]

Assuming a certain posture at work, especially in situations where the bodies represent the very working tools (see also par. 3 in ch. III), means actually to *incorporate* specific requirements, and to be subjugated to a precise discipline attempting to organize labor in a "scientific" and pervasive way¹⁸⁸.

¹⁸⁷ Curiously, music was also used by the "uncle" as a tool of "oppression". Inside SicilSerre an annoying radio was playing all the day long, making communications extremely difficult. As Giovanni declared, music was used on purpose – at least partially – to prevent conversations.

¹⁸⁸ On the topic of the body posture required while working, one of our informant was making an interesting



Image 1



Image 2

observation. He was wondering why female packinghouses' workers are usually compelled to stand in front of their working desks, while they could accomplish exactly the same type of tasks being comfortably seated: «Of course – he concludes – this position is preferred by the employers, since being uncomfortable you probably tend to work faster». Working in a packinghouse, in fact, velocity is one of the most required skill. At odds, women employed inside the nurseries are asked to be seated, since in their cases patience and preciseness appear to be the most required ability.



Image 3



Image 4



Image 5

Images 1-5. Workers assuming the “rabbit” posture. Photo by Giuliana Sanò [Donnalucata, April 4th, 2013].
[Deleted in the open access version]

2.4. *Control and self-control: «E' bene completare...»*

Even if everyday pressure exerted by the employers (and by their foremen) on their employees is quite cogent, could we assume that control is somehow “sufficient” to motivate workers to work so hard as they do? Is it enough? We come back here to the well-known quandary raised by Michael Burawoy at the outset of *Manufacturing consent* (1979), where he tried to provide some hints in order to understand what at first blush could appear as a bizarre contradiction: as in numerous others workplaces, in fact, also inside greenhouses it was possible to experiment the presence of a quite general “adhesion”, from the side of the workers, to a certain “ethical code” of conduct, implicitly taking place inside the companies (Zelizer, 1989). That is to say, inside the jobsites it exists a set of informal rules and conventions prescribing those workers' behavior that are deemed to be “legitimate” (and thus morally binding) by the majority of the employees. This does not imply that workers ignores the very purpose of these type of dispositions (namely to provide a direct advantage to their employers). Nevertheless, they feel that they cannot back out of performing them.

One of the most common conventions that has some relevant implications for what concerns the duration of the daily shift is that «it is worth to complete» a task that has been started. This

practically means that, even if a shift would be ended, the employers expect and the employees feel materially bounded to the *imperative to complete* a certain assignment. During my experience of participant observation, I saw at work and experienced myself several times this type of (moral) obligation. One day in Gurrieri's firm, for instance, Alessandro asked me to finish to fill the box of tomatoes that at that moment we were picking together. «Don't hate me, please!» he said. Even if our shift should have ended at 17 o'clock, in fact, Alessandro felt obliged to continue till completing (no matter that no one was supervising us). Also working at SicilSerre, in several occasions I could see this convention taking place. One day in particular, I was working with Ahmed and the "uncle" to "tie" tomato [*attaccare il pomodoro*]. Our shift should have ended at 17 o'clock. At 17.05 we were still at the beginning of a tomatoes' line. Giovanni, obviously, expected that we completed it before going back home. I was so incredibly tired (and also mad about this implicit rule, by which I did not feel bound) that I stopped to work at around 17.15. I then waited outside of the greenhouse till my mates arrived, namelessly till around 18 o'clock. While waiting, however, I was feeling genuinely guilty and ashamed for my behavior. Once at home, I asked Ahmed some additional explanations, and he simply argued that usually the rule of thumb in whatever workplace is that «è bene completare» [«it is worth to complete»]. However he was not furious with me, as he usually tended to be when – inadvertently – I was not "conforming" to the expected behavior inside the greenhouse. I had thus the impression that "it was okay" to leave the workspace, even if it could have been *better* to complete the job.

On the other way around, when a shift is almost ending and an assignment is entirely completed, employees are not expected to leave the workplace earlier. Inside Gurrieri s.r.l., for instance, it happened one day that we completed to *fare la girata* ["turn the plants around the nylon strings"] inside a huge greenhouse at 16.50. At that point the entire team met outside of the greenhouse. I expected that everyone would have started to get prepared to go back home. Surprisingly it was not like this. With no necessity to speak among themselves, all the team members gathered with trepidation around Antonio. He immediately took his phone to call Franco and asked him what we should have done. «Come on! It's just ten minutes» I said aloud, stimulating a certain astonished reaction in my team mates. «It's not *just* ten minutes», Peppe kindly corrects me «Ten minutes of nine employees is actually quite a lot of work». That situation was for me an occasion to wonder on the deep reasons (and in turn the "inner" mechanisms) pushing them to "behave correctly". "But it wasn't long before I too" was going to Giovanni, in SicilSerre, exactly ten minutes earlier than the end of the working day to "denounce" that me and Ahmed have completed our task in advance. What else thus – aside from *coercion*, and *fear* to lose the job – does provide an *everyday reason* to behave

“honestly” and to not burn time at work?¹⁸⁹

2.4.1. *Competition inside the workplaces as a “game of making out”*

In order to account for the set of changes occurring within the capitalist productive regime during the first half of the XX century, Michael Burawoy (1979) took into consideration an extremely relevant process, namely the *production of consent* taking place inside workplaces. It is not just coercion, it goes Burawoy's argument, that could explain alone workers everyday commitment to produce. In his Gramscian perspective, in fact, the disciplining of workers' “bodies” goes inevitably alongside with the control exerted over their “minds”, actually being “body” and “mind”, two aspects that it is impossible to separate if not analytically. However, differently from Gramsci, for whom a hegemonic order is prompted mainly through social institution (family, mass media, State, or society at large), Burawoy attempted to demonstrate how consent could also be *manufactured* at the very point of production, namely inside workplaces. For this reason, he devoted his attention to the mechanisms through which labor is *organized* within the factories, realizing that labor process is actually arranged through a series of “games”, that he named “the games of making out”. The very “rules” of these “games” are with no doubt set by the management, but – while implemented inside workplaces – they tend to assume a strong *value in themselves*, involving all the actors, that start to perceive them as “external”, “natural” and thus “immutable”.

The episode of the “contest” between Ahmed and Nicola occurred in SicilSerre (already recalled in the previous chapter, par. 4.1) could represent a clear example of a “game of making out”. Differently for the everyday situations, in which such type of “races” could be implicitly played, in the episode under concern the “game” was started on purpose and openly encouraged by the same employer. Giovanni, in fact, in his attempt to select the “best worker”, directly asked to his two employees, Ahmed and Nicola, to *engage in a competition* among themselves. His “recruitment procedure” could indeed be debatable; however the rules setting in that context was not a negotiable issue. Moreover, Giovanni explained his behavior justifying it as a “legitimate” necessity in to be able to select the more efficient employee.

From the laborers' perspective, the boss behavior was totally intelligible. Ahmed expressed strong

¹⁸⁹ In chapter III, we already recalled the formulation of this problem provided by Burawoy at the outset of *Manufacturing consent* (1979: XI): «Why do works work as hard as they do? [...] why should workers push themselves to advance the interest of the company? Why cooperate with and sometimes exceed the expectations of those “people upstairs” who “will not do anything to squeeze another piece out of you”? But it wasn't long before I too was braking my back to make out, to make the quota, to discover a new angle, and to run two job at ones – risking life and limbs for that extra piece. What was driving me to increase Allied's profit? Why was I actively practicing in the intensification of my own exploitation and even losing my temper when I couldn't? That is the problem I pose».

disapproval, frustration and rage for being treated as «a racehorse», understanding clearly that the “uncle” purpose was to speed up the work rhythms and to squeeze workers' productive capabilities for his own and exclusive advantage. Nevertheless Ahmed could not refuse to participate. And when the “competition” took place, he himself showed detachment from the overall sense of the situation in which he was embedded, concentrating exclusively on the very purpose of the “game”¹⁹⁰. The situation of competition inside the greenhouse, thus, seemed to assume a *value* in itself. While competing, each worker makes him/herself thinking that s/he is going to achieve his/her goal: «I am a great worker, I am fast, I am young, I am strong... and I am even faster, younger and stronger than the other employees! So I can do that!». While challenging the other mates, moreover, the laborers is challenging his/her own body too, attributing a value to the very possibility of overcoming its physical limits: an inner (embodied) pressure, thus, motivates also his/her everyday effort inside the plastic factory¹⁹¹. These relative satisfactions, Burawoy buttresses, are often constructed in the form of games, in order to reduce the strain of «endless series of meaningless motions». The situation of competition, hence, becomes a *subjective frame* to motivate the action; it provides a (short-term) meaning to the work effort in the concrete moment of its performance; so, accomplishing the assigned tasks becomes relevant here and now, and it does not appear simply an instrumental action pursued for the (long-term) purpose of earning a salary.

The perpetration of these sort of “games” in the long run, stimulates the production of what Burawoy called the *culture of making out*: inside a specific jobsite (as well as in the society at large) the purpose of making out seems to constitute the final end in itself¹⁹². That is why it is not surprising, for instance, to hear farmworkers remunerated through piecework joking about the number of crates collected per day, showed off at the same time as a marker of (relative) “richness” but also as a symbol of physical strength and virility. As in the case of numerous other types of occupations, also in these circumstances the salary earned per day assumed not only a strictly “economic” value, but it also represents a sort of *reward* providing satisfaction, being these two aspects quite impossible to be distinguished.

All in all, thus, the “games of making out” represent a pervasive device adopted by the managers (and to which the same managers are subject too) in order to organize labor process in a way that guarantees the “manufacturing of consent” at the very point of production; at the same time, as

¹⁹⁰ I found also myself to take – emotionally – active part in the “race”, being unconsciously very keen on supporting Ahmed.

¹⁹¹ For what concerns individuals' (embodied) pressure to overcome their physical limits within a different context, in this case a gym, see Sassatelli, 2000.

¹⁹² Moving the attention from the culturally oriented action (namely, a type of action fraught with culturally shaped meanings) to the more “intimate” ethical action (namely, a type of action oriented by moral principles), Marc Breviglieri speaks about an «ethics of doing well» [*etica del far bene*] (2006: 174-174), that, in the first place, means «to be at ease with doing well». On this point see the next paragraph.

Burawoy himself noticed, playing a “game” within the shop floor could also be understood as a way to *handle the everyday routine*, and to struggle against the *boredom* caused by the daily experience inside a (plastic) factory. A “game of making out”, thus, could be framed – on the other way around – as a tool of everyday resistance. To explore these set of games and strategies through which laborers “get familiar” with their workplaces and experiment forms of *appropriation of their routine*, we introduce a second “image”: the “greenhouse-countryside”.

3. The “greenhouse-countryside¹⁹³”: domesticating working spaces

In this second “image”, greenhouses are framed in the term of a daily experience of tranquility and freedom from the stress generated by the “world of the city”. Differently from other workplaces, in fact, agricultural firms could also be depicted as an idyllic space of “evasion”. It was initially Mohamed who suggested us this interpretation: «I prefer to live in the *countryside*», he was maintaining, referring to an habitation close to his greenhouses, «'cause there I feel more calm and relaxed [*sto tranquillo*]!». In the summertime, when his family goes on holiday in Tunisia, Mohamed catch the opportunity to move “in the countryside”. When, in July 2013, Giuliana and I went to visit him before leaving definitely the city of Vittoria, we met him in the tranquility of his “summerhouse”. In that occasion our visit interrupted his reading of the Koran in a silent and cozy environment close to the greenhouses. Needless to say, this situation was strongly jarring with the impression of the greenhouse-factory that we perceived during the period of our participant observation (in March 2013). I had the same feeling of incredulity one evening that I finished my shift in SicilSerre, and meantime I was gathering my dirty clothes around, the space was invaded by Giovanni's wife and kin, all exited for the celebration of my boss' birthday. The organization of a party strongly clashed with my understanding of that space as a “productive” area. According to their point of view, instead, it was indeed “normal” to do a picnic in that place [properly to do a *scampagnata*, that literally means “to go out in the countryside”]. Differently from others workplaces, thus, agricultural spaces of production could also represent, in certain peculiar circumstances, spaces of evasion and spare time and not exclusively of labor and coercion.

Thus, to juxtapose the image of the “greenhouse-factory” with that of “greenhouse-countryside” (analytically as well as it happens “empirically”) could be helpful to represent the different uses of

¹⁹³ Differently for the other three labels employed throughout this chapter, the word “countryside” to address the greenhouses' extensions was currently used by several among our interlocutors.

the same (work)space experienced by diverse people in different timing. In addition, the image of the “greenhouse-countryside” could also convey another set of meanings useful to understand people everyday experience. Farming their workplace as a “countryside” (and not as a “factory”), employers and employees tend to attach to it a certain symbolic value, evoking the “bucolic” atmosphere characterizing open air spaces. Through this ideal-type, thus, we will have the possibility to explore the processes of attribution of meanings through which ordinary people start to *live* (and thus *use*, *adsorb* and *reshape*) a certain environment, *embracing* their routines and not simply being bound and determined by them. Inside greenhouses, in fact, as well as in other jobsites, individuals with their creative capabilities and their necessity to provide a sense to their everyday experience usually tend to *domesticate*¹⁹⁴ the spaces of production; at the same time, they can gradually “get familiar” with their routines till the point of handle them perfectly and feeling confident in their positions; a twofold effort that is quite often jeopardized by the very fact of working by the day.

3.1. To “live” the workplace...

When for the first time we accessed in Mohamed's company, aside from the greenhouses, he was also very proud to show us that in his “countryside” he was taking care of an open-field garden where he used to cultivate in season crops, and he was breeding some small animals, such as rabbits and chickens, entirely for his family self-consumption. Moreover, he was even more proud to show us a Tunisian oven, that he assembled in his yard: «Here, Aida comes at least ones per week to prepare fresh bread for our family at the Tunisian fashion», he explained. For Aida and Mohamed, thus, their greenhouses company assumed the shape of a proper “countryside”, namely of a domestic space, intertwining productive and reproductive elements (as it used to be for the “traditional” farmer's households). Moreover, their way to “modify” the surrounding space conveys a strong symbolic value, connected with the necessity to keep on “lighting the fire” of an imagined “Tunisian culture”, to which they feel to belong to. Through a material object (the oven), through a far-away bread flavor, and through the maintenance of stereotypical roles (the wife preparing the bread, and the husband working the land), they confirm, show off and reproduce their sense of feeling “Tunisians”.

¹⁹⁴ I am acquainted with the fact that the term *domestication* has entered the field of the sociology of labor in a different (even if coterminous) sense. Bologna and Fumagalli (1997: 16, in Bellè et al. 2014), among the others, employ the term to indicate «the incorporation of labor in the set of rule proper of the private life». These bundle of studies, focused on the role played by the emotions inside the workplaces, recognize the orientation proper of cognitive capitalism to commoditize and thus produce value out of workers' emotional sphere (Bellè et al. 2014: 253). Throughout this chapter, however I employ the term domestication in the acceptation provided by Breviglieri (2006), namely to highlight the progressive *familiarity* that the workers assume in their work environments.

Similar elements, indicating a process of *domestication* of the workplaces, seem to be obviously more evident in cases of family farming (based both on the land ownership or rental). Also for waged workers, however, to spend their everyday routine inside the same places means often to attach to them a feeling of “familiarity”, that leads sometimes to “care” about the surrounding spaces; the fact of enjoying relatively good working conditions, of course, often stimulate the emergence of this type of feelings. On the other way around, in places where the everyday routine is characterized by abuses and tough labor conditions, disaffection and detachment towards the “employer's spaces” is self-evident (as it was the case in TomatoesArtists).

Inside Gurrieri s.r.l., phenomena of domestication by the side of the workers seems to be quite common; one of them assumed for me a particular relevance. One day during the lunch break all the team members – me and Giuliana included – were lazily resting under a shadow. At a certain point I noticed Afrim that started to cut the dead bunches of an olive tree situated nearby. Since it was not the first time that I saw Afrim committed in this type task, I asked him why he was doing this extra-work, wondering if this was a way to satisfy a precise request coming from his boss. He explained me that Franco did not care so much about that tree, allowing him to pick all the olives that he desired. «Last year, I had quite a lot of fruits from this plant», he said enthusiastically. The primary reason for which Afrim decided to take care about the tree was, of course, the direct possibility to enjoy its fruit in the forthcoming season. At the same time, however, his behavior conveyed a deep sense of *attachment* towards his workplace and the “objects” surrounding him¹⁹⁵.

3.1.1. ...and to “live in” the workplace

On the other way around, the situation of live-in workers is consistently different. For people living in the firms where they are employed, in fact, their relationship with the surrounding space is rarely so “idyllic”. They usually perceive themselves as “entrapped” in the “countryside”, and thus they constantly complain about this suffocating work and life environment:

Camila: Greenhouses, greenhouses, greenhouses... You have a look around, and you can see only greenhouses...

[Vittoria, c/da Alcerito, July 13th, 2013]

The feeling of oppression conveyed from the plastic landscape mirrors (and is intensified) by the sense of loneliness and isolation perceived by countrysides (forced) inhabitants:

Camila: Here no one passes by and nothing happens! When you hear the noise of a car's engine, you run out of the door a bit excited... and what can you find? Uff, a “Tunisian” [*referring with*

¹⁹⁵ In my field-notes, I jotted down: «It seems that he wholeheartedly *cares* about that tree» [Donnalucata, April 12th, 2013].

this name to the informal taxi, driving people from the countryside to the city center]; or... uff, Battaglia [*her boss*]. Really! Nothing happens here! [Vittoria, c/da Alcerito, July 13th, 2013]

In these situations it is difficult to trace phenomena of attachment to the workplaces. However, it was rather interesting to notice how workplace could *also* become domestic spaces. During the period in which we were frequenting Vittoria's countryside, for instance, we were invited numerous times to eat and drink in the countryside yards of our Romanian friend, situated actually in the middle of the greenhouses extensions, generally within the firms' fenced-in perimeter¹⁹⁶. More often, however, the relation was almost “inverted”, with elements of the sphere of production pervading and reshaping the intimate spaces of reproduction:

Aziz invited us to have a dinner at his cousin's place [*in the countryside*]. In this moment, five guys were living in that “house”, a place that – among themselves – they usually call «the garage». The garage is a small “house”, with a plastic kind of “veranda” at the entrance. It has three rooms: there is a “hall” with a little table in the middle and around it three furnitures that are used alternatively as beds or sofas; a kitchen hosting also two other beds; and a third bedroom located at the right side of the entrance. The house's walls are made of bare cement bricks, but it was very cute to notice that my friends covered them with nylon cloths (for water), but also with colored blankets or slight bamboo reeds layers... I mean, they decorated it as a proper “home”, an Arabic home. One of the things that attracted my attention in particular was the furniture: chairs, tables, beds, shelves, closets... all of them were made of the plastic colored boxes in which farmworkers usually collect vegetables. It gave us an idea of how daily working tools could be “creatively” used and reused.

[Vittoria's countryside, c/da Alcerito, July 18th, 2013]

In parallel with what it was said in the previous chapter concerning day laborers' working and life *time* (par. 2), also *spaces* of production and reproduction in this context appear to be strongly woven, with a risk of extension of the former towards the latter. Instead of a domestication of workplaces we could assist, in these circumstances, to a sort of *commodification* of domestic spaces, that causes a progressive loss of intimacy and a reduction of possibilities to seek refuge in a “backstage” (on this point, see Andrijasevic and Sacchetto, 2015; Ngai *et al.* 2015).

3.2. *The routine and the “usual acts”*

If we exclude the specific circumstances of people compelled to *live in* the workplace [*abitare nel luogo di lavoro*], we can come back to the concept of *living* the workplace [*abitare il luogo di lavoro*] moving the focus of our attention on what Marc Brevigliari describes as “the usual act” (2006). Even if the great stream of publications in the sociology of work considered the processes of routinization and rationalization realized inside the taylorist job-environments as a dispositive leading to monotony, alienation, and acceleration of the work rhythms, it is nevertheless true that a sociological

¹⁹⁶ Ones I asked to my friends where they were collecting the wood with which we were preparing our barbecue: «it's an old greenhouse skeleton», they said amused, «this area is fool of wood that could be burned».

approach to the routine has to consider also the “creative” and “functional” aspects present in this type of everyday processes (see Strauss, 1994). As Breviglieri points out (2006: 182), the routinary *savoir-faire*, on the one hand, presumes «*la dimensione della facilità dei gesti, del riposo cognitivo e fisico trovato nella spigliatezza [aisance]¹⁹⁷ e naturalezza dei movimenti e nella comodità del mondo familiare*» (emphasis added), dimensions that is necessary to take into consideration in the analysis of the subjective labor experiences. On the other hand, “a customary use” [*un uso abituato*] of workplaces and working tools implies – and at the same time demonstrates – the deep *appropriation of individual competences* realized by a worker through his/her mindful body, a dimension that underlies laborers' self-esteem. When people learn how to handle their routines, thus, routine provides them with a sense of certainty, safeness, and persistence, even comfort and pleasure. Usual acts, hence, could stimulate *liberating perspectives*, and could become a source of *innovation* and *creativity*, resulting from the different ways through which it is possible to shape and adapt [*bricoler*] a surrounding environment (ibidem: 167, emphasis in the text). Novels and narratives are full of this type of examples. The main character of Italo Calvino's short story reported in the outset of this chapter, for instance, amusingly demonstrates to be able to unhinge the alienating effects of the assembly-line organization through the adaptation of his train of thoughts to the rigid and stereotypical acts required by the use of the shop floor's machine. Moreover, he was “enhancing” his everyday life into the factory, breeding a chicken inside the plant realizing that “domestication of the workplace” we previously recalled.

In the evening of my last day of participant observation inside Gurrieri s.r.l., I wrote several pages in my diary, describing the routine I was about to abandon, and expressing my discontent for giving up with a “job” I was at the same time “hating”.

We will miss especially the routine assumed in this weeks: the almost sleepless nights passed to check the time... the alarm clock's ring at 5.30 a. m. (I hated, I deeply hated them!)... the count down made every morning waiting for the end of the week (“I don't wanna do it anymore”, I was thinking all the time). And then the waking up, with that persistent muscles' pain and the nightmares' images still too vivid. The eyes very small, the mood very low. Then the coffee, the sandwich to prepare. The way down the stairs, the neighbors' dog irritatingly barking every morning, disturbing the overall peace. Entering the car and driving for 45 minutes till Donnalucata. At that time it is still dark. Piazza Senia, when we pass by, is almost empty. Maybe in few minutes it is going to become quite crowded. The road that goes side by side with the sea; and

¹⁹⁷ As Tommaso Vitale stresses in his Italian translation of Breviglieri's article just cited above: «*Il concetto di “aisance” è di difficile traduzione. Copre uno spazio semantico che in italiano è reso da due termini: spigliatezza (o naturalezza) e agio. Nel senso della naturalezza e della spigliatezza il termine rimanda ad una dimensione del movimento e dell'uso della mano che viene riconosciuta dagli altri, dall'esterno. Nel senso dell'agio, il concetto di aisance non rimanda ad una ricchezza materiale, ma implica un'emozione sentita all'interno della persona che agisce e prova un certo agio, al tempo stesso sperimentando un senso di appropriazione, ben esemplificato dalla locuzione italiana “sentirsi a proprio agio”. La forma di appropriazione e possesso in questione è anche una disposizione [...], ma una disposizione acquisita tramite una dinamica di apprendimento e non attraverso un'eredità sociale come in Bourdieu. Il significato semantico complesso del termine rimanda, perciò, all'intenzione dell'autore di distinguere per i gesti abituali una modalità di appropriazione diversa da quella privata, che spesso viene dimenticata dalle grammatiche politiche del liberalismo*» (in Breviglieri, 2006: 167, emphasis in the text).

when it turns towards East... the astonishing beautiful sunrise. Every morning, at the same time, it seems that the sun goes a bit higher in the horizon line. And after meeting the same people recurring the same road, maybe to move to their workplace, we reach Donnalucata. Every morning we stop in Franco's bar. At the beginning I didn't want to pass by so frequently... it seemed that we were punching in! But then to have that coffee becomes a routine too, the bar becomes a place to meet people, to chat a bit, to exchange comments about the work. Every morning, in fact, we meet Claudio, a Franco's former employee. Exactly every morning he approaches us with the same refrain: he declares to have a good relationship with his former boss and he misses his job too much. And every morning he makes us the same questions: «Where are you going today? To the *Giardino*? To the *Fumerie*? To the *Torre*?», listing entirely all the nicknames with which we are used to define the greenhouses different areas.

[Donnalucata, April 20th, 2013]

Inside the greenhouse, Alessandro briefly summarizes his weekly routine in this way:

Alessandro: Monday is okay, 'cause you have just relaxed during the Sunday; Tuesday is the worst day during the week; Wednesday so-so... the mood is improving; Thursday and Friday pass at a lightning speed!

[Donnalucata, April 10th, 2013]

The sense of certainty conveyed by Alessandro's description of his weekly routine, is anchored to the idea of “normalization¹⁹⁸” of everyday life attained *through* labor. On the other way around, however, in a labor market where working by the day is the most common form of occupation, day labor seems clearly to jeopardize this effort of “searching for a routine” to be able to adjust to the “norm”. Whether to be capable of managing oneself routine could represent a creative act of resistance, thus, day labor makes impracticable this possibility.

4. The “greenhouse-hospital”: de-naturalizing agriculture

Even if many of our informants refer to the surrounding environment in the transformed belt as “the countryside” (recalling a universe of meaning that is closer, in our mind, to the bucolic idea of a verdant and luxuriant landscapes) to enter inside a greenhouse is a totally different experience compared with the possibility to visit other types of agricultural workplaces. Inside the greenhouses, in fact, very little room is left for “natural elements”: the floor is covered partially or completely by plastic cloths, with sometimes no possibility to walk on the ground (see image 6); seeds are “artificially manufactured”; seedlings – once transplanted – are precisely disposed and aligned, and almost nourished through chemical solutions; their product is standardized (crops present almost all the same shape and size, a quite intense color and a flavorless taste).

My colleague and I had for the first time this impression, thanks to the meeting with a “technician”, a

¹⁹⁸ I use the word “normalization” both with a descriptive and prescriptive acceptance, namely addressing “how things are” but also “how things ought to be” to conform to the “norm”.

young agronomist working inside the greenhouses. In his account, he sketched a picture of a workplace where everything tend to be “aseptic” and “sterilized”. Hinging on his description, thus, it is possible to start to introduce a third “image” that I called the “greenhouse-hospital”:

For what concerns the greenhouses realm, Marco speaks above all about the “technical” aspects. He tells us that, before sowing, it is necessary to practice the procedure that is called “sterilization”, namely – he says – a «total annihilation» of whatever is contained in the soil, so that the plant has less risks to «catch diseases». He says that the land, in the area, is completely exhausted, and that the plants now need to be fed with chemical nutrients supplied drop by drop. The bromide, now forbidden, has been substituted with other twenty pesticides, and so on and so forth. Many producers are even introducing the so-called «soilless» technique [*coltivazione fuori suolo*], namely they grow the seedlings in coco peat or other inert materials, nourishing them constantly with chemical solutions. «The best treatment for the plants – Marco says – is in any case prevention». For this reason, farmers need to check and make sure that the plant «don't get sick». To keep their «immunity», Marco said that there are some big companies implementing sophisticated «hygienic standards»: at the greenhouse entrance they have carpets to clean the shoes and hot wind to dry and disinfect the visitors' clothes; moreover, they use alcohol to cleanse the scissors every time they cut a seedling, and so on and so forth. He speaks, thus, about a “greenhouse-hospital”, a place where everything has to be sterile and scientifically monitored.

[Vittoria, in the interviewee's car, March 6th, 2013]

The companies that he referred to in this account, and that he showed us during our visit in the area, were mainly medium-big sized firms, endowed with a significant amount of *economic, human* and *technological* capital, investing considerably in research and development. As he himself explained, we are dealing mainly with nursery companies¹⁹⁹, or local branches of multinational seeds corporations²⁰⁰. For Marco, as for several other (especially young) “technicians” met in the field, to manage a greenhouse company in a proper way, requires the ability to mingle both “traditional” and “practical” knowledge, with more “sophisticated” and “scientific” notions. It is generally quite diffuse the idea that it is impossible to run a business «with the primary school, as our fathers did». Nevertheless, this discourse usually empathize an alleged «continuity» between an ideal-typical “traditional” and a “modern” way to do agriculture.

¹⁹⁹ When we visited *Centro Seia*, a quite big nursery company in Vittoria, we actually experimented for the first time these kind of hygienic procedures.

²⁰⁰ As I said in the Introduction, there exists a handful of multinational seeds industries, controlling the seed market worldwide (i.e. Monsanto, based in the US; Du Pont – US –, Syngenta – Swizerland –, etc.). Several of these ones have their experimentation sites in the transformed belt. Among them: Seminis (belonging to Monsanto group); Gautiers Sementi (the Sicilian branch of Gautier Semences – FR –), Enza Zaden (NL), Esasem (IT), Southern Seeds (IT), Med Hermes (IT), etc.



Image 6. The “plastic factory”. Photo by the author [Vittoria, 29th, 2013]

At this point, however, in order to shed light on the peculiarities of greenhouses horticulture, I rather prefer to underline the elements of discontinuity and rupture, marking a quite radical (even if not sudden) change between the two modes of production. First and foremost, as it was highlighted in the outset of this paragraph, the greenhouse environment and the set of techniques employed to cultivate, stimulate a gradual loss of centrality of the “natural resources” on which husbandry hinges on, and this leads to a progressive *de-naturalization* of agriculture.

One of the elements currently epitomizing the culmination of this process of de-naturalization is the adoption of the so called *soilles cultures* [*coltivazioni fuori suolo*]. The soil degradation and «tiredness» (as my informants says) abundantly suffered in the area, led – in fact – to the necessity to find other solutions to guarantee the persistence of sufficiently high crop yield; *fuori*

suolo – introduced locally for the first time in 1992 in Santa Croce Camerina – seems to represent this type of solution²⁰¹. In a nutshell, this technique allows the cultivation of plants in an inert medium, such as perlite, gravel, rockwool, coco-peat, expanded clay aggregate, and similar substrates. In these cases, plants are alimented through mineral nutrient solutions, avoiding the risks of contracting diseases within the ground, and – as a consequence – reducing the use of pesticides. Moreover, one of the soilless cultivation main advantage is the drastic reduction in the amount of water necessary in the production²⁰². Thanks to the possibility to control over *weather conditions*; thanks to the overcoming of the problem of extracting nourishment directly from the *soil* in an area where the land is almost not productive anymore; and as a consequence of the reduction of the crops dependence on *water*; the process leading to unhinge agriculture from the necessity of “natural” elements (*sun, soil and water*) seems to be almost complete²⁰³. Inside a “greenhouse-hospital”, thus, all the aspects of the crop production tend to be less and less bound to raw materials, while being even more dependent on scientific know-how and technological artifacts. Greenhouses, thus, – and above all soilless cultivations – deeply modify the *way of doing agriculture*. As a consequence, this set of changes affects also the language used to refer to this sphere of production: we are now speaking about “operators” [*operatori*] dealing with soilless cultivations and not about “farmer” or “producers”. Moreover, as we previously said, this deeply modifies also the type of knowledge employable in this sector, that it is not anymore the “traditional” one, but requires a high level of specialization, pliability and adaptability to innovation. Changing the way of *doing* agriculture, it thus changes the way of *thinking* agriculture and agricultural workplaces. This subtle and deep process does not occur exclusively in the case of (young and educated) “technicians”, but also affects farmworkers' idea of what agriculture is (and ought to be). Several months after our period of participant observation inside Gurrieri s.r.l., for instance, when the company introduced the soilless technique, to inform me about the novelty, Mimì said:

Mimì: *mo' 'nta serra ci po' trasiri puru cu lu vestitu* [right now, you can enter inside a greenhouse even in full dress].

[Bologna, January 25th 2014]

Agriculture inside a greenhouse-hospital, thus, loses even the connotation of a «dirty job», as many

²⁰¹ Intervention of Doc. Dimauro, in the Conference *Sviluppo delle coltivazioni fuori suolo nella serra mediterranea*, at the *Primo salone delle coltivazioni fuori suolo nell'ambiente mediterraneo*, Fiera Agroalimentare AGREM, Vittoria, April 26th 2013.

²⁰² Intervention of Prof. Giuffrida and Prof. Leonardi (University of Catania) devoted to *Le coltivazioni fuori suolo: aspetti impiantistici e gestionali*, in the Conference cited in the previous note.

²⁰³ This argument risks to appear quite counterintuitive for the overwhelming majority of the actors met in the field, that constantly tends to refer to the territory where they live and produce as “naturally” endowed with resources (*in primis* the three ones listed above) that guaranteed in the past, and – according to them – are still able to provide, “naturally” good products.

of our interlocutors usually define it (see also Cole and Booth, 2007), in order to be framed as a “clean” and “aseptic” type of activity.

Among the advantages produced by soilles cultivations, and more in general by greenhouse horticulture, numerous people address the possibility of producing *standardized* crops²⁰⁴ (namely, vegetables with regular and uniform shape, identical – flavorless – taste, and other similar organoleptic properties). Standardization, thus, constitutes another element epitomizing the process of de-naturalization currently undergone by protected agriculture. Once again, the language used to indicate the vegetables is quite evocative: standardized seeds, for instance, are usually identified by a “code” that refers to the number of their patent (see image 7); later on, while processed, the products are again identified with a number referring, in this case, to their (standard) dimensions: inside the packinghouse, for instance, zucchini are indicated according to their length expressed in centimeters (laborers currently refer to them as «the twenty» or «the twenty-three» [*la venti, la ventitre*]).

The production of standardized crops is generally evaluated as a positive result; in comparison with “the market realm”, in fact, this aspect is usually considered an indicator of accountability and reliability, becoming quite often a synonymous of produce *quality* too. As another agricultural “technician”, a young breeder, was stating in his interview:

Gianni: If I was a big broker, I wouldn't want to have any pain, I'd want a product that is uniform, that is always the same, that has no problem with all the certifications, and all that stuff... Today this is the way to succeed [*Oggi questa è l'arma vincente*]!

[Santa Croce Camerina, June 20th, 2013]

When Gianni speaks about his work as a breeder, namely the experimentation of new vegetable varieties through the selection of the best *parentali* [“parents”], he does not convey an idea of agricultural crops as “natural” products but actually as “well-done manufactured goods”.

Gianni: These aspects already concerns the proper tasks of a breeder... [*showing some tomatoes' plants*] these are some *parentali*, different lines [*linee*]; crossing this one with this other one you will produce an hybrid. Each product has a line... that can vary according to the specific requests made by the grower. S/he could say, for instance: “Listen, the hybrid has to be highly productive! The tomato should have a strong color, with a short leaf, and so on and so forth”. According to these necessities, the breeder might produce a hybrid that has these characteristics. So, I start trying to cross several *parentali* that are endowed with that characteristics. [*Pointing a plant*] This line, for instance, is highly productive since it has these three bunches, it has a nice color, the green leaves are wonderful, so... it's ok... this could be a good *parentale*, a good “father”, for instance... Do you get it? [...] I mean... *a tailor, can you image a tailor? You have to manufacture a garment and you have to select the better fabrics...* just to give you an idea!

[Santa Croce Camerina, June 20th, 2013]

²⁰⁴

Among the others, Prof. Giuffrida and prof. Leonardi in the intervention previously cited.



Image 7. The “code” of the standardized products. Photo by Giovanni Battaglia [Vittoria, July 26th, 2013]

As I previously said, this form of production is rarely perceived as creating a rupture with the traditional open air agriculture. Even if the natural resources (sun light, water and soil) and the environmental characteristics of the area tend to become lesser and lesser relevant to practice horticulture, nevertheless they are deemed to be pivotal for greenhouses production. Protected husbandry, in fact, is often constructed discursively as being the “natural development” and prosecution of traditional agriculture. People upholding such thesis, often frame this type of horticulture as the “materialization of the future”. On this topic, I thus report the considerations provided by Francesco (Ciccio) Aiello, the former Vittoria's mayor, deemed to be one of the politician bearing the responsibility (or the merit) of prompting the greenhouses development in the area, in the form (and with the contraindications) that nowadays we can experiment.

Ciccio Aiello: *[When cultivating] in the normal soil, a person is forced to eat a product that is a bit spoiled, a bit ruined [uno il prodotto se lo deve mangiare torto, un po' tuccatieddu], 'cause this is the natural agriculture [è l'agricoltura in modo naturale]. Instead, this is a type of agriculture that – since it must confront with the market – it has to present products that are not deformed [malformati]. And, so [in the 1960s] we started this long journey that would have known, later on, also disharmonies, pathologies, excesses... for example, the use of chemical products started to be massive. On these aspects greenhouse agriculture represents a total reversal compared to the trends historically characterizing traditional agriculture. It means that traditional agriculture is a form of horticulture that attempts to recycle everything; at odds, greenhouse agriculture expels.*

Thus, a *great historical process* occurred in these years... I mean, many people ignored or didn't understand it. Many people attempted to obstacle it. Greenhouses were ostracized by environmentalist or neo-romantic groups, *in summa* [I mean], by those who think that agriculture must remain static... These are the first experiments on large scale of a form of agriculture that *is the agriculture of the future*... [to provide a metaphor, let's think about] skyscrapers-agriculture, or space-stations [*Questi sono i primi esperimenti diffusi di un agricoltura che sarà, che verrà, faranno i grattacieli dell'agricoltura, o le basi spaziali co'stu tipu d'agricoltura!*]

[Vittoria, inside a bar in the city center, May 10th, 2013]

5. The “greenhouse-dump”: local development or local disaster?

At odds with the share of people recognizing in greenhouse agriculture a viable springboard for local development²⁰⁵, other interlocutors point out that protected cultivations represent a source of deep degradation for the landscape and – more in general – even for the local economic context. This fourth and last image attempts, thus, to summarize several arrays of critics concerning protected agriculture and its relation with the surrounding territory. The greenhouses, it goes the argument, spoil and ruin the landscape, being not so well “integrated” and harmonious in the environment as their supporters try to maintain. Moreover, they represent the visible (and material) sign of a form of inhomogeneous territorial development (mirroring a similarly unequal social development). This fourth image, thus, rises important and stern contradictions: its upholders, in the first place, strongly oppose the idea of a “greenhouse-dump” to that of a “greenhouse-countryside”, framing greenhouse as unhealthy and polluted space. Moreover, they attribute to this form of agriculture the heavy responsibility of degrading the environment till the point of seriously jeopardizing other possibilities of developments, and seriously damaging the inhabitants' health. At odds with the previous ideal-type hailing greenhouses horticulture as a form of “progress” and “innovation”, this image spotlights rather the “dark side of production”, and underlines the limits to its own development: without the possibility to anchor the alleged good quality of the local product to an image of “naturalness” and “authenticity”, this form of agriculture is at risk of suffering (and is actually undergoing) a deep crisis.

To sum up the complex twine of critics and reflections that this fourth image rises, we hinge again on the ethnographic account. It is through the figure of Giuseppe (Peppe) Scifo – the trade unionist belonging to FLAI-CGIL with whom it was maintained a fruitful and collaborative relationship during the fieldwork – that the last ideal-type we are dealing with is displayed.

²⁰⁵ On this point see also the Introduction, and in particular the enthusiastic description of the transformed strip's landscape made by Salvatore Gentile, the son of Pietro Gentile, one of the pioneer that imported the greenhouse's structure in Vittoria.

Peppe Scifo: I think that here we should start to question the entire development model, for what concerns the overall territory! Cause we are assisting to a continuous massacre of people who get sick and nobody... because here there isn't something like the Ilva in Taranto that can be easily accused to be the direct cause [*of this disaster*], here it is different. Here we lack these data, but the empirical perception is that actually there is a huge problem, because people have breathed for ages... I mean, all of us have breathed and eaten methyl bromide, we are all contaminated! [...] The alternative? It could exist, I mean, of course it could exist... for sure we should abandon this romantic idea of coming back to the traditional garden! However, this type of agriculture could become sustainable, highly sustainable. [...] Basically, we should come back to have a “paternal” relationship with the land, that it's based on the necessity to take care of its organoleptic properties, and so on and so forth. Otherwise, you know, here we're going to be increasingly squeezed by supranational dynamic, fierce competition, by decisions taken in arenas that's impossible to control directly.

[Vittoria, inside the interviewee's car, March 7th, 2013]

Peppe, thus, embodies a very critical idea for what concerns the “development process” investing his territory. In his perspective he encompasses a set of worries regarding both *labor* and *land* exploitation; he is critical about the sudden accumulation process (supported by local politics) that led to the affirmation of the entrepreneurial model that he deems to be similar to the one described by Max Weber in *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. Saying it differently, he refers to a pattern based on the existence of a «petite bourgeoisie» constituted by several small producers, currently incapable to cooperate among them to modify their productive strategies for the purpose of supplying the market with really healthy and good quality foodstuffs. That would mean to have the «possibility to sell products with a [real] added value, and allowing in this way the [economic] surplus to be kept in the productive process and not being transferred in other branches of the value chain, as the commercialization [or the retailing]».

Peppe surprises us for the way in which he chooses to account for the intrinsic contradictions of the transformed strip model of “development”, concretely showing us how the violent and unbalanced economic accumulation processes strongly affected *his* territory. At 9 o'clock on a Monday morning, he gives us an appointment «to go around». «Where have you been?», he asks. And we show off the newly acquired knowledge on the Vittoria's agricultural outskirts (listing Alcerito, Macconi, Marina di Acate, and so on and so forth); we mention the name of some of the companies, and of some of the laborers' meeting palace that – so far – we timidly hang out at. Peppe, thus, drives us to the sea-side, he parks on a hill and invites us to get off the car: «This is the only beach shred that is still with free accessible in the area» he says. On our right side, he shows us the Club med, a colossal block surrounded by sparse trees: «It has been located over one of the most beautiful sites of the coastline, and it has preserved – as you can see – the Mediterranean flora. To protect its private space it actually fenced-in all the area» (see image 8).



Image 8. Agriculture & tourism. The “third world” development model. Photo by the author [Vittoria, March 7th, 2013]

Outstretching the gaze beyond the promontory, it is possible to glimpse the archaeological site of Kamarina, and behind it the unsettling profile of the petrochemical industry of the nearby city of Gela. On our left side, stretches the car parking of Kastalia, a holiday camp situated few kilometers further. It is curious to notice that the parking is located beneath a skeleton of abandoned greenhouses; within the iron structure several palm trees have been planted, indicating a sort of clumsy attempt to provide again the land with beauty and vitality.

Peppe: Over there you can see the holiday camps, the summerhouses, and so on.... this was the initial idea of Vittoria's bourgeoisie... in a period with no so much regulation, there were some good chances to build [abusively] a house almost on the beach. *On the other hand, however, there was the agricultural economy that transformed this land in a workplace.* So, right now, we have a land that is spoiled in several senses: in the first place, because the villas have been constructed on the beach; and secondly, because the greenhouses at a certain point have been abandoned.

[Vittoria, March 7th, 2013]

He thus explains:

Peppe: I'm showing you the clash existing between *touristic* and *agricultural* vocation! I think that this one could be an interesting observation! When we refer to a “development plan”, we are actually referring to a totally disorganized and messy process that this very landscape [*territorio*] epitomizes.

[Vittoria, March 7th, 2013]

In addition, pointing an abandoned greenhouses slot in a nearby area (see image 9), he says:

Peppe: *La “campagna”! Per noi questa è la campagna: scarseggia di alberi e di verde... questa idea della terra che è stata assolutamente snaturata - e che questo sia avvenuto per mezzo dei contadini è un elemento alquanto insolito. Perché di solito la campagna la deteriora l'edilizia, l'industria, non “la campagna” stessa.* [The “countryside”! For us this one is the “countryside”: it lacks of trees and green areas... this idea of the land, that is totally distorted [or de-naturalized] – and the fact that this occurs as a consequence of farmers’ behavior is quite weird. ’Cause, usually, countryside is deteriorated by constructions, by industrial productions but not by the very agriculture].

[...]

Nearby, instead, it was built the Donnafugata resort, which is a golf course, that's shocking, it's extremely expensive! And I think this could be dangerous: you take away big portions of this

wonderful territory in exchange of a few dozen of hirings... and all around [*the luxury places*]
people still suffer for hunger!

[Vittoria, March 7th, 2013]

And he concludes:

Peppe: Our problem, here, is that we are moving towards a “*third world's economy*”, not just for what concerns the relationship between *capital* and *labor*, but also regarding the relation between *land* and *labor*.

[Vittoria, March 7th, 2013]

Alienation of the territory from its inhabitants, to use it exclusively as an economic assets enjoyable for few dozen of people, represents thus Peppe's main concern. Moreover, it goes his argument, land deterioration, perpetrated for several years, risks now to seriously jeopardize not exclusively the touristic sector, but also for the very agriculture. The quite diffuse rhetoric, exalting the alleged “good quality” of the Sicilian product²⁰⁶, is difficult to be maintained, since it is hard then to anchor it to an equally “good” image of the local landscape (see image 10). In his wholeheartedly criticism, Peppe, in fact, notices:

Peppe: How is it possible that the Tuscan products are so well-know worldwide? The oil, wine... 'cause they immediately evoke in the collective imaginary the idea of a green landscape, with gentle hills and scented vineyards... this kind of things... but if you go there, it's really like that! I mean, it's how it is! No ways: agricultural products need to be anchored to the territory! How can I promote a product coming from this area, how can I guarantee for its authenticity, when, when... [...] I mean, it's hard to promote an image conveying healthiness! Damn, here it's really hard! I'd be in trouble in trying to do that... the area of Gela, for instance, is an area that produces a variety of artichoke that's really typical, the so called *violetto di Niscemi*. But that's in the area of Gela petrochemical industry, where among one artichokes field and another you can find oil rigs... where farmers are often mad 'cause from the aquifer could come out oil... how can you explain it when you try to promote your agricultural products?

[Vittoria, March 7th, 2013]

²⁰⁶ In particular, the interviews realized with the representatives of local institution – i. e. the Vittoria's mayor and the Vittoria's council member in charge of dealing with agriculture – aside form the ones made with farmers, are full of this type of references to the alleged “excellent quality” of the Sicilian product.



Image 9. Abandoned greenhouses. Photo by Giovanni Battaglia [Vittoria, July, 26th 2013]

Peppe's point of view, thus, provides us with a critical gaze for what concerns the forms assumed by greenhouse agriculture. In his analysis he is able to mingle and tie together several typologies of problems concerning “his” territory: *excessive land consumption* caused both by agriculture and touristic (abusive) constructions; *soil degradation*, an inevitable greenhouses “side effect”, generating both environmental problems and public health concerns; *territory alienation* for its inhabitants in order to be transformed into a private economic asset enjoyable by «few dozen of people». These are some of the elements determining what he considers to be a “messy” and “inhomogeneous” development model, generating mainly social inequality and labor market segregation: an economic pattern that with a sharp metaphor he defines as a “third world” development path.



Image 10. Local development or local disaster? Photo by Giovanni Battaglia [Vitoria, July 26th, 2013]

Thanks to the image of the “greenhouse-dump”, that attempts to epitomize the set of worries and rhetorics of the risk [*retoriche del rischio*] diffused in the area for what concerns the agricultural production, we thus conclude this excursus regarding workplaces and their relation with the territory. Throughout this chapter we attempted to provide a focus of day labor framing it inside a (concrete) *space*, that is first and foremost a *workplace*, but is also a local *territory*, characterized by its own “development” dynamics and dyscrasias. In the next chapter, instead, we will employ an *intersectional* pair of lens in order to analyze laborers' subjectivities (striving between attempts of subjugation and pushes to resist), considering how workers are harnessed and – at the same time – how they are able to reshape their gender, class and “ethnic” belonging.

Chapter V

Negotiating gender, class and ethnicity inside workplaces

Risulta talmente semplice criticare i discorsi che riguardano il potere, il genere, la classe e la razza che ci troviamo raramente a discutere le nostre speranze utopiche riguardo al futuro.
A. Clark, *op. cit.*

1. Intersectionality as «a heuristic device»

The aim of this last chapter is to try to take into consideration the role played by gender, class and ethnicity within workplaces. The sociological debate dealing with the intersectional approach is already quite broad, showing in itself several and diverse positions. The concept was initially elaborated in the field of *gender studies* in early 1980s (see, among the others, Anthias, Yuval Davis, 1983; Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1993)²⁰⁷. It found – later on – wide application within *migration studies*, especially for what concerns the analysis of the *labor contexts*, e.g. in particular domestic work (cf. among the others, Andall, 2000; Anderson, 2000; Ehrenreich, Hochschild, 2003; Colombo, 2003); however, there are compelling examples concerning also other labor market sectors (Sacchetto, Vianello, 2013; Vianello, 2014)²⁰⁸. The development of an intersectional approach has definitely contributed to foster some of the internal debates in which gender and migration scholars were engaged respectively within their own fields. On the one hand, within gender studies, the concept of intersectionality encouraged the discourses oriented towards the necessity to recognize the existence of a plurality of feminisms, supporting thus the claims advanced within post-colonial studies (Hooks, 1981; Carby, 1982; Mohanty, 1988). On the other

²⁰⁷ In these first path-breaking works, the authors' main aim was to criticize the model of “double” or “triple” discrimination (proposed, among the others, by Brettel and Simon, 1986). They were, in fact, maintaining that multiple types of oppression cannot be lined up in an additive way. A new approach to the analysis of the complexity of the power structures was thus in demand.

²⁰⁸ cf. Sacchetto and Vianello, 2013, for what concerns the situation of unemployment affecting migrant workers. Cf. also Vianello, 2014 for a brief review on migrant labor and intersections in other sector, such as prostitution, nursing jobs, touristic sector, and so on (pp. 31-42).

hand, intersectionality accelerated the process attempting at engendering migration studies²⁰⁹, a process started with the path-breaking Morokvasic's article, *Birds of passage are also women...* (1984) with the purpose of criticizing the gender blind approach mainly diffused among migration researchers. From its pioneering days till now, the intersectional perspective has encompassed several epistemological and theoretical positions, making it difficult to think about intersectionality as a consistent body of literature²¹⁰. There are, in fact, some differences between the posture of post-structuralist feminists, who oppose categorization *per se* (Butler, 1990), framing intersectionality as an ideological and discursive practice (Collins, 1993); and the position of other scholars, mainly speaking about material and historically co-determining discrimination practices (Verloo, 2006: 113; cf. also Crenshaw, 1989). The Dutch gender researcher Mieke Verloo, for instance, speaks about the existence of a *structural intersectionality*, in order to indicate that there is not only social ascription and identity building at work but, also *material basis for inequality* (cf. also Bürkner, 2012: 183). Moreover, some among these analyses hinge on constructivist and qualitative perspectives (as the majority of the studies already quoted); while some others, instead, are based on quantitative and longitudinal studies (see, among the others McCall's contributions, and in particular McCall, 2001).

Within this chapter, I decided to take as a starting point the compelling definition of intersectionality elaborated by Floya Anthias. After several decades devoted to study gender, race²¹¹

²⁰⁹ For a review on the scholarships devoted to this goal, both in Italy and abroad, see, among the others, Abbatecola and Bimbi (2013) and Vianello (2013). As the authors point out, one of the most relevant field of studies concerning gender and migration have dealt with the influences and transformation of masculinity within the migration processes. Unfortunately, this chapter do not engage with this relevant topic; for the study of masculinity we thus refer to the classical Connell (1995), while for the analyses of the transformation of masculinities within migration contexts see in particular the contributions provided by Della Puppa (2013), Carnassale (2013) and Walter et. al (2004); finally, for what concerns the topic of migration and masculinity in agriculture see the interesting contribution provided by Cohen (2006), dealing with Mexican workers in the U.S.

²¹⁰ Choo and Ferree (2010), for instance, distinguish between «three styles of understanding intersectionality»: group-centered, process-centered, and system-centered.

²¹¹ Since the category “race” is still not very common in the Italian debate, I find not superfluous to account for the perspective I am employing, throughout this thesis, when I use the term “race”. I share the standpoints of Queirolo Palmas and Rahola (2011: 21) that affirm that «*nominare la razza oggi non significa ovviamente – dà fastidio anche solo doverlo ribadire – conferirle alcuna presunta verità scientifica e tantomeno biologica. Significa invece fare i conti con processi materiali e simbolici che organizzano lo spazio sociale attraverso i riflessi infiniti di quella che W. E. B. Du Bois (2007), più di un secolo fa, indicava come la linea del colore. L'assunto da cui partiamo è che, pur nelle traiettorie irregolari disegnate nel tempo e nello spazio da quella linea, valga la pena di continuare a seguirne il tracciato e quindi ripetere e riaggiornare l'incipit di The Souls of the Black Folk: “the problem of the Twenty-first Century is the problem of the color line”*». The use of the term “race” in this academic tradition recalls the employment of this category done in Anglo-Saxon literature on *Race Relations* (Wieviorka 1991, 31-40, in Colombo 2003) as well as the more recent debate on *Critical Race Theory*. These approaches aim at a political understanding of race, attempting, on the one hand, to overcome a Marxist determinism that conceive race as a mere superstructural phenomenon descending from economic relations; on the other hand, they aim to criticize the implicit essentialistic rhetoric diffused in too many culturalist and multiculturalist discourses. Throughout this chapter I will use the term “race” and the term “ethnicity” more or less as synonyms, even acknowledging the historically-determined differences among the two, depending on the different historical context of the “emergence” of the two categories. At odds with what Queirolo Palmas and Rahola (2011) state, within the body of literature concerning intersectionality, that I am referring to, the

and class discriminations, in fact, the author formulated a definition – provided in one of her most recent contributions – which I deem to be extremely comprehensive:

«Broadly speaking, an intersectional approach emphasizes the importance of attending to the multiple *social structures* and *processes* that intertwine to produce specific *social positions* and *identities*. From this perspective, we need to simultaneously attend to processes of ethnicity, gender, class and so on in order to grasp the complexities of the social world and the multifaceted nature of social identities and advantage/disadvantage. What is common to the approach is that it posits that each division involves an intersection with the others (Anthias & Yuval Davis 1992; Collins 1993; Crenshaw 1994). In this way classes are always gendered and racialized and gender is always classed and racialized and so on, thereby *dispelling the idea of homogeneous and essential social categories*» (2012: 106, emphasis added).

In the first place, Anthias would like to point out the existence of certain specific axes (that she defined both as *social structures* as well as *processes*) the combination of whom is able to influence and shape individuals' (1) social position and (2) their identities. Similar to Bourdieu's analysis of the social action (that we dealt with in ch. I), Anthias' definition thus gives enough room both to the role played by the «field» (i.e. «the structure»), providing the array of opportunities and constrains to which the actor has to confront; and to the set of interactions emerging through the individuals' interplay (e.g. «the processes»), never pre-determined but always influenced by the presence of subjective embodied dispositions (i.e. «the habitus»). Anthias states, moreover, in line with Bourdieu's conclusions:

«It is important to locate the discussion in terms of *structures* on the one hand (broader economic and political institutional frameworks) and *processes* on the other hand (broader social relations in all their complexity including discourses and representations). Intersectionality is a social process related to *practices* and *arrangements*, giving rise to particular forms of *positionality* for social actors» (2012: 107, emphasis added).

Anthias's standpoint, thus, allows to avoid the pitfalls of structural determinism on the one hand, as well as those of unfettered interactionist and constructivist perspectives on the other hand.

Secondly, Anthias proposes to look at these three axes (gender, class and ethnicity) considering them as ongoing *processes* and not as *homogeneous and essential social categories*. The *intersectional* and the *processual* approach to the analysis of gender, race and class are thus tied together and both implied in Anthias' perspective. The concept of intersectionality, hence, does not exclude but rather subsumes gender studies' contributions fostering a comprehension of gender as a *relational* and *processual* category, i.e. conceiving *gender as a practice* (Gherardi, 1998; Sassatelli,

term “ethnicity” do not assume a meaning that recalls the fragmentation of the national identity in post-colonial states. “Ethnicity” and “race”, especially when referred to immigrants (Balibar, Wallerstein, 1991, in Queirolo Palmas, Rahola, 2011) tend to be used as synonyms, as I will do throughout this chapter.

2006; Poggio, 2006; 2009); moreover, intersectionality encompasses also the reflection of scholars dealing with class, considering it not only as the given sum of objective attributes (class *in se*), but as a social category always *in making* (Thompson, 1963; Allegra et. al. 2008; Brunello, 2013); finally, an intersectional approach could help us in understanding ethnicity not as the result of an ascribed cultural and national membership, but – yet again – as a process that deploys in our everyday life (Colombo, Semi, 2007).

The attempt of this chapter, thus, is to scrutinize gender, race and class *in their everyday making* inside the workplaces, taking into consideration that these three processes are necessary “done” (i.e. performed) together. Gender, ethnicity and class, in fact, appear to be three *mutually constituted* categories. According to Weber (2001), the three intersect as a «social system» that «operate at all times and in all places»; moreover, given their inextricable and mutually constituting character, no one social category will ever eclipse the other (Weber, 2001, in Browne and Misra, 2003). As Weber states, in fact:

«Race, class, gender, and sexuality are interrelated systems at the macroinstitutional level—they are created, maintained, and transformed *simultaneously* and *in relation to one another*. Therefore, they cannot be understood independently of one another» (Weber 2001: 104, in Browne and Misra, 2003: 492, emphasis added).

Unfortunately, the decision to introduce the three topics through separate paragraphs within this chapter does not seem to give enough emphasis to the fact that they represent three mutually constructed categories. Nevertheless, this choice is bound by the necessity of making the exposition simpler and clearer. I thus just apparently “distinguish” the three categories, even if I try to deal with them as a whole throughout to the examples proposed.

Lastly, as I did in the previous chapters, the aim of this section is going to be, on the one hand, to shed some light on how the employers, at the moment of recruiting or managing their labor force, tend to adopt an intersectional approach, generating several «matrix of domination» (Collins, 1990). The cross cut among ethnicity, gender and class, in fact, is leading to certain configurations which appears to be different compared with the discriminations experienced on the basis of each axis alone. As Browne and Misra maintain, however, entrepreneurs ostensibly are not intentioned a priori to perpetrate any form of discrimination. «Presumably, employers are attempting to hire the most productive worker, and use race and gender as *proxies for worker productivity*. Intersectional theories would argue that discrimination is not simply based on inaccurate information, but *arises to maintain status hierarchies by race and gender* (Browne & Kennelly1999)» (ibidem, 2003: 500,

emphasis added)²¹².

On the other hand, throughout this chapter, I strive to highlight how gender, ethnicity and class could be performed in such a way that creates what we can define, paraphrasing Patricia Collins (1990) a “matrix of agency”. Through their mutual intersection, in fact, gender, race and ethnicity could produce multiple spaces of opportunities and resistance.

The majority of the examples provided throughout this thesis have already explored these peculiar configurations of oppression and agency. In ch. III (par. 5.2.2., 5.2.3), for instance, it was presented the case of Tunisian farmworkers manipulating the Italian welfare system, in order to receive an unemployment subsidy. Looking at this case through the lens of intersectionality allows us to focus on the fact that Tunisian migrants in the labor market face a particular (institutional and social) discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity and class. The other way around, they *act* on the basis of a similar emigration and working-class condition, so feeling part of an “ethnic class” (that is thus a class *per se*). This common condition provides them with the amount of social legitimation necessary to adapt to the ongoing “system” and to shape it for their own purposes. Moreover, in this example, is generally the man the one who is entitled of receiving the unemployment subsidy, reconfirming yet again his role of male breadwinner.

Intersectionality, thus, could be used as an extremely fruitful «heuristic devise», fundamental to provide further hints on the organization of the labor process inside workplaces (Anthias, 2012: 102; and Devis in Bürkner, 2012: 85).

2. Using ethnicity, doing ethnicity

Throughout this paragraph, to explain how ethnicity could be used as an «exploitative dispositive» (Queirolo Palmas, Rahola, 2011: 25), in interconnection with class and gender, we should maybe start referring to the broader context, namely to the *migration regime* within which the mobility of migrant farmworkers is organized. The way in which ethnicity is “used” by the single employer, in fact, takes place within a broader framework defined by *national and supranational migration policies*. This preliminary – even if brief – overview could thus be useful to understand the broader frame in which entrepreneurs act when “using” ethnicity “from below”. Finally, we will try to explore how ethnicity could be performed everyday inside the workplaces through the ongoing

²¹² At the same time, in the recruitment procedures is also taking place a self-selection bias: ostensibly, being a woman, a worker is pushed in looking for a job inside certain sectors that usually tend to differ from men's occupations.

interplay between migrant employees and their employers.

2.1. *Ethnicity “from above”*

Numerous scholarships, within migration studies, have already been devoted to denounce what has been defined as *institutional racism*. In that perspective, it was underlined how a specific borders regime, based on the construction of the political category of *citizenship* (corresponding to the social category of *nationality/ethnicity*) was actually aimed at managing migrant mobility in a way that *produces* cheap and available labor force (see, among the others, Balibar, 2002; 2004; De Genova 2002; 2004; Mezzadra, 2004; Raimondi, Ricciardi, 2004; Rigo, 2007). Within this paragraph, unfortunately, we have not enough room to speak about the overall European and Western migration regimes. However, I find indeed fundamental attempting to discuss, at least briefly, the ways in which farmworkers mobility has been *managed* in Europe and North America, in order to try to explain how ethnicity has been politically constructed and used within the agricultural sector. One of the most common system, through which “racialized” labor force is hired, has been (since the 1940s) the organization of recruitment programs managed by Western governments and their agencies. The aim of these international agreements is to provide cheap (formal) labor for northern countries' enterprises, i.e. to provide seasonal laborers bound to the obligation of returning to their countries of origin as soon as the harvest season ends²¹³. These type of programs have been framed as win-win undertakings both for the laborers (that could find a job “opportunity” and send remittances to their loved ones), and for the employers (who have at their disposal a quite docile labor force), and for the States (that are not burdened with any extra cost for welfare provisions when laborers finish to work). In the USA, the *Bracero* Program, used to recruit Mexican workers, has been implemented since 1942 (Calavita, 1992; Cohen, 2006). In France, since 1945, the hiring of foreign farmworkers is disciplined through the so-called OMI contracts (*Office des migrations internationales*), that – in 2005 – have been transformed in ANAEM contracts (*Agence nationale de l'accueil des étrangers et des migrations*). Since the 1990s, these programs allow French farmers to recruit mainly Maghreb and Polish workers (see, Morice, Michalon, 2008; Morice, 2008; Décosse, 2013). In Canada, since almost 50 years, migrants' recruitment has been organized through the *Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program* (SAWP). Starting from 1966, Canadian growers have been hiring initially Caribbean farmworkers and, later

²¹³ To the seasonal laborers it is generally required to come back to their countries of origin at the end of the work period, that usually ranges between two and nine months, with the prohibition to be hired in the following seasons whether this obligation is not respected.

on, mainly Mexican laborers (Basok, 2000a; 2000b Preibisch, Binford 2007; Preibisch, 2010; Piché, 2012). Since 2000s, Spain has implemented the *contractos en origen*, designating farmers' recruitment Associations to hire laborers directly in their countries of origin (mainly, Romania, Morocco, Ecuador, Senegal, etc.) with the collaboration of the local offices (Hellio, 2014; Linder, Kathmann, 2014). Similar programs have been implemented also in Germany and UK. In Italy it does not exist a proper guest-workers program akin to the ones we just mentioned. It exists, however, a quota system, the so-called *decreti flussi per lavoro stagionale*, recruiting foreign workforce for the agricultural and the touristic sector²¹⁴. According to these provisions, almost every year, the Italian government issues a temporary resident permit for a certain number of foreign workers. The quotas of “required” laborers, however, are established according to the share of unemployed people registered in each area. This means that, for the South of Italy, where the level of unemployment is extremely high, the *decreto flussi* supplies a minor number of laborers; as a consequence, this number is largely insufficient for the necessities of South Italian agriculture. It is largely recognized, therefore, that *decreti flussi* have been generally used to provide a form of regularization for foreign workers already present on the Italian territory (Corrado, 2013; Perrotta, 2014b).

To explain how patterns of discrimination, based on ethnicity, class and gender were produced through these government recruitment programs, I am going to take into consideration the results of a qualitative research realized in the Andalusia strawberry's farming between 2008 and 2011 by Emmanuelle Hellio. Her work documents that, in the last ten years, in the Andalusian agricultural labor market there have been massive changeovers in the composition of the seasonal workforce: first North African and Sub-Saharan men were recruited; then Polish and Romanian women; followed by women from Morocco. In particular, her research aims at demonstrating how the decision to “shift” from Romanian to Moroccan women was mainly due to the employers'

²¹⁴ Alessandra Corrado (2013: 50) explains very well how the *decreto flussi*'s system works, according to the Law 189/2002 (well-known as “Bossi-Fini”): «*In Italia, sulla base di quote stabilite annualmente attraverso i Decreti Flussi possono essere rilasciati permessi di soggiorno per lavoro stagionale in seguito ad una richiesta nominativa effettuata dal datore di lavoro presso lo Sportello Unico per l'Immigrazione provinciale; in seguito all'espletamento degli accertamenti burocratici, viene rilasciato un nulla osta alla richiesta, che viene inoltrata successivamente all'Ambasciata italiana nel paese di origine del lavoratore. L'Ambasciata convoca il soggetto richiesto dal datore di lavoro, al quale viene così rilasciato il nulla osta per l'ingresso per lavoro subordinato stagionale in Italia nonché il visto d'ingresso. L'immigrato giunge in Italia ed entro otto giorni si presenta, con il datore di lavoro o un suo delegato, allo Sportello unico per l'immigrazione per sottoscrivere il pre-contratto di lavoro. In seguito alla firma del pre-contratto il lavoro ha inizio ed il datore di lavoro deve darne comunicazione al Centro per l'impiego, all'Inail ed all'Inps. I Decreti Flussi per lavoro a tempo indeterminato prevedono, per i lavoratori stranieri non comunitari titolari di permesso di soggiorno per lavoro stagionale in uno dei 3 anni precedenti, la conversione del permesso stagionale. In altre parole, solo chi ha avuto un permesso di soggiorno stagionale in precedenza e ha fatto ritorno alla sua scadenza nel paese di origine e successivamente ha partecipato ad un secondo flusso stagionale può convertire il secondo permesso di soggiorno stagionale, mentre, chi partecipa al Flusso Stagionale per la prima volta, allo scadere dei 9 mesi deve obbligatoriamente far ritorno nel proprio paese di origine».*

Associations necessity to recruit the most vulnerable (and thus controllable) segment of the workforce, according to their gender and national belonging. Initially, in fact, Romanian and Polish women started to be recruited through the *contractos en origen*. When these two countries joined EU, however, this source of labor force was interrupted. According to Hellio's interviewees²¹⁵, in fact, the freedom of movement that these workers were now enjoying, could jeopardize their docility, since they can quite easily move from one employment to another without the risk of turning into irregular migrants. Moreover, she explains clearly how gender, together with nationality, was openly used as an instrument to control workforce mobility. Recruiters' strategies, in fact, attempt to «instrumentalize female family attachment as means to guarantee the return of workers» in their home countries. Moroccan authorities, stimulated by their European counterpart, in fact, opted mainly for the selection of married women (aged between 18 and 45) with children under the age of 14, to have a certain assurance about their decision to return to Morocco. Moreover, each woman, at the moment of the job's interview, has to «co-sign the application together with her husband so as to show that the decision [*to work seasonally in Europe*] was taken by both of them; [...] that she really discuss the project with her husband and that he's ready to support her candidacy²¹⁶». According to Hellio's standpoint, thus: «Moroccan managers consider gender as being one of the most effective *control mechanisms* of the worker's mobility. [...] It is their status as women and as mothers and thus their place in production and domestic reproduction relations that make these seasonal workers so attractive to employers» (ibidem: 149 and 155, emphasis added).

In a similar perspective, focusing on the Canadian context, Kerry Preibisch and Leigh Binford (2007) highlight the role of a *racialized understanding* in implementing foreign workers' recruitment programs (SAWP). They argue about the fact that, in the last 20 years, in Canada, Mexican farmworkers have gained an increasing share of the labor market at the expense of Caribbean laborers. In addressing this process, the authors try to account for «the role of *employers' racialized preferences* in influencing the level of demand of workers» (ibidem: 6). In the first place, they provide evidence (through both quantitative and qualitative data) demonstrating that each national “group” tends to be generally associated with a certain commodity sector. The motivations provided by the growers to justify these peculiar recruitment strategies represent a set of «blatant

²¹⁵ «From a mercantilist point of view, Romanians are no longer recruited. [A] contracted labourer of non-EU source can only work in Huelva while the Romanian goes where she wants. That's why and how businesses gradually convert their labour. [I] run such a business: I had Romanians, who are EU citizens, coming to work here. In the days following, there might be work elsewhere, in a bar for instance, and she leaves me. Not the Moroccan one, she has to work in agriculture», from the interview with *Jesús Oveja*, 14 May 2009, Office for Foreign and Seasonal Workers, Cartaya municipality. Quoted in Hellio (2014: 143).

²¹⁶ Interview with the Director of the International Placement, March 16th 2010, quoted in Hellio, 2014:149.

racist beliefs», “naturally” connecting migrant “biological” and bodily characteristics to their alleged work-related capabilities. In the Ontario case-study, in particular, «Mexican workers are considered to be shorter in stature and are preferred for work that involves stooping close to the ground, while Caribbean workers are considered more suited to fruit tree-picking» (ibidem: 17). However, the authors show how the «racialized and gendered notions of efficiency of different groups of people have been and are deployed as a *labor strategy*, evidencing how the racialization – or the gendering, for what matters – of the production process operates as a discursive process to produce the laborers demand by agricultural producers in the high-income countries of the North. [...] *Growers' country surfing is a quest for the most docile, reliable and, therefore, exploitable labor force – regardless of their country of origin*». So, racial and gendered stereotypes appear to be a crucial element in implementing Canada's foreign worker programs: on the one hand, they work as a barrier preventing the entrance of certain migrant groups; on the other hand, they deepen labor segmentation along ethnic, gender and class lines (ibidem: 32, emphasis added).

As the two case-studies attempt to show, the presence of these mechanisms used to supply cheap and docile labor, not only *hinges on* deep-seated gendered and racialized hierarchies of domination, but it also tends *to confirm and reproduce* – through its very existence – these relations of subordination. As Browne and Kennelly (1999) state, in fact, intersectionality «*arises to maintain status hierarchies by race and gender*» (ibidem, in Browne, Misra, 2003: 500).

2.2. *Ethnicity “from below”*

Not always, however, the *national segmentation* of the labor force has been organized through the State's programs and the employers' Associations as in the case-studies presented above. In the majority of the situations, instead, the national segmentation of the workforce has been determined by autonomous migrants' movements (based mainly on migration chains) and employers' recruitment strategies, based on the well-known processes of discrimination and stereotyping. Adopting a definition coming from the American economics of labor (Arrow 1972), Ambrosini (2011: 287; 2013: 143) defines these processes as «statistical discrimination»: «A positive or negative characteristic, observed in certain components of a given social group is extended to the entire group, strengthening or weakening the possibility of the single individuals to be hired or promoted²¹⁷». For what concerns domestic labor in Italy, for instance, several authors

²¹⁷ The author (2013: 144) quotes an interesting interview on this topic, dealing with the families' strategies at the moment of hiring a foreign caregiver: «*Il medico ci ha detto: - Guardate che non potete costringerla a tenere una*

acknowledged the existence of an “ethnic” stratification determining migrants' employment opportunities: till the end of the 1990s, for example, women coming from Philippines had the highest chances to be employed as maids or nannies earning the best salaries, while African women occupied the lowest positions (see, among the others, Andall, 2000; Anderson, 2000; Colombo, 2003). It is worth noticing, together with several scholars, that these racist rhetorics and practices have generally been used to justified processes of substitution of a “racialized” labor with other national component of the workforce with the purpose of shrinking labor costs and recruiting the more docile workers (Browne, Misra, 2003: 498). Also in the agricultural labor market, in various America and European contexts similar cases have occurred. In those situations, the emergence of these phenomena was said to be caused by the greater “availability” of the “new comers” to accept lower salaries and worst labor conditions. Berlan (2008), instead, arguing that the presence of migrant workers constitutes a «structural necessity» for intensive horticulture, demonstrated how these «cycles of ethnic substitution», i. e. the existence of labor force segments in competition among them, have been fundamental for salaries containment. To provide further examples, we can refer to a research project conducted in 2005 both in Veneto (province of Verona) and Calabria (Piana di Gioia Tauro) by Andrea De Bonis (2005). Also in those cases, the author recognized the emergence in the two areas of processes of substitution of workers coming from Maghreb with East-European migrants²¹⁸. As we have said broadly throughout this thesis, in the transformed littoral strip, it was possible to register a similar process of substitution of Tunisian laborers with East-European workers, started mainly at the beginning of the 2000s (see the Introduction). Leaving in the background broader migratory dynamics, what I have attempted to do in the previous chapters was to show how phenomena of competition tend to emerge *inside* the workplaces, mainly stimulated by the entrepreneurs. As it occurred in SicilSerre (see par. 4.1, ch. III), for instance, the employers *use* ethnicity as a powerful instrument to justify the implementation of differentiated informal rules concerning salaries and labor conditions for Tunisian and Romanian workers. Competition on “ethnic” basis is thus *created* in order to motivate farmworkers to accelerate labor rhythms, being them blackmailed by the possibility of substitution with most vulnerable migrant workers. In the transformed belt, thus, as Peppe Scifo states, the process of substitution, e.g. the emergence of an “ethnic” competition, has been mainly a «market»-driven process:

persona che non le va bene. È controproducente anche per la sua salute, se una persona non le va, se è così negativa verso questa persona, cambiatela e io vi consiglio: prendete una peruviana, perché le peruviane sono particolarmente portate all'assistenza delle persone anziane. Hanno proprio nelle loro tradizioni una grande riverenza e un grande rispetto verso le persone anziane, per cui hanno una grande pazienza – [I3, in Corrias 2004, 82-83]». Ambrosini suggests also to look at how migrants are able to shape and use these very stereotypes at their own advantages with the purpose, for instance, of protecting some «ethnic niches», when these spaces constitute one of the few occupational opportunities.

²¹⁸ For what concerns agricultural labor in Campania and Puglia, see Aita and De Vito (2004).

Pepe Scifo: In the end, *the market makes his own rules*. [The Romanians] expected that joining the EU they would have improved their situation... but it didn't happen! Their condition is now worse than the one faced by Tunisians, because they are more exposed to blackmails. Even if they have their residence permit, they are forced indeed to accept a sub-salary [*devono sottostare al sottosalario*].

[Vittoria, March 7th 2013]

As we have seen, discrimination and stereotyping processes wildly take place in the labor market, leading employers' choices in the workers' selection:

Giovanni: Romanian workers are slower, I knew it, they are more clam! Tunisians instead are more active at work!

[Vittoria, inside SicilSerre, June 13th 2013]

The interesting aspect to be noticed is that also laborers tend to assume stereotyping categories based on ethnicity, finding themselves embroiled in a “competitive frame”. To provide an example: before the “race” against Nicola inside SicilSerre (see par. 4.1, ch. III), Ahmed declared that *il rumeno non è uomo come tunisino* [a Romanian is not a – proper – man as a Tunisian is]. Saying this, Ahmed not only differentiated among the “Tunisians” and the “Romanian”, but he also compared the two “groups” on the base of a different belonging to an alleged homogeneous “manhood”. In this case, he attributed to the category “man” a strong “moral” value, attaching to it several meanings, such as courage, physical strength, but also correctness and honesty. To discredit the “Romanian” for the participation to a common “manhood” was thus a deep act of distrust and rage against him. Also Serena had no problems to recognize that Tunisian laborers employed in her packinghouse used to «work worse» than Italian ones: «*lavorano più sporco di noi*» [their work is “dirtier” than ours], she states, meaning that Tunisian tended to leave a higher number of broken tomatoes inside the processed boxes due to their shallowness.

In all these cases, competitive *attitudes* (even if not necessary *practices*)²¹⁹, often justified by “ethnic” reasons, are conveyed also by the workers. In these situations, ethnicity is thus used to *create a border* within the jobsite. Needless to say, in fact, is not only the existence of a material border that produces ethnicity; the other way around, it is also true that ethnicity could be performed in such a way to deepen, ignore or manipulate that border. A frontier, inside workplaces, is thus everyday produced and reproduced, showing to be also a quite mobile and symbolic line, able to generate strong material implications on people’s everyday life.

²¹⁹ As Burawoy states (1979), *attitudes* or prejudices tend to be imported from urban settings, such as housing and education, which continuously reproduce “race relations”, while *activities* on the shop floor appears as largely unaffected by racial division. According to him, in fact ethnicity remain more important on *informal occasions* inside the jobsites (such as at the lunch breaks, etc.) than during the working hours. On this point, see also Perrotta (2011a), for what concerns the use of ethnicity on the construction sites.

2.3. Performing ethnicity inside the workplaces: examples of language uses

“Playing” ethnicity within work environments practically means that national belonging could be mobilized to create borders of *solidarity* among laborers, or vice versa, borders of *exclusion* (between employers and employees or among the workers' group). In order to provide some examples on how ethnicity is a category everyday in making inside workplaces, I opted to focus on a particular ethnic marker, i.e. the languages used by workers. Differently from other ethnic attributes (such as the skin's color²²⁰), being able to use a certain language is not an ascribed attribute, but a *competence* (Quassoli, 2006), that each worker could decide to mobilize or not according to a given situation. Language use – hence – could convey several meanings, showing closeness or detachment, familiarity or hostility towards other people.

Inside the workplaces, a dominant language (in my specific case both Italian and Sicilian) is generally used by the employers and their overseers, implicitly or not, to establish a certain hierarchical order. The impossibility to understand “what has been said” obviously intensifies drastically workers' perception of being subaltern in a foreign country and in an extraneous workplace. On this topic, the accounts of their first day inside TomatoesArtists that Aleksandra and Fathima reported us during our conversations were fraught with so much sufferance, to be able to illustrate the high level of symbolic violence that can be perpetrated through the language use.

Aleksandra told us that she was previously working as a caregiver in a quite rich family where – she said – they were used to speak Italian. Little by little, she was thus learning Italian with them. When she arrived to the packinghouse, instead, she was totally shocked. She accounted, in fact that everyone was speaking Sicilian, and she wasn't able to understand anything yet again. «It was terrifying», she said wholeheartedly. She said that, at the very beginning, when the overseer was speaking she was not able to understand what to do. The forewoman was saying “*ranni*” [big, in Sicilian], and she was understanding “*ragni*” [spiders, in Italian]. The first times she was coming back home crying, “terrified” of being not able to understand Sicilian. Then, one day, she asked Marta, one of her colleagues, if she could please translate in Italian what the overseer was saying. Since that moment, Marta kindly helped her, and her situation gradually improved. Also Fathima accounted her first terrible experiences: «I was also coming back home crying», she said. When she started to work, she knew very few words: “*Buongiorno*”, “*Ciao*” and “*Cca bbanna, ddra bbanna*” [a Sicilian expression]. It was thanks to her children going to school that she was gradually able to learn Italian.

[Santa Croce Camerina, June 17th 2013]

The instrumental use of the language to create a certain distance between employers and employees,

²²⁰ Borders of inclusion and exclusion, however, could be created also mobilizing other type of ethnic markers, such as the skin's color. When we interviewed Toniou, the Albanian quite successful entrepreneur, he maintained that he usually does not hire Tunisians, on the basis of the fact that they are not “white”. He prefers instead to enroll Italian, Romanian and Albanian workers: «We are all Europeans, aren't we?». His border, thus, tends to separate an alleged Europeaness from a supposed Africaness, in this case mobilizing the color of the skin to create alternatively closeness or detachment. Moreover, as this example shows, race, class and gender intersect in the perceptions of the employers also in such a way that they tend to select the laborers that they deem to be “most similar” to them (on this point see Browne, Misra, 2003: 501; and Preibisch, Binford, 2007).

or between “insiders” and “outsider”, is thus a quite relevant element. Not understanding could in fact constitute a strong barrier, making everyday tasks even more demanding. Moreover, it could also stimulate a deep perception of exclusion. Inside JustTomatoes, the packinghouse where we refused to work after our bad experience (cap II. Par. 2.4), a similar situation was actually created to my detriment. I said to the overseer that I was coming from Milan University. She maybe thought that I, myself, was coming from Milan. The forewoman, so, started to chat with the other team's members in a quick Sicilian, supposing that it was impossible for me to understand. They were offending and teasing me, using, once again, language as powerful instrument to create a border among us (this time an inter-regional one).

But language could represent also a powerful instrument to stimulate *solidarity* among workers, creating a *free space* in which the Italian employers cannot easily access. I was making these reflections while working side by side with Megi and Darjana, two Albanian very talkative women. They used to spend several hours inside the packinghouse, often discussing, among the other things, also about their problems at work (as it was possible to understand by grasping some words). Their conversations were for sure moments of evasions from the routine, but also spaces of solidarity, occasions for complaining and for hypothesizing paybacks against their bosses. Actually, when lacks the possibility to speak a common language different from the one spoken by the bosses (for example in the case of foreign laborers working for their *paisani*) employees tend to “complain” about it. Inside Kamari firm, for instance, Ahmed – more used to be employed by “the Italians” – was missing the possibility to speak freely with his team mates, since Mohamed or his relatives were actually able to understand their discussions.

It is also quite common, in several workplaces, that conflicts among the laborers' group arise. In those cases, it is not rare that, even if laborers are facing work-related problems, they tend to express them in terms of ethnicity. An example of this attitude occurred inside Gurrieri's. Gigi, the “black” Tunisian man, was actually marginalized by the other team members, due ostensibly to his terrible character and his incorrect attitude towards his colleagues. The way in which Peppe, among the others, was conveying such a feeling of antipathy was through the use of racist rhetorics and a linguistic register full of stereotypes (see ch. II, par. 2.2.). As Burawoy states (1979), in fact, when complicity and mutual friendship do not occur at the production sites, “race” could be used to establish a distance, employing a *common* (hostile) *idiom* and reconfirming in this way that «in society ethnicity is a ruling value». Inside Gurrieri's, conflicts between Gigi and Afrim arose often, taking ethnicity as a pretext. We assisted, for example, to a curious episode involving the two men, concerning the use of their mother tongues at work. Gigi was scared about the fact that, when Afrim and Wera were talking each other in Albanian, they were actually gossiping about him; as a reply,

he was all the day long singing an annoying refrain in Arabic very close to Afrim's ears. This situation became so explosive, till the point that the two men were almost punching each other²²¹. Franco, thus, was called to settle this dispute. Once informed about the alleged motivations of the quarrel, he imposed the exclusive use of the Italian language inside the workplace: «Outside you can speak whatever you want, but when you are inside the greenhouse, since now on, Italian is compulsory». Few hours later, in order to disturb Afrim while working, Gigi was singing at the top of his voice an Italian refrain: «*Lasciatemi cantare... io sono un italiano, un italiano vero!*», ionizing with a famous Toto Cotugno's song. As this episode demonstrates, even if Franco's power was exerted with the “good intention” of solving an annoying dispute, the imposition of the use of the Italian inside the workplace reconfirmed, once again, the existence of an ethnic dominant order in the jobsite, about which the boss is the warrantor.

Last but not least, it is worth pointing out that the use of the Italian (or Sicilian) language realized by a foreigner in certain specific contexts is able to *whiten* him or her; that is to say, it is able to make him or her *socially closer* to “the Italians”, “the bosses”²²². We easily recognized this “whitening-effect”, observing the social relations of some of our interlocutors. In particular, we interviewed – among the others – a Tunisian man, well-known in Vittoria as Enzo (we were not acquainted with his “Arabic” name). He was the only Tunisian citizen working as a broker at the Vittoria's fruit and vegetable market, a workplace mainly constructed as “Italian” due to his labor force composition. Aside from «cleverness and ability», that he deemed to be two of the fundamental skills to ply such a job, he was also showing a great competence in speaking Sicilian dialect. His ability in using Sicilian allowed him to be totally “integrated” in his work environment, as well as in other public places mostly frequented in their spare time by Italian growers and brokers, and usually “interdicted” to Tunisian citizens. Also Mohamed embodied another relevant example of what I am maintaining. He was able to speak fluent Sicilian (and not Italian), and, moreover, he was completely at ease employing several “technical” words referring to the greenhouse's work (such as “*faccia*”, “*manichetta*”, “*panaru*”, “*cascia*” – see ch. II par. 2.1.). Also in the case of Mohamed, the “normal” overlapping of ethnicity (being Italian) and class (being the boss, or any case an autonomous worker) is upset, generating several “disorientations”, for

²²¹ Recurring to physical violence and aggressiveness is, obviously, one of the forms through which male workers *construct their masculinity* within workplaces. On the broad topic of masculinities construction refer to the classical Connell (1995). For what concerns the construction of masculinities inside workplaces, see, among the others Doria (2014), dealing with what she defined as «*pratiche di spavalderia*» [«cocky practices»], characterizing the men gendered approach to safeness inside the construction sites; and on the same point cf. also Bruni (2012). Lastly, see Perrotta (2011a: 156-159) who provides a brief review on the intersections among class and masculinity in several “male” work environments.

²²² «The Italians», for instance, is a common expression that is used to address the bosses. Ethnicity, in this case, is used as a “shortcut” to indicate class belonging (see par. 4).

example, among his workers. Ahmed, for instance, states more than once that «it's better to work for the Italians», demonstrating clearly that also workers tend to “absorb” a certain hierarchy, usually based on a certain correspondence between class, race and gender²²³.

3. Using gender, doing gender

As we said, ethnicity is, at the same time, *produced* “from the above” – namely through a political attempt to manage migrations – *used* “from below” – i.e. employed as a dispositive to create competition in the labor market – and *performed* every day inside the workplaces – e.g. constantly mobilized to create borders of exclusion or inclusion. The aim of this paragraph is to take gender into consideration as we did with race connotations. So, taking as a given the existence of a dominant gender order generally embedded within the organizational culture of the workplaces, throughout these pages I will try mainly to deal with gender *as a practice* (Poggio, 2006; 2009; Connell, 1995) reproduced in the everyday life inside the jobsites through «small daily rituals actively enacted by the subjects that embody them» (Sassatelli, 2006: 10). As Barbara Poggio states, in fact: «In recent decades the traditional essentialist conception of male and female as ascribed individual traits has been superseded and, under the stimulus of constructivist thought and its view of gender as a social product, attention has progressively focused on *gendering processes*: that is, on *how gender is constantly redefined and negotiated in the everyday practices through which individuals interact; how men and women ‘do gender’ and how they contribute to the construction of gender identities by engaging in a process of reciprocal positioning*» (2006: 225). As several scholars report, the idea of ‘doing gender’ has its roots in symbolic interactionism as well as in ethnomethodology (Goffman, 1976; 1977 and Garfinkel, 1967 in Sassatelli, 2006: 19; and Poggio, 2006; 2009: 13); then, it gained a prominent position into the discussion, thanks to the compelling contribution provided by West and Zimmerman in their path-breaking article *Doing gender* (1987); till being pushed to its “extreme” consequences thanks to the post-structuralist feminist thought, theorizing the performability not only of “gender” but also of “sex” (Butler, 1990; Kondo, 1990). The field of studies dealing with the organizational culture provided a substantive contribution to the analysis of the gender practices which take place inside a space where the lives of men and women are embedded for a great share of their time during the day: i.e. the workplaces (Gherardi,

²²³ Also Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) recognizes that domestic workers “absorb” such a hierarchy, preferring often to be employed by “the Withe” than from other racial minorities (in Browne and Misra, 2003: 504).

1998; Gherardi, Poggio, 2003). As Gherardi (1998) suggests, work environments do not constitute exclusively the setting of gendered performance, but they, themselves, tend to convey a proper organizational culture (through symbolism and through everyday naturalized practices). When we enter inside a jobsite, thus, we “intuitively” know that it implies a certain underling set of cultural meanings that are, first and foremost, gendered meanings. From the spatial organization, the language used and the type of rituals implemented we could “perceive” an organizational culture, to which male and female employers and employees tend to accommodate.

Greenhouses and packinghouses represent two types of workplaces implementing totally opposed organizational cultures. Gendering processes are strongly at work in both places. Greenhouses are discursively constructed as male spaces. The agricultural work, in fact, is usually described as «dirty, tough and physically demanding». As it is quite straightforward, any well-trained body could afford such heavy workloads, while on the contrary not sufficient trained bodies equally suffer (cap II, par. 5). Toiling in the covered fields, however, is often meant to be a sort of (male) «heroic» undertaking: a high workload experienced under hostile environmental conditions (i.e. humid and warm temperature). In a male constructed environment, the concept of “hard working” is thus «legitimized» and even «enhanced», being framed as a sort of «heroic» enterprise (Gherardi, Poggio, 2003: 115).

On the contrary, it goes a common argument, inside the packinghouse work needs to be «rapid»²²⁴ and «clean»²²⁵. Moreover, these tasks necessitate «precision», «dexterity» and «patience»²²⁶. Lastly, to work in the packinghouses is deemed to require a certain «aesthetic sense» and a sort of «tidiness» in the vegetables’ disposition. As Sandra explains, for instance, the tomatoes’ boxes realized to be sold to the big retailers «*have to be beautiful*». For what concerns the *ciliestino* (which is presumed to be a delicatessen), «the consumer has to be able to see the green stem of each tomatoes’ bunch from both sides of the transparent boxes, *due to aesthetic reasons*». The attempt is maybe to convey a certain naturalness and genuinity of the product, even if it has nothing to do with

²²⁴ According to Sandra, one of the packinghouse managers that we interviewed, the average speed in a tomatoes’ processing plant is to produce – per hour – 12 paper carton containing 10 plastic boxes each. Of course, it depends «on individual ability as well as on the quality of the products. Very fast people are able to produce 20/22 cartons per hours. In that cases, even if they commit the mistake of leaving a broken tomato inside the small box that’s not such a big deal!» [Vittoria, March 11th 2013].

²²⁵ As I already pointed out, the expression *lavorare sporco* [“to do a dirty work”] is generally employed in the cases in which the female packinghouse laborers appear to be not so accurate in cleaning vegetable by leaving, for instance, too many broken tomatoes inside the processed boxes.

²²⁶ Accuracy is also highly required for what concerns the work done by women inside *nurseries*, encompassing specific tasks such as grafts and transplants. Regarding body’s position assumed while working (see ch. IV, par. 2.3), these type of tasks inside nurseries are usually carried out while being seated. Instead, inside packinghouses, where rapidity is the main goal, women are forced to work while standing. Akin to Sicilian packinghouses’ managers, also *maquiladora* entrepreneurs in the U.S. argue that «*women natural dexterity and patience* give them advantages over men when it comes to industrial assembly» (Wright, 2001, in Preibisch, Binford, 2007: 15, emphasis added).

the actual foodstuff quality.

Both inside greenhouses and packinghouses, an intense process of stereotyping is thus at work, framing male and female laborers as *naturally* suitable for certain specific tasks. Several interlocutors, in fact, convey an image of these workplaces akin to the one I report below:

Valeria: Who were the workers in charge of processing the product inside that cooperative?

Vittorio: Salaried workers, mainly women. Today it is still the same! If you go in the packinghouses, the 99% of the laborers are women... *as it used to be once upon a time!* Women had to process the foodstuff, while men used to be employed for... I mean, they had to carry cases... cause in that situation it was required *some brute strength, as the one that we, as men, have!* You have other qualities, instead!

[Vittoria, inside the interviewee's office, May 29th 2013]

Differently from the great majority of the organizations, that attempt to proclaim a certain neutrality – even being harnesses by gendered set of meanings – (Gherardi, 1998), the greenhouses, as well as the cargo-boats (Sacchetto, 2009), the construction sites (Perrotta, 2011a; Doria, 2014), the mines (Gouldner, 1954), the operation rooms (Bruni, 2012) are clearly constructed as male spaces. However, even if covered fields are deemed to be a masculine environment, the persons working in them are obviously not only men: a not so irrelevant share of Italian and migrant farmworkers are actually women. The male culturally shaped organization, on the contrary, tends to neglect the existence of the work carried out by women. Not only in the reproductive, but also in the productive sphere, in fact, gratuitous labor realized by women tends to be too often invisibilized. Alternatively, salaried labor conducted by female farmworkers appears to be currently stigmatized, and their presence inside the greenhouse is continued to be constructed as “out of place” (see the next two paragraphs).

The specialized literature on the agricultural sector too often does not deal with female forms of waged or non-waged labor inside the fields (cf. Vianello, 2014: 40). Female work in agriculture has been in fact a quite marginal topic in the body of literature concerning the primary sector, even if with some good exceptions (Barndt, 2002a; 2002b; Reigada Olaizola, 2006; Preibisch, Grez, 2010; Mannon, et. al., 2011; Hellio, 2014; Moreno Nieto, 2014). Scholars concerned about the experiences undertaken by women employed in sectors usually occupied by men are generally worried about the access to socially evaluated positions, characterized by a sort of glass ceiling impeding women's carriers. According to Poggio and Gherardi, the literature tends to define these pioneers as «intruders» (McIntosh, 1985; Kvande, Rassmussen, 1994, in Gherardi e Poggio, 2003: 61), as «foreigners» (Gherardi, 1998), or as «travelers» (Marshall, 1984, in Gherardi e Poggio, 2003: 61). Female engineers, designers or managers depict themselves and are depicted by men as perpetuating a «double challenge» to maintain their social positions (against the female patterns of expectations, and against the male dominant order) [ibidem: 61-89]. In my case-study, instead,

working-class belonging plays definitely a pivotal role, influencing deeply the “matrix of domination” and opportunity faced by the women we are dealing with.

3.1. *Women's invisible work*

Family farming has been for several decades the form assumed by the majority of small and medium-sized enterprises in the transformed littoral strip. As it is widely recognized, this type of organization is usually underpinned by a great amount of non-remunerated labor generally carried out by the next of kin and, among them, by numerous women. Employing their wives as “helpers” (and not as proper workers) has implied and is still implying for the growers a great reduction of the labor costs, the amount of which is not so irrelevant. Since the 1960s, with the mushrooming of several family-run firms, this practice started to be diffused among the Italian farmers. Currently, it is also quite spread among Tunisian *compartecipanti* and land renters. Inside Mohamed's company, for instance, we have been employed in the tomatoes' picking together with Aida, the grower's wife, notwithstanding he himself as well as other (male and female) interlocutors tend to declare firmly that Tunisian women and, more in general, «women from Maghreb never work inside the greenhouses for religious and cultural reasons²²⁷».

On this topic, it is worth reporting an extract of the interview conducted with Vittorio, the son of the first farmer who installed greenhouses in the transformed strip. He has been in fact a privileged observer of the economic and social changes experienced in the area, concerning also the labor force recruitment. In his view, Sicilian entrepreneurs have been not so forward-looking to “employ” their wives within their companies; according to him, instead, the women's enrollment has been a marginal phenomenon in the area. Aside from the historical truthfulness of this information, the aspect that is interesting to notice in this quotation is the way in which our interviewee frames women's labor. He narrates, in fact, women's presence inside the greenhouse as being an “optional”, and he describes their labor as a form of «help», not as proper work. He seems also to express displeasure for the fact that the *natural* presence of a wife «close to her husband» was actually lacking. He covertly reproaches women for the fact that they «have left their men alone», and have not «followed» them during their daily occupations, just for a matter of female coquetry. Moreover, this discourse, while enhancing the virtues of the male breadwinner heroically toiling inside the greenhouses, at the same time tends to discredit and neglect the parallel woman's endeavors inside the house. The reproductive labor (domestic workloads, children's and elders' care, etc.), to which

²²⁷ From the interview with the Psychologist Sabrina D'Amanti, Vittoria, in the interviewee's studio, June 7th 2013.

women are usually bound, is considered, in this argumentation, to be «*un cavolo di niente*» [«almost nothing»]:

Vittorio: In Latina, in Fondi, there are also greenhouses extensions. In that cases women *have followed* their husbands inside the firms [*le donne hanno accompagnato i mariti dentro le aziende*]. That's something that here in Vittoria didn't happen! This was one of our biiiiigest mistakes! It's extremely different if the *head of the household has his woman close to him*, in the countryside, or if *he is left alone* [*Un capo famiglia altro è se ha la donna vicino a sé in campagna, altro è se invece è lasciato da solo*]! First of all, for an economic reason, for the household income! Economic, what does it means? That it's different if you hire [someone], so you have to rise your costs of production, or if *your wife is helping you*, isn't it? Secondly, [in this way] your wife gets used to behave as a Lady, as it occurred here in Vittoria... during the 1960s, the 1970s, the [farmers'] wives were the Ladies, the Duchesses here! Then, when the periods of crisis arrived, everyone had great problems, 'cause *women were used to do almost nothing*. If they would have been used to be active, to work hard, to yield, to help... but that wasn't like this! They were the Duchesses here! There were the husbands taking care about almost everything! He was thinking about the work, he was thinking about the seedlings' transplant, and so on and so forth... E-V-E-R-Y-T-H-I-N-G! They [the wives] were just behaving like Princesses, staying at home. The ones, among the wives, that got used to *follow* their husbands in their own countryside *they had a good time* [*si sono trovate bene*]! And also now they are having a good time working with their husband! [*Speaking louder*] That the big difference!

Valeria: So, there have been also cases of women employed inside the greenhouses...

Vittorio: Yes, yes, yes, also here in Vittoria. That's because not all of us have the same mentality [*implying that someone, the most "progressives", "allowed" women to work with them*]. The presence of the woman, I think, would have helped the husband to say: "Why don't we associate with others? Let's try!". Instead, *man has been left alone*. Till everything was ok, he was able to *bring back home some money*, to save them in the banks, to build a house... [*i soldi 'i purtava a casa, mintia 'nta banca, facianu a casa...*].

[Vittoria, in the interviewee's office, May 29th 2013]

During the fieldwork, we met numerous women that, as our interlocutor suggests, used to «follow their husband inside the greenhouses». In all these cases, their daily work has rarely been conceived as a proper form of labor, and actually almost never remunerated. Several Italian and foreign women, however, after an initial period in their labor trajectory spent as “helpers” in their husband firm, started to be employed as salaried workers inside packinghouses. Considering similar life-stories accounted by some of my female workmates inside TomatoesArtist, I was writing down:

Generally speaking, considering also the personal biography of Fathima and Darjana, it seems that it exists a common pattern: the man works inside the greenhouses; his wife “helps” him in the countryside till she attains the goal of becoming herself a waged laborer. There seems to be something that ties together the different places of the local supply chain even stronger than “economical connections”, concerning male and female workers' personal biographies.

[Santa Croce Camerina, June 19th 2013]

Numerous women, after leaving their job in the greenhouses, declares that they rather «prefer» to be employed inside the packinghouses. According to their explanations, this is mainly due to the fact that in the processing plants the workload is «less heavy». However, in these cases, what is at stake is that also female workers possibility to gain a certain degree of *autonomy* from their husbands (that is, as usual, both an economic as well as a “social” independence). Women's labor inside the packinghouses, thus, tends to become more visible since the presence of a monetary exchange in the

form of a salary confers it a broadly recognized value (Zelizer, 2011). The salary, hence, appears to be a sort of social as well economic reward for women's efforts, attributing them a value otherwise totally neglected. Regarding this topic, it is worth referring to a conversation in which I was taking part, realized between Aleksandra and Fathima in a lunch break at TomatoesArtists. Fathima was telling us that, during the previous weekend, she had no time to rest, since she had to help her husband inside the greenhouse. «Did he pay you?», Aleksandra asked, «at least for half a day?». Fathima shook her head left and right. «He must pay you, 'cause you're working for him! At least he owes you 10 €!» And she concluded with a compelling and straightforward suggestion: «Next time you have to ask him for this money!».

The attainment of earning a salary, however, is not *per se* guarantee of a better social consideration attributed to women's work. Gaps in the women's level of retributions compared to men have been, in fact, broadly recognized inside the labor market. In the packinghouses, as well as in other work environments, employers often tend to justify low wages attributed to women, with the conviction that this money is earned just “to make up household's income”, and does not constitute a primary family livelihood (cf. Browne, Misra, 2003: 505), reconfirming – in this way – the construction of the male breadwinner also in a situation in which both the partners resort to waged labor.

3.2. *Women's stigmatized work: the construction of an “out of place” femininity*

The greenhouse, thus, «is not a place for women», as several among our interlocutors maintains, also while commenting about our presence there. This is, of course, not “true” in an absolute sense, as I tried to argue broadly. In other contexts, as in Huelva (Spain), that represents the area hosting one of biggest share of greenhouses surfaces in Europe, the majority of workers employed in the strawberry covered fields are indeed woman (see Hellio, 2014; Reigada Olaizola, 2006). However, the greenhouse «is not a place for women» in the transformed littoral belt. When women are hired inside the greenhouses, as it is the case for many Romanian female laborers, «the “normal” gender requirements are not respected anymore» (Gherardi, 1998: 15). Their femininity, thus, represents a sort of “anomaly”, when not even a “threat²²⁸” for the male organization.

In the majority of the cases, however, the presence of female workers is “normalized” (i.e. come closer to a “traditional” construction of femininity) since many among them are employed together with their husbands or their partners. Their situation, thus, appears to be totally different compared

²²⁸ «Proprio per il loro essere associate alle emozioni e alla sessualità, le donne (e il campo simbolico del femminile) sono state a lungo viste come potenziali minacce per la disciplina organizzativa, ovvero come coloro che porta all'interno delle organizzazioni il “germe” dell'irrazionalità». (Bellè et al. 2014, 654).

with the one of foreign women “migrating alone” (Vianello, 2009), leaving their loved ones back home, and eventually applying for family reunification later on (Bonizzoni, 2007; Abbatecola, 2010; Boccagni, 2012; Ambrosini, 2014a). The condition of female farmworkers in the transformed belt, thus, appears to be quite different compared with – for example – foreign live-in caregivers (Ambrosini, 2013; 2014b). Some of my interlocutors declare that they «gave up with their previous work as a *badante*» and opted for an employment in agriculture, so that their husbands could join them and they could work together (this was, for instance, Lorina's story). In other cases, the couple – especially the young ones – decides to move together in a foreign country to be able to earn some money to settle down, as it happened to Adrian and Ionita, or to Petru and Gabriela employed in SicilSerre. Alternatively, the couple could take the decision to migrate when its offspring is not any more in need of a parental help, working with the purpose of gaining some extra money to pay for their university or their marriages, as Camila and Constantin, or Afrim and Wera employed in Gurrieri's. The situations are, as usual, quite variegated; what is relevant to notice, indeed, is that several women migrate and work together with their husbands and partners (not “following” neither “preceding” them).

The presence of numerous couples, however, does not impede that female farmworkers are highly stigmatized and deemed to be “out of place” inside greenhouses. Also as a consequence of this fierce interdiction from an alleged male work environment, Romanian women in the transformed strip have become the target of a violent process of stereotyping based on their gender, class and ethnic connotations. Similarly to many other women occupying subaltern positions in the labor market, especially if foreigners, they have in fact undergone a processes of “hyper-sexualization”²²⁹. Two opposite stereotypes are at work in the local context: Romanian female laborers are constructed alternatively as «sexually available²³⁰» or as sexually «naïve²³¹», so vulnerable and in need of protection.

Sabrina D'Amanti: [During the research²³²], the employers' recurring impression was that the sexual aspect, I mean, the elements referring to sex in the labor relationship were more emphasized in cases in which the women undertaking the job were originally from Romania, i.e. it was possible to register a higher [sexual] availability for what concerns Romanian women. The recurring idea was that there wasn't any type of coercion, but a proper will exerted by these

²²⁹ I borrow this term from Angela Devis (1981) that employed it to describe the construction of American Black men, that according to a racist stereotype, represent potentially a threat for White women. An hyper-sexualization of the Black and Latin American men's body is frequently occurring also for what concerns the agricultural sector. See, among the others, the example provided by Preibisch and Binford (2007), discussing the discrimination perpetrated by the Canadian farmers against Caribbean laborers, accused often of creating problems with local women.

²³⁰ From the interview with the Psychologist Sabrina D'Amanti, Vittoria, in the interviewee's studio, June 7th 2013.

²³¹ From the interview with Don Beniamino Sacco, realized by F. Toscano, in Santo Spirito's church, Vittoria, August 22nd 2012; and from the interview with Father Florian, inside a bar, Vittoria, May 14th 2013.

²³² Between 2009 and 2010, the psychologist Sabrina D'Amanti was in charge to conduct an exploratory investigation (financed by the Vittoria's Municipality and realized by the *Associazione per i diritti umani*) concerning the situation of migrant woman in the transformed strip (op. cit. in the previous notes)

women. Some of them were using this opportunity to take several advantages, such as the possibility to work less, or to have a privileged position [inside the firm], as a coordinator. [It was possible to observe] attitudes and behaviors inviting to these type of approaches, such as skimpy clothing inviting to a relation that goes beyond the working exchange²³³.

[Vittoria, in the interviewee's studio, June 7th 2013]

Father Beniamino: We cannot generalize! But in many cases, there exists the employers' attitude to have a bossy approach towards the employees. [Simulating an hypothetical employer] That means that a girl from whom I "enjoy" the labor is my own property. And she can be my own property with 5 €, 10 € more: «You are in need! So you are forced to be submitted!» The girl deceives herself, she thinks that she'll win over the growers' heart, instead she wins exclusively his body, but not his heart.

[Vittoria, Santo Spirito's church, August 22nd 2012, interview realized by F. Toscano]

What I would like to maintain is that both sides of the stereotype work together in order to produce and mutually strengthen the idea of a greenhouse as a male space, largely interdicted to women. When women access the greenhouse, they are in both case "sexually deviant": either they behave as «prostitute» either they are «victims of a sexual blackmail». Both the approaches somehow imply a construction of women as being "out of place", a construction that tends to stigmatize their labor in agriculture making it "anomalous". By the construction an anomalous and out of place femininity, thus, female workforce is relegated to a more marginal and thus a more vulnerable position inside workplaces. Gender, once again, is therefore used as a «*control mechanism*» over the most vulnerable workers' fringe (cf. Hellio, 2014: 149).

Looking at these phenomena through the lens of intersectionality, it is possible not only to recognize the existing stigma (produced through the cross cutting of gender, race and class), but also to investigate how this stigma is reproduced in order to perpetrate the current pattern of domination. Romanian women, for instance, face violent forms of discriminations at the moment of being recruited (more than Italian women and Romanian men). For example, Toniou, an Albanian entrepreneur, declares: «*Non assumo donne perchè sennò agli uomini gli gira la testa quando vedono un pezzo di mutandina*» [I don't hire women 'cause, when men see a piece of their pants, they become stupid and inefficient]. Similar discriminations in the selection process could be equally perpetrated also when the recruiter is a woman:

Valeria: On average, how old are the girls employed in this packinghouse?

Sandra: The age varies. But as regards their heights, they are tall more or less like me [*joking on the fact that she is quite short*]. I usually don't hire nice girls. The beautiful girls come here to look for something else... and then they slow down the production, 'cause the men that carry the cases are gobsmacked and burn their time looking at them.

[Vittoria, March 11th 2013]

²³³ On this topic, it is interesting to return to a relevant question advanced by Abbatecola and Bimbi (2013: 43): «*Come mai la sessualità, pensata in termini di desiderio legittimo legato alla solitudine (cfr. Della Puppa) entra in gioco solo quando si parla di migranti uomini? E per quali ragioni le migranti sembrano solo poter vendere sesso ma mai desiderarlo?*»

In my interlocutor's words, beauty is *naturally* used as a proxy to individuate workers in «search of something else», i.e. workers showing an opportunistic behavior and *inclined* to goldbricking. The selection procedures in the labor market are often based on aesthetic and bodily characteristics (see in particular Bürkner, 2012: 187-189) that, once more, intersect gender, race and class to produce stereotypes and – as a consequence – discriminations.

Finally, other more violent forms of abuses could be exerted as a result of a labor organization that constantly stigmatizes Romanian women inside the workplaces, relegating them to the lowest position due to their gender, race and class belonging. Cases of sexual harassments – i.e. the most evident consequence of Romanian farmworkers' social inferiorization – have been repeatedly denounced by several observers²³⁴. Even in my interviews, I registered some accounts concerning stories of abuses²³⁵. It is worth pointing out that such violent episodes concludes often with an additional *institutional* violence (cf. Bourgois, 2011: 378), suffered by women who attempt to interrupt an undesired pregnancy. As several among my interlocutor denounce, in fact, the right of a woman to interrupt a pregnancy is seriously jeopardized in the province of Ragusa:

«In the case of Vittoria, women are unable to interrupt a pregnancy in the city since all the doctors are conscientious objectors. Just in Modica's hospital it is possible to encounter non-objectors doctors. However, the exponential growth of the abortions causes an extension of the waiting list, making sometimes impossible to interrupt the pregnancy within the 3 months prescribed by the law. This means that some women are compelled to come back to their countries of origins to have an abortion, while others, instead rely on abusive structures and resort on people that require huge amount of money to practice the surgery even without any competence»²³⁶.

Father Florian: Now it has been suspended the possibility to have an abortion in Vittoria. But when it was still possible, we were informed about many of those stories here in the city. It would be interesting to understand if the [gynecological sector] has been really closed for conscientious objections. Or alternatively, it has been closed because people would have been obliged to talk about it, because [presence of this public service] would signify to become acquainted with inauspicious deeds, that the entire society didn't want to know. [...] We would have heard too many of these stories! We don't know about them, cause someone decided that for alleged “ethic” reasons this service is not provided anymore in Vittoria. I doubt about it. I seriously doubt.

[Vittoria, May 14th 2013]

Framing the position of foreign women inside workplaces is an attempt to look at the episodes of

²³⁴ In the last few months, several Italian newspapers have dealt with the topic of the sexual exploitation of Romanian women inside the greenhouses. See, among the others, the reportages realized by the journalist Antonello Mangano published in *L'Espresso* (September- October, 2014), available at:

<http://espresso.repubblica.it/ricerca?query=antonello+mangano>. See also the report of a brief experience conducted by Alessandra Scirba in the transformed belt (24-26 July 2013) titled *Effetto serra. Le donne rumene nelle campagne del ragusano* available at: <http://www.altrodiritto.unifi.it/ricerche/migranti/ragusa.htm>

²³⁵ These accounts, however, have always been provided not directly by women with whom I spoke but by “expert witnesses” (priest, doctors, psychologists, members of the institutions etc.). I found indeed that it risks to be voyeuristic and thus non respectful to provide such accounts straightaway.

²³⁶ Extract from the research report wrote by S. D'Amanti and Pitti C., *Storie di donne immigrate. Indagine sulle difficoltà e disagi affrontati dalle donne che approdano nella nostra terra. Quali i limiti della nostra accoglienza, quali gli ostacoli*. Available at:

<http://www.stranieriinitalia.it/briguglio/immigrazione-e-asilo/2010/dicembre/rapp-donne-imm-vittoria.pdf>.

abuses and discriminations as the result of a structural violence addressed towards female racialized working-class subjects (Bourgois, 2005). Workplaces, in fact, do not represent just the *setting* where such type of stigmatizations and harassment could take place. Through their organizational culture, the male construction of the greenhouse strives to neglect female labor, producing in this way an “out of place femininity” that could be more easily subjugated.

4. Using class, doing class

As I anticipated, it is relevant to point out that, while using an intersectional approach, the workplaces – and more in general the labor market – should not be conceived exclusively as “the setting” where gender and ethnicity cross. That is to say, our intersectional approach should not be limited to look at how race and gender produce a system of economic stratification (Browne, Misra, 2003). The position occupied in the labor market, in fact, should be used as a lens in itself through which looking at other specific forms of discrimination. To be relegated, more or less temporary, to a given labor condition implies in fact to be stuck in a certain reviled social position, as it seems to be the case for foreign farmworkers.

As we did with gender and race, also for what concerns class it seems to be necessary to adopt a *processual* and *relational* approach similar to the one suggested, among the others, by Edward P. Thompson²³⁷. In his approach, in fact, class is not considered simply as «a thing», i.e. the “objective” result of specific productive relations. At the outset of his masterpiece *The making of the English working class* (1980: 10-11) he states in fact: «By class I understand a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and consciousness. I emphasize that it is a *historical* phenomenon. I *do not see class as a “structure”, nor even as a “category”, but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships* [...]. And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs»²³⁸. Moreover, in his attempt to merge and link together “class” and “culture”, Thompson (1980: 11) discusses about the difference between class experience and class-

²³⁷ The reference here is to his classical book *The making of the English working class* published for the first time in 1963, and recently discussed, among the others, in a collective contribution written by Allegra et. al. (2008) and in Brunello (2013).

²³⁸ The first term was empathized in the text. The second emphasis is added by the author.

consciousness in these terms: «The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-system, ideas and institutional forms. If the experience appears as determined, class-consciousness does not». And later on he states (1980: 12, emphasis added): «*Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition*». Also Pietro Brunello (2013: 8) agrees on the fact that class has to be framed «*come un divenire e non una cosa, come esito di un processo di costruzione di un'immagine di sé (esperienze, comportamenti, valori, tradizioni) in rapporto con altre classi*». Embracing a conception of class as a *relational category*, a category always *in making* in the everyday life, we are thus able to look at how class belonging is constantly mobilized in order to produce specific borders of solidarity and exclusion among interconnected people. How men and women “live” their class belonging? How they use it? How they “do” class in their everyday life? As the ethnographic experience confirms, especially in some of the contexts characterized by seasonal cultivations, foreign farmworkers perceive agriculture as a temporary occupation, a sector of the labor market from which they attempt to escape as soon as possible (see the pioneer contributions, such as the one written by Iori e Mottura [1990] as well as some recent research on the topic [Garrapa, 2015]). Their perception of being part of a common “farmworkers' class” is thus effectively quite often lacking. In the greenhouses case, being agriculture a more durable type of occupation, the situation is slightly different. In these circumstances, the perception of the existence of a class-based commonality is hinged both on the awareness of being *daily laborers*²³⁹ as well as on the *ethnic connotations*. In my fieldwork, as well as in other racialized labor market sectors, ethnicity and class result in fact inextricably connected (on this topic, cf. Roediger, 2011). To provide a straightforward example, we can consider the common conviction that «to work in the countryside is the *only possible option* for Tunisian» or that «for Tunisians there is just agriculture». In these cases, “the Tunisians” tend to conceive themselves not only as a “homogeneous” national group, but also as members of a common “working-class” in relation (and in opposition) with “the Italians”, deemed to be “the bosses”. Class and ethnicity are therefore mutually shaped and interrelated, being the former often an indicator of the latter and vice versa. This apparently *natural* overlapping become broadly evident in situations in which the two do not necessary coincide²⁴⁰. When the most common ethnic-class hierarchical order is subverted, in fact, ethnic definitions

²³⁹ The condition of temporariness within the workplaces makes it difficult both the perception as well as the material organization of daily workers in terms of class (see, among the others, the contribution provided by Rogaly – 2009 –). To refer to the debate dealing with the topic whether “precariat” constitutes or not a new social class cf. Standing (2011).

²⁴⁰ This could be the case, for instance, when Tunisian (and sometimes Albanian) citizens manage their own firm. These cases, however, are not so numerous in the transformed belt (see Table 2 in the Appendix).

continued to be glibly used to indicate class belonging and vice versa. A couple of episodes occurred in SicilSerre could add more evidences to these apparently vague statements. I attached a relevant meaning to a situation occurred between me and Ahmed during one of our lunch breaks together. At around 11 o'clock we used to interrupt our work feeling extremely tired and hungry. One day, as soon as I washed my hands I started overeating a sandwich while I saw Ahmed burning time. When I asked him the reason of his behavior, he replied frankly that he was waiting till our boss went away before touching his meal, since he did not like «to be observed by *the Italians* while eating». Curiously, I was not included among *the Italians* any more in that circumstance. The previous day, instead, before leaving the firm, the uncle stopped to look at me and Ahmed while sharing a cous cous that my friend bought for the two of us. He mocked me saying «Ah, you eat like Tunisians! You're like them!». In the first example, Ahmed attempted to eschew a gaze coming “from above” (from his boss)²⁴¹, even expressing this need in terms of ethnicity. In those circumstances, my “Italianity” was actually neutralized and I assumed a connotation associated to my (anomalous) position in the labor market. From Ahmed's standpoint, in that moment, I was not included among the “Italians”, since I was – above all – a worker (aside from being his friend). Similarly, from Giovanni's viewpoint, I «look like a Tunisians», not only because of my choices concerning food, but also because I was sharing a common working condition with the majority of “Tunisians”. In both the cases, Ahmed and Giovanni mobilized class in its intersection with ethnicity to establish fluid borders of solidarity or exclusions.

5. Conclusive remarks: adopting a «translocational lens»

Within this chapter, we attempted to frame social relations inside workplaces using an intersectional approach. In particular, we tried to investigate the mutually constitutive phenomena of «social positions» and «social positioning», as suggested by Anthias (2012). According to the author, to scrutinize the *structure* of social positions actually means to look at how gender, race and class intersect producing given outcomes and arrangements; to deal with the process of social positioning, instead, means to look at the «practices, actions and meanings» through which people

²⁴¹ In those circumstances, I was also considering as extremely invasive the gaze received “from the above” (i.e. from our boss), intrusively looking at us in such an intimate moment: «You feel tired, you feel thirsty and hungry, your skin is burning due to the scratches made by the tomatoes' dry leaves, you feel ugly and ruffled... you don't want to be looked at! There is nothing to look at!», I was nervously writing down in my notebook in that circumstances. The *gaze* (who is looking, from which perspective, and with what purpose) assume also a pivotal role in the ethnographic research (see par. 6.1 of the methodological Appendix).

actively perform gender, class and ethnicity. Looking through this theoretical lens, then, we entered yet again inside the workplaces. We analyzed how gender, race and class could be used as a set of *dispositives* to control workforce: in particular, we looked at how ethnicity is politically constructed through the maintenance of a borders regime oriented towards the management of racialized workforce mobility. Then we looked at how gender could be used as a “control mechanism”, through a double construction of women's labor based both on invisibilization and stigmatization. Finally, we strived to consider ethnicity gender and class as something that laborers “do” everyday, and not as something that they are automatically endowed with. We attempted to deal with them as *competences*, namely as set of *dispositions* that individuals are able to mobilize (or not) in order to create closeness of detachment with other people occupying a different position in the social hierarchy. Language, i.e. a “mobile” ethnicity marker, could constitute a clear example of people's ability to use their resources in order to produce social ties and social gaps.

Before concluding, it is worth pointing out another relevant aspect, that could be complementary to the perspective adopted throughout this chapter. We discussed, in fact, about gender, race and ethnic intersections, defining the social position and the set of opportunities of foreign farmworkers in Italy. For the sake of completeness, to provide a complex and multifaceted picture, it would have been relevant to take also into consideration how these specific configurations tend to change through *time* and *space*. Concerning time, it would have been germane to look at how processes of social mobility could affect and subvert the current patterns of domination and agency. Concerning space, instead, it appears to be significant to investigate the phenomena of «social positions» and «social positioning» relying at the same time on a transnational approach. In the migrants' experiences, for instance, gender, race and class intersect differently in different countries. We can consider, in terms of class, the completely different experience of a foreign farmworker in Italy and in his country of origin, where maybe he is hailed as someone who realized a successful migratory project. Alternatively, we can consider how differently gendered structure could operate through diverse social spaces (Salih, 2003; Pessar, Mahler, 2003; Riccio, 2008: 147). Concerning this topic, it appears to be compelling Floya Anthias' (2002; 2012) proposal to employ «a *translocational lens*». Leaving aside the linguist *escamotage*, the concept of translocation could be useful since it represents an attempt to merge together a *transnational perspective* with an *intersectional approach*. To embrace this theoretical framework could allows us to take into consideration how gender, ethnicity and class intersect differently through different countries:

«If social locations can be thought of as social spaces defined by *boundaries* on the one hand and *hierarchies* on the other hand, then we are forced to *think of them in relation to each other* and also in terms of some of the *contradictions* we live in. [...] Using this framework, it is possible to analyse intersections of social

relations as at times mutually reinforcing (e.g. minority, working class woman may live in the worst social space, in many different political, economic and cultural contexts) and at times as contradictory (e.g. working class man is in a relation of subordination to his employer, whereas in a relation of domination to his wife). In the first case, social divisions articulate to produce a *coherent* set of practices of subordination, whereas in the second, social divisions lead to highly *contradictory processes* in terms of positionality and identity. Also, it is possible to understand these intersections as varying in different national contexts and in the transnational field» (ibidem, 2012: 108, emphasis added).

Anthias' compelling argument, thus, fosters to consider a translocational gaze, deemed to be a useful perspective to investigate the complexity of social hierarchies in which migrants are positioned within the transnational social space. Unfortunately, throughout this thesis the data at our disposal does not allow to provide further empirical evidences on this topic²⁴². Nevertheless, to strive to keep this perspective open, at least at a theoretical level, seems to be a fundamental goal.

²⁴² In January 2014 I traveled to Tunisia for almost ten days to visit Ahmed family as well as Mohamed relatives. This experience, though, was extremely brief and shallow. It allowed to collect very few empirical data concerning migrants' social positions in their countries of origins, and it is why I do not refer to them throughout this thesis.

Conclusion

The social costs of eating fresh

Freshness and human labor: the social life of fresh food

«[This contribution attempts] to challenge the imaginary that fresh fruit and vegetables, nicely arranged on our supermarket shelves, are just food, commodities from “nowhere” without an history. Our encounters with fruit and vegetables in supermarkets are predominantly brief, smooth, uncomplicated and full of anticipated joy; they ultimately end by paying a monetary equivalent for our produce, an allegedly just price. Once paid, the largely unknown journeys in particular commodity and value chains reach an end – almost. Yet, two interactions are still unfolding. First, the fruit and vegetables we bought still have to be consumed to become a constitutive part of our social reproduction. Second, the money we have paid is expected to trickle back along the very small trajectories to reimburse those who were engaged in refilling and arranging the shelves, those who worked in marketing and distribution, those who were occupied with packing, cleaning and transporting, as well as those who produced and harvested the fruit. In short, we are paying back the added labor. Even further down this invisible line, family members of laborers who are monetarily remunerated in the agri-food chain are also expected to participate in the price we pay, as they invested in (unpaid) domestic work and are thereby helping to reproduce the labor power of, for example, seasonal workers. When agreeing to pay a certain price we implicitly agree to the conditions under which this price has been produced without, however, necessarily comprehending its details. Offering “food from nowhere”, supermarkets employ exchange processes beyond our knowledge, awareness or even concern» (Gertel and Sippel, 2014: 246).

This argument starts from the conceit that commodities, like persons, have social lives (Appadurai, 1986). They are embroiled in dense relations of production and reproduction. They carry *value*, but also *values*. They are marked by their own history. This thesis is inscribed in a broad body of literature that attempts to trace processes of production and reproduction underlining commodities' «tangled routes» from fields to supermarkets (Barndt, 2002a). This modest contribution, as well as its coterminous works, tries to demonstrate that these trajectories are not so smooth and uncomplicated as they would appear from a supermarket window. As Jörg Gertel and Sarah Sippel

clearly state, the attempt of this burgeoning body of research is to challenge the invisibility and distancing generated throughout the agro-industrial supply chain, that aims at detaching commodities from the context and the relations through which they are produced. Freshness, instead, immediately implies “just in time” labor, as a resource necessary to satisfy a “just in time” consumption. The assumed high quality of agricultural products and the socially constructed need to eat them fresh (even when it is necessary to resort on a global scale market for their provision) is connected with a measure of “waste”, of (more or less remarkably) extra-ordinary expenditure, in a commodity circuit which may be seen as resembling something of a ritual *dépense* (Bataille, 1992, in Miller 1998): it is somehow necessary to rely on precious goods which, through perishability and destruction, will appear “sacred” as somehow fleeting. They not only acquire value as eventful items worth of consumption, they also continuously open the necessity for the circuit to be re-activated with more production, exchange and consumption. Locally, as well as in global public forums, however it seems that the social life of vegetables and their *perishability* is not squarely addressed as social, or more precisely ceremonial, fact. It is considered more bluntly as a technical problem, to be solved with just-in-time production, fast transportation, sophisticated techniques of preservation, etc. And together with produce rapid depletion what is also neglected is the *perishability of the human bodies* which are daily committed to their production. Of course, addressing perishability as a socially organized feature of (in particular some) foodstuff, and its symbolic or ceremonial properties, opens up broader theoretical-political questions, related, among other things, to the organization of production and consumption in contemporary societies.

During my fieldwork, I encountered a local context that quite often attempted to omit the social origins of its economic development. The narrative of the *miraculous transition from desert to a productive garden*²⁴³, vigorously upheld by local actors, leaves uncontested the fact that numerous Italian and foreign laborers have worked (and are still working) to build this miracle. The main concern of many of my interlocutors, instead, was to show the alleged «high quality» of the Sicilian products and to demonstrate it formally, through the proliferation of several «high quality *brands*». Moreover, they tended to complain fiercely of the distortions of the global value chain generating a downward pressure toward produce prices, as well as cutthroat competition among several international actors (Maghreb countries, Spain, Turkey, etc.).

Vittoria's Mayor: We are trying to intervene in the distortion of the [local] fruit and veg market, because aside from that we can't do anything [for what concerns the global supply chains]. We have been victims of a commercial substitution between Europe and the African countries. These are the rules of globalization! For us it's just a tragedy, but we know that we can't fight against windmills. Now, one of the best solutions could be to create *high quality brands* [*marchi di*

²⁴³ See the Introduction providing some of these accounts. For the presence of similar rhetorics in the region of Almeria (Spain), interested by the biggest greenhouses extension in Europe, see Reigada Olaizola, 2006.

qualità] which distinguish our product akin to what happens when we go to buy a shirt from a Chinese shop or from a prestigious boutique: we have to choose! So, ours should become a luxury product, for the elites! We should be able to make it typical, to realize quality checks, to create a brand and sell the produce with a brand. Akin to what happened to the *Pachino* tomato.

[Vittoria, in the Mayor's cabinet, May 3rd 2013]

Furthermore, this rhetoric is embedded within another powerful discourse regarding the *current economic crisis*: being “without an alternative”, firms are somehow compelled to reduce wages, as labor is considered to be the last avenue through which to adjust costs of production. The narrative of the economic crisis justify the emergence of a quite broad consensus among several actors regarding the reduction of labor costs: local institutions, members of the offices in charge of controlling the regularity of labor, growers, dealers and sometimes those same workers affected by these reductions. For the sake of exemplification, I report an excerpt from the interview conducted with the Vittoria's Council member in charge of agriculture [*Assessore all'agricoltura*]:

Assessore: Our economy is based on agriculture, agriculture is the driving force of our economy. [...] [Right now] the companies are collapsing, they are no longer able to resist. Those who resist do it through hard sacrifices, because they don't earn nothing, there is no bank credit anymore, and so on. [...] We are trying, in this moment, to be very close to the producers. [...] Since the price is done by the supply chain, we can't do so much, can we? In this moment so we are trying to be particularly close to the growers, to listen to the claims that they rise. We know about the situation and we try to put pressure at a political level, both to the regional and national governments. [...] Personally, I have always been committed with agriculture because, as I told you, my profession is the business consultant, so I have as client numerous agricultural companies, and I usually get acquainted with their issues. And moreover, I came originally from a farmers' family; so I grew up within these types of issues. Several among my relatives have got a greenhouses property, so now I'm seeing them dieing one by one.

Valeria: And what about workers in the agricultural sector?

A.: There is the presence of many non-communitarians [*extracomunitari*]. Initially, there was the presence of many Tunisians, now instead there is the presence of Romanians. They accessed the European Union and thus they don't need any residence permit. But it is also true that these guys have taken out the job from our Sicilian men. That's because every Romanian works for 30 € per day, while the Sicilian family man cannot work eight hours per day just for 30 €. And these guys took out the work, I refer to the Romanians. Like in the past, when our ancestors went to America. When they arrived in America they accepted one dollar compared to the 11 \$ required by an American laborer. It's the same!

V.: So, in your case, as a business consultant supporting companies, you got acquainted with the main difficulties for what concerns the application of job contracts...

A.: Many companies do not apply the contracts. But that's not because they don't want to enforce it, but because they can't do it! You have to think about the fact that it costs 65 € per day, plus 30 € for taxes [...]. So it's 95 € per day that the grower has to spend. For this reason he is forced to... I mean, it's a war among the poor actually!

V.: And for what concerns the urban space, what about the presence of foreign nationals here in the city of Vittoria?

A.: As a citizen, for what concerns the presence of non-communitarians... we attempted to let integrate a lot of them in the society. Who has got a family, the Tunisian family man [was able to integrate], while the Romanians have another kind of mentality. But the Tunisian man who has got a family, with children, who is a good behaving person... he is integrated in the society. Instead, for the others it's not like that. So they create quite big problems to the citizenship. There are certain areas, like Piazza Senia, that became proper ghettos. Non-communitarians squares: some squares where there are just Tunisians, and others where there are just Romanians. So people are forced to shut in their houses in the evening, also because they [the immigrants] typically drink too much, so much beer, and so they are often drunk [...]. Unfortunately the non-communitarians usually come here [in Vittoria]. I'm absolutely not racist, I even tried to provide some help, but we should put a

stop, 'cause we cannot continue in this way. Also because now we are actually in need.

[Vittoria Town Council, May 14th 2014]

Immigration and public space

Needless to say, not all of the persons we spoke to expressed such controversial standpoints. However, I consider it relevant to take into account also the dominant «common sense»²⁴⁴, namely the set of categories, practices and types of rhetoric taken for granted and endowed with validity in this given context. The existence of these sets of narratives in the public space provides wide legitimation for the proliferation of certain diffuse private arrangements inside workplaces. What is worth noticing in this last account, as in several others, is that, notwithstanding the positive «myth» describing Vittoria as a «welcoming place» [*città dell'accoglienza*]²⁴⁵, migrant laborers continued to be fiercely ostracized in the public space (according to class and color lines), regardless their long-standing and stable presence in the local context.

Father Anselmo [in charge of the church located in Piazza Senia]: There is no integration between us and them. Actually, for example, the square is not lived by people from Vittoria. The Vittoriesi are extraneous to the square. Even when they come to church they are almost afraid to cross the square. Especially in the evening, they don't do it for sure! There is no police, no safekeeping, the square unfortunately has been ruined, because of course they [the Tunisian migrants] tend to leave empty bottles, to leave every [type of waste]. [...] They are mainly goldbrickers [*nullafacenti*]. Some of them stay there for the whole day, others only for a few hours, but – I mean – they spend time doing nothing. I have no idea about how many of them are working and how many, instead, don't even work [...] I do not exclude that some of these people unfortunately are also devoted to illegal activities. [...] The problem would be to create forms of integration, but actually they are not possible.

V.: What do you mean by integration?

Father A.: [I mean] forms of dialogue, of civic cohabitation, while I think that now it exists a complete extraneousness. All the attempt to create any type of dialogue, to create common initiatives, till now have not worked!.

[Vittoria, Piazza Manin's church, May 9th 2013]

As Father Anselmo pointed out, Vittoria's city center is highly segregated. Due to the intersection of

²⁴⁴ The concept of «common sense» has been widely dealt with in sociology, from the contributions of phenomenology and ethnomethodology, up to the critical works of authors such as Gramsci, Geertz and Bourdieu. As Stuart Hall (1980) points out, recalling to the Gramscian concept of *egemonia*, in each given society it may exist a «dominant order» to which individuals are somehow pushed to confront. In my case study – as well as in other Western context – the hegemonic viewpoint coincides mainly with the one upheld by the person cited above (see also ch. III, par. 5.2).

²⁴⁵ The “founding myth” of the city of Vittoria was often recalled during my interviews with the locals in order to symbolize the inhabitants' attitude to be open-minded and welcoming. According to the historical account, in fact, the city was founded in the XVII century by the duchess Vittoria Colonna, who asked to the Spanish sovereign the possibility to build a new settlement in the area. The duchess, then, pushed the inhabitants living in the nearby areas to move in the recently created village. Several of my interlocutors used to describe the city's welcoming attitude, relying on the myth of its foundation in order to foster the narrative that «all the current habitants are actually the descendants of that first migrants» [from the interview with the Vittoria's Council member in charge of welfare, May 6th 2013].

gender, race and class, Piazza Manin neighborhood became the space where only Tunisian working-class men spend their time. Akin to the informal ghettos diffused in the countryside (Sacchetto, Perrotta, 2012; Hazard, 2007; 2008), and not radically different from the institutional camps for foreign laborers that usually takes place, in various forms, close to agricultural sites (Brovia, 2014; Campesi, 2014), Vittoria's urban space is marked by a deep (social) border, transforming some neighborhoods into a «place of confinement of the “exceeding” workforce» (Sacchetto, Perrotta, 2012: 154). As Sacchetto and Perrotta state, their inhabitants appear to be spatially, economically, culturally and politically separated from the rest of the city. A second inner frontier, moreover, divides the city inhabitants from countryside residents. As I attempted to highlight throughout these pages, numerous laborers live quite scattered apart in the rural outskirts in a situation that we can define, borrowing a Gambino's term, as a regime of seclusion. With the term *seclusione*, Ferruccio Gambino means a «spacial disposition that strengthen the overlapping between labor, spare time and relaxing moments, i. e. more in general [it is a form of spatial organization that strengthen] the reproduction of everyday life within a unique place, from where laborers are formally free to go out in certain moments» (Gambino, 2003: 104-105). The regime of *seclusion* represents an organization of life and production that does not limit, at least formally, workers' freedom of movement. We have seen, however, especially in the case of laborers bound to work by the day often without a salary, that they frequently fell to be *trapped* in certain life-work spaces (see, in particular, ch. III, par. 4.2; and ch. IV par. 3.1.1).

Ahmed: Piazza Senia is like a prison, but at least in jail there is the basket to play.

[Vittoria, Piazza Senia, June 12th 2013]

In Chapter V, I tried to highlight the «matrix of domination» (Collins, 1993) experienced by workers mainly inside the workplaces. Here I am attempting to broaden the context of analysis, shedding light on the fact that “Tunisians' neighborhood” as well as “Romanians places” (e.g. “Romanians” bar, discos, shop, etc.), represent the spacialization of a segregation based on gender²⁴⁶, race and class also found within the public spaces.

²⁴⁶ We can of course provide several example to illustrate that the intersection between gender, ethnicity and class could produces “matrices of agency” too. This effort has been done for what concerns the work environments within chapter V. Also as regards the public spaces, gender, race and class are constantly mobilized to shape and re-shape them. For instance, it is quite straightforward to notice that the “main squares” of the ethnic and class connoted neighborhoods are male-dominated areas. To play cards, drink and chat in the center of the public forums is in fact a typical male approach to leisure time (for a visual analysis of the posture of the Sicilian man in the public spaces, see La Cecla, 2000). Women's presence instead occupies more marginal interstices: *fare cortile* [doing yard] is a form of appropriation of the liminal spaces between the house and the neighborhoods, relevant to create social ties that overcome ethnic connotations. See the pictures 1 and 2 in the methodological Appendix, describing these different male and female forms of appropriation of the public spaces.

The social costs of eating fresh

Recently, Jörg Gertel and Sarah Sippel edited a fundamental book, broadly quoted throughout these pages, focusing on Mediterranean agriculture that engages in the study of agri-food system, political regulations, migrant labor and commodity chains. Its captivating subtitle is *The Social Costs of Eating Fresh*. In its conclusions, the authors continue addressing the pivotal concerns that animate the various essays composing the volume, in order to shed light on some of the *social costs* derived from the agro-industrial business. I have thus decided to borrow Gertel and Sippel's layout to summarize several types of social costs that we dealt with throughout this thesis and to propose some new relevant issue able to stimulate further reflections. In the first place, as Gertel and Sippel do, I also dealt with the *environmental costs* of greenhouse farming: «The Mediterranean “seas of plastic” have changed the face of the landscape: they have generated environmental pollution; natural resources have been seriously damaged if not depleted; exhausted soil might be unfertile for many decades to come while the depletion of fossil groundwater resources is of a finite and irreversible character» (ibidem, 2014: 250-251). We fostered these considerations mainly in Chapter IV, discussing the relationship between greenhouses and the local context. In that section, I tried to compare and contrast two different pushes present in the district: on the one hand the attempt to anchor the local produce to an imaginary of “typicalness” and “naturalness”, suggesting good quality; on the other hand, the critical acknowledgment of being entrapped in a productive system based on land exploitation and depletion. Landscape, in this latter view, is said to be «de-naturalized», «spoiled», «contaminated», putting seriously at risk the local environment as well as its inhabitants' health.

Secondly, it is worth taking into consideration another set of costs engendered by greenhouse farming, that we could roughly define as *cultural-economic costs*. According to my interlocutors, the local fragmented system of production generates a «non-cooperative culture» that in turn affects the economic fabric poorly. The historical reasons for this pulverization of the property may be traced, according to some of my interlocutors, to the particular model of development carried out by the local Communist Party from the second post-war period (Micciché, 1980). In fact, the policy promoted by the leftist leaders, for a quite long time administrators of the province, was that of the so-called “five *tumuli*²⁴⁷”, i.e. a policy pushing for the purchase of at least one hectare of land by each family to ensure their self-sustainment²⁴⁸. This policy assured the division of large properties

²⁴⁷ The *tumulo* (or *tummino*) is an ancient unit to measure the agricultural area used in the various provinces of southern Italy, including Ragusa. 5 *tumuli* correspond to approximately one hectare.

²⁴⁸ The peculiar slogan epitomizing the political mood of that days was “*la terra si acquista, non si conquista*”

and the emergence of a myriad of small family-run businesses. Initially, the fragmented productive structure appeared to be extremely fruitful. However, in the long term, the presence of such a divided system stimulated the emergence of a *competitive mentality*, currently limiting actors' capacity to cooperate amongst one another. In the area, few examples of cooperation emerged but ultimately did not succeed²⁴⁹. The past decades of non-cooperative mentality, in turn, affected the current situation, resulting in an economic fabric based on very-small isolated firms, incapable alone of resisting to the overwhelming power of the large retailers. Vincenzo, a policeman and land owner in his fifties, describes in this way the costs produced by such a highly fragmented economic system:

Vincenzo: Here they haven't understood yet what's the mechanism. That is, what does a farmer have to do? Should s/he just produce and and that's it? Here they just think about production, and [they don't think] about distribution! And many of them know it, but they don't have a clear idea, because they don't want to organize among them. [...] In the past, during the 1960s, with these extensions of land, you could get by. [...]. Over the years the market has narrowed, and now it requires a better produce. Someone understood it, but the whole mass [of farmers didn't]... This is one of the worst aspect [of greenhouse farming]: *they have never thought to organize, i.e. to create a cooperative*. The cooperative is the organization that allows you to... [...] for instance, you need to have money to invest, to begin a production, and you don't know in advance if it's going to work. It is like playing cards, 'cause here there isn't any organization. When I was in Trentino, [I noticed that] there everything was organized, because the cooperative was doing the job that alternatively you had to do on your own. In Trentino [...] I saw that there was the cooperative for apples. They realized market projections: for example, in the next six months in Milan or Verona we are going to sell 100 kg of product. Then, we will have to produce 90 kg, so we'll not waste anything. We can't produce 200 kg, 'cause there is the risk that we can't sell them. Here, we just produce [with no projection]! Now, for instance, who suggested him to grow melons? [*He refers to his tenant*]. He undertook a risk, because he didn't know who is gonna take such melons, at what price. He is running the risk, everyone is running risks because no-one knows how the market [is going to be]. *Ma a jucari a carti, si po jucari na vota sula, due vote, tri vote, ma no sempre* [to play cards, you can play it once, twice, three times, but not always].

[Santa Croce Camerina, in the interviewee's land property, April 22nd 2013]

To summarize, thusly, greenhouse agriculture is based – and at the same time reproduces – a certain entrepreneurial mindset similar to the one described by Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, as one of my interlocutor suggests²⁵⁰. This property pulverization, and the emergence of a certain «competitive Sicilian mentality», according to several of our interviewees, is now actually limiting the development perspectives of this area. I defined this set of mutually constitutive processes as the *cultural-economic consequences* of greenhouse agriculture.

[the land has to be purchased, not occupied].

²⁴⁹ Soon after the initial success realized by the cooperative *La Rinascita* founded in Vittoria in 1964, several other similar experimentation mushroomed in the area in the following years: it was created the cooperative *Pietro Gentile*, in Comiso – bearing the name of one of the first growers upholding the idea of a farmers' cooperation – the cooperative *Il Risorgimento*, in Donnalucata; the cooperatives *Demetra* and *Oro Verde* in Vittoria, and other few similar examples. The majority of these cooperatives is now disappeared [From the interview with Vittorio, the son of the one of the farmers that started *La Rinascita* May 29th 2013].

²⁵⁰ Giuseppe Scifo in his interview refers directly to Weber's masterpiece to describe capitalistic development of the transformed belt [Vittoria, March 7th 2013].

As happens in Vittorio's argumentation, the definition of a «Sicilian mentality»²⁵¹ is typically exemplified through a parallelism with the North of Italy. Generally, the narratives and the representations of the South appear to be discursively constructed through a series of dichotomous oppositions with those considered to be the distinctive features of the North. So, in the “professional” political language, in the technical and scientific discourse as in the everyday conversation, the binary North/South is constantly reproduced, underlining the peculiarity of the two areas: the representation of a dependent and unproductive “South” is constructed in opposition with an image of a leading and dynamic “North”; the lack of civic-mindedness in the South is specular to the representation of a North of Italy where everything works properly; and so on, for a great number of dichotomies. This discursive construction is employed also when discussing the current difficulties in the local agricultural system of production. Several of my interlocutors, in fact, compared a *competition-oriented* “Sicilian attitude” with a *cooperative* “Emilia-Romagna approach”; or alternatively the presence of an *organized* productive structure in Trentino with the existence of a *messy* and *fragmented* system in Sicily. Moreover, several among the local actor employed a proper conflicting frame aimed at maintaining that the current crisis is (at least partially) caused by the structurally dependent position assumed by the Southern Italian agriculture compared to an alleged homogeneously capital-endowed North of Italy (cf. on this topic, Farinella, Saitta, 2013; Saitta, 2013b; Pitzalis, Zerilli, 2013). Discussing agriculture, they wondered about the *costs* that greenhouse farming has produced in their area, in terms of North/South gap and *territorial* development. The transformed belt, as other South Italian districts, does not present a self-sustainable form of agriculture. Since it is based almost entirely on the export of fresh produce, it is highly dependent on international and national uneven markets. One of my interviewees defines this pattern as a «third world development model», based on the extraction of raw material in an area where labor and resources are cheaper and more abundant, while the added value is mainly transferred to the capital-endowed zones (cf. ch. IV, par 5). As I stated earlier, these ongoing economic processes are often read by the local actors through the lens of the long-lasting North/South divide:

Vittoria Council's member: 150 after the Italian reunification... they have taken everything, everything from Sicily! We are not the parasites of the North, nor the Sicilians even the

²⁵¹ It is quite complex to attempt to illustrate how local actors tend to resort on the concept of «Sicilian mentality». It represents a cultural construction that assumes different and sometimes even contradictory meanings, accommodating to the situation in which people employ it (Swidler, 2009). It could be used in order to indicate a certain individual and collective *idleness*, the cause of which tend to be attributed, alternatively, to the structurally dependent position occupied by the entire region, or to the subjective incapacity to change and improve an ongoing situation. In addition, the reference to a common «Sicilianess» could also be used to address the individual ability to get by, to make ends meet thanks to his/her cleverness, despite – or as a consequence of – his/her marginal position (in chapter II we illustrated, for instance, the use of this construction made by Davide, the packinghouse manager). On this topic see, Sanò (2015).

Calabrians! We have always worked, like your women! It's ages that the Calabrian women are working [...] So we are not parasites of the North, absolutely!

[Vittoria Town Council, May 14th 2014]

Several scholars, have begun to analyze the current issues concerning South Italian agriculture in terms of the emergence of a «new Southern Question». Starting from Gramsci's pioneering contribution and merging it with the most recent post-colonial studies positions, some scholars are attempting to understand what have been the costs of such an export-driven form of development on local territories. They then have tried to look at the agricultural question in terms of North/South cleavages and ruptures (see, among the others, the contribution provided by Colloca, 2013; the Monographic issue of the Italian Journal *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa* dedicated to the emerging ethnographic studies on the Southern Question(s); and finally the volume recently edited by the collective *Orizzonti Meridiani* [2013]). This analytical path seems to me one of the most stimulating and challenging directions that my research could possible take in the near future.

Last but not least, greenhouse farming caused what Gertel and Sippel (2014) define as the *embodied costs* of agriculture. This thesis has engaged mostly in an effort to define such type of costs that affect, day-by-day, men and women's bodies. The methodology employed to conduct this research, i.e. the participant observation within greenhouses and packinghouses, was useful in this attempt to grasp the «carnal» costs of eating fresh food (Wacquant, 2005). Thereafter a preliminary description of the workplaces in which I was employed (chapter II), I devoted the third chapter entirely to an analysis of the various embodied costs of day labor. I attempted to highlight several dimensions of this type of work. Firstly, I pointed out daily workers' difficulties in managing their own time, being that they are at the employer's total disposal during the working hours as well as in their spare time (par. 2). Secondly, I dealt with farmworkers physical suffering caused by such heavy workloads, as well as to the psychological stress connected to the experience of bouts of frequent unemployment and underemployment (par. 3). Thirdly, I focused on the consequences of material insecurity generated by the presence of an uneven salary (due to its periodical absence, its deferrals or its non provision). In the penultimate Chapter, I dealt with the uncertainty connected with the frequent absence of a formal contract for people working in the sector. Here I attempted to provide an image of the entire formal-informal continuum, shedding light on the interplays emerging between the State, the laborers and the market in producing and shaping informality. Finally, I briefly engaged in dealing with laborers' future expectations, recognizing however the deep difficulty of overcoming a daily model of existence.

This contribution attempted to use a local lens to describe global dynamics at least in a twofold sense. In the first place, it tried to trace the global trajectories undertaken by fresh food,

reconnecting commodities to the *history* and the *places* of their productions. Secondly, it attempted to trace the *stories* of laborers, profoundly embedded (and sometimes entrapped) in a given local context, while still belonging to a global scenario. Merging together and deepening these two dimensions, I hope to have contributed, at least partially, to question the apparent “smoothness” underlying commodity circuits and global value chains. Making these costs visible, as Gertel and Sippel buttress, the attempt of this work «is conditional to open up new spaces of knowledge for alternative food systems» (ibidem, 2014: 214: 252).

Methodological appendix

Che cosa fa l'etnografo? Quando non ha capito interamente la vita che ha vissuto, scrive!

L. Piasere, *L'etnografo imperfetto*

1. On the evolution of this thesis

At odds with what William Foote Whyte states at the outset of the Appendix of his *Street Corner Society* (1943), the paucity of written materials regarding qualitative research methods does not constitute a «handicap» anymore. Contrariwise, at the moment of approaching the task of writing about methodology, a young ethnographer actually feels to be bumped into a quite crowded field. Moreover, differently from the discipline's pioneering days, ethnography and qualitative research methods do not need anymore to be justified or “protected” from the accusation of not being able to produce “scientific knowledge”. The relevance of such alleged “soft” methods has been so widely recognized within the social science field, that our young ethnographer could actually feel quite relaxed about the appropriateness of her choice²⁵². Instead of constituting an overall reflection about the method, and not even a praise in favor of participant observation (an undertaking already fulfilled with success by several experienced scholars²⁵³), the aim of this methodological Appendix is thus much more limited, namely to unearth the processes leading to the set of observations and the preliminary conclusions proposed throughout this thesis. According to Dal Lago and De Biase, in fact, «the strongest validating process that an ethnographer could undertake in order to call for the impartiality and “objectivity” of her work, is being transparent in describing the procedures and – above all – the set of motivations pushing her to opt for them» (ibidem, 2002: XVIII). But an

²⁵² In order to indicate a “neutral” and “generic” individual, since now on within this Appendix, I have decided to employ exclusively the feminine pronouns “she” and “her”, instead of the double form (“s/he” and “his/her”) used throughout the text. This expedient had the primary purpose of simplifying the written text, preferring obviously the grammatical form through which I feel more confident.

²⁵³ Cf. among the readers: Gobo (2001; 2008); Dal Lago and De Biase (2002); Piasere (2002); Denzin and Lincoln (2005), Marzano (2006); Semi (2010); Cardano (2011) and the monographic issue of *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, XLII, n.2.

ethnographer gets set to write down her personal experience not exclusively in order to justify her work. Soon after the post-modernist turn (Denzin, 1997), in fact, being or not enthusiastic supporters of such a way to conceive research, *reflexivity* has become a constitutive element of every ethnographic account, since it represents the most direct way to position the ethnographer within the field, and to openly recognize the fact that she is part of the social settings under observation (Cardano, 2001; Marzano, 2001; 2006). Moreover, the reflexive endeavor, as Kunda states (2000), has the fundamental purpose of unveiling to the reader all the weakness and limits characterizing the researcher's work. Hence, shaping the methodological Appendix as «a sort of confession» (ibidem: 272), the ethnographer feels to be legitimized to undress the clothes of a “sociology” to dress up again the ones of the “common person” (on this topic, see also Van Maanen, 2011). Our young participant observer could thus feel quite relieved, since she knows, from the beginning of her undertaking, that the very ethnographic “tradition” is based on the assumption of individual (and “scientific”) «imperfection» (Piasere, 2002). However, that has little (and sometimes nothing) to do with the author's modesty. Through her reflexive endeavor, in fact, the ethnographer attempts to buttress, once again, the research's *credibility*, showing to be able to point towards herself and towards the very fieldwork process the same critical weapons she used in her analysis (Kunda, 2000: 272). Ethnography, thus, demonstrates to be even worthier when it is able to ethnographies itself.

To proceed with this sort of “confession”, I thus opted to follow the model provided by the already mentioned Whyte's masterpiece that Marzano (2006) defines as the «Classic among the classics». I share with Whyte, in fact, the consideration that it is not naïve to present our personal biography in order to frame our writings²⁵⁴. I truly believe rather that it is actually an honest as well as an useful effort to present the «extra-scientific reasons» motivating our researches (Semi, 2010a: 16). It is maybe thanks to a myriad of sincere personal accounts, that considers the discipline as a *cumulative* and *reflective* processes of production of knowledge, that we are actually able to learn how to train «a certain gaze» (Dal lago, De Biase, 2002), how to deal with our emotions, so, in a nutshell, how to «domesticate» ethnography (Sassatelli, Fine, 2009).

2. Personal background

As usual, it was a quite complex mix of motivations that pushes me toward the decision to focus my

²⁵⁴ I refer here to Bonazzi that defined Whyte's contribution as a «professionally naïve account» (2001: 324).

attention on the research topic I dealt with in this thesis, but at least one I can state clearly: it was the genuine inner push to “go back” to the South of Italy. I knew, and maybe this is one of my main regrets, that throughout this pages the “southernness” characterizing my fieldwork emerges too slightly. I knew nevertheless that this was my research's emotional, as well as analytical, starting point. I wanted to “come back” to the South of Italy for the very deep reason that pushes the majority of naïve sociologists to investigate and write: changing the *status quo* starting, needless to say, from their “place of origins”.

Motivating a thesis that strives to support people's freedom of movement starting from the concept of “belonging” seems at least to be contradictory. I do not what to say that it is not. However, I would like to attempt to explain how these two claims are actually deeply woven in my personal experience, without any apparent schizophrenia. I originally come from a small village in the North of Calabria, and I have been living for the last ten years in medium-big Italian and European cities. During the entire period of my studies, spent mainly in Bologna, I have undertaken several experiences in support of migrants' claims to struggle against the European institutional and social racism. In January 2010, the same day that I was taking a plane to reach Barcellona, where I was going to conduct an ethnographic research on *Sin papeles* migrant movement, an immigrants' uprising blew up in Rosarno, 100 km southern than my village in Calabria. As soon as I read it in the newspaper, I started to be puzzled about where I was actually going and why.

In the autumn 2011, after another period abroad, I come back to Italy yet again. I bumped by chance into a public debate in which a migrant activist, Yvan Sagnet, was speaking about the first immigrant farmworkers' strike that had occurred few months before in Nardò (Puglia). I was simply amazed by those accounts. But it actually took several further months to take the decision of reading *Sulla pelle viva*, to meet BSA²⁵⁵, and to start thinking, concretely, how could I actually do to... “go back” to the South. The PhD provided me this occasion: trying, at least for a period, to *be* there. To look at what? At that stage, I already knew.

Since the moment I decided to catch that occasion till now, I have met numerous people, fellows and friends, that with their stubborn decision *to be there* contribute constantly to struggle, and are able to welcome “newcomers” to be active part of their deep-seated territorial claims. To all of them I implicitly owe the reflections carried out in this thesis, even if I have never done any references to our struggles, our land, our territory.

²⁵⁵ *Sulla pelle viva* (op. cit.) is a collective book, published soon after the Nardò strike, containing, together with the contribution of some sociologists, also several accounts written by Italian and migrant activists directly involved in the protest. Among them, the Brigade di Solidarietà Attiva (BSA), one of the collectives that organized the camp (Masseria Boncuri) within which the strike takes place.

3. Finding my Cornerville

Soon after the Rosarno's uprising and the Nardò's strikes, even academy was brutally woken up: studying migrant labor in agriculture ceased to be a novelty also for the Italian young generation scholars. In the same period I was planning my research project, in fact, I assisted to a great mushrooming of journals' articles, monographic books and investigation on the same topic. And not only that. Video-makers, photographers and reporters were also inquiring that very arguments to denounce the tough labor conditions undergone by migrant laborers in the fields. Especially at the beginning of my study, I definitely appreciated the fact of being in a “good company”. Nevertheless, after a period in Capitanata and a short trip to Rosarno, I indeed realized that I maybe needed more “space” to conduct an ethnographic inquiry. Looking towards a “less investigated” place, was thus one of the reasons that maybe pushes me towards Sicily. One of the first person I contacted in the island, living in Cassibile (SR), indirectly confirmed my initial thoughts. Cassibile's activists – I perceived – seemed to be affected by a sort “younger brother's complex”: «Everyone speaks about Rosarno, but in our area the situation is not so different, or even worst! Also the NGOs and the humanitarian associations we met during our first years of activity against *caporalato* have left this place right now, cause maybe here there is not so much visibility for them has it happens in Rosarno!», it was the bitter comment of a local trade unionist.

4. Planning the study

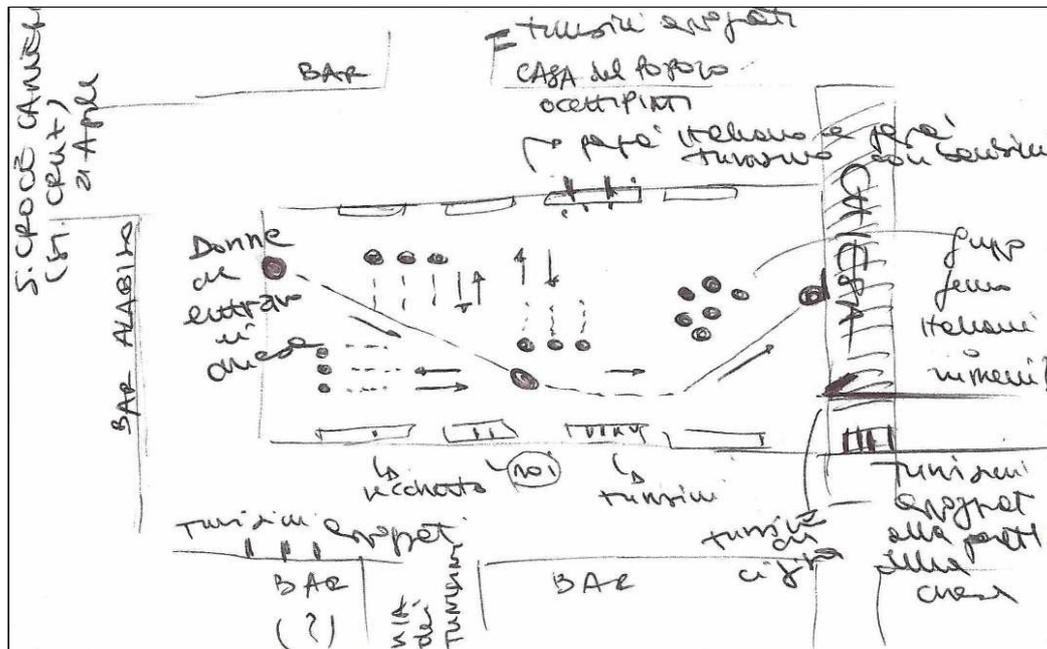
Sicily, thus, geographically and socially “close enough” as well as “far away enough”, seemed for me the most appropriate option to conduct my fieldwork. While planning my study, moreover, I thought that it would have been interesting to look at the peculiar dynamics characterizing de-seasonalized agriculture in the transformed littoral strip, in comparison with a context characterized by seasonal agriculture (similar to the ones that I already approached in Calabria and Puglia). Two case-studies, Cassibile and Vittoria (I.e. the transformed littoral strip), would have helped me to understand these differences. As soon as my research went on, however, I realized that I was not interested in any (objective) dimensions I could compare. I was indeed more attracted by subjective experiences and by daily routines lived by Italian and migrant workers. Hand in hand with the sharpening of my theoretical gaze, in fact, I started to be much more puzzled about how people were able to solve their everyday “economic” problems, mainly connected with the fact of being

harnessed by daily forms of labor. My approach, of course, was not exclusively interested in the patterns of individual interaction. As the majority of the sociologists, I indeed truly believe that everyday negotiations were strongly shaped by social and “political” structures. The adjective “political” takes here at least a twofold meaning. Throughout the research, in fact, I wanted to be acquainted with how local, national and European politics (defining in the first place labor, immigration and organization of global value chains) concretely affect and frame people's routines; similarly, I expected to deal with how gender patterns, as well as ethical constructions, and class feeling of belonging could shape individuals' everyday life. The purpose of comparing, indeed fundamental, at that stage of the research appeared to be not my most urgent priority²⁵⁶.

Even limiting the context of the analysis at one case, the development of that fieldwork did not appear as an easy task. I was stubbornly convinced – since the beginning – that to look at the agricultural labor market, I need to enter the workplaces. Where else, I was wondering, could I study labor if not *inside* the firms? This undertaking, for a white, young and well educated student, seemed to be almost impossible.

My first approach with the field, in January 2013, gave me a concrete idea of how actually difficult it was. Visiting some of the small villages on the coastline, from Gela to Cassibile, alone with my rucksack, I had the feeling of being constantly *under observation*. Even if I could expect this overall reaction to my presence, at the very beginning it was actually not pleasant at all. It stands out in my mind the first time that I visited Santa Croce Camerina: the feeling of “being observed” was almost unbearable. Throughout my studies, I have reflected quite a lot, in a critical sense, on the (power) relations taking place between the “observer” and the “observed” within the field. Naively enough, however, I did not expect that the direction of that relation could be actually inverted. In that situation I felt so uneasy that, no matter what, I could not stop in the square to eat a sandwich, under so many curious gazes. Santa Croce's central square, a place where later on I get used to spend quite a lot of time, looked more or less as in this drawing:

²⁵⁶ The lack of time, due to the almost compulsory short period that a PhD student could spend on the field, constituted also a relevant consideration in order to dissuade me from this initial comparative purpose.



Santa Croce Camerina, April 21st 2013, fieldnotes²⁵⁷

Numerous men, some of them Italians, most of them Tunisians, were “roosted” stick to the surrounding walls, in a posture that several months later I started to perceive as extremely familiar [image 1]. No woman, except for the ones motivated by working reasons (as it was for the traffic controller) or those attending the city's main church, were burning time in the square. Back to Bologna, when I described this situation to one of my (male) friends, an experienced sociologist, he kindly reproached me, suggesting that I was actually assuming, in that very moment, a “northern gaze”. I have reflected quite a long on that statement. I was wondering on how far behind, by that time, I had left my “southern Italian” sensitivity; and I was wondering whether I would assume again «a certain gaze», able to observe and narrate the South in a non voyeuristic manner. It took for me quite a lot of time (and effort) to feel to be again embedded in a southern narration, and to feel at ease assuming a “southern posture”. Assuming a southern posture, in the example I provided, does not mean to omit or even justify the evident gender segregation, and the cruel interdiction of public spaces faced by women, still quite accentuated in southern small cities. It simply means that, thanks to my personal background, I should have known *where* I need to *address* my gaze in order to understand how women equally live public spaces, in a different fashion compared with men [image 2]. For what concerns other “natives' perspectives” (i.e. regarding the observation of workplaces, the observation of male spaces, etc.) I have to admit honestly that, till the end of my

²⁵⁷ I decided to include this sketch within the methodological Appendix, since to draw *mental maps* (see further) has been one among the tools that I employed for the data collection. My field notes, thus, contain similar drawings of places that I deemed to be “relevant” for my research, i.e. Piazza Manin, Vittoria's fruit and vegetable market, disposition of the people present in a meeting, and so on and so forth.

fieldwork, I had the impression of remaining mainly an “outsider”. Thanks to the people I met, however, I had the precious possibility to give some short “peeks” on their everyday environments. And to all of them, once again, I want to restate my endless gratitude.



Image 1. Santa Croce Camerina's main square. Photo by Giovanni Battaglia [July 26th, 2013][Deleted in the open access version]



Image 2. Santa Croce Camerina's main square. Photo by Giovanni Battaglia [July 26th, 2013][Deleted in the open access version]

5. A relevant meeting

Soon after I set foot in Sicily, in January 2013, I had a meeting that changed completely the course of my fieldwork. Thanks to a friend, I came to know that another PhD student, Giuliana Sanò, from the University of Messina, was planning to conduct a research in the area almost in the same period as I intended to do it. As soon as we get in touch, Giuliana and I had no doubt about the fact that we were at least interested in “collaborating each other”. We did not know, at that time, that this would have been the beginning of a deep friendship, of a long-lasting complicity, and an extremely fruitful research period together. Both of us, at our first experience, had initially no clue on how to handle a fieldwork. None of the two, indeed, was particularly keen on demonstrating to be able to conduct an individual and “heroic” undertaking in a “savage” and unknown field (Salzman, 2004). Contrariwise, we were both coming from experiences of associations and activism, thanks to which we were already widely persuaded on the “goodness” of the collective forms of discussion as well as “collective” research methods²⁵⁸. We were thus used to debate constructively our intuitions in collective forums. And, moreover, we both share a conception of sociology – an ethnography in particular – as being a *public* matter (Burawoy, 2013), namely as an instrument to stimulate social changes, as a political practice. This represented inevitably a good ground to start to work together. As also Mario Cardano recognizes, the possibility to conduct a period of research jointly, represented for us an incredible advantage²⁵⁹. The fact of being together (instead of working separately) had important implications for what concerns our possibility to access the field “easier” and “safer”, so being available to take “harder” risks and to feel more comfortable in a higher number of situations. But above all, according to Cardano, working together was quite relevant since it allows to deepen our reflexive approach, and to develop, among us, a «first nucleus of intersubjectivity», providing our research with a stronger “validity”. Ethnographic research too often, in fact, is affected by the limit of being constructed as an individual effort: the ethnographer

²⁵⁸ During the years of our studies, we have encountered and got acquainted with several practices of “collective research” and participated methodologies. Several among them became sources of inspiration, even if – evidently – they were not employed throughout this investigation. In particular, the practices of action-research, and among them of “militant research”, well-known in Italy with the definition of *con-ricerca* (Borio, Pozzi, Roggero, 2002); the form of the *workers inquiring* [*inchiesta operaia*], bloomed in Italy between the 1950s and the 1970s, thanks to groups of workers-researcher animated by the necessity to highlight the dispositives of exploitations, as well as the forms of resistance taking place inside the fordist factories; the practices of *consciousness-raising* close the the sociological and epistemological feminist tradition; the Socratic Method [*metodo maieutico*] employed by sociologists and pedagogists like Danilo Dolci and Franco Alasia to animate “empowerment groups” debating on the situation of labor, unemployment and emigration (see the recently republished Dolci, 2014).

²⁵⁹ I discussed with Mario Cardano about these methodological concerns during the final stage of my data analysis, in April 2015. Thus, I would like to thank him for providing important suggestions and bibliographic references that helped me to structure this methodological Appendix. I would like also to thank him for underlining the several positive implications concerning my personal experience to undertake a fieldwork together with another researcher.

is too frequently meant to be a «lone stranger in the hearth of darkness», as Philip C. Salzman ironically states (2004). In his disenchanting analysis, in fact, he sharply criticizes the «individualism institutionalized through our teaching programs and our research strategies», calling for a «progressive diminishing» of these aspects, in favor of a discipline potentially more open to collaboration and cooperation (2004: 61)²⁶⁰. Indubitably our stubborn decision to work together represents – for our investigations as well as for our “training” as ethnographers – an important step toward this direction²⁶¹. The overall “understanding” of the situation in which we were embedded was for sure enriched thanks to our “double gaze”, and of course gained «an extra “depth”» (Bateson, 1979: 70). It is, in fact, quite intuitive to assert, together with Gregory Bateson (1979: 67) that «two descriptions are better than one». The straightforwardness of such a statement is deeply discussed by the author of *Mind and Nature* in a chapter entitled «Multiple versions of the world». Within this text, Bateson speaks about the peculiarities of a *binocular vision*, considered as the fundamental human capability to (naturally) “create” an image's *profundity*, thanks to the combinations of the two descriptions offered by each single eye²⁶². Bateson's anatomic metaphor highlights quite intuitively the potential efficacy of our “double presence” into the field.

²⁶⁰ Salzman concludes his contribution stating: «Lavorando assieme per un ragionevole periodo in uno o più stili di ricerca, gli etnologi, all'inizio delle loro carriere o già affermati, possono suddividersi le responsabilità di ricerca in modo complementare e più realistico, possono costruire un quadro conforme di concezioni comuni, fornire solide valutazioni e critiche costruttive, e insieme offrire alla più ampia comunità intellettuale un corpus di risultati più raffinato, condiviso e profondo, sul quale è più facile costruire ulteriori ricerche. Certo potremo continuare come abbiamo fatto finora, mantenendo l'aleatorietà dell'avventura individualista, con la sua pochezza di armonia e giustificazione disciplinare, e con la sua continua confusione di mode contrastanti che sbocciano e appassiscono una dopo l'altra. Ma potremmo continuare così solo a patto di accontentarci delle tenebre dell'alea e della confusione, tenebre ben lontane da quella luce che si spera e ci si aspetta dall'antropologia come disciplina di ricerca». I am thankful to Mario Cardano for providing me with this bibliographic reference.

²⁶¹ The ethnographic tradition, moreover, encompasses several examples of research conducted by “couples”, starting from the classic “community studies” to more recent contributions. We could refer, in particular, to *Middletown*, the masterpiece written by Robert and Helen Lynd between 1924 and 1925, or to the 1958 book *Small town in mass society* by Arthur J. Vidich e Joseph Bensamn, or also to the Jane and Peter Schneider's famous research *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily*. Referring to the work of Bourgois and Schonberg among the homeless in San Francisco (2009), Semi (2010: 99) defines this joined experience as a fruitful process of «triangulation taking place among the researchers». Following Kunda suggestions (1994: 273), moreover, the limits of individual research could be overcome by the work of “teams of ethnographers” researching either together either separately but on the same topic. See, among the others, the classical works on psychiatric hospitals, conducted by Rosenham and his team (1973); the “anthropology of Institution and Social Organization” realized by Marc Abélès and his colleagues (see the web-page: <http://www.iiaac.cnrs.fr/laios/spip.php?rubrique1>); the contributions provided by équipes of ethnographers in sociology of the labor process (Ngai, *et al.* 2015) and in the sociology of migrations (Sacchetto, 2011).

²⁶² «Let us consider another simple and familiar case of double description. What is gained by comparing the data collected by one eye with the data collected by the other? Typically, both eyes are aimed at the same region of the surrounding universe, and this might seem to be a wasteful use of the sense organs. But the anatomy indicates that very considerable advantage must accrue from this usage [...]. The binocular image, which appears to be undivided, is in fact a complex synthesis of information from the left front in the right brain and a corresponding synthesis of material from the right front in the left brain. Later these two synthesized aggregates of information are themselves synthesized into a single subjective picture. [...] More important, information about depth is created. [...] In principle, extra “depth” in some metaphoric sense is to be expected whenever the information for the two descriptions is differently collected or differently coded» (Bateson, 1979: 69-70). I owe this reference again to Mario Cardano, in particular to his lecture «*Etno-grafia. La scrittura nella ricerca etnografica, fra persuasione ed evocazione*», Napoli, June 5th 2013.

After long and tiring “sessions” of participant observation (inside workplaces or local trade unions, visiting a firm or hanging around in Vittoria's main square), Giuliana and I used to come back home and discuss for quite a lot of time our observations, our perceptions, our feelings. Those moments were extremely precious for both of us: in the first place, we used to exchange relevant information («I heard by chance this conversation...», «I was speaking with Franco that told me that...»; «While you were leaving the room with Ahmed, I saw the other guys laughing at you...»), and so on and so forth). Secondly, we used constantly to *confront* and *comfort*: sharing emotions and personal feelings, we put a lot of effort in attempting to encourage each other, minimizing the sense of loneliness and frustration usually felt by the “lone researcher” in the field. Let's have a look, for instance, at the following conversation registered during the lunch break we had while working at JustTomatoes (see ch. II, par. 2.4). We were discussing the deep feeling of discomfort that each of us – separately – was perceiving; the possibility to exchange our first impressions, helped me in this case to understand that “the problem” was not exclusively “mine”, but that I was somehow “reacting” at a certain (external) situation.

Valeria: [*hysterical laugh*] I thought that I, myself, was the problem!

Giuliana: no, no! I swear that I started to feel... I don't even know what kind of feeling, if it was rage, if it was edginess... I don't know! [...] I become apocalyptic when I find myself in these situations! I don't wanna see them anymore [*referring to the workers*] [...] And when Carmela says something like “This one is called eggplant!”, or something like that... oh, goddamn! I was above to reply being really really rude... then I shut up!

V.: [*laugh*] I have seen it, I have seen! [...] She was so pressing, damn! I was almost crying [*again hysterical laugh*]. I thought I was particularity sensitive today, I thought it was me! [...] So, tomorrow, we're not gonna come?

G.: Oh, no, come on! To do what?!

[Donnalucata, outside of the packinghouse in which we were working, March 19th, 2013]

Lastly, and this was maybe the main purpose of our long hours discussions, through our endless conversations we attempted to “reach” a more consistent and compelling «interpretation of the interpretations». Sometimes, our “final” – even temporary and precarious – intuition represented the synthesis of a long (generally, but not always, peaceful) debate at the end of which our point of views gradually tend to converge. Other times, instead, each of us continued to have a different understanding of a certain situation that depended on our individual sensitivities. The “twofold” point of view, also in those cases, was indubitably a richness, since that double description, as Bateson states, tended usually to add an extra “depth” in the understanding of the situation. Let me provide an example of what I am maintaining. While visiting the workplaces, or while approaching a new experience of participant observation inside a firm, Giuliana and I tended to assume – unconsciously – different “strategies” to get in contact with the people we met. Let's consider this conversation, registered during a visit that we had in Serena's packinghouse:

A female worker: Are you the new here?

Giuliana: [*intervening promptly*] No! We are not here to work!

Valeria: [*softly and quite embarrassed*] We came just to take a look, to see how the labor concretely looks like...

The worker: Uhm, ok, I got it!

V.: Yes, we are “the new ones” somehow... [*laugh*]

[Vittoria, outside of the interviewee's workplace, March 11th 2013]

To the workers' requests to know the purpose of our visit, Giuliana replied promptly, in this situation as well as in other occasions, that we were there «just to take a look». Her main concern was to try to avoid any risk that the laborers feel to be in competition with us, and perceive us as the ones that could “steal” their occupations (as it occurred, for instance, inside JustTomatoes). I had (and have) no doubt about the fact that Giuliana had a correct and meaningful intuition. My main concern, however, was quite different. I was worried that workers could perceive us as being “two intrusive observers”, “two privileged girls” used “to study and not to work”. I thought that their reaction toward us could be “cruel” (as it was inside JustTomatoes) due to the fact that “we were there *just* to take a look”, while they were actually everyday trapped in that situations. That was the implicit reason for which I attempted mainly to show “closeness” to the laborers, trying to underline that fact that we were «in a certain sense, new ones», and that we were, more or less, “in the same situation”. In several occasions, I attempted to show to the workers that we were mainly interested in “doing” and not in “observing”, that we want to “learn” by them, to acquire their practical knowledge that we considered extremely precious. I strongly appreciated, however, also Giuliana genuine attitude to “be herself” in the situations, less embarrassed to explain frankly our actual position, and extremely sensitive to try to meet the laborers' main puzzlements (while I tended to be concentrated mainly on *mine* own obsessions). Like in this example, numerous other times our point of views used to be quite different but nevertheless complementary. Our join effort to “access” the field, as well as to understand the situation in which we were embedded, represented undoubtedly a meaningful and useful exercise that enriched and provide an added value to our research.

Needless to say, our “double presence”, that in the majority of the cases was appreciated, in other circumstances it maybe appeared awkward. Even when our *hyper-visibility* in the public spaces ceased to be a relevant issue, for instance, in certain “private” settings the fact of being two sometimes continued to constitute a limit. One of the main difficulties we have found concerned the possibility to create spaces intimacy during the conduction of the interviews. This was mainly due, however, more to our initially inability in employing this technique and to our different

«interviewing styles²⁶³» than to our “double presence”. Little by little, as soon as we get more comfortable with the interviewing situation, thanks also to our constant reflection on methodological aspects, these limits tended to be progressively reduced. We opted, however, also for conducting separate research experiences, especially in that cases in which our “double presence” would have been too “intrusive” (i.e. during the period of covered participant observation).

All in all, being two ethnographers was, for us, an unexpected as well as innovative experience. Innovative since it allowed us to experiment some useful techniques to collect data to which we were not acquainted with (aside from the fieldnote, for example, we used to register some of our conversations, materials that, at the stage of data analysis, constituted an important sources of information and inspiration). But it was an innovative experience also because the simple fact of working together strongly questioned the very individualistic approach too often carried on by our «training institutions» (Salzman, 2004). Contesting through acting differently was for sure one of our main results.

6. First efforts

As Giovanni Semi states (2010: 36), we should not image our access to field as being a «one single day», or a «one single situation». *Accessing the field*, namely «being recognized and being considered as worth of consideration» is, in fact, a long-lasting process, especially in circumstances similar to the ones we were embedded in our fieldwork, due to which we were somehow stimulated and forced to change quite frequently the context under observation. It is thus more appropriate to speak about a «set of accesses to the field». In our case, if we consider each workplace in which we have been “hosted” for a while, if we consider city center's public spaces, as well as countryside areas, and if we consider some of the migrants' supporter services that we frequented during the entire period of our stay, we definitely ought to speak about *multiple* accesses to the field. As every ethnographer knows, in each one of these contexts we had to negotiate our role, balancing fears and expectations, desires and necessities. It took quite a lot of time, for me, to be able to produce an honest formulation of what I was doing there. The first night I was in Ragusa, for instance, talking frankly with a friend of a friend, I simply stated that I was there to “study informal labor”. «I do

²⁶³ The first time we interviewed Mario, our employer in TomatoesArtists, for instance, he recognized and appreciated our different «interviewing styles» that – he said – «fit together perfectly», since according to him, I was more talkative, while Giuliana was more reflexive [Santa Croce Camerina, May 2nd, 2013].

work informally in a nursery», he replies promptly, becoming quite rigid. Evidently, from that night on, I have never had any contact with him anymore. Fortunately, I realized quite soon that I could even say something more general, like for instance: “I’m here to study agriculture”. People had such an incredibly high number of interesting suggestions regarding what, according to them, *was worth to be studied* that it would have been a pity to lose so many fascinating hints for my research²⁶⁴. Some of them, for example, suggested to «look at the impact of the economic crisis on the big, medium and small-sized firms in the area», motivated by the firm belief that the current crisis was different from the previous ones, since it affected, no matter what, every economic unit²⁶⁵. Other informants suggested, curiously, to deal with the necessity to «improve human capital within the agricultural companies»²⁶⁶; others with the «frauds perpetrated inside the fruit and vegetable market»²⁶⁷; and so on and so forth. For a considerable high number of time, hence, people attempted to persuade us that, in their everyday life, there was something really meaningful to be considered. Everyone, assuming the role of an alleged social scientist, was thus formulating interesting research questions, to which – especially at the very beginning – it was for us important to pay attention, and somehow to “adapt” to.

6.1. Accessing the field by starting from the workplaces

As I already stated several time, one of my main concern while planning the research, was to be able to study labor *inside the workplaces*. This sounds for me essential, no matter the initial considerations provided by my friends and informants reflecting on the high low probabilities that I could be hired inside a greenhouse. I knew, in fact, since the beginning, that this maybe was not easy. I knew also that I needed to limit drastically my expectations compared with a *proper workplace ethnography*²⁶⁸. A proper workplace ethnography, as everyone knows, is extremely time consuming. Due to the rapid pace assumed by current research's production, I unfortunately had not enough time to spend eleven month in a machine shop of a steel-processing plant, as Roy (1952) did during the 1940s; or three years in a gypsum's mine as Gouldner (1954) did between 1948 and

²⁶⁴ Qualitative research, in fact, generally follows an inductive logic, and it is why a qualitative research project tends to be initially characterized by a certain vagueness and ambiguity. «If all these elements were known to the researcher from the outset, there would be no need to undertake the fieldwork» (Marzano, 2012: 446). The process is, in fact, akin to what Glaser and Strauss define as «Grounded theory» (1967).

²⁶⁵ Ciccio Aiello, former Vittoria's mayor.

²⁶⁶ Peppe Scifo, FLAI-CGIL.

²⁶⁷ Pippo, tomatoes' producer.

²⁶⁸ According to Silvia Doria (2014), the comprehensive definition of *workplace studies*, referring to body of researches belonging to different fields, all of them based on the «local and social embeddedness of the working activity» (Parolin, 2008: 145, in Doria 2014), could be attributed to Heath, Knoblauch and Luff (2000, in Doria 2014).

1951; neither I could spend one year and a half to work in a farm as Holmes (2013) recently did thanks to the opportunity provided by the University of California. Being the purpose of our PhD training much more limited, numerous of my fellows currently opt to desist from employing such a useful technique to study labor process, forced – even unwilling – to rely on less time-consuming methodologies, with the consequence of an overall loss of empirical data that were certainly fundamental in the sociology of work.

However, *time availability* was just one – even if not superfluous – among my concerns. A second relevant deal, was the evident difference in the «structural dimensions» (Semi, 2010a: 21), namely *gender, nationality and social class*, between us and the people usually employed in agriculture (mostly male, mainly foreigners and evidently belonging to the working class, no matter their previous occupations and levels of education in their home countries). Giuliana and I, conscious enough of the impossibility of “naturalize” our presence inside the greenhouse, and neither willing to, opted to declare our purpose of conducting a participant observation. Even if our prospective employers were not completely persuaded by the validity of this alleged “non scientific method”, several among them demonstrated availability to “help” us. Except from a short period of covered participant observation that I had in SicilSerre (ch. 2, par. 2.3), in the other three cases the employers and employees were informed about the purpose of our presence there; just in one of the company we have been remunerated for our work. As I narrated widely in ch. II (par. 2), accounting for the procedures of cases' selection, we started being employed for one “exploratory” week by Mohamed, a Tunisian man in his fifties that we met thanks to a friend of a friend (see par. 2.1)²⁶⁹. That experience resulted to be extremely relevant not only because it represented our very first time inside a greenhouse, but also because it was in that occasion that we met two of the figures that since then on played a pivotal role during the entire period of our staying: they were Ahmed and Karim²⁷⁰.

Karim, among our workmates, is the one that seems to have understood clearer the purpose of our presence into the greenhouse, and somehow plays his role as being an “informant”, since he hopes to gain maybe some advantages from this position. The first time that we met each other, he was convinced that he had seen me on TV! Of course, I tried to persuade him it wasn't true, but still he went on thinking that Giuliana and I were actually two “journalists”. So, on the one hand, when talking with us, he tends to emphasize all the aspects that he hates the most connected with his job... he compares greenhouse with a “hell”, and complains all the time about his physical

²⁶⁹ The period we spent in the firm ranged between the 5th to the 17th of March 2013, even not uninterruptedly, since Mohamed did not need extra workforce every day.

²⁷⁰ Karim assumed a relevant role especially in Giuliana's personal experience. Ahmed, as I accounted throughout this thesis, played a pivotal role in “leading” me discovering the field, both inside workplaces as well as in Vittoria's Tunisian public spaces. It was not easy, for both of us, to handle such a relationship, sometimes becoming really conflicting and cantankerous, other times definitely spontaneous and genuine. In January 2014, Giuliana and I traveled to Tunisia to meet Ahmed wonderful family in his hometown, Gafsa, and Karim wife and relatives in Sousse.

suffering, caused by such an exhausting work (breath problems, back pain...). On the other hand, he attempts to “take advantage” – in a good way – from our presence there. He considers us as being potentially “useful” to him to give up with this job and find something else. The other time we met, he asked me if I could “please” find him another job. Today he asked to Giuliana whether she can bring to him her boyfriend's clothes.

[Vittoria, March 12th, 2013]

The possibility to work inside greenhouses and packinghouses²⁷¹ had for us numerous relevant implications. In the first place, as I have already argued, this opportunity allowed us and *learn* through the body, so to acquire a practical knowledge that rarely could be transmitted by verbal communication. Moreover, we had the possibility to *feel* through the body, experiencing – even for a limited period – muscles' pain and suffocating temperature inside the plastic walls (see ch. III, par. 3; see among the others Wacquant, 2005; Gheradi and Bruni, 2007; Holmes, 2013; Doria, 2014). Secondly, to find ourselves in the workers' position, helped us not only to perceive things differently, but also *to be perceived differently*.

Generally speaking, it allows, in fact, to demonstrate our genuine interest in understanding labor practically doing it. This effort appeared to be fundamental for us in order to gain a certain *credibility* in the field. Alongside with the well-known difficulty to “gain people's trust”, in fact, one of our main worries was to be able “to look reliable” in our purpose of investigation. This was mainly due to our young age; especially in my case, the people I met usually deemed I was drastically younger than roughly thirties. Every time they asked me whether I had finished or not the high school, in the first place I was quite irritated, and secondly I started to be puzzled on how could I actually gain credibility given my bodily characteristics. On the one hand, looking young and unexperienced was for sure an advantage: in numerous cases, for example, since we seemed not “dangerous”, several among the employers feel to be quite relaxed in declaring openly some of the informal and illegal deals they were involved in, providing us with a great number of information. On the other hand, however, we were also suffering for being too often treated as «two naïve young girls». How could “they” take us “seriously”? And what does it mean, actually, to be “taken seriously”? However, my perception was that, day by day, our work started to be appreciated; this gradual increase in credibility, in several contexts, was for sure influenced by our decision to be hired for a while inside greenhouses²⁷².

To be perceived differently, moreover, assumed for me a quite strong meaning especially in my

²⁷¹ For a comprehensive account of the access into the other workplaces where we spend a period of participant observation, see the ch. II, par. 2 entirely devoted to this topic. To briefly summarize: we agreed with a tomatoes' producer to conduct two weeks of participant observation in his firm (the Gurrieri s.r.l), from the 8th till the 21th of April (2013); we worked for two weeks inside a packinghouse, being regularly hired and paid (TomatoesArtist); and, finally, in June 2013, I experienced five days of covered participant observation inside a firm that I called SicilSerre.

²⁷² Bernadetta, among the others, one of the FLAI-CGIL's employees, was constantly maintaining that «even if the[ir] trade union hosted numerous researchers interested in the agriculture's situation in Vittoria, we were the first ones really “getting our hands dirty”, laboring inside the greenhouses».

experience of covered participant observation. In that situation in which my position was not declared, in fact, I could feel – from the side of my employer – a «certain gaze» addressed toward me. One episode, in particular, I think it could provide a good example. I was at that time employed inside SicilSerre. Around eleven o' clock, while Ahmed, Giovanni and I were cleaning the plants, the boss' son arrives with his girlfriend. He entered the greenhouse, and without even saying “good morning” he started yelling at me and Ahmed, shouting that we were doing «a shitty job». He showed arrogantly how we were supposed to work: quick and precise. I replied promptly that, at six in the morning we were also quick ad precise, but that at eleven, after five hours without any break, working at that warm temperature, our eyes could not distinguish anymore the small parts we were expected to take off. It stands out in my mind the way in which he *gazed* me back. And I thus realized strongly the actual “weight” of a gaze. A gaze, in certain circumstances, has the incredible power to “objectify” a person. I thus started thinking at the numerous time in which I was playing the role of the “intrusive observer”, being non participant in a given situations. Especially at the beginning of our research, in fact, some of our informants and interviewees were keen on showing us their firms. Several times, thus, we dropped in the workplaces while laborers were busy. In that cases, Giuliana and I used to feel extremely embarrassed to speak to the workers: no matter which the intent of our gaze actually was, in that moment we were risking, willy nilly, to “objectify” them. It was actually really frustrating. That was one of the reasons for which the decision of «taking seriously the “participant” half of participant observation» (Keller, Keller, 1996: 157) was for us so relevant: it clearly modifies the perspective from which we were looking at the situation. While working side by side, sweating and swearing together, we stopped to be perceived (and with did not perceive ourselves anymore) as “looking” at the laborers “from above”, even keeping frankly our identity and not denying the elements of discontinuity among us. Sometimes, moreover, we could also feel (as in the episode occurred with the boss' son in SicilSerre) to be perceived *as if* we were workers. All this set of perceptions and feelings constituted definitely an added values for the purpose of understanding the contexts in which we were embedded.

6.2. «This square is Tunisians'...»

Let me provide an example of how my fieldnotes look like, and, for one time, I dare leave the Italian to illustrate the semantic richness which I have been struggling to render throughout this thesis:

Dopo l'ultima intervista decidiamo di bere una birra in Piazza Manin. Sono circa le 20. Fin'ora non siamo mai passate a quest'ora. Ci sediamo in un posticino un po' defilato, con le spalle alla

chiesa, dove ci siamo messe già altre volte in passato. C'è un gruppone di tunisini seduto nelle panchine di fronte la strada, nel punto più lontano dalla chiesa. Sono rumorosi, probabilmente ubriachi, in particolare un tipo, ciccione e molesto. Altri tunisini, come al solito, sono appollaiati lungo i muri all'estremità della piazza. Un ragazzo si avvicina: «Come va ragazze?». «Bene». «Ma non siete di qui?». «No, io calabrese». «Io di Messina». «E come mai state in questa piazza?». «Così. Volevamo bere una birra». «Questa è la piazza dei Tunisini». Poi si siede affianco a noi e inizia a chiacchierare mentre fa una canna. Si chiama Bashir. Ci racconta che ha 17 anni, è qui con tutta la sua famiglia, non va a scuola e non lavora. Non fa niente, dice, a parte stare nella piazza. A volte con i suoi amici va a Catania. Ha girato parecchio l'Italia, gli è piaciuta molto Rimini, mentre Messina gli fa schifo. Della Calabria invece ha brutti ricordi. «I tunisini qua spacciano tutti». «Cosa spacciano?». «Fumo, eroina, cocaina, ketamina... Quello lì con il cappellino ha l'eroina, ad esempio. E sapete come fanno a portarla giù dal nord? Se la mettono nel culo». Al che noi, un po' stupite, gli chiediamo come mai ha deciso di raccontarci queste cose senza conoscerci: «Non potremmo essere per caso “della Questura”?». «No, no, li conosco tutti gli sbirri in borghese, lo so che voi siete tranquille...». Nel frattempo alcuni suoi amici si avvicinano e iniziano a presentarsi. Uno di loro continua a rivolgerci la parola solo in arabo. Poi c'è un altro ragazzino che Bashir ci presenta come suo fratello. Si fa chiamare Marco. Bashir dice: «Lui è vittoriese! È nato a Vittoria». Noi: «Sei vittoriese?». Lui: «Tunisino, meglio tunisino». Anche lui ci fa le stesse domande: «Di dove siete?». Bashir risponde per noi. «Come mai state in questa piazza?». «Perché? Non possiamo?». «La piazza è dei tunisini!». «E' di proprietà dei tunisini?». «La piazza è dei tunisini!», ripete ancora una volta invertendo l'ordine delle parole, e con un tono molto più perentorio rispetto a Bashir. Ci chiede come mai siamo a Vittoria. «Per lavoro». «Ah, ah», ride. «Non c'è lavoro a Vittoria. A Vittoria non si fa niente, si spaccia e basta». «Beh, noi sappiamo che tanti tunisini lavorano in campagna qui». «I tunisini picca [poco]. I rumeni lavorano in campagna». «Ah, i tunisini non lavorano in campagna? E che lavori fanno?». «Mah, qualcuno lavora in campagna, ma la maggior parte spaccia». Nel frattempo gli uomini dall'altro lato della piazza, che ci fissano da parecchio tempo, hanno iniziato ad indicarci ridendo. Chiediamo a Bashir se per caso “abbiamo dato fastidio a qualcuno”, immaginando che magari i ragazzi siano stati “mandati”. Lui non capisce immediatamente la domanda, ma comunque dalla sua risposta non sembra fare intendere che sia stato “mandato”. Probabilmente vuole solo fare due chiacchiere con due persone che ritiene «non razziste» come ci dice poco dopo. Passa una ragazzina con un cagnolino al guinzaglio. Bashir, a voce alta, in modo che possa sentirci, dice: «Lei invece è una stronza razzista». Ci consiglia poi di frequentare un'altra «bella piazza, tra via Cavour e via Milano», che di solito viene chiamata “Piazza scuola”. Chiediamo a Bashir e Marco se hanno mai pensato di andar via. «Sì» dice Marco, «io me ne andrò in Danimarca. Mi faccio i soldi e me ne vado lì». Poi conclude passando un pezzo di fumo a Bashir e dicendo: «Fai fumare le ragazze, che poi ce ne andiamo». Bashir facendo una canna dice: «Ora ci fumiamo questa e poi ve ne andate!». «Perché? Dici che è pericoloso stare qui?». «No, no, finché siete con noi non è pericoloso, ma se noi ce ne andiamo...». Dice qualcosa del tipo “poi, fate quello che volete...”. Ma il suo tono così perentorio, insieme al surriscaldarsi delle urla e degli schiamazzi dall'altro lato della piazza inizia a preoccuparci. Ci alziamo e diciamo che, sì, magari andremo via. (Forse non avremo dovuto? Abbiamo dato l'impressione di esserci intimorite?). Con passo apparentemente tranquillo lasciamo la piazza, in mezzo alle urla del ciccione e del gruppo dei suoi amici. Girato l'angolo scoppiamo a ridere e acceleriamo notevolmente il passo fino al bar che solitamente frequentiamo.

[Piazza Senia, May 6th 2013]

Piazza Manin, commonly defined as Piazza Senia, is a place to which the reader – at this point – is already familiar. Together with Via Roma and the surrounding streets, it constitutes the center of a neighborhood, in Vittoria, mainly lived and frequented by Tunisian migrants. Piazza Senia and the nearby areas resemble more a North American “ghetto” than a European *banlieue*. It is quite uncommon, in fact, within the Italian context, to find certain kind of districts, characterized by such a homogeneous national «concentration» (Tosi, Petrillo, 2013). With few exceptions, the majority of the people that hang around in the square, drinks coffees in the cafés or frequents the Internet

point around the corners are originally coming from Tunisia. Almost all of them are male. Till several years ago, Piazza Senia used to be a crucial meeting point where employers generally went early morning to pick up Tunisians laborers to be enrolled by the day inside the greenhouses. According to some of our informants, people started to gather there because during the 1980s there used to be a bus stop to move towards the countryside. Father Cabibo, the priest in charge of the square's church for more than 20 years, defined it as *la piazza del mercato del lavoro* [the labor market's square]²⁷³. Other more romantic views suggest that Tunisians migrants started to gather in Piazza Senia, because of the palm trees growing in the middle, that evoke, someone says, a Tunisian familiar landscape (Sossi, 2005). Nowadays laborer do not use anymore to gather so frequently in the square to wait for prospective employers²⁷⁴. They still use however to spend time there when they are unemployed, hoping to meet a “friend of friend” that maybe “knows someone” that could need a laborer for a few days. Moreover, they use to spend time there to conduct several “deals” or simply to relax:

Ahmed: I'm surprised to notice that Italian people in Vittoria, when they meet inside a bar, spend all the time chatting without breaks... I can't see Tunisians doing the same thing...

Valeria: I also have the same perception when I look at Tunisians in Piazza Manin... they barely talk each other! They spend all the time just to look at the cars passing by...

A.: [*laughing*] Tunisians looking at the cars?! *The Tunisian is cleaver*. One of them is there, carrying four heroin ovules, to sell them [*pointing his mouth*]; another one is waiting to bring someone to the Town Council²⁷⁵; another one is waiting someone to accompany him to the *Questura*; another is spending one hour in an Internet point, another one is selling second hand phones... that other one is a dealer, and maybe he is putting some drugs inside an empty cigarettes' package and is throwing it on the street... then, when a customer arrives, he sells them for 200 Euros... he maybe earns 200 Euros in one single day! Do you get it? And then, yes, for sure he sits down to look at the cars passing by!

[Scoglitti' beach, July 20th 2013]

Yet again, to access such a nationally and male connoted space was for us not so easy. Differently from the “urgency” I felt to enter inside workplaces, however, I felt curiously no urgency to access Piazza Senia's community life. I knew naively that sooner or later “it would happen”. As “diligent” urban ethnography's students, we started to frequent the square and its surrounding streets almost everyday, paying attention to pass at different time of the day; never in a hurry, but always potentially going somewhere; starting to chat with the shopkeepers or eating cous cous in some of the small family restaurants; hoping to meet some friends for a short talk in front of a beer and at the same time learning how to stand the inappropriate male gazes addressed toward us. After several months of assiduous presence in the district, we got to know – as usually happens – that people had

²⁷³ Interview with Father Cabibo, Comiso, June 5th 2013.

²⁷⁴ The most common meeting points are now outside of the city center, on the main arterial roads conducting to the countryside.

²⁷⁵ The expression “to go the Town Council” refers to the use to apply for a document that certifies a fake *residenza*, necessary to have the residence permit. This “favor” is of course done in exchange of money.

started to “notice” us. The encounter with Bechir, one of the young Piazza Senia's dealers, represents the confirmation that we were waiting for. That evening we did not realize it immediately; later on we reflected on the fact that the guys joined us because, at that moment, they *already* knew that they could trust us. From then on, every time that we were in the square, Bechir used to “inform” us about his presence. Nodding or waving or gently poking our shoulders while passing by, he was evidently communicating “Ehi girls, I saw you!”. Ahmed and Karim, especially at the beginning, were often complaining in a paternalistic way about the fact that spending time in Piazza Senia without their company was not so “appropriate” for me and Giuliana. There were several rumors, they said, about us «going around to make question to the Tunisians»:

There are several rumors about us in Piazza Manin. Karim and Ahmed usually tend to report them to us. I mean, of course people start wondering why we are there so often, and start making plausible suppositions to “legitimize”, somehow “normalize” our presence in that space. Some of them are suspicious that we could be «from *Questura*» they say. Ahmed made this hypothesis – he says – the first time he met us inside the greenhouse, and that's why he didn't say us “Hi”. Also Aziz had the same suspect. And also the barmen working at the corner's café. According to the second “rumor”, instead, we come often to Piazza Senia maybe to buy drugs. People frequently ask us if we want some *fumo*, obviously. Also Bechir, initially, maybe thought the same thing. That's why probably he gave us so many information about who was selling what and where. In that situation, when we asked to him naively “How can you be sure we are not from *Questura*?”, he replies that he knows all the policemen in the area, and so he was sure we were not. Maybe he thought thus we could be two prospective costumers. However, *cercare fumo* could be one of the plausible motivations leading us to be always around in the square. Ahmed, at the beginning of our relation, didn't want to spend time with us in Piazza Senia, ‘cause he was scared to be suspected of being a dealer.

No one, except for Karim, seems to expect that we are a sort of journalists. But, come on, why not? Why no one could imagine that we are here because we are interested in “labor exploitation”? Some of the people usually spending time in Piazza Senia saw us several time with Semi in CGIL, or getting down of the Scifo's car. Nevertheless, the idea that we could be a sort of journalists doesn't seem to be so diffuse. We attempt all the time to explain that we are doing a research while introducing us; Ahmed and Karim know it perfectly... however this type of “rumor”, unfortunately, doesn't seem to be so diffuse.

[Vittoria, May 29th, 2013]

It took quite a lot of time for us to feel confident in the square, and for other people to ignore our presence. The possibilities that we were «writing a book about» Vittoria (Whyte: 1943), or that we were simply «friends of the poor» (Holmes, 0213) looked even too remote! Notwithstanding our continuous effort to dispel any suspect, however, there were some spaces that remained for us almost “forbidden”.

Karim invites us to drink a beer with him and one of his close friends. We agree and we ask him to «choose a bar». He suggests a café on Via Cavour [*Vittoria's main street*]. After being there for some hours, we ask Karim if it's ok for him to move to one of the bar where «the Tunisians usually go to drink and play cards». We thus move towards Piazza Manin and we reach the corner's bar, generally one of the most crowded place. Observing from the outside, the place doesn't look like a bar, it seems more or less a private house. All around the entrance numerous Tunisians. Among them, we recognize the faces of several people we have already met on the street. Abdul, in particular, one of the cigarettes' and drug's dealers, is looking at us persistently. We stop at the entrance, hesitating a bit on what to do. The TV inside the bar is transmitting the final match of the Tunisian championship, or something similar, so the place is particularly crowded today. Karim asks to someone inside if we can enter. Someone replies that all the table are full at that moment,

and that we ought to wait. We sit outside and wait. While being there in front of the door, we start to have some doubts about our initial proposal, and we make explicit these puzzlements to Karim: since there are just men inside, could it be a problem – by chance – if we get in? We don't want to create any problem, neither raise any suspicious or astonishment, we say. Karim, thus, asks again if we can actually enter. He comes back to us repeating the conversation that held with the bartender. Karim explains that «we are doing a sort of internship for the University and that we worked inside greenhouses with him». The man apologizes, and says that he's worried to let us in, since he doesn't know if we are from *Questura* or not... since the bar's owner doesn't have the right stuff [*non è in regola*], he says, he's afraid but he can't let us in! He's just a dependent worker, he doesn't want to have any problem! Karim attempts to reassure him. He seems to be quite confident in defending us, and has no problem in supporting our initial idea to get in. However, we say to him not to worry, that it's ok, we'll go inside another time.

[Piazza Senia, May 29th 2013]

After that episode, however, we did not abandon our idea of entering at a certain point in some of the male “tea and *chicha*” places. We used to be already very welcomed in some of the nearby restaurants, halal butcheries and Italian cafés frequented mainly by Tunisians. So, why not there? One night Ahmed finally seemed to cede to our stubborn pressures. It was a Sunday night, and Piazza Senia at that time was not crowded. As usual, some people were spending time alone close to the square's walls, other people playing card and drinking inside the cafés. Everything looked calm. Ahmed proposed: «Why don't we move inside to drink a tea?», addressing the place that one month earlier barred us to entry. He previously informed the bartender who, this time, agreed to let us in. As soon as we ordered, the man who was serving us came closer to Giuliana and ask her provocatively if she can, please, come back after midnight. We went out immediately, almost mad at him. And this was more or less our last attempt to enter inside such a place. We realized that maybe it would have taken for us longer to feel confident to access the cafés and we continued thus to take part to the life of the square mainly in the open spaces. At the end of our fieldwork, we used to be at ease hanging around in the neighborhood. Also Ahmed, that initially was quite shy and reluctant to spend time with us in Piazza Senia, usually preferring other spaces in which he felt less “observed”, started to enjoy sitting in the middle of the square, and gossiping with us about the other people around.

We sit in the square, even if I feel quite nervous today and I don't appreciate so much the idea of being “observed”. Ahmed instead is very confident of being here with us this night. He knows everyone around, he knows the story of every person. He starts to say something about everyone of them. About the Italian white hairs' man that usually sells stolen goods in the square (Ahmed bought from him a stolen clock and a camera). About one of the dealer, that is convinced that we are there to buy some *fumo*: «*Tunisino troppo sporco*» [he's a too “dirty” Tunisian], he says. About the kids playing in the square. About the Algerian selling cigarettes. He goes on and on pointing out everyone saying where they come from, and what they do for a living.

[Piazza Senia, July 27th 2013]

6.3. «I live soon after the sharp turn...»: exploring the countryside

At the middle of our fieldwork, we found ourselves to be in a quite relevant impasse: we had spent some times inside the workplaces, we had met several Tunisian farmworkers and we had even got used, more or less, to hang out in Piazza Senia's neighborhood. There were however several relevant aspects about whom we know very little, some areas that we were not able to explore. What about the surrounding countryside? How to access them? Where could we go, if there were no squares, no streets, no neighborhoods in which it was possible to walk around? In our poor fieldwork's "tool kit", in fact, we had not so many instruments (famous example to be inspired by or peculiar research techniques) that could be employed in order to conduct a "rural ethnography". (on this point see Corrado, Colloca, 2013). How to investigate the rural space akin we did with the urban one? In other words, how to access the countryside and its public and private areas? How to encounter Romanian farmworkers living mainly isolated and scattered in the countryside?

The occasion came after several months we were already on the field. One day outside the medical ambulatory where Giuliana and I were spending some time, being the "doctor assistant", I explain to Lorina, a Romanian woman living in the countryside, the purpose of our presence there. She was so positively impressed by the account I did about our research that without any hesitation proposed us to visit her in her place in the following days. Contrariwise, I was extremely anxious, since this was the first time, during the fieldwork, we were using such a "direct" approach.

Yesterday afternoon I called Lorina, the Romanian woman we met at the medical ambulatory. I was quite anxious about doing such a call, I didn't know how she would have reacted. Instead, she seemed to be extremely happy to talk to me and very spontaneous at the phone [...]. She proposed me to meet outside of her place, cause inside – she said – it was too small and hot. «We could go for a coffee, or move to a friends place», she said, and I replied that we were up for everything [...].

The appointment she gave me was... ehm... curious. «Go to the restaurant *Il Ciliegino*, at the roundabout go towards the direction of the white house, than you'll reach the burned firm – Don't you know it? Everyone knows it! – then you'll find the Nicosia's greenhouses and soon after the sharp turn you'll find my place».

When we arrived at the «sharp turn», we found a Romanian couple waiting at the edge of the street. We stopped to ask them some information. «Do you know a woman named Lorina that lives here in the area?». The man: «Is she black?». «No, ehm, she is Romanian actually». The man: «A lot of Romanians live here in the area... over there, over there, there...», addressing certain places that, seen from the street, doesn't seem to be properly "houses". «They all work for Roberto Battaglia». In the meanwhile Lorina and Patriciu appeared on the street's edge, some meters further. We greeted and thanked. As soon as we came closer, Lori gave me a strong and maternal hug. I was extremely happy to meet her again! She's so sweet and it's so natural to talk each other, that seems we knew each other from ages. She was well dressed and slightly made-up. Patriciu, his partner, is a "huge" and tender man. He doesn't speak Italian so fluently, but I think it depends on his shyness and not on his lack of knowledge. He seemed also very happy to meet us.

[Vittoria, c/da Alcerito, June 24th 2013]

At the end of this first day we spent together, to account to Adrian, her nephew, our first meeting, Lorina said something extremely touching: «*Sei la prima italiana che mi ha rivolto la parola*» [«You have been the first Italians who spoke to me»]:

She says that the first time I spoke to her, outside the medical ambulatory, she had the creeps [*le è venuta la pelle d'oca*!] Also right now, while she is telling Adrian about our meeting, she has again the creeps! Obviously, it's not actually true that she has never spoken with an Italian person before. What about her bosses, the doctors, the informal taxi drivers? But maybe, this was the first time that an Italian girl asked her to “know about her life”, to go out, to chat... she was extremely happy about that. She goes on inviting us to have dinners together, to participate to some family events, like her birthday... I have been also extremely excited to meet her again!

[Vittoria, c/da Alcerito, June 24th 2013]

From then on, thanks to that first encounter with Lorina and Patriciu, we started to hang out in the countryside quite assiduously, meeting Lori's relatives and friends, and more often “neighborhoods”. We got acquainted thus with the fact that countryside has his own districts, bars and meeting points, its own discos as well as the lake to go fishing and relax for a while. From then on, has happened quite often that we accompanied our friends along the rural streets, that just apparently look all the same, surrounded by identical greenhouses.

We move out of our friends' place to go for a drive with Aziz. In the car I start to chat with him, asking if there are other Tunisians and Romanians laborers living in that area they hang out with. «Tunisians *picca* [*a small number; in Sicilian*], Romanians a lot». Pointing out at his right side, he says: «here in the area, there was Denaro's company. It was a big one. He had 150 workers. Without any contract. In the last period, he didn't pay them. And then he went bankrupt, without paying any employee. And after closing the company, he opened it again at his brother's name. On your left side, instead, there is the Stimolo's firm...». And so on and so forth.

[Vittoria, c/da Alcerito, July 17th 2013]

Countryside inhabitants, thus, started to provided us with the their *mental maps* of the area, and – as a consequence – we started to rely on their descriptions in order to discover the nodes, the edges, the districts, the paths and the landmarks characterizing the rural space (Lynch, 1960)²⁷⁶. The focal points in these subjective representations, used to be, above all, the “greenhouses” being at the same times working places as well as living spaces. The «landmarks» that they individuated used to be mainly related to the economic structure of the territory (the XY firm, the ZY company...), spaces characterized by the number of laborers and their living and working conditions. Some of the meeting points, for example bars and small supermarkets selling mainly Romanian products,

²⁷⁶ In the field of behavioral geography, and later on in urban sociology, *mental mapping* has often been used to empathize the element of the human action and to underline how the subjective perceptions could shape the space's representation. In his pioneering book *The Image of the City*, Lynch (1960: 141) asks to the people participating in his research project to create a map as follows: «Make it just as if you were making a rapid description of the city to a stranger, covering all the main features. We don't expect an accurate drawing- just a rough sketch». Mental mapping is thus fundamental to understand the space hinging on its inhabitants perceptions, and not relying exclusively on the alleged “objective” representations made through the geographical maps. In our fieldwork, due to the impossibility to have at our disposal any written drawing, it was necessary to be able to rely on our informants' perceptions of the space in order to be introduced to their everyday environment; and this represents with no doubt an important advantage for our research's perspective.

assumed for us a certain *centrality*, that was impossible to detect from the “outside”. So, little by little, we got used to some of the names referring to the “Romanians” countryside discos: la Dolce Vita, Il Sesto Senso, il Boa. These are clubs located in the rural areas, attended almost exclusively by Romanian workers, and by Italian patrons fascinated – as they say – by Romanian music and disco-style²⁷⁷. What it was interesting to notice was that the rural areas, for long time depopulated and abandoned, started to be used, modified and appropriated by the numerous migrant workers, that reshape the space, attaching to it “new” transnational (as well as local) meanings (cf. Omizzolo, 2013 and Caruso, 2013).

6.4. *Hanging around: the trade union, the surgery the fruit&vege markets*

During our fieldwork, another consistent part of our efforts was devoted to explore the local fruit and vegetable markets, located in Vittoria (the biggest one)²⁷⁸, Santa Croce Camerina, Donnalucata and Ispica. Social research, in fact, knows little about these relevant economic nodes. Studies on the value chain, for instance, usually lack the ethnographic knowledge regarding these fundamental hubs where production is stored to be bought and sold. There are not so many empirical accounts, for instance, regarding the economic and social relationships taking place between producers, *commissionari*, *mediatori* and *commercianti* (i.e. different “typologies” of brokers) working within the big fruit and vegetable markets. Marketplaces represents thus an interesting context that deserves further investigation. To have the possibility of exploring some of these local *Mercati Ortofrutticoli* we decided to “follow” a broker, during his everyday work. The period of *shadowing*, was conducted (not uninterruptedly) between the second half of April and the first half of May (2013). Thanks to the precious help of Beppe, a broker and packinghouse's manager in Donnalucata, we were able to “access” marketplaces, to interview and talk with several *box* tenants (*commissionari* or informally *posteggianti*) and to numerous *mediatori*, the majority of them speaking enthusiastically about their labor. Thanks to the possibility to hear also some of the Beppe's phone calls, with brokers working mainly in the North of Italy, we got acquainted with the

²⁷⁷ It was one of this Italian habitué that accompanied us to visit one of these places, in July 2013. In that occasion, I noticed, once again, the strong interpenetration existing among productive places and life and entertainment spaces. The disco we visited, in fact, was managed by a tomatoes' producer, and was attached to his greenhouses' property. When we met him, the man declared that: «Romanian living in the countryside had no place to enjoy their spare time». So, he started opening a quite small bar were people working for him could drink and dance. From then on, he enlarged his amusement enterprise impressively. It was thus curious for me to notice that he was somehow “receiving back” through “parties” the money he doled out as a salary [Vittoria's countryside, July 14th, 2013].

²⁷⁸ According to our informants, Vittoria's fruit and vegetable market is the biggest market located at the site of production in Italy.

mechanisms through which fresh vegetables value chain works and is organized. Unfortunately all these rich set of data did not find enough room within this thesis, more focused on labor process inside greenhouses and packinghouse. They represent, however, a background knowledge of inestimable value that could be eventually deepened through further researches.

During the period of our staying in Vittoria, moreover, we spent several hours in some of the services organized by local institutions, associations and trade unions to provide diverse types of support for migrant laborers and their families. Honestly, the decision regarding the prospective places to frequent was not so difficult to take. In Vittoria, where our fieldwork was based, notwithstanding the great incidence of migrant workers (see the Introduction), there were not so many “services” devoted to deal with immigration issue. We approached – for instance – the local churches activities²⁷⁹, even if they seem to be mainly devoted to people residing in a *Centro d'Accoglienza* connected to the church (thus not so relevant for the purpose of our study). Giuliana approached also the local Mosques (located in Vittoria and Comiso). Moreover, we contacted several local trade unions, asking for the possibility to meet and realize some interviews. Surprisingly no one, except for FLAI-CGIL, accepted our invitation, even after several solicitations. During our first meeting, in January 2013, Giuseppe Scifo, the secretary of the FLAI-CGIL's local office, welcomed us providing a «*piena agibilità*» [full availability to use] in every moment the spaces of the organization. Moreover, they gladly accepted our company during the tour they usually make in the countryside with the *Solidal Transfert*, a service aimed at providing advocacy for what concerns labor and sexual exploitation, addressed to vulnerable migrants residing in the countryside. With Peppe, Bernadette, Semi and Emanuele (the latter working for the Solidal Transfert project), not only we get along very well with, but we also entrained a mutual stimulating relationship, that was fundamental for our experience in Vittoria.

Last but not least, we found very useful to attend a surgery providing free medical assistance for regular and irregular migrants (see ch. III, par. 3). Thanks to the great availability of doctor Orudgeva, with whom we shared the purpose of our investigation, in fact, we could be present to the colloquiums she made with the patients visiting the ambulatory. The first time we joined her while she was working, she surprised us incredibly: before starting, she provided us with two white jackets; from then on, she asked to each patient whether we could listen or not to their conversation, specifying that we were conducting a research. Of course, the white jacket did the rest, turning us in

²⁷⁹ The *Centro d'Accoglienza* managed by Don Beniamino Sacco provides shelter, food and Italian classes, for people residing in the Center. Moreover, it encompasses a greenhouses property and a shop where greenhouses' products are sold for the “community” self-maintenance. An association of Italian and migrant women is also working in connection with the Center.

two totally trustworthy “doctors”. Was it “ethic” to accept her suggestion and wear the white jackets?

Last but not least, in the period of our staying in Vittoria, together with the numerous informal conversations we had during the situations of participant observation²⁸⁰, we also realized several semi-structured interviews (43 in total)²⁸¹. The interviews were usually addressed to people involved or well informed about the local agricultural labor market, and in particular: 4 farmworkers and *compartecipanti* (3 male; 1 female); 8 greenhouses owners (all male); 3 packinghouses managers (2 male; 1 female); 3 nurseries owners (2 female; 1 male); a breeder working for a seeds' company (male); an agronomist (male); 3 fruit and vegetable markets directors (male); 3 brokers (male); 6 among politicians and technicians, members of the local institutions (5 male, 1 female)²⁸²; a trade unionist (male); an *Ispettore del lavoro* (male); 3 among doctors and psychologist (2 female, 1 male); 3 priests (obviously males); a member of an association (male); a journalist (male); a policemen (male).

7. On covered participant observation: the good reasons for being a “fink”

The episode just mentioned, referred to the full availability of Doctor Orudgeva to provide a solid “alibi” for our investigation, as well as my experience of covered participant observation realized inside SicilSerre, allow us to develop a palette of questions regarding some of the *ethic quandaries* emerging within social research, and within qualitative research in particular. Is it *fair* that some of the people with whom we share our ethnographic experiences are not acquainted with the fact that we are conducting a research in their everyday environments? Under which circumstances is actually *deemed to be fair* and *legitimate* that people could not be informed about the ethnographer's actual purposes? Which kind of advantages, opportunities, limits and risks do the covered participant observation develop? These represent some of the dilemmas that usually harness ethnographic research²⁸³. In my experience, in particular, I found myself in the necessity to

²⁸⁰ We roughly counted to have collected (more or less in depth) the stories of 78 people, especially among farmworkers, packinghouses laborers and employers. This number however is evidently an approximation.

²⁸¹ We always asked to our interlocutors if it was possible to use a tape recorder during our conversations. Not always, however, they accepted to be registered. The interviews' settings varied a lot, being mainly: workplaces and offices, private houses, bars, etc.

²⁸² In particular: G. Nicosia, Vittoria's mayor; C. Aiello, Vittoria's former mayor, now in the town Council; M. Fiore, assessor in charge of agriculture; G. Caruano, assessor in charge of welfare provisions [*servizi sociali*]; G. Consolino and G. Cannizzo, *servizi sociali*.

²⁸³ On this topic see, among the others, Semi (2010: 41-48), Marzano (2006: 62-100; 2012) and Christians

“defend” the decision to conduct a covered participant observation, in front of several colleagues and professors working for the University of Montreal, a North American country where the practice of requiring the *informed consent* before undertaking certain research experiences is diffused (on this topic see Marzano, 2012). In those circumstances, I was asked – not as an “accusation” but mainly as a form of curiosity – to justify my choice and narrate my “peculiar” experience. Before that moment, however, speaking mostly with Italian colleagues and professors, I had never doubted about the “fairness” of my decision, and none of my interlocutors seemed to be particularly surprised about my accounts. I started wondering why. The answer was quite straightforward: research's (and researcher's) ethic is, as everything else, a social construction, deeply *situated* and *culturally shaped*. So, while in some contexts, “obsessed” by the necessity to receive the approval from the University's ethical committees, to conduct a covered research could appear at a first glance an amoral choice, in my case, since I was coming from a different research tradition, these type of considerations did not impede to opt for this form of observation. What is “moral”, in fact, is evidently historically defined (Rahola, 2002). Pioneering ethnographic researches realized within the colonial peripheries, for instance, used to be devoted to the “observation” of populations deemed remote and “savage”, with the purpose of producing a form of Knowledge aiming at their subjugation. Nevertheless those works were deemed to be high moral undertakings, since the ethical discourse constructed during the colonial period endowed them with a significant degree of legitimacy. On the other way around, instead, a large part of contemporary critical ethnography is positioning side by side with subalterns subjects, in order to strive alongside with them, «declaring the unavoidable «political» character of the ethnographic work, and its vocation to actively intervene in social and power relationship» (Marzano, 2006: 66). As I already argued, the “form of morality” that I gradually developed during my everyday experience in the field was mainly inspired by this latter conception of the role of social science. For what concerns the ethical behaviors underlining this conception of the research, Marco Marzano – quoting Lee – defines this posture as a *conflicting methodology*. Adopting this methodology, «*i danni morali inflitti alla reputazione e all'immagine di alcuni gruppi sociali o di talune istituzioni sono il risultato di un'azione volontaria da parte dell'etnografo. I metodi adoperati da chi si rifà a questa prospettiva ricordano per molti versi quelli del giornalismo d'inchiesta*²⁸⁴ *che ha da sempre come obiettivo primario lo smascheramento delle malefatte dei potenti, la denuncia dei soprusi, la*

(2005).

²⁸⁴ To provide an example, a few years before my study, the Italian public opinion was shocked by a reportage realized by a famous Italian journalist, Fabrizio Gatti, based on his personal experience as a fake Romanian farmworker hired by *caporali* in the tomatoes picking in Puglia [see Gatti, F. (2006), *Io schiavo in Puglia*, in L'espresso, September 7th 2006].

difesa dei deboli. In questo caso, il ricorso da parte del sociologo all'inganno non è motivato, come nella posizione utilitarista, dal diritto a conoscere scientificamente il mondo sociale, ma piuttosto dai valori politici ai quali il ricercatore aderisce, dalla sua visione del mondo. Le manipolazioni, le bugie e i sotterfugi ai quali egli talvolta fa ricorso nei confronti di alcuni tra i suoi soggetti sono necessari per smascherare le istituzioni che a questi metodi hanno fatto ampio ricorso» (Marzano, 2006: 70). In the circumstance in which I was embedded during my fieldwork, thus, I actually felt to behave like a «fink», as Goffman suggested (1989:125), since I was using the same weapons developed by the institutions usually in charge of social control; however, I was employing them with the completely opposite purpose of *unveiling* (and not supporting) these sort of oppressive mechanisms. To be more precise, differently from a journalistic inquiring, the effort of my ethnographic observation was not “limited” to unmask and denounce social unbalances, but it was aimed at attempting to *understand* broadly the historical and material causes leading to certain social dynamics (embracing a *Verstehen's* approach, as Weber suggests).

Starting from this perspective, thus, I firmly believe that employing the method of covered participant observation, for an extremely limited period, as I did, does not constitute in itself an amoral undertaking. Since I have never disclosed the real name or position of the small company that I addressed with the pseudonym of SicilSerre, this firm could be (and in a certain sense is) actually everywhere. The findings of my broader investigation, suggest – in fact – that the SicilSerre's example could be considered paradigmatic. The fact that a certain labor market situation is (unfortunately) so “typical”, constitutes the most compelling guarantee, assuring that it would be difficult, even for an embedded actor to recognize the places and the participants I am referring to²⁸⁵.

During the entire period of my fieldwork, and especially during my experience of covered participant observation, the genuine moral concern to which I felt bound was to avoid to create any type of “problems” for the people involved, together with me, in this ethnographic experience, being perfectly aware of the fact that our action as researches have *concrete* consequences on *real* people. In my case, in particular, my main concern was to “protect” Ahmed from the risk of losing his job whether Giovanni, our employer, would come to know my identity. I attempted to reduce this hazard agreeing with Ahmed, that was perfectly aware of my position²⁸⁶, a simple “rescue”

²⁸⁵ To be definitely sure of these suppositions, I proposed to Peppe Scifo widely informed about the local labor market's situation, to read the draft of a text narrating my experience. I did not receive from him any negative feedback.

²⁸⁶ Ahmed was well acquainted with the purposes of our investigation, due to the fact that Giuliana and I devoted quite a lot of time in the attempt of accounting for our work. Moreover, since we realized that explaining verbally what “to make a research” actually means was not enough, we proposed him to join us during some of our interviews. Even jeopardizing the entire “interview context”, in those circumstances we were more concerned in letting Ahmed accessing “our field”. The result of these efforts was that he finally conceived our work as being based on the practice of

strategy: he should deny to be acquainted with my work as a researcher. However, considering the extremely brief experience that I had inside the greenhouse, we never had the necessity to resort on this banal excuse.

Another consideration that worried me during the period of my fieldwork with Ahmed concerned what to do with the salary that I was receiving as a “fake” farmworker. I deemed not “fair”, in fact, to be paid inside the greenhouse for a task (participant observation) for which I had been already paid by my University. Overwhelmed by own doubts, at the end of my fieldwork, before leaving Vittoria, I decided to give that money back to Ahmed. In hindsight, I actually regretted that decision. Comparing my experience with akin situations occurred to other ethnographers worried about similar moral instances, I am now not so convinced about the appropriateness of that choice. Hesitations, doubts, puzzlements and even mistakes constitute in any case an inevitable part of the fieldwork.

This wholehearted defense in favor of covered participant observation, however, does not represent an absolute support toward this technique itself. As every other methodological tool, also this one need to be used appropriately. In fact, I firmly believe that, in other circumstances, it is not only amoral, but even counter-productive to realize a covered participant observation. In certain situations (i.e. in the case in which we asked to be employed inside a greenhouses' company) a covered observation would have generated useless “suspects” toward us, “suspects” that would have totally impeded our presence on the field. In the Gurrieri's company, for instance, the decision to declare openly the purposes of our investigation contributed to create a relaxed and complicit atmosphere, comfortable both for us that – we hope – for our fellows²⁸⁷. Moreover, the fact that we were conducting a research in which the workers' everyday life was deemed to be worth of consideration and genuinely appreciated, represents – at least for some of our colleagues – a positive experience. The simple fact that we were there, in fact, constituted several times the pretext to stimulate the development of individual or collective accounts, that our fellows prayed us to «not forget».

«scassare la michia in campagna», i.e. “making annoying questions to the people working in the countryside”. Even considering our work mainly superfluous and unproductive – I think – he was nevertheless keen on helping us, proving “good occasions” for our research. In the case of SicilSerre, he was also providing me with several “white lies” that I should use with the “uncle”. Nevertheless, during one of the moment in which I started to obsess him with questions, scared about the fact that our employer could “discover” my position, I was, once again, surprised by Ahmed's reaction, who frankly asked me: «So, who are you actually?».

²⁸⁷ Our team's members, for instance, were often teasing us, asking whether we would have encompassed in «our final report» certain embarrassing situations occurred within the firm. Initially, they actually expected that our boss ought also to write a sort of report to be shown to our University. They were thus cheating us saying: «Watch out! Franco is going to write this and that in the report». To joke frankly on our work created an incredibly positive atmosphere. They were nice occasions to laugh together and have some pauses from the monotony of the greenhouses work. Moreover, they helped in minimizing our feeling of being two “finks” inside the workplace.

It was a great lunch break! We were all of us resting under the olives tree, when Afrim started his account [...] [*He accounted, in an extremely amusing way, his troubled story, namely his experience of traveling, working and living in Italy as an irregular migrant*]. His way of narrating was so funny, even if so bitter, that we all bend over with laughter! When we came back inside the greenhouse, he kindly asked to Giuliana: «When you are back home, please, write down in your notebook that there was an old and crazy Albanian man that told you this amazing story today». He seems to be “glad” toward her (and toward us), since he knew that someone was carefully listening and even remembering his life story.

[Donnalucata, April 11th 2013]

8. Considering gender

How we *perform* our gender identity during our fieldwork is obviously an extremely relevant aspect to be considered. The effort to discuss how gendered bodies matters, moreover, is deemed to be almost compulsory when the ethnographer is a young girl embedded in an almost male context (cf. Doria, 2014). In several good ethnographies written by male scholars, instead, gender is often a topic concerning “the field outside”; they do not necessary display the gendered position that they assumed within the field. Male gender, in this sense, it is more often “neutralized” and taken for granted, obviously with some good exceptions²⁸⁸. Being a woman, contrariwise, gender is expected to be an analytical matter of concern, an issue with whom – willy nilly – we are required to confront. Throughout this thesis, I dealt with this topic several times. In chapters II, III and IV I briefly discussed about the «arrangements between the sexes» emerging in the work environments that we visited. In chapter V, then, I used gender as one of the main lenses through which looking at the everyday experience of men and women inside workplaces. I thus reflected on how gender and organizational culture are mutually shaped (defining male and female jobsites, male and female tasks, etc.). At this point, thus, I would like to make just some extra comments referring mainly to my gendered position within the field by taking into consideration our “double presence”. What does it mean to be two women to conduct a fieldwork? Aside from some straightforward considerations²⁸⁹, this exercise was for me extremely useful to experience how differently two women embedded in the same situation could conceive their gendered position. As usual, it could be useful to provide an example. One day, while working at Gurrieri s.r.l., during a break, I started to shout rudely at Giuliana stating that that I was detesting and finding unbearable Peppe machist's behavior toward us: «And then, have you noticed that you two, guys, are the slowest in finishing to

²⁸⁸ See, among the others, the account made by Domenico Perrotta (2011a), reflecting on how his masculinity and his sexual behavior become a topic of discussion together with his Romanian male fellows inside the construction site.

²⁸⁹ Obviously, being two women, instead of each of us alone, we felt more at ease and “safer” in a greater number of situations.

pick a tomatoes' line? Come on, we should *demonstrate that we can work hard* [implicating as men]²⁹⁰». Giuliana shook her shoulders. She was not in the mood of demonstrating nothing to no one. There was no point, according to her, to force ourselves to accelerate our work rhythms. Needless to say, our divergent viewpoints were nevertheless complementary also in that situation. After several months, when I attempted to discuss this unpleasant episode with Giuliana, she amusingly summarized that conversation saying: «Are you pretending to maintain that in that case we negotiated our gendered posture differently, acting I myself as a *femminuccia* [sissy] while you as a *femminista* [feminist]?». Aside from the gag that I found extremely funny, her intuition seemed to me highly appropriate: leaving aside any comparative or “judging” intention, what was interesting to notice was that our gendered approach towards the field was totally different. Moreover, each of us was performing a certain role, *also because* of the presence of the other person. I was thus negotiating my role as a woman first and foremost *towards* and *with* Giuliana. These obvious consideration were useful to understand what does it mean to conceive gender as *a practice* (and not as a given): obviously enough, even finding ourselves in the same field, at the same time, facing the same external set of opportunities and constrains, each of us was *practicing gender in a different way*, each of us according to her own sensitivity.

9. Writing about the field

The ethnographic method – it is often empathized – allows young and enthusiastic scholars to spend time on the field, observing and being involved into the “world outside”. Honestly, this is a quite naïve depiction of what an ethnographer actually does everyday. It is undoubtedly true that the main feature catheterizing this type of experiences is the researcher's active participation on the field; but it is undoubtedly true, nevertheless, that the greatest part of the ethnographic work is still realized within the libraries (where also its final product is generally confined). The Chicago School's motto that hope for «going out there and take a look around» is still unfortunately largely disregarded²⁹¹. The great majority of the ethnographer's time, on the field as well as at home, is – in fact – devoted

²⁹⁰ In this situation, the role of a woman at work is constructed as a «challenge». This narration embraces, in any case, a dichotomous gender construction, impling the “need to *demonstrate*” to the other colleagues to have certain skills (on this topic, see Murgia, 2009: 125). My behavior was also motivated, as I said, by the attempt to not seem “privileged observers” inside the workplace.

²⁹¹ In a PhD training, lasting on average between three and four years, the student is suggested to be on the field for a period ranging from six months up to one year; this clearly means that the time actually devoted to be «on the street» is less than 1/3 of the entire ethnographic job.

to the process of writing, realized alone, in front of a laptop. And this process rarely constitute a voluntary and creative act. More often it is simply the result (barely adequate) of a self-disciplined endeavor to “register” thoughts. Imagine to have worked inside a greenhouse for 9/10 hours and to be forced to sit on your chair to write for another three hours before being able to rest: that is just to explain, concretely, that I found terribly frustrating to force myself to write, on the field as well as once at home. Being at my first experience, these feelings of frustration and confusion have often stimulated the emergence of genuine doubts concerning the efficacy of such a method, weaving so deeply emotional as well as analytical efforts. I am thus afraid that this mix of anxiety and turmoil has affected the elaboration of the written text.

Once left the field, in August 2013, I started to work at the preparation of this thesis. As any other ethnographer, I began analyzing the huge amount of fieldnotes and interviews' transcriptions that I took in the previous months. The annotation I jotted down in the field have been analyzed in two steps. Thanks to a first reading of the entire *corpus*, I was able to selecte some «sensitizing concepts» (Blumer, 2008), namely categories and definitions around which the ethnographic “narration” tended to turn. In my case, for example, I identified the pivotal concept of “day labor”, emerging from numerous account and connecting different everyday situations. Then, I undertook a second reading in order to code the notes (Semi, 2010a: 97), being attempting – this time – to grasp the set of elements useful to sharpen this central concept. I was able thus to identify the day labor's main dimensions, i.e. the elements catheterizing daily workers experience and narrations (time, body, material insecurities, future uncertainties, etc.). Then, I attempted to understand, through the reading of my texts, how the “classical” sociological dimensions (i.e. gender, nationality and class) tended to be shaped and are reshaped inside the workplaces, giving room to subjugation as well as to forms of resistance.

Analyzing my notes I also realized, unfortunately, that there were several episodes that I “missed” to report. I realized, moreover, that this “lack on notes” sometimes was not totally casual, even almost unconscious. I was thus forced to recognize that the very process of fieldnotes' writing has been already quite selective, notwithstanding I deeply strove to “let it open” and to let my thoughts flowing freely as much as it was possible. I think however, that I somehow unconsciously “refused” to jot down some episodes, since they provoked me too much “trouble”; episodes that I did not know how to handle (because I did not want to undertake the risk of being too voyeuristic in my descriptions); or episodes that deeply hurt me, since I felt humiliated or embittered. Thus, even attempting to provide an initial “naturalistic” description of the field, I realized that I was totally

unable to attain such a goal²⁹². Being able to handle (analytical and emotional) complexity is in fact an extremely difficult task; as a consequence, to apply a sort “self-censorship” to simplify our work, thus, it is a risk easy to run. Even at the very initial stage, thus, I undertook, willy nilly, a *process of translation* of the “reality” into a “text”, knowing already that I was going to lose several “real” nuances in favor of a flat and simplified exposition.

At a second stage, moreover, while producing an elaborated text, I led this process of translation to its extreme consequences. As any ethnographer acknowledges, in fact, the interpretative effort could be sometimes so radical, till the point that, in numerous cases, the people with whom we shared the ethnographic experience are almost not able to “understand” anymore what we are talking about. I obviously face this problem directly, but I nevertheless think that this represents an overall limit of the ethnographic writing. In my case, the *problem of translation* is epitomized by the necessity to use a foreign language (English) to provide an account of the field; this choice had the not superfluous consequence that almost none of the people I am writing about is going to be able to read these considerations. This is undoubtedly one of my main sorrows. On the other way around, I would like to express my deep concern also for the reader: the use of the English language not only limited my possibility of expression, but, above all, limited substantially the extreme richness encompassed in everyday people “voices”. As I argued several time, I firmly believe that it is not possible, neither desirable, an alleged “naturalistic” transposition of the field's language. The field's language needs *in any case to be translated* into an elaborated text. Nevertheless to keep the several nuances that a language embeds would have enriched drastically the reader's comprehension. In my field, for example, the language spoken was an extremely interesting mix between Italian and the local Sicilian dialect²⁹³. It would have been thus meaningful to underline that a Tunisian man was currently speaking a fluent Sicilian (while not Italian); it would have been meaningful to highlight that a local politicians have not renounced to his strong Sicilian accent, in order to stress his belonging to a certain territory; it would have been meaningful indeed to notice that a local trade unionist tends sometimes to use some Sicilian expressions, in order to show closeness (or feeling of belonging) to the working class. All these relevant nuances, unfortunately, have been lost in the final written text. I tried to limit this inconvenient using sometimes the direct Sicilian expression

²⁹² Moreover, as I stated above, my fieldnotes were often written after several hours of discussion held with Giuliana. This means that they were fraught with the interpretations of «the interpretations of interpretations».

²⁹³ The fact that I come from Calabria, and I was thus able to understand Sicilian, was in fact fundamental to access the field. I would have missed the overwhelming majority of the “natural” conversations, in the workplaces as well as in the public spaces, being not confident with it (as it happened with the Arabic and the Romanian language). This aspect was not superfluous for the people with whom I was speaking, that were frequently asking me whether I could understand Sicilian or not. The fact that we could “share” a similar language demonstrated closeness not only for what concerns the regions of belonging, but also as a class marker. Franco, for instance, to know if I was used to speak the dialect with my own family, asked me what was my father doing for a living.

with a proposal of translation into square brackets. In several other cases, instead, I did not propose, but I impose my own translation. I am thus directly responsible of what “people say” and “how they say it” throughout these pages.

10. Reflection on field research

«Uno sguardo che è contaminato, una differenza che è sempre rappresentata e un senso che è conseguenza di una continua negoziazione; il tutto segnato alla base da squilibri di potere e di parola» (Rahola, 2002: 33).

I would like to spend some more words, before concluding this thick methodological Appendix, providing an overall reflections about my experience, although in the form of more general considerations concerning the ethnographic methods.

Ethnography, meant as a research practice as well as a writing genre (Dal Lago, 1995), is fraught with several contradictions and fallacies akin any other forms of discourses' production.

In the first place, the ethnographer, endowed with the “power to talk”, is often tormented by necessity to clarify from which *position* she is speaking. Both the approaches framing the research as the practice to *speak about* or to *speak for*, demonstrated, in fact, their strong limits. The initial ethnographic accounts aimed at “speaking about” (social reality) have been, right now, mainly overcome; they derived, in fact, from a research's tradition that pretended to be as close as possible to positive science, conceiving “the reality out there” as something detached from the observer, and thus immediately recognizable and cognizable. As Michel Burawoy states (2014), with a fascinating metaphor, these “type” of social scientists attempt to behave «as a fly out of a window» looking at the world without interacting. At the opposite side, another methodological (and epistemological) proposal, instead, conceives ethnography as a “political” practice, a tool immediately useful to influence and subvert current power structures. Numerous of these good intentioned “interventionist researchers” undertake extraordinary effort to “speak for”, pretending to be able, through the production of “alternative” discourses, to “provide a voice” to subaltern subjects. Needless to say, is equally difficult to uphold this second proposal without postulating – more or less explicitly – a researcher's alleged superiority compared with the actors' critical capacity, often clumsily “masked” as embeddedness with the context studies. Being trapped between these two positions within social sciences, several scholars attempted to undertake a genre of investigation and writing that tries to *start from the self*, stimulating a *reflexive* discourse. Needless to say, this approach has been accused

from one side of being not “objective” enough, and from the other side of being not “committed” enough. Nevertheless, *reflexivity* has been considered the only possible alternative to at least partially try to overcome these intrinsic contradictions, in which we remain – no matter what – harnessed (Burawoy 1998; Cardano, 2001; Marzano, 2001; Rahola, 2002).

To start from a subjective narration, however, stimulates the emergence of other types of relevant inconveniences. First and foremost, ethnographers are concerned to evaluate how much an individual account, that has its origin in a subjective viewpoint, could be considered *trustworthy*. To be trustworthy, obviously, an ethnographic experience should never be shallow and superficial. It needs to be deep and intense. The ethnographer has to develop «an intimate familiarity with people and situations» (White, 1943: 357) allowing her to “feel” the manifold complexity any given context. An ethnography, thus, needs time. However, as I already stated, the forms in which research is nowadays organized do not provide this fundamental resource, seriously jeopardizing the possibility to realize a good job. This is, in my opinion, one of the main constraints by which the ethnographic practice – especially right now – is bound. Moreover, ethnography needs time also to be practiced and «domesticated»: we should *train* that «certain gaze» and *learn* how to produce trustworthy accounts. We should, moreover, have the possibility to perceive our work as perfectible *through time*. If the research reports, like in this case, become the hasty and rough product of a (knowledge) worker, harnessed herself by the precariousness of labor market conditions, the possibility to realize a good job is, yet again, jeopardized. Being too often the result of a precarious form of labor, current research runs the risk of resulting – in turn – fragmented, not solid and not socially meaningful. I would like to make these considerations explicit to the reader, because I truly believe that how a *research* is, strongly depends on how a *researcher* is, being herself strongly affected by her own material conditions and everyday life.

Secondly, the subjective dimension in which the ethnographic research is embedded generates another sort of problem. How, starting from a local and situated experience, it is possible to produce any type of *generalization*? We are now dealing with a deep and longstanding problem with which the entire micro-sociological tradition is constantly forced to confront. Generalizations, scholars maintain, are possible thanks to a meticulous work aimed at “extended out” theory from particular cases, through a rigorous inductive process (Burawoy, 1998; 2009). This practically means to be able to confront, above all, with several other theoretical contributions and to make numerous comparisons among different cases-studies through periods and spaces. Our new empirical results, in this way, could potentially revisit and consequently innovate theory. I modestly recognize that this thesis still needs further improvements on this very aspect. Even attempting to approach, test, connect and innovate several theoretical perspectives (economic and labor sociology, migration and

workplace studies, intersectional analyses) this contribution is still quite weak in the fulfillment of «extending out from the field» (Burawoy, 1998: 5)

Lastly, I would like to express a final consideration concerning the difficulties to merge together an *emotional-relational* “type” and an *analytical-rational* “type” of comprehension. Starting from a subjective and mainly emotional experience, how can a researcher be able to produce an analytical discourse (that ought to be trustworthy and generalizable)? While positive social science shows a propensity towards the alleged “objective reasoning”, reflexive ethnography hinges on an intense activity that tends to assume the form of a proper *emotional labor*²⁹⁴. In order to develop a reflexive practice, in fact, on the one hand, we are asked to *contain and manage our emotions* (to become closer to a certain expectation of scientific “objectivity”); on the other hand, we are required to use actively our relational capabilities, as well as our feelings, as a stimulus (and a starting point) for comprehension and reflection. In a nutshell, we are somehow expected to produce value from [*mettere a valore*] our emotional side, paradoxically through an effort of rationalization of our feelings. As any ethnographer directly experienced, this continuous shift between “feelings” and “thoughts” is an extremely tiring, as well as frustrating and sometimes even unfair, experience.

All the all, the fieldwork – and more in general the ethnographic research – fraught with frustrations, rage, boredom, but also with emotional zeal, trust, love and enthusiasm, represents – in any case – a fascinating experience, involving and thus deeply affecting the entire ethnographer's life.

²⁹⁴ According to Arlie Russell Hochschild, emotional labor means the management of the emotions, in the cases in which this effort appears to be openly required in the job description. The emotional labor is sold in exchange of a salary. It has thus an exchange values (ibidem, 1983: 7).

Lorina: [Abbracciandomi] Lo sognavi questo?

Valeria: Cosa intendi?

Lorina: Lo immaginavi tutto questo? Le campagne, noi... Avresti mai immaginato di conoscerci, di stare qui..

Valeria: No, mai. Ma è bello. Davvero. E tu?

Lorina: No, neanch'io... quando sento mia figlia in Romania e lei mi chiede: «Mamma che fai?», io le dico che ho conosciuto delle ragazze qui, e sono contenta... E lei dice: «Va bene mamma, se sei contenta tu, sono contenta anch'io».

[Vittoria, C/da Alcerito, July 17th, 2013]

Appendix

Table 1. Number of firms by Utilized Agricultural Area (UAA) and land use (province of Ragusa)

Area		Ragusa (Province)				
Year		2010				
Utilized Agricultural Area (UUA)		Very small firms (0 - 1,99 Ha)	Small firms (2 - 9,99 Ha)	Medium-sized firms (10 - 49,99 Ha)	Big firms (50 Ha and more)	TOTAL
Land use						
Open field cultivations		292	362	151	32	837
Protected cultivations		2317	828	157	29	3331
Protected cultivations	Tomatoes inside greenhouses	1639	615	110	15	2379
	Other vegetables inside greenhouses	1063	379	73	14	1529
	Other cultivations in <i>tunnel, campane, etc.</i>	15	29	19	14	77
Open field cultivations of flowers and plants		24	12	3	...	39
Protected cultivations of flowers and plants		158	71	8	...	237

Source: author's elaborations on ISTAT data (2012)

Table 2. Number of agricultural firm managers (male and female) by nationality in the Province of Ragusa (year: 2010)

Manager citizenship	Italian		Form EU (27 countries)		Extra EU (27 countries)		Total	
Area								
Italy		1617100		2528		1256		1620884
Sicily		219404		164		109		219677
Ragusa (province of)		12706		13		51		12770
Acate		1192		3		1		1196
Comiso		607			607
Ispica		954		2	..			956
Santa Croce Camerina		485		1		18		504
Scicli		1160		1		2		1163
Vittoria		1850		1		13		1864

Source: author's elaborations on ISTAT data (2012). The data considers all the types of agricultural firms (protected and open field cultivations, *seminativi*, etc.). It does not consider the people born abroad that obtained the Italian citizenship, right now managers of their own firm.

Table 3. Number of people registered to INPS (Vittoria) as farmworkers by nationality (2000-2011)

Vittoria, INPS data												
Year	2000		2001		2006		2007		2010		2011	
Total number (Italian and foreigners)	7174		7460		8584		9346		9880		10196	
NATIONALITY	a.v.	% on tot. amm.										
Tunisia	1215	16,94	1263	16,93	1385	16,13	1456	15,59	1761	17,82	2065	20,25
Romania	4	0,06	5	0,07	36	0,42	1166	12,48	1776	17,98	1895	18,59
Albania	58	0,81	69	0,92	150	1,75	161	1,72	177	1,79	196	1,92
Algeria	130	1,81	131	1,76	252	2,94	251	2,69	183	1,85	185	1,81
Morocco	13	0,18	3	0,04	20	0,23	25	0,27	90	0,91	81	0,79
Poland	9	0,12	9	0,12	55	0,64	77	0,82	50	0,51	57	0,58
Egypt	13	0,18	10	0,13	19	0,22	16	0,17	43	0,43	58	0,57
Ukraine	0	0	0	0	22	0,26	22	0,23	24	0,24	25	0,24
TOTAL (foreigners)	1442	20,1	1490	19,97	1939	22,59	3174	33,97	4104	41,53	4562	44,75

Source: INPS data, Vittoria office. Elaboration by F. Toscano (2013)

Table 4. Number of people registered to INPS (province of Ragusa) as farmworkers by nationality (year: 2012)

Year: 2012														
Area	Total number of farmworkers (INPS)	Number of foreigners	% of foreigners	TUNISIA	ROMANIA	ALBANIA	MAROCCO	POLONIA	ALGERIA	EGITTO	LIBIA	INDIA	UCRAINA	SUDAN
ACATE	2788	1865	66,89	512	1199	32	49	36	9	11	1	1	15	0
CHIARAMONTE	897	217	24,19	49	111	35	0	1	1	0	0	17	3	0
COMISO	1912	644	33,68	362	189	35	17	9	8	1	3	4	16	0
GIARRATANA	248	11	4,44	1	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	5	0	0
ISPICA	1526	747	48,95	362	206	12	48	47	36	4	2	24	4	2
MODICA	1647	286	17,36	99	47	14	69	16	1	0	0	22	15	3
MONTEROSSO	378	2	0,53	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
POZZALLO	512	151	29,49	74	36	18	7	4	2	0	0	0	9	1
RAGUSA	2087	1245	59,66	684	328	130	13	7	15	2	1	63	1	1
SANTA CROCE	2325	1562	67,18	971	295	187	8	7	73	7	2	12	0	0
SCICLI	2619	1085	41,43	514	85	435	2	23	1	0	3	18	4	0
VITTORIA	10044	4745	47,24	2188	1925	187	97	51	185	71	4	7	24	6
RAGUSA (Province of)	26983	12560	46,55	5816	4425	1086	310	203	331	96	16	173	91	13

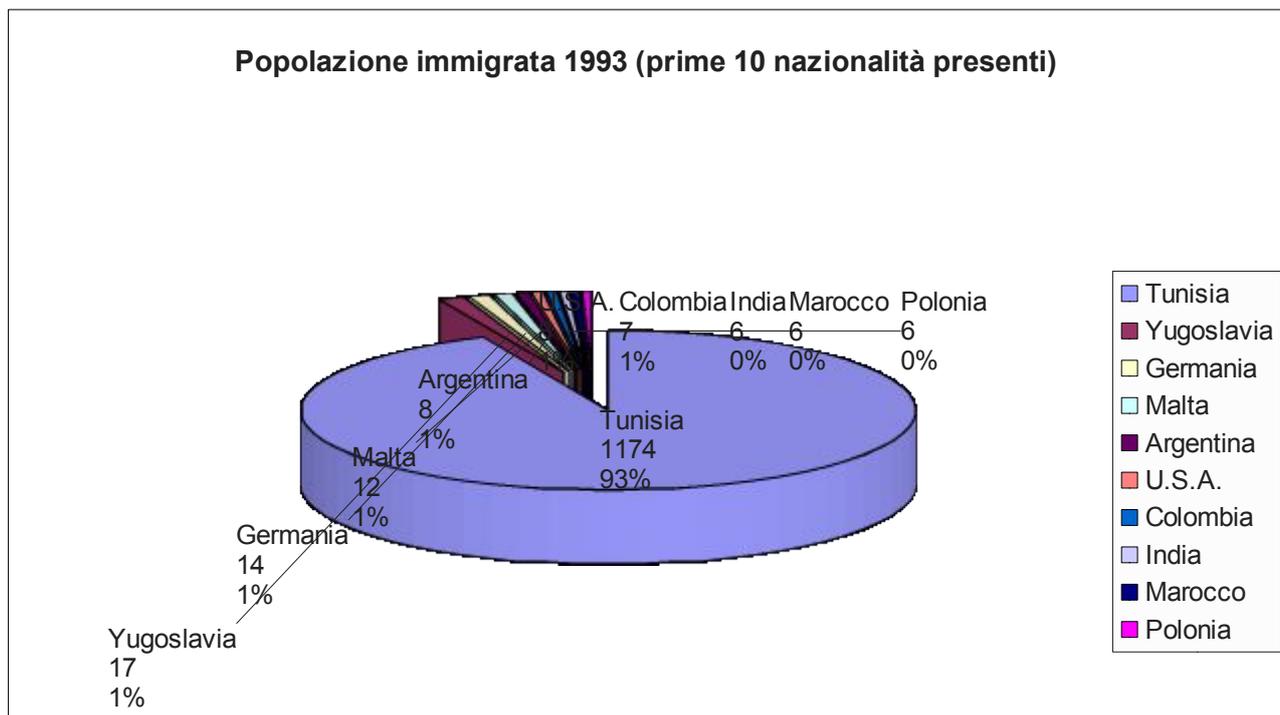
Source: author's elaboration on INPS data (2013). Provided by FLAI-CGIL (Vittoria)

Table 5. Number of people registered to INPS (province of Ragusa) as farmworkers by nationality (year: 2013)

Year: 2013														
Area	Total number of farmworkers (INPS)	Number of foreigners	% of foreigners	TUNISIA	ROMANIA	ALBANIA	MAROCCO	POLONIA	ALGERIA	EGITTO	LIBIA	INDIA	UCRAINA	SUDAN
ACATE	2838	1944	68,50	609	1125	31	58	31	11	11	2	1	13	
CHIARAMONTE	878	274	31,21	51	142	34	0	1	0	0	0	19	4	
COMISO	1880	714	37,98	342	169	38	32	10	11	1	3	6	17	
GIARRATANA	239	31	12,97	3	3	1	0	2	0	0	0	8	0	
ISPICA	1560	838	53,72	379	229	12	47	45	36	3	2	32	4	
MODICA	1668	344	20,62	103	43	12	59	17	0	1	1	32	15	
MONTEROSSO	363	15	4,13	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	
POZZALLO	522	177	33,91	83	38	22	2	4	2	0	0	0	6	
RAGUSA	2132	1333	62,52	732	313	123	18	6	16	2	1	66	4	
SANTA CROCE	2295	1593	69,41	982	271	187	7	9	63	9	2	12	1	
SCICLI	2569	1115	43,40	514	75	449	2	19	1	0	3	19	6	
VITTORIA	10035	4862	48,45	2166	1941	193	94	40	179	49	2	6	23	2
RAGUSA (Province of)	26979	13240	49,08	5964	4349	1102	319	185	319	76	16	204	93	2

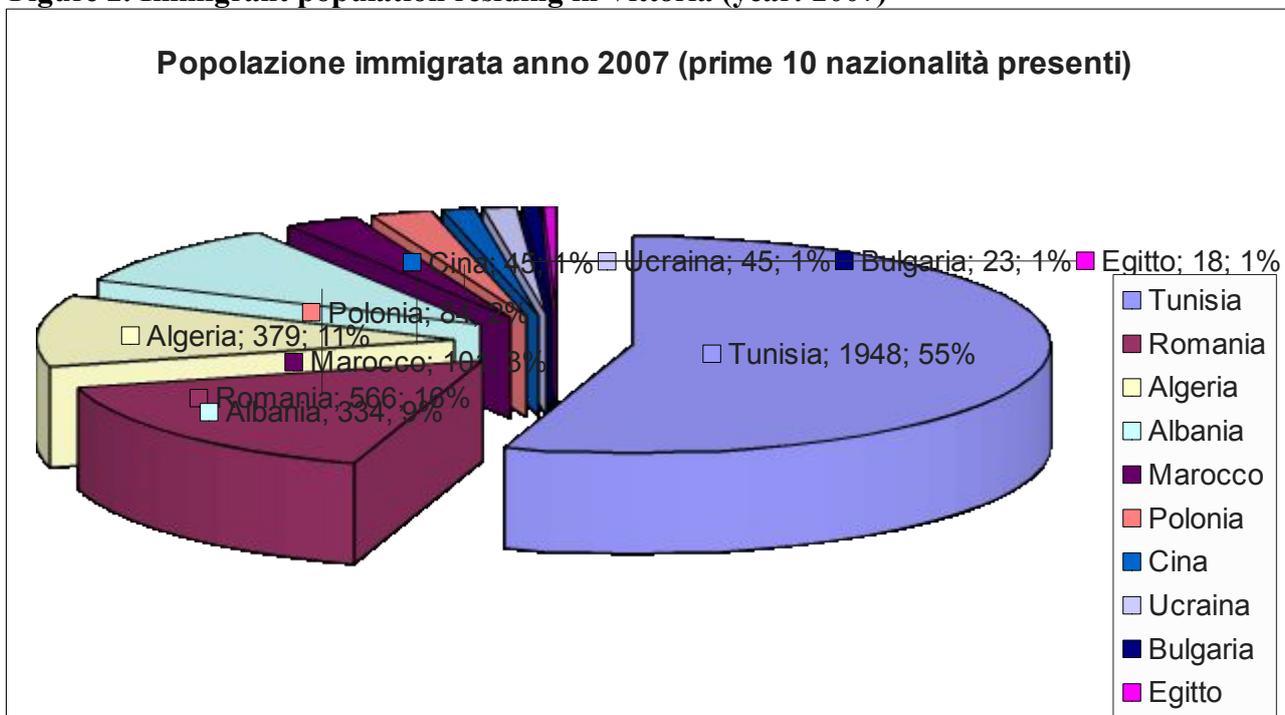
Source: author's elaboration on INPS data (2014). Provided by FLAI-CGIL (Vittoria)

Figure 1. Immigrant population residing in Vittoria (year: 1993)



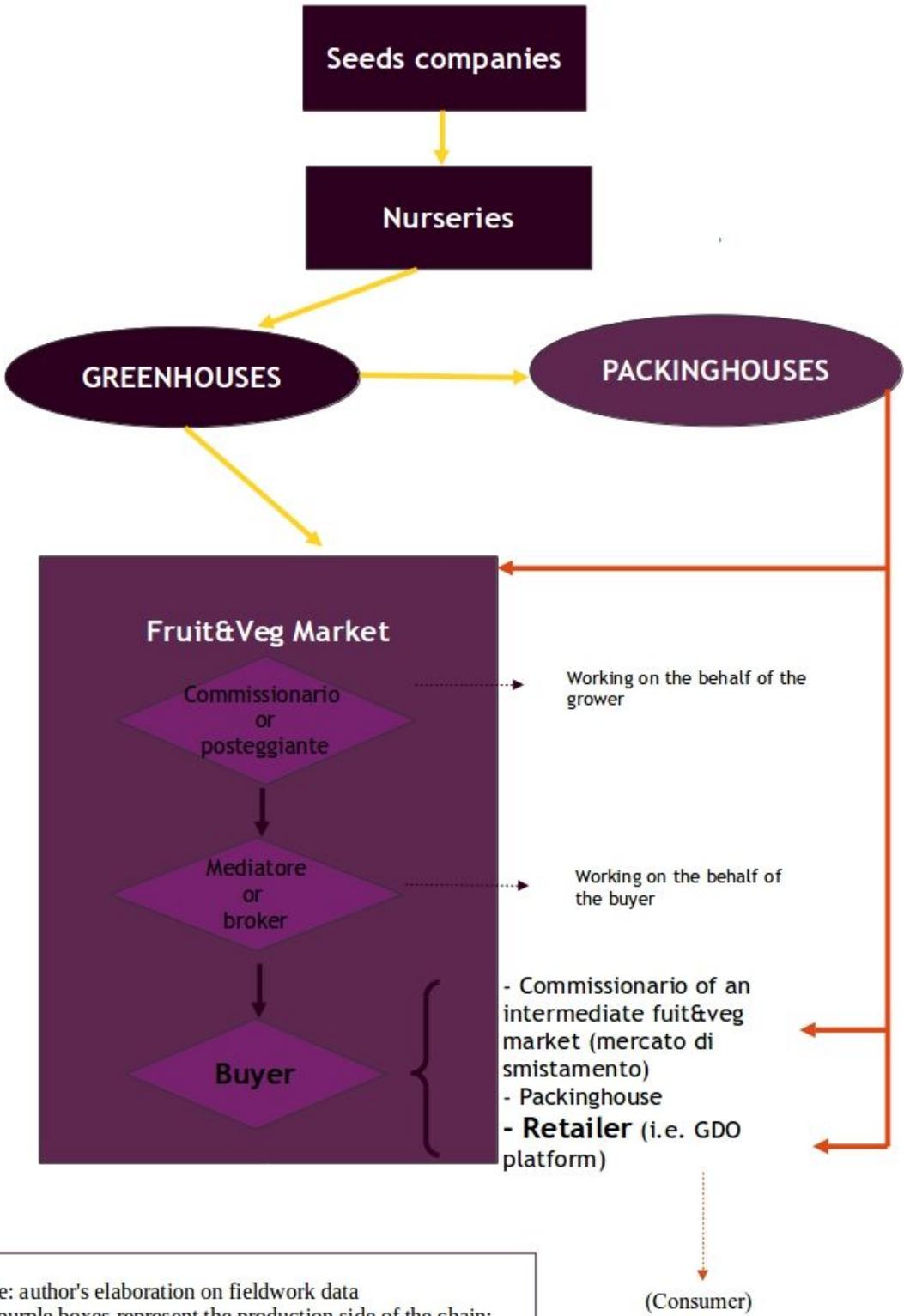
Source: data from Vittoria civic register (1993). Elaboration by Giovanni Consolino (settore servizi sociali, Comune di Vittoria)

Figure 2. Immigrant population residing in Vittoria (year: 2007)



Source: data from Vittoria civic register (1993). Elaboration by Giovanni Consolino (settore servizi sociali, Comune di Vittoria)

The fruit&veg supply chain



Source: author's elaboration on fieldwork data
 Dark purple boxes represent the production side of the chain;
 Light purple boxes represent the processing and distribution side

Participant observation inside TomatoeArtists: the job contract



Ricevuta Comunicazione Obbligatoria Online

Comunicazione Obbligatoria Unificato UniLav

Numero Protocollo	00807317
Codice comunicazione	1608813318222906
Data invio	17/06/2013 16:00:00

Sezione 1 - Datore di lavoro

Codice Fiscale	
Denominazione	/
Settore	01.13.20 - COLTIVAZIONE DI ORTAGGI (INCLUSI I MELONI) IN FOGLIA, A FUSTO, A FRUTTO, IN RADICI, BULBI E TUBERI IN COLTURE PROTETTE (ESCLUSE BARBABIETOLA DA ZUCCHERO E PATATE)
Pubblica amministrazione	NO

Sede Legale

Indirizzo	SANTA CROCE CAMERINA - 97017
Recapiti	

Sede Lavoro

Indirizzo	/ SANTA CROCE CAMERINA - 97017
Recapiti	Tel: _____

Sezione 2 - Lavoratore

Codice fiscale	PRIVLR86D49D086J
Cognome	PIRO
Nome	VALERIA
Cittadinanza	000 - ITALIANA
Data di nascita	09/04/1986
Comune di nascita	D086 - COSENZA
Comune domicilio	C108 - CASTROLIBERO - 87040
Indirizzo domicilio	VIA PIETRO MANCINI, 13
Livello istruzione	70

Sezione 4 - Inizio

Data inizio	18/06/2013
Data fine	30/06/2013
Ente previdenziale	01 - inps
Codice ente previdenziale	82765
PatINAIL	99991001
Tipologia contrattuale	A.02.00 - LAVORO A TEMPO DETERMINATO
Socio lavoratore	NO
Lavoratore in mobilità	NO
Lavoro Stagionale	SI
Tipo lavorazione	RACCOLTA E LAVORAZIONE ORTAGGI
Giornate lavorative previste	7
CCNL	011 - c.c.n.l. per gli operai agricoli e floro-vivaisti.
Livello Inquadramento	COM
Tipo orario	F - tempo pieno
Qualifica professionale	8.3.1.1.0.7 - bracciante agricolo
Lavoro in agricoltura	SI

Sezione 8 - Dati invio

Data invio	17/06/2013 16:00:00
Tipo comunicazione	01 - Comunicazione Obbligatoria
Assunzione forza maggiore	NO

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Photo section²⁹⁵



²⁹⁵

As several of the picture throughout this thesis, also the following photos are realized by Giovanni Battaglia in July 2013. I would like to thank Giovanni for his contribution. Moreover, I would like to thank the workers that accepted to take part in this reportage.









