UNIVERSITÀ DELLA CALABRIA

# OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE OF RACIALIZED MIGRANT FARMWORKERS IN THE CONTEXT OF AGRICULTURAL RACIAL CAPITALISM.
# THE CASE OF WEST AFRICAN FARMWORKERS IN THE PROVINCE OF FOGGIA (ITALY).


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**Abstract**

*The present dissertation intends contributing to the rich debate investigating migrant labor exploitation and resistance in the context of industrial agriculture by looking at the issue through the theoretical perspective of racial capitalism. Adopting this theoretical perspective appears to be fruitful in order to better frame the experience of oppression and resistance of racialized migrant farmworkers. Indeed, while labor studies have often tended adopting a race-blind approach, considering migrant workers as a homogeneous category and race merely as a tool of class division, building on the contribution of theorists of racial capitalism allows to better frame the experience of racialized migrant farmworkers in the context of industrial agriculture, looking at the racial-colonial oppression not as a mere element of the superstructure but rather as integral to the oppression of workers in the context of capitalism. Building on four-years of research developed adopting a militant ethnographic approach informed by decolonial methodologies, the dissertation focuses on exploring the experience of West African migrant farmworkers living in rural informal settlements situated in the province of Foggia. The analysis highlights how the oppression experienced by West African migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia can be explored as being at the intersection of four processes: ghettoization, exploitation, illegalization and racialization. These processes appear to be central both in defining their experience of oppression and in motivating their struggle for liberation. In addition, the ambivalent role of NGOs operating in the area is explored, as representing an integral element to the reproduction of systems of oppression through policies aimed at preventing racialized migrant farmworkers fully achieving their right to self-determination, while at the same time avoiding conflict with institutions. Nevertheless, despite the increasing "NGO-ization of resistance", particularly pronounced in the province of Foggia, West African migrant farmworkers have been the protagonists of multiple forms of resistance and mobilization in the province of Foggia in the past few years, proving their determination to struggle for the recognition of their rights.*

**Acknowledgments**

This dissertation is the result of years of commitment and dedication to the issue of migrant farmworkers' struggles living in the informal settlements of the province of Foggia. Since the first day I entered those spaces, defined by some as non-places, definition with which yet I yet do not agree, my life has changed. I was able to deconstruct so many of my assumptions rooted in years of socialization within a society that hierarchize people on the basis of their social, cultural, educational and economic status. My first thanks go therefore to these places, and especially to Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement, that has been for me a life school, where I learned first and foremost to free myself.

I want to thank all those who I met along the way, from the first day I went to Borgo in June 2019, and I didn't feel up to the task, until today that I know most of those of live and have passed through Borgo and Torretta. Ousmane and Emil who were like brothers to me, supporting me while I was living with them in Borgo. Angela, who I met in particular cirmustances and became a dear friend. Aissata, who treats me like her daughter. Fanta and Fatou, who have been good friends and fed me with delicious dishes.

I would like to express my gratitude to my tutor, Alessandra Corrado, for the trust shown during the entire research process and for having allowed me to explore this subject from different theoretical perspectives and always valorizing my activist commitment.

A special acknowledgement to Francesco Caruso, who suggested me to apply for this PhD position in the summer of 2020 while I we were walking on the street of Borgo Mezzanone. In the following years, thanks to our collaboration, from both an academic and activist point of view I was able to deepen my understanding of forms of oppression and resistance.

I give thanks to Babucarr with whom, since 2020, we started the process of creation of the Italian-African Farmworkers association, building on his idea of exchanging agricultural techniques and expertise between Italy and The Gambia. Thanks to our collaboration, in the past few years we have been able to achieve many results both in Italy and in The Gambia. Discussing with him has always been inspiring and gave food for thoughts.

A unique thank goes to my husband, Issa, whom I met at the end of 2019 in Borgo Mezzanone, for allowing me to enter so deeply his life and making me understand so many of the things explored in this dissertation. Thanks to him I was able to free love from the cage in which I had enclosed it due to excessive intellectual super-structures.

Finally, I want to thank my parents and my friends from Florence who supported me along the way, being able to understand my changes and transformation.

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# INTRODUCTION

Migrant labor exploitation and resistance in the context of industrial agriculture has been in the past decades the subject of countless academic investigations (Avallone 2017; Basok 1999; Caruso 2015; Caruso, Corrado 2021; Cohen 2019; Corrado et al 2017; Cruz 2009, 2010, 2014; Décosse 2011, 2017; Gadea et al 2017; Hellio, Nieto 2017; Hjalmarson 2021; King et al 2021; Melossi 2021; Peano 2017, 2020; Perrotta and Sacchetto 2014; Perrotta, Rayemaekers 2023; Piro, Sanò 2017; Potot 2010; Rau, Mesini 2008; Vosko 2018).

These have shed light on the interconnection existing between migrant labor and agriculture, particularly strengthened following the rise of the "corporate food regime" (McMicheal 2009) and the cutting down of production costs through the exploitation of migrant labor. Investigations developed on the subject have analyzed both the exploitation and migrant labor, implemented through various mechanisms of precarization, illegalization and racialization of the workforce, as well instances of resistance of migrant farmworkers. Resistance has been investigated both in terms of forms of unionization of migrant farmworkers (Caruso 2015; Cruz 2009, 2010, 2014; de Castro et al 2018; Ganz 2009) as well as in relation to forms of everyday resistance (Avallone 2017; Gadea et al 2017; Piro, Sanò 2017). Nevertheless, despite the richness of the literature on the topic, most of the analysis, a part from few exceptions (Cruz 2009, 2010, 2014; Cohen 2019; Hjalmarson 2021; Manjapra 2018), have failed on the one hand to stress the continuity between contemporary systems of migrant labor exploitation in the context of globalized agriculture and the exploitation of racialized labor during the plantation system, and on the other hand, to fruitfully unpack the category of "migrant farmworkers" looking at the way in which differences in terms of racial, ethnic and migration status impact both forms of oppression and forms of resistance. With this dissertation, I intend filling this void, by suggesting to adopt the theoretical lens of racial capitalism in order to stress both the continuity between contemporary forms of racialized/migrant labor exploitation and control and historical ones to be situated in the context of what can be defined as "agricultural racial capitalism" as well as expanding the analysis beyond the exploitation in the workplace, looking at the different forms of oppression experienced by racialized migrant farmworkers employed in industrial agriculture, as well as looking at the ways in which they resist this oppression both through unionization, mobilization and self-organization. In order to do so, I will focus on the case of West African migrant farmworkers employed in the agricultural sector in Southern Italy,

and more specifically in the province of Foggia. This case study has been chosen in that it appears particularly apt to fruitfully explore the interconnection between different forms of oppression experienced by racialized migrant farmworkers in the context of agricultural racial capitalism, as well as analyzing forms of mobilization and resistance.

The dissertation is structured in two parts. The first part is composed by three theoretical and methodological chapters, while the second part is made of six chapters, based on field research.

The **first chapter** will be dedicated to analyzing literature investigating the relationship between international migrant labor and capitalism, as well as more specifically the connection between agricultural work and migrant labor, defined by the expression "agriculture-migration nexus". The historical relation existing between agricultural racial capitalism and migrant labor will also be taken into account, exploring its ties with slavery and unfree labor relations. The second part of the chapter will be focused on the analysis of forms of organization, unionization and resistance put in place by racialized-migrant-(farm)workers, acknowledging the relevance of each dimension of racialized-migrant-(farm)workers' experience of oppression.

The **second chapter** will focus on the theoretical framework adopted for the present analysis, as being one at the intersection between decolonization and Marxism. In order to do so, I will first examine the theorization of the colonial-racial issue within the writing of Marx and early Marxist, and then analyze the analysis developed by some leading thinkers, broadly defined as "Black Marxists", regarding the entanglement between racism and capitalism. In the second part of the chapter, contemporary debates on race and its intersection with other systems of oppressions will be analyzed. Then focus will then be shifted on illustrating contemporary definitions of racial capitalism, building on Gargi Battarcharrya's (2018) seminal work "Rethinking Racial Capitalism". Finally, the last part of the chapter will be dedicated to exploring the ways in which, following the rise of neo-liberalism, struggles have been redefined through what has been defined by Arundhati Roy (2014) as the "NGO-ization of resistance" as well as through the affirmation of humanitarianism as a replacement of solidarity.

The **third chapter** will be centered on methodology. The adoption of a decolonial lens of investigation cannot only be concerned with the theoretical framework but should necessarily extend to the epistemological and methodological approach adopted. In order to lay the foundation for the decolonization of methodologies, the chapter will critically engage with the colonial legacy of social sciences and their methodologies, building on analysis

developed both by authors belonging to the coloniality/modernity paradigm, scholars of decoloniality, as well as referring to theoretical approaches internal to Western social sciences, such as the theory of knowledge/power, the standpoint feminist theory, and the militant research approach. These theories question the distinction between researcher and object of research and the idea of objectivity and neutrality of research, highlighting the situatedness of every form of knowledge and its implications in the construction of power relations. Following the analysis of various epistemological and methodological approaches going towards the decolonization of research methodologies, the second part of the chapter will be focused on analysing the methodology of the present research.

The **fourth chapter** will be focused on analysing the contexts of origin of West African migrant farmworkers. After situating West Africa in the history of racial capitalism, the analysis will move on looking at the ways in which migration management and polices of border externalization by the European Union configure as a core element in the reproduction of neo-colonial relations between Western Europe and West Africa and in defining racial capitalism in the 21st century. The second part of the chapter will be dedicated to the field research carried out between December 2022 and March 2023 in Senegal and Gambia. After reflecting on my own positionality as a white European woman, I will briefly explore the socio-economic context of the two countries and Senegalese and Gambian youths' desire to mobility. In order to explore the way in which the fight against irregular migration became a central element of the involvement of EU, various projects implemented by European NGOs and International Organization for Migration aimed at countering "irregular migration" will be analyzed. Finally, the last part of the chapter will be dedicated to exploring the ways in which European institution prevent "regular migration", looking at the example of the Italian Embassy in Dakar.

The **fifth chapter** will be dedicated to offering a contextualization of Italian agricultural racial capitalism as well as to introducing the context of analysis. Following an analysis regarding the role of racism and coloniality in the building of Italian national and racial identity, as well as of contemporary shapes of racism in Italy, the focus will be moved on analyzing the evolution of immigration normative framework from the first laws in the 1980's to nowadays. The developed analysis will suggest the existence of three phases (1980's- 2009; 2010-2018; 2018-2023) all characterized, yet in different ways and degrees, by the constitutive tension between "legal" and "illegal" migration. Yet, if in the first decades, migration was mainly managed to working residency permits, following 2010 migration has been increasingly managed through asylum, allowing to speak of a

"refugeezation of migration". The chapter will then move on looking at the role of migrant labor in the context of Italian agriculture, as well as exploring the impact of the criminalization of labor intermediation taking place starting from 2011. In the last part of the chapter, the province of Foggia will be introduced explain why it can be considered as a center of agricultural racial capitalism, laying down the foundations for the analysis developed in the subsequent chapters.

The **sixth chapter** will be focused on examining two of the four dimensions of racial capitalism in the province of Foggia, ghettoization and exploitation. These are the most visible and analyzed components of the experience of West African migrant farmworkers in Foggia. Indeed, the province of Foggia is often considered the emblem of migrant labor exploitation and *caporalato* due to presence of the largest rural informal settlements in Italy, making the condition of exploitation visible visible. However, as it will be explored in this chapter and in the following, informal settlements rather than a direct consequence of migrant labor exploitation respond to a series of needs, involving multiple dimensions. The present chapter will be dedicated first to investigating the history of informal settlements in the Foggia province and the trajectories of ghettoization, and later to critically analyzing the contradiction of the anti-*caporalato* narrative and practice, and finally offering a broader definition of exploitation in light of the conceptualization of racial capitalism offered by Gargi Bhattacharyya (2018) explored in chapter two.

The **seventh chapter** will focus on the other two components of racial capitalism in the province of Foggia, namely, illegalization and racialization which, while often hidden in debates on the subject, represent fundamental elements. Indeed, these two processes are often the root cause of the processes of ghettoization and exploitation already explored in chapter six. After exploring the ways in which illegalization is enacted on a daily basis by street-level bureaucrats in the province of Foggia by looking at the case of Foggia Immigration Office and Foggia and San Severo Muncipalities, the analysis will move on exploring the shape of racism and white supremacy in the province of Foggia, and concluding looking at the definition of racism as vulnerability to premature death suggested by Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2008).

The **eighth chapter** will develop an analysis of another aspect of racial capitalism, less explored but not less relevant, that of the NGO-ization of resistance and the creation of a Non-Profit Industrial Complex aimed at managing the endless "emergency" of racialized migrant farmworkers' exploitation and ghettoization. The first part of the chapter will be dedicated to offering an overview of the major non-governmental actors operating in the

province of Foggia, as well as the major sources of EU funding allocated in the past few years in relation to the fight against migrant labor exploitation in the agricultural sector and the overcoming of informal settlements. The second part will be dedicated to examining the three components of the NGO-ization of resistance in the province of Foggia, that we can define as the issue of accountability, the issue of interdependence between NGOs and institutions and the issue of coloniality and white saviorism informing NGOs and unions practices. Finally, the last part of the chapter will be dedicated to assessing and critically analyzing two specific projects funded through EU funds, looking at the ways in which they tend reproducing the narrative of the exceptionality of labor exploitation and criminalization of informal settlements and *caporalato*.

The **ninth chapter** will focus on exploring the ways in which West African migrant farmworkers living in the province of Foggia have mobilized and organized in the past few years to resist against the oppression of racial capitalism, manifested in all the above illustrated forms. The first part of the chapter will be dedicated to analyze the approach adopted by unions and other political collectives that in the past decade have presented themselves as representatives of migrant farmworkers' claims. The analysis will be developed by looking at the ways in which the relationship existing between race, class, eurocentrism and coloniality affects the attitude of these actors and their relationship with racialized migrant farmworkers. The second part of the chapter will be dedicated to analyzing West African migrant farmworkers' mobilization that took place in the past five years (2017-2023), looking at the ways in which the multidimensionality of the oppression they experience was articulated in the context of those mobilizations. In the last part of the chapter, the self-organization of West African migrant workers in the province will be explored, with a particular focus on the experience of Torretta Antonacci, former Gran Ghetto. This analysis will allow to delve into the processes of self-organization of migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements, looking at the challenges and opportunities emerging along the way.

# PART 1

## CHAPTER 1

## RACIALIZED MIGRANT FARMWORKERS IN THE CONTEXT OF AGRICULTURAL RACIAL CAPITALISM: BETWEEN OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE.

The subject of racialized migrant farmworkers oppression and resistance is located at the intersection of multiple strands of literature.

For one thing, it is necessary to recall literature developed in the realm of labor studies about the role and nature of migrant labor within capitalism and its impact in the process of labor organizing and unionization. For another thing, literature regarding the connection between agricultural work and migration must be taken into consideration. Finally, also citizenship and border studies literature have investigated how migrant subjects organize and act collectively to reclaim (mostly) their citizenship rights, placing a larger focus on the structural inequalities created by the border regime and the struggles put in place to overcome and escape them. Despite being located at the intersection of multiple fields of study, as well as multiple systems of oppression, the topic has often been investigated privileging one dimension of racialized-migrant-farmworkers experience, being it that of migrant or that of (farm)workers, while the issue of racialization has often been underexplored, both in terms of oppression and in terms of self-identification for the purpose of organization. In what follows, a review of the literature on the subject will be proposed, developed trying to take into account its multidimensionality,

The first part of the chapter will be dedicated to analyzing literature investigating the relationship between international migrant labor and capitalism, as well as more specifically the connection between agricultural work and migrant labor, defined by the expression “agriculture-migration nexus”. The historical relation existing between agricultural racial capitalism and migrant labor will also be taken into account, exploring its ties with slavery and unfree labor relations. The second part of the chapter will be focused on the analysis of forms of organization, unionization and resistance put in place by racialized-migrant-(farm)workers. Acknowledging the relevance of each dimension of racialized-migrant-(farm)workers’ experience of oppression, and not limiting the analysis only to the exploitation experienced in the agricultural production process, the literature examined will

belong both to the field of farm labor studies - specifically investigating migrant farmworkers forms of organizing and unionization - to 'Global labor' studies perspectives - exploring new forms of organizing beyond unionism, such as social movement unionism and community unionism – as well as to citizenship and border studies, exploring migrants' struggles against the border regime.

## 1.1 International Migrant labor and agricultural racial capitalism

Literature regarding migrant labor and agriculture is at the intersection of multiple strands of literature such as agri-food studies, rural studies, labor studies, migration studies, race and ethnicity studies, not really communicating with each other. Each strand of literature adopts a different perspective, placing larger focus either on processes of production of food at the global level, on the interaction between rural spaces and migrant subjects, on the labor process or on the specific experience of migrant workers. Furthermore, literature developed in the past decades on the topic of migrant labor in the agricultural sector has largely focused on the exploitation of migrant workers, sometimes defined as "modern slavery", without yet fully contextualizing the centrality of racialized/migrant labor in the agricultural sector as central to the global development of capitalism. In this section, after briefly examining some of the interpretations regarding the role of international migrant labor in the evolution of capitalism, the focus will be shifted to analyzing the literature produced on the topic of migrant labor and agriculture in the context of contemporary industrial globalized agricultural production. Finally, in the last part of the chapter, the historical entanglement of unfree labor, racism, migration and agriculture will be examined, while at the same time exploring more in depth the role played by racialization in the context of seasonal workers program in the US and Canada. The literature produced in these contexts will be analyzed in light of their nature of settler-colonial states characterized by a long-standing presence of racialized-migrant farmworkers.

### 1.1.1 International migration, labor and capitalism: an overview

The relationship between international migration, labor and capitalism has been at the core of social theory's analyses since the origin of both migration and labor studies.
Migration studies have long tried to grasp the causes of migration, often adopting a perspective centered on the nation state as the main unit of analysis and taking sedentarism

as the natural condition of human societies. The field has been characterized by a tension between the role of structure and that of agency, with different theories alternatively giving more relevance to structural factors (macro) as a reason for migration or instead to individual and group agency (micro) in order to grasp the dynamics and paths of contemporary migration (Arango 2002; Miller, Castels 1993; Scholten 2022). Classical and neoclassical economic theories played a crucial role in shaping theories of migration, conceptualizing human beings as economic actors in search of a maximization of their individual profit and dividing the causes of migration into "push" and "pull" factors to be analyzed as external and independent variables. However, these approaches lack a historical contextualization of the root causes of poverty and 'underdevelopment', often described as descending from internal features of the societies of origin, rather than as the consequence of centuries of colonialism, exploitation, dispossession and domination. Furthermore, the structural inequality characterizing the global regime of (im)mobility, depriving a large section of the population of the Global South from the freedom of movement exercised by citizens of the Global North is rarely taken into account as a root cause of inequality. Push and pull theories are still prevalent in a large area of migration studies as well as dominant in migration policy, as highlighted by countless policies proposing to curb migration 'flows' by acting on the 'root causes' of migration.

On the other hand, Marxist, neo-Marxist and autonomist Marxist approaches have shed light on the connections existing between processes of dispossession in the countries of origin, rooted in centuries of colonialism and uneven development, and international migration, represented as a constitutive element of the shape and nature of class and capitalism in today's world economy. Migration can be seen as a consequence of the centripetal movement of capitalism, draining both resources and labor from the periphery to fill the needs of the center (Wallerstein 2004). Migration, rather than a distinct field of study, can be seen in this way as a lens through which examine the contemporary functioning of capitalism, and as a process of class formation (Hanieh 2018). Borders, by forcing a segment of world population into restricted mobility and illegalization, represent one of the most powerful tools to control, discipline and restrict the movement of labor (Mezzadra, Neilson 2013).

In their study regarding English working class, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels investigated the role and consequences of Irish immigration in relation to the exploitation of the working class and affecting possibilities of organization. Yet, while Engels' reading was deeply influenced by racist prejudices against the Irish workers (Duggan 2013), from Marx's

point of view, Irish immigration needed to be seen as a consequence of English colonization of Ireland. Paired with nationalist ideology, it represented a tool for the elites to reduce wages, maintain their power and fragment the working class, by placing English and Irish proletarians one against the other.

> "Owing to the constantly increasing concentration of leaseholds, Ireland constantly sends her own surplus to the English labor market, and thus forces down wages and lowers the material and moral position of the English working class. And most important of all! Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two *hostile* camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the *ruling* nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the "poor whites" to the Negroes in the former slave states of the U.S.A. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of the *English rulers* in Ireland. This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. *This antagonism* is the secret of the *impotence of the English working class*, despite its organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this." (Marx, 1975 [1870])

Marx's definition of the reserve army of labor has often been recalled in order to associate migrant labor to a pool of cheap labor, considering it on the one hand necessary to capital accumulation and, on the other hand, detrimental to national workers' rights. The conviction that migrant workers lower labor standards and negatively affects the possibility of "native" workers to organize had major impact on unions' approaches to immigration and to immigrant workers, favoring in many instances an anti-immigration stance of unions in the West aimed at securing the rights of national workers. However, numerous analyses have been also developed from a Marxist and neo-Marxist perspective questioning the nationalist take on migration and rejecting the supposedly negative impact of migrant labor on 'native' workers[1]. These contributions, by grounding the nature and the role of migrant labor within contemporary capitalism in a historical perspective, highlight the close connections existing between colonialism, uneven development and contemporary migration, and call the need to strengthen of solidarity among workers (Castles, Kosack 1973).

[1] On the very construction of the idea of Native vs migrant as a fundamental element of modern nation-state capitalism see Nandita Sharma (2020).

In their seminal work on the subject, Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack (1973) argued that immigration represents a structural element in the formation of class structure in Western Europe. Rather than worsening 'native' workers economic and social position due to a lowering of labor standards, Castles and Kosack maintained that the presence of immigrant workers allowed the former to improve their conditions. This happens both from an objective point of view, opening the space for upward occupational mobility by filling the need of workforce in low-paid jobs, and from a subjective one, through the perception of relative privilege of native working class compared to immigrants. Ultimately, according to the authors, labor migration:

> "must be understood in the historical context of the international capitalist system. Labour reserves exist, on the one hand because the uneven development of the means of production within Europe has left backward areas in the Southern parts, on the other because the European colonialism of the last few centuries has created under-development in Africa, Asia, and America. Today migration is highly profitable for Western European capitalism. At the same time, it does nothing to alleviate the backwardness of the regions from which migrants come; indeed, it is often a hindrance to development. Labour migration is a form of development aid given by poor countries to rich countries. (Castels and Kosack 1973: 7-8).

Despite mentioning the role of colonialism as a root cause of contemporary migration, the authors failed to address the legacy of colonialism and racism in affecting the different experiences of immigrant workers both from the point of view of exploitation, segregation and discrimination within receiving societies, and from the point of view of dispossession in the countries of origins. Indeed, following a 'traditional Marxist' understanding of class structure conceiving race as an element of the superstructure, Castels and Kosack (ibid.) maintained that:

> "Prejudice against immigrants is of the same nature whatever their colour or nationality. Its intensity may, however, vary towards different immigrant groups in one country according to historical and cultural factors and the ease with which the group may be identified […] Immigrants should be looked at not in the light of their specific group characteristics— ethnic, social, and cultural— but in terms of their actual social position. Immigrant workers have come to form part of the class structure of the immigration countries. This in turn has effects on the economic, social, and political situations of all other classes."

Thus, while positive for their understanding of immigration as a structural feature of capitalist economy and for not endorsing the nationalist argument on the industrial army of

reserve, Castles and Kosack conceive the category of 'immigrant' as a homogeneous one, without paying enough attention to racism and colonialism, both in their historical and in their contemporary dimension. Indeed, a race-blind approach has long characterized both migration and labor studies, whereby race and ethnicity have often been conceived only as an ideological tool to fragment the working class and prevent labor organization, a weakness that will be extensively examined in the second chapter. Lastly, Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches to migration have often been criticized for overestimating the role of structure without paying enough attention to the subjective dimension of migration and movement.

An autonomist Marxist perspective on the relationship between mobility, labor and capitalism, trying to balance structural and individual factors has been developed by the strand of "post-workerism" and, more specifically, by Yann Moulier Boutang (1998) who suggested re-reading the history of capitalism, from slavery to contemporary forms of migration, as the history of mobility of labor and of the attempts of capital to control this mobility. Contrary to Marx's assumption of free waged labor as the norm of capitalism, Moulier Boutang argued that the history of capitalism has been a history of a combination between forms of free and unfree labor, whereby slavery cannot be seen as a form of primitive accumulation but rather a constitutive element of the functioning of capitalism. While this argument had already been done by Black Marxist scholars, among which W.E.B. Du Bois and Cedric Robinson, as it will be further explored in the second chapter, Moulier Boutang's main contribution has been that of shedding light on the role of mobility control as central to the development of capitalism. Inspired by the workerist tradition interpreting the evolution of capitalism as a response to contrast workers' resistance, this theorization interprets it as determined by capital's attempt to limit workers' possibility of flight, by constraining the mobility of labor through different normative and coercive tools implemented by national states. Labor resistance can thus be enacted also in a non-confrontational way, through the flight of workers, who resist their proletarianization.

Following Moulier Boutang's theorization, a new approach to migration and labor emerged, defined as "autonomy of migration" (Mezzadra 2004, 2015; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Casas Cortes et. al 2015; De Genova et al. 2015; Tazzioli et al. 2018). This analytical perspective, while acknowledging the role of structural factors, focuses on migrants' subjectivities and the ways in which they 'exceed' restrictions and definitions imposed on them. Borders, rather than as barriers, are interpreted as filters, operating a selection both in terms of those who can or cannot enter, and in terms of controlling the pace at which entrance is allowed. Borders are conceived as tools to create hierarchies and categorize subjects as

‘regular’, ‘illegal’, ‘deportable’, etc. thus promoting their differential inclusion, by creating “different degrees of precarity, vulnerability and freedom by granting and closing access to resources and rights according to economic, individualizing, and racist rationales” (Casas Cortes et al 2015: 79-80). Migration is interpreted as a social movement, that shapes, rather than being shaped, the evolution of capitalism and nation-states system (Mezzadra 2004, Mezzadra 2015, Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, Casas Cortes et. al 2015, De Genova et al. 2015). Specific attention is also given to the analyses of the everyday forms of resistance and escape from the border regime, further examined in the last part of this chapter. While this perspective has been particularly relevant in order to counter a deterministic or victimizing approach to migrants and refugees, shedding light on the subversive and autonomous nature of migrants’ movements and their refusal to be disciplined, it has been criticized for overstating the weight of migrant’s subjectivities and, to a certain extent, romanticizing migration, regardless of the dramatic suffering and death hidden behind the struggle for the freedom of movement. Furthermore, despite often mentioning the role of racism and racialization, the investigations developed through this perspective have largely failed to investigate the multifaceted dimensions of racism, going beyond the structural discrimination inherent in the border regime.

To conclude, literature has been prolific in examining the longstanding relationship between migration, labor and capitalism. The Marxist-inspired literature, in its various declination, has been the one more attentive to investigate the relationship between contemporary border regime and historical forms of control of the mobility of labor, such as slavery and indentured labor, in order to historicize contemporary forms of labor control going beyond a reading of contemporary migration decontextualized from the history of capitalism. However, despite their positive contribution to the field, these studies have been characterized by a lack of theorization of the role of racism and colonialism beyond mere ideological elements aimed at dividing the working class, but as structural and integral to the functioning of capitalism. While autonomy of migration has paid more attention to this element, the contribution of postcolonial theory, Critical Race Theory, Afro-Marxist, Black Marxist and the Black Radical Tradition has largely been ignored, somehow reproducing that epistemic racism characterizing social sciences since their inception.

### 1.1.2 Migrant labor and industrial agriculture: an overview of the literature

The strong relationship existing between international migration and agriculture has been highlighted by numerous investigations (Corrado et al. 2017; King et al 2021; Rye, Scott 2018), that have underscored the emerging of new patterns of labor mobility, with an increasing preference of rural areas as destinations of international migration (Rye, O'Reilly 2021; Rye, Slettebak 2020). Given the multiple linkages existing between migration and agriculture, some authors suggested the conceptualization of an "*agriculture-migration nexus*", pointing at the ways in which migration and agriculture co-construct each other (King et al 2021). It has been maintained that, in the context of neoliberal restructuring of global agri-food production, the employment of migrant workers became a central feature of agricultural production, representing a "spatial fix" (Harvey 1981), allowing to cut production costs by dramatically reducing the cost of labor through the employment of hyper-precarious and exploitable migrant workforce (King et al 2021). This process has been favored by the implementation of seasonal workers programs, specifically aimed at the recruitment of workers in their country of origin to be employed for a specific amount of time in the agricultural sector of the country of destination, subjected to highly restrictive rules and deportation in case of dissent (Vosko 2018). In the context of what has been defined as the "corporate food regime" (McMichael 2009), the demand for cheap and flexible workforce has been supplied through the differential inclusion of migrant labor, favored by processes of illegalization, racialization and precarization, allowing for the creation of a "just in time" workforce (Garrapa 2017; Melossi 2021; Arnaut et al 2017, Corrado et al 2017; King et al 2021). This gave birth to the emergence of "global enclaves" of agricultural productions, areas functional to global agri-business, characterized by high shares of migrant and racialized workforce (Moraes et al 2012). It has been argued that, while the relationship between agriculture and human migration is by no means new, what characterizes its contemporary configuration is the application of principles of industrial production to agricultural process (King et al 2021).

Dual labor market and segmentation theory have been often used to analyze the over-representation of migrant workers within agricultural sector as well as to assess the role of internal labor market segmentation on the basis of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, status (De Bonis 2005; Gadea et al. 2017; Peano 2020; Pedreño Canovas 2001; Potot 2010; Rau, Mesini 2008). It has been argued that agriculture represents one of the economic sectors where the "multiplication of labor" can be observed most clearly (Corrado et al 2017:12;

Mezzadra, Neilson 2013). Yet, literature has not been unanimous in its conclusions regarding the causes as well as the outcomes of labor market segmentation. For instance, in relation to the French context, some authors have maintained that internal labor market segmentation along status and ethnic lines had been purposely created and reproduced, through the implementation of national and European policies aimed at creating different migration and working statuses as well as ethnic differentiation (Décosse 2011, 2017; Rau, Mesini 2008). On the contrary, other authors have argued that the co-existence of multiple categories of workers within French agricultural labor market should not be conceived as the outcome of an intentional strategy aimed at fragmenting the workforce, but rather the result of the interaction of various socio-economic factors and migration trajectories (Potot 2010). Similar analyses have also been developed in relation to the Spanish and the Italian context, shedding light on the progressive fragmentation of agricultural workforce -along lines of gender, ethnicity, status and nationality- and the process of "incorporation and expulsion" of different groups of workers (Gadea et al 2017), drove by the need to reproduce workers' vulnerabilities and reduce labor organization, but justified through the deployment of ethnic-cultural narratives (De Bonis 2005; Gadea et al 2017, Peano 2020; Pedreño Canovas 2001). This fragmentation between has been reproduced both in a material way, through the definition of different statuses determining different material living and working conditions, and in an ideological and symbolic way, through the reinforcement of cultural, racial and ethnic stereotypes mobilized also during the working time, as brilliantly shown by Valeria Piro and Giuliana Sanò (2017) in their analyses of the Sicilian greenhouses.

The subject of seasonal workers programs has also been extensively investigated, being it a central feature of the employment of migrant labor in the agricultural sector of a consistent number of countries. Seasonal workers programs appeared to be particularly connected to agricultural work, due to its intensive-labor nature, not evenly distributed along the year (Berlan 1986,1987). If the US, and more specifically California, have represented the original model of guestworkers programs in agriculture (Berlan 1986,1987), in recent years, the supply of workers through seasonal workers programs has been investigated with a particular focus on Canada, France and Spain (Basok 1999; Cohen 2019; Vosko 2018; Hajlmarson 2022; Paz Ramirez 2013; Décosse 2011, 2017; Rau, Mesini 2008; Potot 2010; Gualda 2012; Hellio, Nieto 2017; Reigada 2012, 2017). Literature on the topic has highlighted the coercive nature of seasonal workers program, used as a tool to import labor power by curbing down on revindication through the constant threat of deportability (Vosko 2018). It has been variously argued that the isolation of seasonal workers from society,

segregated between the workplace and the housing area, often located within the farms or in their surroundings, favors their hyper-exploitation and prevents any form of sociability beyond the workplace (Cohen 2019; Décosse 2011). In the case of Spain, it has been explored how the mechanism of *contractation en origen* - aimed at supplying Huelva's strawberry industry through the recruitment of Moroccan women, who are required to be over a certain age and already mothers - rests on the mobilization of patriarchal ideology in order "to reinforce the control over movement of temporary workers" (*author's translation from Spanish*, Hellio, Nieto 2017: 34). With regard to French seasonal workers program, it has been argued that, while not satisfying the entire demand, it plays a central role in the establishment of a segmented labor market, differentiated along lines of nationality, ethnicity, migration status, recruitment and working status (Berlan 1986; Décosse 2011, 2017; Rau, Mesini 2008; Potot 2010). Literature on the subject of seasonal workers program has been quite unanimous in maintaining that they can be considered as major vectors in the reproduction of hyper-exploitative and precarious labor and living conditions, mobilizing various ideologies and systems of power - among which patriarchy and racism - in order to further strengthen their control over migrant workers.

The role of informal labor intermediaries (gangmasters, *caporali, furgonetero*, etc..) as well as of formal Temporary Employment Agencies (TEAs) has been widely examined, as a tool to foster exploitation, by promoting the competition among workers, often differentiated along ethnic-national lines as well as through the multiplication of labor regimes and the hyper-mobility of workers (Avallone 2017; Caruso 2016; Gadea et al 2017; Perrotta, Sacchetto 2014; Perrotta 2014; Rau, Mesini 2008). The ambiguous role played by informal labor intermediaries, in-between exploiters and mediators, has been highlighted by some investigations (Caruso 2016; Perrotta 2014), in an attempt to deconstruct the mystified and inaccurate comparison, developed in the past decades, between gang-masters and slave owners, not too different from that between human traffickers and slave traders (Bales 2007). Indeed, a relevant number of contributions, with particular reference to Italian agriculture, framed the issue of migrant labor exploitation and intermediation in terms of "modern slavery" (Cristaldi 2015; Omizzolo 2016). Yet, while in few cases the parallel with historical chattel slavery has been established in a more consistent way (Jinkang 2020), the discourse of modern slavery and human trafficking has been mostly deployed by NGOs, research institutions as well as politicians, to divert attention from systems of structural inequality and institutional racism, trying to attribute the responsibility of the suffering, death and exploitation of migrants to individual, often racialized, actors. The focus on the "individual

morality" of gang masters conceived as part of foreign criminal organizations, permits to locate forced labor, exploitation and slavery outside the realm of modernity in the hands of an "uncivilised" Other (O'Connell Davidson 2010:257). Hence, instead of promoting the structural changes needed to improve working and living conditions, dominant understandings of trafficking obfuscate "the structural, underlying causes that give rise to exploitation, structural violence, and the coercion of [*migrant*] workers" (Kempadoo 2005: xvii) and set the ground for the adoption of repressive and criminalizing measures.

Ultimately, despite the extensiveness of the literature produced on the topic of migrant labor and agriculture, the progressive compartmentalization of research fields within contemporary academia has often inhibited the development of transdisciplinary investigations, exploring the subject of migrant labor in the context of contemporary agriculture going beyond an approach based only on agri-food studies, or labor studies, or migration studies, trying to combine different disciplines and theoretical perspectives while at the same time contextualizing historically the phenomenon, going beyond a mere observation of the state of affairs. Furthermore, the analyses have been excessively focused on examining the exploitation of farmworkers, overlooking forms of organization and resistance, while at the same time being unable to move beyond the limited category of labor exploitation to examine broader experiences of oppression.

In one of the richest contributions and review on the topic of labor and agriculture of the last decades, Josefa Salete Barbosa Cavalcanti and Alessandro Cavalcanti (2014) defined a "paradox" what happened in agri-food studies at the beginning of the new millennium. Indeed, while during the 19$^{th}$ and 20$^{th}$ century, following Western societies' industrialization and the sharp increase of urban migration, labor relations and labor organization were central to agricultural debates - investigating the proletarianization of agricultural labor, the possibility of coexistence between family farming and capitalist agriculture and the emancipatory role of labor - this connection was lost with the beginning of the new millennium. While Fordism was characterized by the achievement of a "social pact" between capital, State and labor, making the latter to be conceived as "a collective process and a fundamental component of society" (ibid. xix), neoliberal globalization represented capital attempt to regain power over labor, a class response to the labor movements' achievements of the 20$^{th}$ century. Neoliberal globalization, through the increasing centralization of economic power in the hands of few multinational corporation fostered labor flexibilization and exploitation and weakened unionization, also through the increasing influence of immigration legislation in the regulation of labor. From a point of

view of resistance, if throughout the 19th and 20th century, peasants and farmers were conceived as "agents of emancipatory movements" and labor movements were at the center of investigation, contemporary analyses moved their focus to "alternative forms of resistance", which increasingly shifted their actions from the sphere of production to that of consumption. These forms of resistance, while framed in opposition to neoliberalism, often ended adopting neoliberal principles, focusing on individuality, individual actions and de-emphasizing "structural conditions, political and economic power and collective action" (ibid.:xxvii). Ultimately, Bonanno and Cavalcanti maintained that, at the beginning of the new millennium:

> "overall research has moved away from labor as a topic of investigation at a time when the exploitation of labor emerged as one of the primary factors in the restructuring of global agri-food. Also neglected was the topic of labor as an agent of emancipation." (ibid:xxv).

Similarly, it can be argued that, while the number of publications investigating the employment, exploitation and resistance of migrant workers in the context industrial agriculture steadily increased in the past decades[2], these have mostly focused on *migrant workers*, rather than on *migrant labor*, i.e. they have been more focused on the specific experience of 'migrants' employed in the agricultural sector than on the structural role of migrant labor in the process of production. Furthermore, while highlighting the role played by labor market segmentation in the segregation of migrant workers within the agricultural sector and in the creation of "ethnic" occupational niches (Azzeruoli 2017; De Castro et al 2020; Omizzolo 2016; Fratesea, Papadopulos 2021), most of the literature did not develop a systematic analysis regarding the role played by the intersection of processes of racialization, status precarization and illegalization in impacting different experiences of exploitation, marginalization and exclusion. The category of 'migrant workers' has often been used as a homogeneous definition, without exploring the profound differences existing within it, somehow following Castles and Kosack affirmation that the very fact of being an 'immigrant' defines per se the positions of 'immigrant workers' within society. Instead, drawing from other fields of study - such as postcolonial theory, Critical Race Theory and Black Marxism- it is possible to shed light on the different impact of the overlapping of border and racial regimes not only on the exploitation of migrant labor but more broadly on the systemic precarization, marginalization, subordination and dehumanization of certain

[2] See Rye, Scott 2018 for a comprehensive literature review.

segments of racialized and illegalized population within Western societies. The subject of seasonal workers programs, as well as of other devices of labor mobility control, while investigated, was rarely explored in its historical ties with colonialism, slavery, unfree labor relations and indentured labor. Indeed, the definition of modern slavery adopted by certain analyses has not been done with the aim to trace a continuity between the systems of labor mobility control and coerced labor characterizing the plantation system and colonialism and contemporary border regime, but rather to criminalize racialized subjects as the sole responsible of death or labor exploitation, while at the same time hiding the structural causes of 'human trafficking' and 'illegal gangmastering'.

### 1.1.3 Agricultural racial capitalism: from slavery to guestworkers programs

To better understand contemporary global agri-food system it is necessary to contextualize in relation to its historical evolution, deeply rooted in colonialism, trans-Atlantic slavery, and characterized by unfree and racialized labor relations since its inception (Rogaly 2021). To better define this relation, Kris Manjapra (2018) coined the expression "agricultural racial capitalism"[3] to underscore the expansion of a system of agricultural production based on unfree labor relations, coerced and racialized labor which, rather than disappearing, expanded following the formal abolition of slavery. Indeed, it is precisely following the abolition of plantation slavery that the plantation as an "exploitative, racial, political-ecological complex began to expand and travel the face of earth" (Manjapra 2018:2). Exploring the evolution of global agricultural capitalism, Manjapra (ibid.) traces its origins in the commercial cultivation of sugar in Brazil in the 16$^{th}$ century, being the country the largest producer and exporter of sugar at the global level until 1680. Later, sugar production was extended to British and French Caribbean colonies of Jamaica and Saint Domingue, where a "new version of the plantation complex" was implemented, which became known as the "West Indian method of commercial agriculture", based on the appropriation of land from indigenous people, forced labor, enslavement and the intensive production of single crops for exportation (ibid:11). A great contribution to the analysis of the role of cane sugar plantation system in the development of global capitalism was brought by the work of Susanne Mintz (1986), who investigated the close connection existing between the coerced labor of enslaved Africans in the plantation system and the emergence

[3] While Manjapra uses the concept of racial capitalism, he does not mention the origin of the term, which it will be analyzed in the second chapter.

of the industrial working class in England in the XIX century. As she argues, slave labor allowed for the dramatic reduction of production costs turning sugar from a luxury good into a commercial one, and thus allowing it to be introduced into the everyday diet of industrial workers to further increase their productivity.

It was precisely after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833, that alternative systems of coerced labor started being implemented in other parts of the world, falling under the control of the British Empire, as well as in the Caribbean, in the form of indentured laborers or "Coolies". Indentured labor, defined by Hugh Tinker (1993) as a "new system of slavery", took place together with the reorganization of land property in many areas fallen under colonial rule, with dispossessed Indian and Chinese farmers forced into labor migration. The last phase of the global racial agrarian regime individuated by Manjapra, going from 1870 to 1930, was characterized by a "bureaucratization" and the progressive substitution of colonial states with multinational companies. The use of indentured labor did not reduce but rather reached its peak in this period. In the 1930's, plantations and industrial factories, stopped simply being "the mirror of each other" and become owned by the same multinational corporations.

According to Nandita Sharma (2017:32-36), the contemporary system of immigration controls should not be seen as "timeless and integral element of a state's sovereignty" but rather its origin should be located precisely in the aftermath of the abolition of the slave trade and slavery by the British Empire and the attempt to replace slave labor relations within the plantation system with a more 'morally acceptable' system of unfree labor relations. The 'coolie' system - as a system of recruitment of laborers from India and British-controlled China to other parts of the British Empire - was therefore put in place. Coolies were hired under a contract of indentured labor which tied them to their employers for at least five years. While not physically forced to move as in the case of the Transatlantic slave trade, they were displaced and forced to migrate as a consequence of British colonization and the dispossession of their lands and means of subsistence. In order to prove the difference between 'coolie' system and chattel slavery, presenting the former as a voluntary program of labor recruitment, the British Empire approved a series of restrictions to the movement of people between the territories of the empire. Furthermore, labor contracts, mostly written in English, were made to sign to coolies before departure, in order to prove that workers had freely agreed to their recruitment.

> "People's free mobility across British imperial territories, such logic held, had to end in order to ensure that British subjects remained 'free' workers. In the process, the coercion inherent in the making and reproduction of a capitalist labour force was obfuscated." (ibid.:40).

The coolie system can thus be seen as the predecessor of what would then become guest or seasonal workers programs. Guestworkers programs have since then been historically related to agricultural labor, conceived as more socially acceptable, convenient and flexible compared to slavery, and particularly apt to supply the intensive-labor needs of agriculture (Berlan 1987; Castles 1986, 2006).

The United States, and more specifically California, can be seen as the original model of the contemporary system of international migrant labor recruitment and employment within the agricultural sector. Jean Pierre Berlan (1987, 2001) in his theorization of the "Californian model of agriculture" clearly highlighted the continuity existing between the import of migrant labor within Californian agriculture and the import of labor characterizing the plantation system. Yet, this connection has largely been ignored by most of the works that have recalled Berlan's "Californization of European agriculture" to highlight the structural dependence on migrant labor, often failing to analyze contemporary systems of migrant labor exploitation and control in a historical perspective. As Jean Pierre Berlan (ibid.) maintained, the "Californian model of agriculture" started developing in the 1850's when Californian farmers were no more able to supply the need of agricultural workforce only through the forced labor of Native Americans, nor could find white or Black Americans available to perform the job, given the ongoing golden rush and the abolition of slavery in Northern America. As reported by the newspaper "Californian Farmer" in 1854:

> "California is destined to become a great cotton, rice, tobacco, sugar and coffee producer, but where to find the workers? The Americans will not work our lands, this swampy land, our fields of rice and out cotton plantations, and they will not produce the harvests which require a labor similar to slave labor. In the South, there is the work of the slaves, but here slavery cannot exist. Then, where are we going to find the workers? The Chinese! […] the Chinese must be to California what Africans have been for the South" (*author's translation from French,* Californian Farmer 1854 cited in Berlan 2001:2).

After being introduced, Chinese workers were progressively substituted by Japanese, recruited directly from Japan and mostly employed in the sugar beet industry.[4] The Japanese

[4] At first described as quiet, industrious and skilled workers, being experienced farmers in their country of origin, resentment and racism against Japanese farmworkers rapidly grew since they started organizing to demand higher wages and started becoming landowners and farmers (McWilliams 1935). Therefore, a series of state and federal legislative acts

workers were then increasingly excluded through a series of legislative acts, both from emigrating to the US and to become landowners. Then, the US government started approving a series of bilateral agreements to import Mexican laborers in the fields, soon becoming the largest component of agricultural labor force. As it happened formerly with the Chinese and the Japanese workers, racial discourse was deployed to support the "superiority" and higher docility of Mexican farmworkers compared to other ethnic, racial and national groups:

> "The Mexican is not aggressive. He is amenable to suggestions and does his work. He does not take the Chinese or the Japanese attitudes. He is a fellow easy to handle and very quiet in his living, a man who gives us no trouble. He takes his orders and follows them." (Congress report, McWilliams 2000 [1935]:127)

In 1924, Californian farmers started recruiting Filipino workers, which would become the second largest national group employed in Californian farms (McWilliams 2000 [1935]). However, the "deportability" of Mexican workers represented a major element in their preference to Filipino workers, at that time a colony of the US and thus not deportable. Deportation not only represented a tool to enforce docility, but would also become a way to regulate the labor market at times of recession. As a matter of fact, following the end of the First World War and Great Depression in the 1930's, about 500.000 Mexican were deported.

Cruz (2009, 2010, 2014) suggested that, even though most of the analyses on the subject of migrant farmworkers do not adopt a racial lens, looking at White supremacy- that he defines as "a social force that distributes resources - political, economic, and social- in such a way that the lived experiences and material outcomes are differentiated for each group"- can be instructing in better understanding the evolution of agricultural labor as well as its organization and unionization in the US. Indeed, as maintained by McWilliams (2000 [1935]:104):

> "the history of farm labor in California has revolved around the cleverly manipulated exploitation, by the large growers, of a number of suppressed racial minority groups which were imported to work in the fields".

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were approved to curb the growing influence and power of Japanese farmers and farmworkers. 1920 Alien Land Act restricted the right to landownership for foreign citizens, while 1924 Immigration Act banned immigration from Japan to the US (McWilliams 1935). From 1920's, the US approved a series of guestworkers programs aimed filling the labor shortages deriving from the exclusion of Japanese and other immigrant workers. Thus, from 1922, through a series of bilateral agreements as well as through illegal immigration, about 160.000 Mexican laborers entered the US each year and were employed within Californian fields, soon becoming the largest component of agricultural labor force.

Building on Tomas Almaguer's (1984) investigation about racial hierarchies in late 19th century California, Cruz (2009, 2014) argued that racial stratification shifted during 20th century, with Japanese going up in the racial hierarchy as they became tenant farmers, below whites but above Mexicans and Filipinos. Investigating farmworkers experience and attempts to organize through the lens of White supremacy, allows Cruz to underscore the evolution of racial hierarchization in relation to the docility and (un)desirability of certain groups of workers, involving not only the relationship between whites and people of color, but also the intra-relationship existing among differently racialized groups. On the one hand, through the overlapping of racial and occupational hierarchization, white workers were associated with industrial workers, the only category legally allowed to unionize, while workers of color were associated with non-industrial workers and therefore prevented to join unions by the National Labor Relation Act of 1935. On the other hand, Filipino workers were subjected to higher forms of racism compared to Mexican workers, also due to their categorization as "colonial subjects" and thus further excluded from joining unions. However, in the following decades, 1930's racial hierarchization would shift, with Japanese farmers being dispossessed and interned in camps following 1941 Pearl Harbor attack, and Mexican workers started being recruited through the Bracero program, which dramatically increased the power of employers over workers. Cruz (2014) further examined the role played by the two programs, which he defined as "racial state projects", in preventing labor organization in the period going from 1940's to 1960's. The Bracero program first and the H2A later[5], introduced a new division among workers, on the basis of "status", which would strengthen the division between citizens and foreigners, pushing farm workers movement to become "more immersed in the politics of citizenship than in mobilising all workers regardless of citizenship status" (Cruz 2014:44).

The centrality of racialization in the definition and construction of seasonal workers programs has been further examined by Kristen Elise Hjalmarson (2021) and Amy Cohen (2019) in the context of Canada Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) in British Columbia.

[5] In the context of the United States, the first official program of recruitment for seasonal workers was approved in 1941 under the name of Bracero Program, from the word *bracero,* meaning 'someone working with hands' in Spanish. If, as examined in the first paragraph, Californian agricultural labor market was already differentiated on the basis of race, Bracero program introduced a new differentiation between workers, on the basis of migration status. The Bracero program has been interpreted as the response of farmers and growers to the labor organizing activities of the 1930's (Cruz 2010; Ganz 2009). The program went on from 1941 until 1964, supplying almost 4.5 million Mexican workers. It was later suspended following a series of investigations, protests and campaigns that pointed at the negative impact of the program on US labor rights and the systematic violation of *braceros'* fundamental rights, with the US Department of Labor officer in charge of the program himself defining it as a form of "legalized slavery" (SPLC 2013).

Hjalmarson (2021), adopting the lens of racial capitalism, underscores the neglect of SAWP's literature in relation to Black Caribbean workers' experiences, affirming that:

> "their exclusion from research on the SAWP follows the marginalisation of Black labour and the invisibility of Black geographies in Canada, reproducing notions that the country is 'non-Black' or that 'Black in/and Canada' is somehow "surprising"". (ibid:3)

Hence, to locate the experience of Black Jamaican workers, she first situates Blackness in relation to Canada's history, exploring the ways in which since the 1800's Black free immigration was prevented and "Canadianess" was constructed in relation to whiteness. In the 1950's, while debating on the immigration of workers from the Caribbean, the Canadian government tried to rule out any possibility for them to settle permanently in Canada, by referring to their un-assimilability and their un-fitness to Canadian climate. Hence, the SAWP was created to prevent the permanent settlement of workers of color, considered only as disposable and deportable workforce. Racism, discrimination and control characterize the lives of Jamaican workers employed through SAWP. At the same time, Hajlmarson highlights the everyday acts of resistance realized by Jamaican workers, reaffirming their right to be treated with dignity and respect, as told by an interviewed worker:

> "I remember he called me a n****r and I said, 'Go fuck yourself'. Excuse my language. And he got like, so upset at me. [He said,] 'You're not coming back next year!' I said, 'Oh, sure. Go and report it. I don't care. I'm not your kid. I'm not a slave." (ibid:13)

Amy Cohen's (2019) investigation on the experience of Mexican and Jamaican workers in the SAWP program relevantly shows that the differences in the experience of various racial groups goes well beyond the treatment in the workplace, involving also their housing condition and levels of segregation within the society. As maintained by Mario, an interviewed worker from Mexico, Mexicans enjoy better housing conditions compared to Jamaican workers:

> "The Mexican workers, we live in the bunkhouse. It was constructed a few years ago. It is pretty crowded, but it is clean and new. The Jamaicans, they live in the shacks and trailers around the property. Some of the buildings are so old they are falling apart." (ibid: 140)

According to Cohen, workers are aware that racial hierarchies are created by employers to divide workers and foster competition, in order to increase productivity and reduce labor

conflict. Furthermore, unfree labor relations and exploitation characterizing SAWP, as other temporary workers program, are not to be considered as a "by-product" or an accident, but they can rather be understood as the constitutive elements of the program, which is ultimately aimed at institutionalizing and reproducing "racialized citizenship" (Walia cited in Cohen 2019:132). Adopting this theoretical framework allows Cohen to underscore the historical continuities between seasonal workers program and previous arrangements to control labor mobility, such as slavery and indentured servitude, summarized in the words of Moises, a Mexican worker part of SAWP program:

> "The housing is undignified, but when we complain about the conditions to the boss, he says 'why are you complaining, in Mexico you live in huts and sleep on the floor?' The boss yells at us, harasses us to work harder. I am not allowed to leave the farm without asking permission. I am not allowed to go find another job no matter how badly I'm treated. Slavery hasn't ended, it has just become modernized" (ibid.:138).

The history of US and Canada as settler colonial states, taken together with a higher attention paid, especially by US academia, to analysis of structural racism, allowed research developed in these contexts to highlight relevant historic continuities between contemporary systems of agricultural production and racialized unfree labor relations (Cohen 2019; Walia 2010; Manjapra 2018; Sharma 2017). However, while US agriculture has been characterized by the presence of racialized/migrant labor since its inception, European agriculture has been historically connected to internal migration. France represented the first country to be structurally dependent on international migrant labor, following the end of Second World War (Berlan 1986), while this was not significantly relevant in other European countries - such as Italy, Spain and Greece - until the 1990s. In the late 1970's, Southern European countries, traditionally countries of emigration, started experiencing a shift, becoming countries of immigration, giving birth to what was to be defined as the "Mediterranean model of immigration" (Pugliese 2008). This was characterized by high degrees of informality, a large presence of immigrants in service and agriculture rather than industry and a large share of irregularity, cyclically regularized through amnesties. In the late 1990's, this model experienced a new transformation, starting to lose its informal nature, and agricultural labor markets became increasingly organized and structured, through the control of international mobility and the implementation of private and public mechanisms of agricultural workforce recruitment (Corrado et al 2017).

As a consequence of the relative newness of these phenomena, most of the investigations exploring the role of migrant labor within European agriculture, and more generally most investigations regarding migration at the European level, have adopted an understanding of racism as accounting for various forms of discrimination based on the status of 'immigrant' or on nationality without actually looking at the different experience of racism in relation to differently racialized subject. Indeed, while seasonal workers programs and other measures of control of labor mobility, contributing to the production and reproduction of the border regime, are rooted in racism and reproduce it, they are also organized according to a specific logic. Therefore, if it is true that race and migration status are often intersecting, they are not interchangeable. It would be thus more productive to explore the ways in which racial and border regime co-construct each other, rather than collapsing them into the same category. As suggested by Kehinde Andrews (2018), comparing the different experience of Irish and Black people in the US and the UK, it is necessary to distinguish between xenophobia and racism.

> "It is vitally important that we distinguish analytically between racism and xenophobia in this discussion. The Irish have undoubtedly historically experienced xenophobia in America and Britain. As foreigners they have been derided, scorned and faced discrimination. In competing for resources with those already inside the nation state they have faced marginalisation and had to overcome this to become part of the respective societies. This is a process that any migrant community has to go through and is distinct from racism, which works on a different set of metrics. Those groups that are not White will face the xenophobia of being a foreigner, but racism is more elemental than this. It is tied to and written on the body, it is rejection for having difference rooted in biology. Racism cannot be overcome through integration into the social system**.** While the Irish assimilated into America and Britain, Black people in both countries have largely remained marginalised. Even though I was born in Britain, and I am relatively successful, my children are still Black British, and will never fully be granted equality in the national picture. Structurally, the Irish are now indistinguishable from White people in general, while Black people remain subject to severe disadvantage. The idea that the Irish were not White before they arrived in America is also typically ahistorical. There is a reason that Irish people migrated voluntary to America on boats, while Africans were stolen and taken there in chains." (ibid:197).

For this reason, the above-mentioned analyses developed in the US and Canada are particularly instructive in shedding light not only on the continuities between slavery, indentured labor and migrant labor in the context of commercial and industrial agriculture, but also stressing the ways in which racism – to be understood not as a general discrimination against "immigrant workers" but as a system of power rooted in colonialism and White

supremacy - differently affects the experiences of 'immigrant workers' not only in relation to labor exploitation but more broadly in relation to their 'being in the world'.
Therefore, it appears more appropriate and theoretically precise to discuss about racialized migrant farmworkers, rather than simply migrant farmworkers.

### 1.2 Racialized-Migrant-(farm)workers' resistance and organizing within (agricultural) racial capitalism

The compartmentalization of research areas described in the first section of the chapter haa also affected the literature regarding racialized-migrant-farmworkers' forms of organization, unionization and resistance, which has often been developed through the lens of a specific discipline and thus often privileging one of the dimensions of racialized/migrant/(farm)workers' experience. For one thing, as mentioned before, literature developed in the past decades on farm labor has largely focused on exploitation, and thus the subject of organization, unionization and resistance has been underexplored. For another thing, when explored, farm labor studies have largely focused on the dimension of workers, paying larger attention to processes of organization taking place in the realm of the labor process, within unions and in the workplace, while at the same time taking as a theoretical and historical reference the history of farmworkers' struggles. For another thing, farm labor has long been marginalized within labor studies, being these mostly developed around the idea of the industrial worker or now mostly focused on new urban workers, such as those employed in the gig-economy, in the logistics or in the hospitality sector. For this reason, interesting investigations regarding forms of unionization, self-organization and resistance of racialized/migrant workers taking place beyond the workplace and involving issues different from the labor one have been developed with regard to other working sectors, similarly characterized by a large presence of migrant workforce employed in precarious and exploitative labor conditions. Finally, the struggles of racialized/migrant/(farm)workers' can also be interpreted paying larger attention to the dimension of migration status. The literature on this topic, from citizenship to critical border studies, can be a precious lens through which analyze struggles against the border as well as the subjective position of racialized/migrant and its role in terms of self-identification.

### 1.2.1 Racialized-Migrant farmworkers' organizing

Literature investigating forms of unionization, self-organization and organizing of racialized-migrant farmworkers has varied according to the farm labor history of specific countries. While in the case of the United States the history of farmworkers and their struggles has historically coincided with the history of racialized migrant farmworkers' struggles, the same cannot be said for other contexts, such as the Italian or the Spanish one, where the farm labor movement has historically been made of national workers. In these cases, both literature and unions rhetoric have associated the contemporary struggle of migrant farmworkers with the historical struggle of 'native' farmworkers, defined in Spain as '*jornaleros*' and Italy as '*braccianti*'. The overlapping between these experiences is rooted in union dominant understanding of working categories as the main framework for organization, an approach that has been questioned in the past decades by multiple experiences of organizing based on different shared features, such as nationality, ethnicity, community, etc.

As highlighted in the first part of the chapter, the United States and more specifically California have been the original model of the contemporary system of agriculture based on the recruitment and employment of international migrant labor. Literature on the topic of migrant farmworkers' struggles has been developed since the early 20$^{th}$ century, highlighting the tension existing between the 'Whiteness' of established unions and the California labor movement, which has been interracial since its inception (Cruz 2010).

Marshall Ganz (2009) in his seminal work about the California labor movement developed a rich investigation not only of the United Farmworkers Movement (UFW), but also proposed a detailed account of the organizing efforts that preceded the birth of the UFW in the first half of the twentieth century. Looking at the history of migrant farmworkers' organizing in the period going between 1900-1960's, Ganz (ibid.) highlighted how a large responsibility of the failure of farmworkers' organizing efforts was to be attributed to the racism of established unions. For instance, in 1903, Japanese and Mexican workers employed in the sugar beet industry, joined together in the Japanese Mexican Labor Association (JMLA), and, after successfully organizing a strike and winning the signing of a contract with Oxnard sugar, sent a formal request to join the AFL. However, due to rampant racism against Japanese and Chinese, the AFL eventually refused, replying that only

Mexican workers would have been admitted (Almaguer 1984; Ganz 2009; Hee Choi 1999).[6] On the contrary, revolutionary and multi-racial unions such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) were countering anti-Asian racism and were open to collaborations (Hee Choi 1999). As suggested by Cruz (2010:41), investigating the history of California farmworkers movement through the lens of White Supremacy allows to uncover the ways in which multiple forms of racism existing within "White organized labor" differently impacted on workers of color's attempts to unionize and join national labor unions.

The centrality of overcoming racial fragmentation to successfully organize farm workers and build effective alliances has been highlighted by more than one investigation accounting for the birth and evolution of the UFW in the 1960's, considered the largest farmworkers movement in US history (Cruz 2010; Ganz 2009; Araiza 2014). According to Ganz (2009), the UFW was successful thanks to a mixture between the labor shortage determined by the end of Bracero program in 1964, the ability to create inter-racial and multi-level coalitions as well as the influence of 1960's Civil Rights Movement and multiracial alliances. The conditions that made it possible to create the UFW as an inter-racial union have been further examined by Cruz (2010), while the latter point has been analyzed by Lauren Araiza (2014), who delved into the reciprocal relation existing between UFW movement and the Black Freedom Struggle, underscoring the role played by the establishment of multiracial coalitions of Blacks, "Chicanos", "Filipinos" and Whites. While White Supremacy created a racial hierarchy meant to divided racialized subjects, Mexican Americans were able to reappropriate their categorization as "Brown" or "Chicanos" to position themselves between Whites and Blacks, building alliances with the Black community as well as taking inspiration from the strategies deployed by the Civil Rights Movement.

Yet, despite being inter-racial and being born and made of migrant farmworkers, the UFW and his leader Caesar Chavez – a US citizen of Mexican origin - ultimately adopted an 'anti-immigration stance' being against not only Braceros but 'illegal' immigrants as well.

> "Congress has but scotched the snake, not killed it. The [Bracero] Program lives on in the annual parade of thousands of illegals and green carders across the United States-Mexico [sic] border to work in our fields…and probably never have had, any bona fide intention of making the United States of America their permanent home." (Cruz 2010:87).

[6] It is interesting to note the role played by Japanese labor intermediaries "who served not as agents of the employers, but as intermediaries between workers and growers. Their strategy was to accept wages below standard, gain control of local labor market, wait until crops reached a critical stage, and then threatened to strike unless wages were raised (Ganz 2009:44).

Literature investigating the history of United States' farmworkers struggles can be instructive in that it allows to draw parallels, with all due differentiations, between the contemporary struggles of racialized migrant farmworkers in European countries, such as Italy or Spain, and the historical struggles of migrant farmworkers in the US. At the same time, as previously highlighted, US literature pays higher attention, compared to literature accounting for Western Europe, to the role of processes of racialization and racism in affecting not only labor exploitation and broader oppression, but also forms of organizing, looking at the discrimination put in place also by established unions against racialized migrant farmworkers.

In the context of Western Europe, literature regarding unionization and other forms of organizing of racialized migrant farmworkers has been developed mostly in relation to Southern European countries, namely Spain and Italy, that have been the one where the influx of racialized migrant agricultural workforce has been more consistent in the past decades. As already mentioned, the subject of unionization and labor organization has been underexplored in migrant farm labor literature, which focused on systems of exploitation, and, when investigating organization, has done so by privileging one perspective of analysis rather than adopting a multidimensional approach.

On the one hand, due to the long history of farmworkers' struggle present both in Spain and in Italy, some of the contributions have tried to draw parallels and discuss the continuity between the history of farmworkers' struggles and the contemporary struggles of racialized/migrant farmworkers. For instance, Francesco Caruso (2015), in his comparative study investigating the contemporary struggles of migrant day laborers in Italy (Castel Volturno) and Spain (Almeria), suggested that the organizing efforts of Moroccan farmworkers in Andalusia might have been more successful than those of migrant farmworkers in Italy due to the inheritance of the struggle of Andalusian farmworkers through the unions of the area, among which the Sindicato Obreros del Campo (SOC). Caruso analysis is particularly inspiring in that, by proposing to analyze contemporary migrant farmworkers' struggles through the perspective of subaltern studies and social movement unionism, introduces a relevant conceptual rupture, suggesting new perspectives of analyses that do not traditionally belong to the field. For one thing, adopting the lens of subaltern studies allows to interpret the multiple forms of organizing put in place by migrant farmworkers through a less Eurocentric gaze. For another thing, the framework of social movement unionism allows Caruso to critically examine the work of unions in the context of farmworkers struggles, assessing the ways in which unions themselves, through their

hyper-bureaucratization and the creation of what he defines as 'cartel unionism', can be considered as responsible in preventing migrant farmworkers' self-organization and negatively affecting their struggle.[7]

Similarly, Carlos de Castro, Elena Gadea and Andrea Pedreño (2018), in an in-depth analysis on unionism and migrant farmworkers in the Murcia region (Spain), shed light on the difficulty for traditional unions to represent migrant farmworkers' demand as well as on the obstacle posed to their self-organization. Indeed, if following the year 2000 unions began to attempt representing migrant farmworkers, they channeled their demands by comparing them to the "conventional workers". However, "they met the double obstacle of being farmworkers and immigrant" (ibid:10). Indeed, the revindications of migrant farmworkers, mostly Moroccan, exceeded the working sphere, involving also residency status and the access to fundamental rights (healthcare, education, etc.). On the 25th of January 2015, migrant farmworkers in Murcia organized a mobilization to demand better working and living conditions, to which they call unions to participate. In that occasion, almost 4.000 farmworkers, of Moroccan, Ecuadorian and Sub-Saharan African origin participated. Few months after the demonstration, feeling that traditional unions had not been able to channel the power expressed by the demonstration into new union strategies or new bargaining processes, Moroccan farmworkers decided to create the union ALAFA (*Agrupación Laboral Autónoma de Fuerza* Agraria). Yet, the newly formed independent union ALAFA was patronized and obstacled[8] by other unions. As maintained by the authors:

> "the public presentation of the new agrarian union was realized during 1st of May mobilization and was welcomed with hostility both from the side of media, on the side of employers as well as established unions. The secretary general of the Agro-alimentary Federation of CC.OO [..] argued that "this is a corporativist and racist union. Negotiation should take place by sectors not by race" (*author's translation from Spanish*, de Castro et al. 2018: 14).

[7] Similarly, Beltrán Roca Martínez and Ibán Díaz Parra (2013), explored the ways in which the history of the union SOC-SAT operating in Andalusia (Spain) - rooted in the history of day laborers (*jornaleros*) and peasants (*campesinos*), while at the same time influenced by anarchist political ideology- can be instructive in explaining the success achieved through of a series of direct action put in place since the early 2000, such as land occupation, strikes and marches. Yet, the analysis developed by Martinez and Diaz Parra only mentions the role of migrant farmworkers without actually exploring the ways in which their presence influenced or changed the structure and organizing action of the union.

[8] Trying to grasp the multiple issues at stake in the struggles of migrant farmworkers in Southern Spain, Andrea Pedreño Canovas (2018) suggested framing the issue in terms of a tension between struggles for recognition and struggle for redistribution or, as he states, between status and class. Various instances of mobilization and forms of self-organization realized by migrant farmworkers, among which the 2015's march of migrant farmworkers in Murcia as well as the creation of the union ALAFA (*Agrupación Laboral Autónoma de Fuerza* Agraria) by mostly Moroccan farmworkers, are thus interpreted exploring the ways in which the actions were directed to achieving different forms of recognition: status, cultural or juridical.

The paper of de Castro et al. (2018) brings a precious contribution to the analysis of processes of unionization and self-organization of migrant farmworkers, shedding light on the increasing tension between established unions and migrant farmworkers' attempts to self-organize. However, the issue of racism, while fundamental for a better framing of the issues at stake, as also highlighted by the above-mentioned reference, remained dramatically underexplored.

In the Italian context, investigations regarding migrant farmworkers' unionization and organizing have been developed from various theoretical perspectives, making it somehow difficult to develop a coherent framework in which to analyze the struggle of racialized/migrant farmworkers in the past thirty years. Some analyses have explored contemporary struggles of migrant farmworkers in Italy, and more specifically, the Rosarno anti-racist struggle, in light of the history of farmworkers' struggles in Italy (Di Bartolo 2013)[9]. The differences between the two contexts have been highlighted, descending from unions' inability to represent migrant workers, both for their precarious working position and for their migration status. However, the centrality of the racial issue in relation not only to the specific conditions of segregation of Black African workers but also to their leading role in the context of migrant farmworkers' struggles in Italy, has not yet been adequately investigated. Indeed, while some accounts have investigated migrant struggles as representing a "critical standpoint on race" (Oliveri 2018), they have not developed an in-depth investigation regarding the role played by racial discrimination as the triggering element of many instances of mobilization, as well as representing a strong identifying factor among racialized, mostly Black African, workers. The Nardò strike, defined as the first self-organized strike of migrant farmworkers in Italy, has been analyzed in more than one contribution (Brigate di solidarietà attiva et al 2012; Perrotta, Sacchetto 2014; Oliveri 2012). Most of these, developed by researchers and activists participating to, and, in some cases,

[9] The same historical parallel has been established by unions, especially in the province of Foggia, who often recall the history of farmworkers' struggles (*movimento bracciantile*). In the Italian case, the farm labor movement (*movimento bracciantile*) had been particularly strong in Southern Italy from the beginning of the XIX century until the late XX century. Giuseppe di Vittorio, who would then become the founder of Italian largest union, the Italian Labor Conferation (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro – CGIL), was himself a farmworker since childhood, who started organizing in the province of Foggia and fighting for the recognition of farmworkers' rights in Italy. For this reason, the history of unionism in Italy is tightly connected with that of farm labor. At that time, farmworkers were not only fighting for a fair salary and dignified working conditions, but among their requests was also the 'right to land', being farmworkers often dispossessed peasants. Farmworkers' strikes were often repressed with violence.
Yet, from the late 1980's, as it will be further explored in the second part of this work, Italian farms started being populated by migrant farmworkers, coming from Western and Northern Africa, Albania.
In 1989, following the killing of Jerry Masslo, a South African refugee living in the province of Caserta and employed in the agricultural sector of the area, the first self-organized strike of racialized-migrant farmworkers in Italy took place. The issue of racism would represent a constant element in the organization of farmworkers taking place in the following 30 years, which will mostly see as protagonist African migrant workers, racialized as "Blacks".

leading the strike (Sagnet 2012), have proposed a detailed account of the two weeks' Nardò strike. The positive factors allowing for the strike to take place have been investigated, such as the "open camp" organized by the associations Finis Terrae and Brigate di Solidarietà Attiva, to be conceived not as a mere reception center for farmworkers, but rather as a political camp organized around ideas of solidarity between activists and workers and characterized by a strong work of sensitization regarding labor rights (BSA et al 2012). The role of the strike leader, Yvan Sagnet, has also been investigated in order to assess the weight of this figure in allowing the strike to take place, while at the same time assessing the negative impact of the over-mediatization and personalization in favoring fragmentation in the final days of the strike and ultimately the death of the movement (BSA et al 2012). It has been further highlighted that one of the defining characteristics of the strike has been its capacity to overcome national, racial and cultural differences, defining itself as a multi-racial strike. Finally, contribution highlighted that the strike was fundamental in pushing for the approval of decree-law n. 138/2011, introducing illegal gang-mastering as a crime within Italian criminal code.

In addition to the already mentioned contributions, other interesting analyses have been proposed by researchers who have long been involved in solidarity with the struggles of migrant farmworkers and can thus be better defined as researchers-activists, such as Domenico Perrotta (2020) and Irene Peano (2017a), who defined migrant farmworkers' struggles as central to the revival of labor struggles in contemporary Italy. Perrotta's (2020) collection of articles - published in occasion of Rosarno racist attacks' tenth anniversary - represents one of the richest and most insightful accounts of migrant farmworkers' unionization and self-organization, covering a wide range of topics. Notably, it is one of the few investigations analyzing the role and strategies of different unions, NGOs and solidarity actors, while at the same time referring to other experiences of mobilization and struggle put in place by migrant workers also outside the agricultural sector, such as the logistics. Peano (2017a:2)'s analysis is particularly inspiring in that she contextualizes migrant farmworkers struggle in Italy in relation to both racism, labor and citizenship rights, crucially maintaining that the three issues are fundamentally intertwined. Reconstructing the history of migrants' struggles since the killing of Jerry Essan Maslo in 1989, Peano maintains that if self-organized struggles of migrant workers have been critical in reviving radical struggles beyond migration itself, unions have instead abdicated to their function of organizing and representing workers, becoming service providers and failing to address the progressive precarization and fragmentation of labor in a conflictual way. Furthermore, migrant

struggles, by framing requests as a recognition of humanity and against a treatment as "animals", pointed to the need to "go beyond an obsolete set of citizenship rights" to explore new ways of conceiving social justice struggles (ibid:12-13).

In conclusion, literature on the topic of racialized migrant farmworkers mobilizations, unionization and organizing has often centered its analyses on the working sector, thus following traditional unions' approach according to which organization takes place on the basis of sectorial category. The working position as a farmworker has been considered in many analyses as a defining feature of the experience, failing to grasp the centrality of migration status and race as central factors in the process of organizing. In more than one instance, it has been stated that the challenges posed by international migration in relation to unionization and workers' organization rests on the subordination of the issue of class to issues of race, ethnicity, religion (Di Bartolo 2013; Pedreño Canovas 2018; Castro et al 2018), subscribing to an understanding of class as a supposed universal category.
However, this approach has been challenged in the past decades by countless experiences of organizing beyond 'traditional unionism', such as that of workers centers, which have been developed by focusing on racial and ethnic identification rather than working sector. For this reason, it appears necessary to expand beyond the agricultural sector, to explore the ways in which racialized/migrant workers have organized.

### 1.2.2 Racialized/Migrant workers organizing beyond unions

Discrimination against migrants and racialized workers has long characterized Western labor movements (Virdee 2000). As mentioned in the first part of the chapter, an understanding of the role of migrant labor within national economies as detrimental to workers' rights has often negatively affected the approach of union toward migrant workers. Furthermore, nationalist and racist ideology has long been dominant not only within the labor movement, but also in the context of Marxists and Leftist politics, as it will be further explored in the second chapter. When not openly discriminatory and racist against migrant workers, unions have often adopted a paternalistic approach, struggling to grasp the difference of the issues faced by racialized/migrant workers compared to that of 'native' white workers (Webb 2017). Indeed, a 'universalistic' approach, according to which workers are all the same by the very fact of being workers, has long prevailed within unionism (Alberti et al 2013). This conviction has been rooted in in the assumption that class, conceived as a race-less and gender-less category, represents the fundamental lens of

identification. In the past decades, this approach experienced a dramatic crisis, accompanied by a general crisis of Western unions' ability to represent and organize not only racialized/migrant workers, but workers in general, who increasingly became more precarious and fragmented (Mezzadra, Neilson 2013; Standing 2011). Despite being widely defined as a crisis of 'class consciousness' descending from the fragmentation of the working class, it could be better characterized as the crisis of the false conceptualization of the working class as a universal. The difficulty in grasping these transformations, on the side of unionism, politics and labor studies, can be attributed to the Eurocentric bias inherent in their analyses, developed taking white Western males employed in Fordist factories as the norm of employment relations (Nowak 2021). Acknowledging this as a fundamental weakness of labor studies, Jörg Nowak (2021) called for an abandonment of the theoretical Eurocentric framework of industrial relations and a shift towards Global Labor Studies. This perspective allows not only to expand the geographical scope of analysis beyond the Global North, but also to focus on the ways in which labor movements have been expanded beyond the working place, involving broader political change, such as in the case of Black labor movement during apartheid in South Africa (Nowak 2021; Webster 1987).

In the past decades literature has shed light on new forms of unionism and organizing, often involving racialized/migrant workers employed in hyper-precarious working conditions (Martínez Lucio, Perrett 2009; Tapia, Alberti 2018). Some new forms of unionism have been developed as part of strategies of trade union renewal through which trade unions have tried to expand their scope of action, while others have expanded in an autonomous way, going beyond union themselves (Martínez Lucio, Perrett 2009). Among the main models present in the debate, that of social movement unionism and that of community unionism are the more interesting for the present analysis, and will be here-after briefly examined, with a focus on their relationship with racialized/migrant labor.

Social movement unionism as a term was first coined by Peter Waterman (1993) to call for a convergence between social movement theory and labor studies in the analysis of trade unions approaches bearing similarities with social movements. In the following decades, the term was been used in a variety of contexts, both in academia and by labor activists, to variously describe the ways in which labor activism can use strategies belonging to social movements as well as to highlight the ways in which union politics goes beyond bargaining to fight for larger political change (Webster 1987). Social movement unionism can be seen as one type of unionism, along economic unionism and political unionism, born in response to the increasing bureaucratization and institutionalization of trade unions, many

of which were born as social movements in the 19th century (Pillay 2013). Social movement unionism is often used to describe unions characterized by "horizontal organization, the building of broad social coalitions, the recruitment of vulnerable subjects, non-professionalized grassroots activism, direct action and anti-bureaucratism" (Caruso 2017:278). However, the concept of social movement unionism has mostly been employed with a focus on class politics, without investigating in depth the ways in which these interact with other issues, such as race, migration status, etc. For the purpose of the present work, it appears particularly interesting to examine the way in which social movement unionism was used to describe trade unions activism during apartheid South Africa. Indeed, in this context, Black South Africans were excluded from participating to political life due to the rule of segregation put in place in 1947. Therefore, due to political exclusion, unionism became another form of political participation, which was not only aimed at fighting for better working conditions but strived for a broader political change and the end of racial segregation. While most of the analyses produced about this context were developed from a 'traditional labor perspective', i.e. they did not paid adequate attention to the role of racial capitalism in the definition of Black South African workers' experience, this perspective can represent a precious tool in understanding the Black labor movement struggle of the 1980's as an example of the ways in which unionism can effectively merge labor, political and racial issues. As it will be further explored in the following chapters, apartheid South Africa, with all the due differences, bears a number of similarities with the contemporary condition of segregation of (Black African) migrant workers in Europe, and more specifically in Italy, and therefore the fight for labor and racial justice that was developed in that context can be an inspiring example.

Community unionism has been increasingly used in a wide range of disciplines to define quite broadly "a whole series of ways that unions work with communities and community organisations over issues of interest to either or both" (Lipsig-Mumme's cited in Stewart et al 2009: 3). However, due to its extensive deployment, it has become somehow difficult to grasp what the term actually means. According to Paul Stewart et al. (2009:4), both the meaning of community and that of unionism must be clarified to better delineate its meaning and distinguish between issues of "union revitalisation" and "union community relationships". Community is a broad definition including various kind of communities (such as religious, ethnic, national, political, etc.) and by itself it does not define the nature and scope of the community in relation to unionism and organizing. In line with the purpose of the present analysis, Miguel Martínez Lucio and Robert Perret (2009:694), highlighted

that, while it is not possible to define a single model of community unionism, it is preferrable to examine "different initiatives and formats of community union engagement in relation to ethnicity and race issues". Therefore, the authors maintain that rather than fetishizing community, is more productive to explore the ways in which different "community-oriented strategies" are put in place according to different initiatives and organizing goals. Gabriella Alberti (2016) suggests that, while 'community' unionism has often been used as opposed to 'workplace' unionism, it would be more prolific to explore the ways in which trade unions and community organizations can collaborate to achieve improvements both in the workplace and in broader areas of workers' lives. From this point of view, the US model of 'workers centers' can thus be recalled as an example of a strategy of complementarity between unionism and community organizing.

Workers centers are defined as "community-based and community-led organizations that engage in a combination of service, advocacy, and organizing to provide support to low-wage workers" (Fine 2006:x). Fine highlights three waves of workers centers formation. During the first wave, taking place in the 1970's, they were founded by Black labor activists and immigrant activists, with the aim to counter discriminatory practices against African American and racialized workers, subject to worst working conditions and treatment in the workplace, as well as broader discrimination within society. The second wave took place in the 1990's and saw the larger involvement of Central American and Southeast Asian immigrants, as well as the increase of fundings from religious organizations, NGOs and unions. Nowadays, worker centers' members are mostly immigrant workers, and these started emerging also in rural area, following massive employment of migrant workers in the food industry. One of the defining features of workers centers is the focus on the development of (migrant) workers' leadership in order to foster their ability to defend and advance their own rights. Differently from unions, they do not focus on workplace, nor they focus on occupation or industry category in order to represent workers. Instead, ethnic or racial identification is a defining feature and "discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity is a central analytic lens through which economic and social issues are viewed by the centers." (Fine 2006:13). Advocacy and organizing activities are mostly focused on three areas: improving salaries and working conditions; fighting for immigration legislation reform and to defending immigrants from discrimination and attacks in their communities; addressing issues such as access to healthcare, education, housing. They adopt a variety of strategies aimed at placing economic pressure on employers and businesses, while at the same time pursuing advocacy at the local and national institutional level.

Workers centers can thus be considered as an example of intersectional community organizing, able to merge labor, racial-justice and immigration organizing, grounded in the awareness that the systems of power underlying structural discrimination and exploitation are connected. Gabriella Alberti, Jane Holgate and Maite Tapia (2013:4134) proposed the definition of "intersectional unionism" to characterize a union approach going beyond the 'universalistic' tradition of conceiving workers as primarily characterized by their position in the relations of production and giving "only secondary importance to intra-class divisions (intersections) that are crucial to the ways in which certain workers are segmented, marginalised and exploited." In order to examine this definition in practice, the authors analyse the approach of the three largest unions in the UK, as manifested through various campaigns and strategies. In doing so, they highlight the tension existing between "universalistic" and "particularistic" approaches, the former defining migrant workers only as *workers*, i.e. with a focus on labor issues, or only as *migrants*, i.e. with a focus on citizenship and status issues. For instance, while in certain cases specific branches were opened for migrant workers, these were marginalized and not integrated within the structure of the union itself, limited to the provision of services to "support 'vulnerable and powerless' migrants" (ibid: 4140). In other cases, instead, unions adopted an intersectional understanding of migrant workers in the organizing process, but later failed to integrate it within union structures. The authors ultimately maintain that an "intersectional" approach, given by a combination of "universalistic" and "particularistic" approach and grounded in the acknowledgement of specific vulnerabilities inherent in the position of 'migrant', while not exempt from challenges, appeared more successful in order to tackle labor and status issues and facilitate migrant workers active participation in trade unions. While very inspiring, the analysis of Alberti et al (2013) fails to further unpack the category of 'migrant' which is here used as broad definition without exploring differences not only in terms of status, but also in terms of experiences of racism and racialization of different 'migrant workers'.

### 1.2.3 Migrants' self-organization and everyday resistance

To conclude the review of the literature regarding racialized-migrant (farm)-workers' forms of unionization, organizing, and self-organization, it is necessary to briefly review the literature produced in the context of migration studies, border studies, and critical border

studies, focusing on the forms of struggle and resistance of migrants for their status and against the border regime.

Literature developed in the field of migration and citizenship studies has often explored instances of mobilization and collective organization of undocumented migrants, with a focus on assessing the symbolic and political nature of migrants' struggles for citizenship, building on the tradition of citizenship studies emerging from Hannah Arendt (Isin 2008; McNevin 2011, 2013; Nyers and Rygiel 2012; Oliveri 2012; Rancière 2010; Schaap 2011). According to Arendt (1968:236) citizenship, understood as the membership in the political community represented by the nation-state, is a pre-condition for political action, essential to make one's "opinion significant and actions effective". In this sense is to be read Arendt famous call for 'a right to have rights', meaning the right to recognition. According to Jaques Rancière, on the other hand, recognition is the end rather than the precondition of political action, and "politics is fundamentally about contesting political exclusion by enacting equality" (Rancière 2010; Schaap 2011: 23). Hence, while struggles for the recognition of migration status would be considered by Arendt as pre-political, Rancière conceives them as the quintessential representation of politics. Building on this theoretical framework, citizenship and migration studies have analyzed mobilizations and struggles of undocumented migrants defining them as "acts of citizenship" (Isin 2008; Oliveri 2012) or ways of enacting "citizenship from below" (Nyers and Rygiel 2012; Andrijasevic and Anderson 2009; Grove-White 2012, McDonald 2012). Despite being conceived as ways to stress undocumented migrants' activism despite their exclusion from the *polis,* these definitions, by using the language of citizenship to describe these acts risk cleansing citizenship of "the burden of its historical past" (Mezzadra 2015:14). Indeed, citizenship is inherently exclusive and its 'others' or outsiders are not 'accidental' (Nyers 2006) but functional to the very constitution of its insiders or the citizens themselves. Therefore, while literature exploring 'acts of citizenship' enacted by noncitizens has been insightful in stressing the political and transformative potential of those acts, it risks not to acknowledge that "citizenship always comes with the baggage of its history" (McNevin 2011:100).

On the contrary, literature developed in the field of critical border studies, among which also the strand of autonomy of migration mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, has stressed the strategies developed by migrant subjects to escape and resist the border, superseding the discussion regarding the classification of migrant struggles as either political or pre-political, as well as going beyond the language of citizenship (Tazzioli 2018; De

Genova 2010; 2015; Mezzadra 2004, 2006; Mezzadra, Neilson 2013; Casas Cortes et al 2015). Particularly focused on the analysis of movements across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, and of internal European border crossings, the contributions developed according to this perspective have shed light on the multiple instances of resistance enacted by those crossing the border (Hess 2017, Tazzioli 2018), as well by those facing the multiple borders reproduced within the nation-state through countless administrative and social barriers (Mezzadra, Neilson 2013). Their analyses have challenged the distinction between "forced" and "economic" migration, highlighting that, even when forced, movement always imply a certain degree of choice and autonomy. While some suggested defining the very act of crossing the border as "an act of resistance" that disrupts the order of the nation-state (Hess 2017), other contributions looked at the ways in which migrants crossing borders enact a series of strategies, such as the refusal to be fingerprinted in the first country of entry, in compliance with Dublin Regulation III, to "assert their freedom" against the multiple restrictions imposed on them by EU normative framework (Tazzioli 2018). Tazzioli (ibid: 24), suggests rethinking "autonomy of migration" through the lens of asylum, maintaining that even if refugees and asylum seekers are traditionally represented as the victim par excellence, by claiming their right to choose where to live and apply for asylum they "disrupt asylum's juridical and normative borders and cannot be subsumed or contained within the human rights framework". Furthermore, Luca Quierolo Palmas and Federico Rahola (2020), also following the increasing criminalization of solidarity taking place in the EU, suggested comparing contemporary struggles of migrants crossing the borders and those in solidarity with them to the "underground railroad" that facilitated the escape of enslaved Africans from the South to the North of the US in their quest for freedom.

This literature has been particularly precious in countering the victimization of migrants and refugees, dominant in scholarly analysis influenced by humanitarian discourse, further examined in the last part of the second chapter. Furthermore, it has stressed the transformative role of collective practices of resistance, even if these are not taking place in the form of mobilizations or public demonstrations. However, for one thing it has been criticized for "attributing an ambition to mobility and migrants that not necessarily is there" (McNevin 2013:194), somehow over-politicizing the act of migration itself, while under-estimating not only the role played by structural factors in the movement of people, but also the harshness of migrants' lived experience. Finally, despite their call to "de-migrantize migration studies" (Tazzioli 2018), this literature has also failed to develop a more comprehensive account of migrant subjectivities as historically, socially, politically,

geographically and culturally situated subjects, somehow reproducing an understanding of migrants always as immigrants and never as emigrants (Sayad 1999).

## Conclusion

Through the review of the literature presented in this chapter, it has been possible to highlight tendencies as well as weaknesses of the literature on the topic of migrant farmworkers conditions and struggles in the context of contemporary agro-industry. The literature on the topic has mostly privileged one perspective of analysis, often failing to examine the subject from multiple perspectives, accounting for the multiplicity of forms of oppression to which racialized migrant farmworkers have been subjected in the context of their employment within agri-food industry in countries Global North. Most of the analyses, while recognizing the over-representation of racialized/migrant farmworkers in the agricultural sector and explaining it in light of dual or segmented labor market theory, have not gone further in examining structural factors of discrimination, precarization and exclusion taking place within broader society and economy allowing for agricultural labor to be their only working opportunity. Hence, the over-all focus of most of the analyses has been on the exploitation of migrant workers in the process of production.

Given the large influence of Marxian analysis in the conceptualization and development of labor studies, it appears necessary, in order to overcome these limitations, to develop a broader reflection on the conceptualization of capitalism given by Karl Marx as an economic system based on free-waged labor whereby labor exploitation is represented by the appropriation of surplus labor by capital at the expenses of workers. As it will be thoroughly discussed in the second chapter, this interpretation relegates slavery and other forms of unfree labor to the phase of primitive accumulation, hence to the pre-history of capitalism. At the same time, racism is not conceived as a constituting element of capitalism, but rather just as an element of the superstructure, a contingent one. This understanding, even if not explicit, is clear in most of the mentioned analyses, largely ignoring the issue of racialization and the ways in which White supremacy differently impacts on differently racialized migrant workers. These analyses have often treated the category of 'migrant' as self-explanatory and have investigated race by collapsing it with ethnicity and nationality, considering it as a mere ideological tool used to divide the working class. On the contrary, the present work will point to the centrality of the colonial-racial issue not only for the development of capitalism at a global scale, but also for its contemporary reproduction as well as for the understanding

of forms of struggle aimed at resisting it. The following chapter will be thus dedicated to lay the theoretical foundations necessary for this analysis.

# CHAPTER 2

# THEORIZING RACIAL CAPITALISM, DECOLONIZING MIGRATION STRUGGLES

Decolonization and Marxism have been defined as fundamental political, theorical and methodological tools to interpret as well as to intervene in the social world of the 21st century (Ndlovu Gatsheni, Nlodvu 2022). Indeed, if decolonization points to the need of deconstructing the colonialism and racism inherent to contemporary systems of power as well as of knowledge, Marxism centers capitalism and exploitation as fundamental elements in the making of social reality. Furthermore, both agree on the need and urgency for social theorists not only to interpret the world but also to act in order to change it. At the same time, the need to "decolonize Marxism" (ibid:3) has been voiced from multiple sides, stressing the Eurocentric and racist-colonial biases of some Marxisms.

Contemporary global migration, conceived as the movement of people characterized by the dispossession of their means of subsistence in the countries of origin caused by colonial and neo-colonial policies and further affected by the coloniality of the global mobility regime, can be better understood when analyzed through the lens of decolonization and Marxism. Indeed, if decolonization is central to shed light on the historical legacies of colonialism and racism in defining contemporary systems of (im)mobility and exclusion, Marxism fundamentally centers capital accumulation as a fundamental element in understanding both the causes of dispossession and those of exploitation. At the same time, it can be maintained that most of the weaknesses and fallacies of contemporary theorizations regarding the intertwining between migration, labor and capitalism, as well as of the struggles for and about migration, can be traced back to the old-standing debate regarding the relationship between the role of racism and colonialism in the development of capitalism, as structural elements or instead contingent ones. Indeed, global migration brought at the center of the stage the contradiction inherent to colonial as well as settler colonial societies, through the displacement of formerly colonized and racialized subject in the center of the metropole (Mellino 2012b).

The initial part of the chapter will be dedicated first to examine the theorization of the colonial-racial issue within the writing of Marx and early Marxist, and then to analyze the theorization regarding the entanglement between racism and capitalism as proposed by

some leading thinkers, broadly defined as "Black Marxists"[10], who shed light on the centrality of the colonial-racial issue for the development of capitalism, among whom W.E. Du Bois, Franz Fanon, Aime Césaire, Stuart Hall and Cedric Robinson. In the second part of the chapter, contemporary debates on race and its intersection with other systems of oppression, as conceptualized by theorists of Critical Race Theory and intersectionality, will be analyzed. Then the focus will be shifted on illustrating contemporary definitions of racial capitalism, building on Gargi Battarcharrya's (2018) seminal work "Rethinking Racial Capitalism", examining the ways in which racial capitalism operates nowadays, through a conceptualization of the border and contemporary systems of mobility control as an "incarnation of racial capitalism". Finally, the last part of the chapter will be dedicated to investigating the ways in which, following the rise of neo-liberalism, struggles have been transformed through what has been defined by Arundhati Roy (2014) as the "NGO-ization of resistance" as well as through the affirmation of humanitarianism as a replacement of solidarity. At the same time, while considering the impact of these transformations on social and labor movements, it will be highlighted how what has been defined by Césaire as "fraternalism" still operates today through the marginalization and exclusion of racialized/migrant subjects from anti-racist struggles in Europe, and more specifically, Italy.

### 2.1 Decolonizing White Marxism, Theorizing Racial Capitalism

Despite being considered as the revolutionary theory par excellence and having influenced countless revolutions and anti-colonial struggles, as well as, unfortunately, oppressive regimes, Marxism has been variously criticized for being a Eurocentric theorization, reproducing the universalism of Enlightenment and the idea of progress and modernity, for not having paid enough attention to racial, colonial and gender oppression, for having generalized the European experience, for having promoted class reductionism, privileging class as the main lens to understand social relations, as well as for having underestimated forms of collective organization and struggle not centered on class. Most of these critiques were proposed by intellectuals, revolutionaries and activists who found the analyses of Karl Marx inspiring and yet thought that they were missing some of the crucial

[10] As maintained by Grosfuel (2021:xix) "Black Marxism is not a skin colour but a particular form of understanding Marxism and the world at large. Black Marxists think from the social/ historical experience of Black bodies, considered "inferior" in the articulation between capitalist accumulation and racial domination in a White Western global world. Black Marxists' thought is the critical vision produced from the geopolitics and body- politics of knowledge of the oppression experienced by Black people in a "Modern/ Colonial Capitalist/ Patriarchal Westerncentric/ Christiancentric Racist world-system" dominated by Westernized White elites. The consequences of rethinking Marxism from the Black experience include the need to "stretch" and "redefine" Marxism in a decolonial form, away from its Eurocentric assumptions".

elements regarding both the functioning of capitalism and the possibilities of the struggles for liberation. The critiques were developed by looking at the specific condition of oppression of Black people in the United States (Davis 1981; Jones 1949; Robinson 2000 [1983]; W.E. Du Bois 1935;) or trying to adapt Marxist analyses to the conditions of colonized people in Africa and the Caribbean (Cabral 1979; Césaire 1955; Fanon 1963; Nkrumah 1965), Asia (Chakrabarty 2000; Guha, Spivak 1988) and South America (Quijano 2000). Most of them pointed to the lack of theorization in "classical" Marxism regarding the "colonial-racial" question or even to a clearly racist and colonial attitude of some Marxists.

Marxism can be defined as a "travelling theory" and "living theory" which, starting from the writings of Karl Marx, has been interpreted in multiple ways through the past two centuries, producing "multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations of social life" (Smith 2022:49), and it would be thus more appropriate to speak about Marxisms (Satgar 2019). Some of these Marxisms - such as orthodox Marxism, Stalinism, etc. - have been founded on the "epistemic Eurocentrism" inherent in Marx's early works and have therefore reproduced "the worst features of western Eurocentricism and modernity: wage exploitation, alienation, technocentred violence, exclusive ethno-nationalism and the eco-cidal domination of nature" (Satgar 2019:8). Many other Marxisms, however, have been emerging from colonized contexts and have been critical in supporting struggles for liberation from colonial domination and racism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Ndlovu 2022).

Miguel Mellino and Andrea Ruben Pomella (2020), tracing the evolution of Marxist theory in relation to the analysis of the relationship between colonialism, imperialism, racism and capitalism, highlighted a turn following the rise of Stalinism and the end of the Second World War. Indeed, they argued, while the "early Marxists" paid a higher attention to the centrality of colonialism and imperialism to the global functioning of capitalism, this focus appeared to be lost in what Perry Anderson defined as "Western Marxism", emerging from the 1920's until the 1970's in the West. Mellino and Pomella suggest defining this Marxism as "White Marxism", by that meaning not the origin or the skin color of its authors but rather the ways in which their analyses are characterized by whiteness as an ideological, cultural and material dispositive of power. According to the authors, among the main features of White Marxism are: the conceptualization of capitalism as the product of intereuropean development; the equivalence established between capitalist modernity and development and between emancipation and progressivism; the devaluation of race as a central element in global capitalism and its subordination to class; an historicist conceptualization of capitalism; the focus on the universalizing and homogenizing nature of

capitalism and its neglect for the constant production of differences and hierarchies within capitalism. Yet, simultaneously with the affirmation of White Marxism, there has been a surge in the appropriation and reformulation of Marxist analyses by Black American intellectuals (Du Bois 2007 [1903]; Robinson 2000 [1983]), African and Caribbean intellectuals and revolutionaries (Cabral 1979; Césaire 1955; Nkrumah 1965; Rodney 1972) whose intervention has not only been theoretical but fundamentally political, many of them being killed in their struggle to achieve a fair decolonization for the African continent.
In what follows, the different interventions of Marx and early Marxists regarding the issue of colonialism and racism will be explored, assessing their contributions as well as the critiques moved to them. In the second part, the focus will be placed on the contributions of Black Marxists thinkers, and the ways in which they have theorized the relationship between racism, colonialism, capitalism, criticizing the whiteness of Marxism while at the same time maintaining some elements of its analytical framework.

### 2.1.1 The "colonial-racial" question in Marx and early Marxists

Marx discussed only briefly the role of colonialism, racism and slavery in relation to capitalism, and his point of view has been considered as ambivalent and changing during the course of his life. Marx's writings on English colonialism in India and on the "Asiatic mode of production", taken from some letters of 1853, have been considered as the evidence of his racist, colonialist and Eurocentric attitude. In these, he argued that colonialist capitalism in India represented an evolution, if compared to the "Asiatic mode of production" – a vast definition including, India, China as well as Islamic countries, characterized by stagnation, despotism and lacking internal class conflict.

> "England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating – the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia […] The British were the first conquerors superior and therefore inaccessible to Hindu civilization" (Marx 1853 in Fernbach 2019:1094).

Building on these affirmations, Edward Said (1978) identified within Marx's writings the Orientalist attitude he was investigating, giving birth to what has been defined as "the postcolonial critique of Marxism"[11]. Similarly, Stuart Hall (1992:223) argues that Marx's

[11] The debate between postcolonial studies and Marxism has been prolific and diverse. Since their emergence in 1980's, postcolonial studies have variously criticized Marxism for its universalism, Eurocentrism, lack of elaboration

observations regarding non-Western societies were reproducing the main features of the discourse of "the West and the Rest", organizing his arguments "in terms of broad, simple, contrasting oppositions which mirror quite closely the West-Rest, civilized-rude, developed-backward oppositions". While these critiques referred to a limited corpus of work, developed in the first part of Marx's life (1850's), it has been argued that his views changed overtime, moving from Eurocentric modernist ideas - according to which non-western and pre-capitalist societies should have been integrated into Western capitalism before being able to implement communism and social revolution - to a more nuanced understanding of non-western world and profoundly critical of the impact of capitalism and colonialism in this societies (Anderson 2010; Satgar 2019). Yet, as highlighted by Vishwas Satgar (2019), the "epistemic Eurocentrism" of the first Marx has influenced a great number of Marxist thinkers, that have further developed a modernist, stagist, developmentalist, and Eurocentric understanding not only of capitalism but also of class struggle.

The issue of slavery was also analyzed by Marx in some of his early writings, in the Capital vol. I, as well as in some writings regarding the American Civil War (Anderson 2010). In 1846, in a letter, Marx stressed the paramount importance of the enslavement of Black people in the United States for the birth of industrial capitalism:

> "Direct slavery is as much the pivot upon which our present-day industrialism turns as are machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery there would be no cotton, without cotton there would be no modern industry. It is slavery which has given value to the colonies, it is the colonies which have created world trade, and world trade is the necessary condition for large-scale machine industry […] Slavery is therefore an economic category of paramount importance." (Marx in Anderson 2010: 83)

Later, in the Capital, Vol I, Marx analyzed more in-depth the role of slavery and colonialism, defining them as belonging to the phase of primitive accumulation, thus representing founding moments of capitalism, but still not integral to it.

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regarding different histories of capitalism, economism, historicism, etc. In response, Marxists have accused postcolonial studies of particularism, culturalism, cultural relativism, of supporting the neoliberal project through a focus on identity that forgot the role of class, of representing an elitist intellectual project which hardly went out of the academia and influenced real world struggles. In some cases, the debate went as far as to become a sort of battle between opposing factions, where the space of constructive dialogue almost vanished. Yet, as it has been shown by different authors (Bakan, Dua 2014; Sinha, Varma 2017), the commonalities are more than expected. Indeed, both Marxism and postcolonial theory include a wide range of different positions, whereby some theorists, are considered belonging to both theoretical traditions, according to the different focus adopted to analyze their work (Sinha, Varma 2017). Furthermore, a great deal of postcolonial theorists either emerged from a critical engagement with Marxism, such as the Subaltern Studies group, or took as an inspiration and point of reference "Third World Marxists" (Bakan, Dua 2014). See Bakan, Dua 2014, Sinha, Varma 2017, Smith 2022 for an in-depth analysis of the debate.

> "The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation." (Marx 1976:915).

Marx maintained that American slavery constituted a specific mode of production, which he defined as "slave mode of production", differing from capitalist mode in that it was not based on the free wage-labor relation. He also mentioned the role of slavery of Black people in the United States as an obstacle to the organization of workers, creating a division between black and white labor, without yet investigating in depth the issue and the consequences of racism.

> "In the United States of America, every independent workers' movement was paralysed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. Labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin." (Marx 1976:414).

During the American Civil War, Marx wrote in fierce support of the abolitionist movement and of the emancipation of Blacks and, once it ended, he supported the full recognition of citizens' rights to the newly freed citizens (Anderson 2010). However, despite these interventions, Marx never developed a coherent and systematic analysis of the central role of slavery, colonialism and racism, not as contingent elements but as structural features of global capitalism (Mellino, Pomella 2020).

Following the death of Marx, the issue of colonialism and racism and their relations with capitalism were at the centre of the debate not only at the theoretical level but also at the political one, being at the core of the Second and Third Congress of the Communist International. The positions regarding colonialism within communist parties were not homogeneous and still ambiguous. In more than one instance, the superiority of "white race" compared to other "uncivilized" and "barbarians" was proposed as a reason to support colonialism, together with the idea that the introduction of capitalism was a progressive force in the colonized societies. However, despite some members' racist and colonial views, anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism mostly prevailed in the line of the Second International, and more than one resolution was voted against colonization and in support of the struggle for liberation[12].

[12] See Gaido, Quiroga 2018 for an extended analysis of the debate.

Among these, Rosa Luxemburg analyses about the role of colonialism in the global expansion of capitalism and its destructive effects on non-capitalist societies represent some of the most anti-colonial writings on the subject by early Marxists (Mellino, Pomella 2020). Rosa Luxemburg (Hudis, Anderson 2004) analysed with particular attention the violent expropriation realized by colonial capitalism within colonized societies, shedding light on the ways in which it destroyed non-capitalist and "primitive communist" modes of productions. Following the colonization of America in the 15th century, she maintained, capital expanded worldwide through world trade and colonial conquest. Through the establishment of commercial companies and the expropriation of land by European capitalist colonialism:

> "the indigenous social relations and mode of economy of native peoples are everywhere destroyed, whole peoples partly eradicated, partly proletarianized and placed under the command of industrial and commercial capital as slaves or wage-laborers in one form or another." (Luxemburg in Hudis, Anderson 2004: 16-17).

Luxemburg importantly stresses how the colonial wars of the 19th century emerged from the resistance of indigenous communities "against their destruction and proletarianization by modern capital" (ibid). However, despite their tenacious resistance, at the time of her writings, colonial capitalism appeared to be triumphant.

> "First of all, this means a tremendous extension of the realm of capital, the construction of a world market and world economy, in which all inhabited lands of the earth are reciprocally producers and customers for products, working integrally together and participating in one and the same earth-spanning economy. The other side, however, is the advancing immiseration of ever greater circles of humanity around the globe, and the increasing uncertainty of their existence. To the extent that in place of old communistic, peasant or corvée relations, with their limited productive powers and low standard of living, but with firm and secure conditions of existence for all, there appear capitalist colonial relations, proletarianization and wage-slavery, all the peoples affected in America, Asia, Africa and Australia come to experience bare misery, an unknown and unbearable burden of labor, and finally complete insecurity of existence." (ibid.)

Luxemburg approach was fiercely anti-colonial and she did not leave any space for ambiguity. Colonialism was captured in its destructive and violent nature, as well as in its purpose of expanding capitalism. Primitive accumulation was not conceived as a preliminary stage of capitalism but rather as a continuous process aimed at reproducing the conditions of capital accumulation through the violent dispossession of labor power and

means of production from non-capitalist forms of social organizations. Furthermore, contrarily to the historicist, Eurocentric and stagiest conceptualization of capitalism as a necessary step towards liberation, Luxemburg gives relevance to the forms of resistance of indigenous populations as well as to the revolutionary nature of forms of social organization which resisted colonial capitalism, defined as "primitive communism". This is particularly relevant for opening up to an understanding of "class struggle" that goes beyond the classical idea of the industrial-male-white-workers striking in the factory, shedding light on indigenous/alternative forms of anti-capitalist resistance that preceded Marxism.

The question of racism was also addressed by Marxist theorists and activists, assuming a central relevance in the debate of 1920's-30's, and Leon Trosky was among those who paid higher attention to the subject of racial discrimination in the United States. In the context of the Third and Fourth Comintern Congress the "Black Question" became the subject of two resolutions. In these, the issue of the "Black Belt" in the United States was characterized as a national issue and thus the right to self-determination of Black Americans was proclaimed. Yet, the issue of racial discrimination was still mostly understood only as a tool of the elites to divide white and black working classes and the specific nature of racial oppression was missing from most of the analyses. Furthermore, racism was still pervasive within national Communist Parties as well as within labor unions. Following the rise of Stalinism, the colonial-racial question almost disappeared from the debate of "Western Marxism" (Anderson 2010), while the Eurocentric, developmentalist, racist and colonial stance became dominant. However, multiple contributions emerged from "the margins" trying to bring the colonial-racial question back to the centre of the debate, given its outmost importance in describing modernity and global capitalism, but also trying to shed light on the diverse nature of colonial, racial and class oppression and the different nature of their struggles (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Ndlovu 2022).

### 2.1.2 Race and class in the writings of "Black Marxists"

The nature of the relationship between race and class has been one of the crucial elements at the core of the debate between "White Marxists" and Black, anti-racist and anti-colonial Marxist, but has also been at the center of the debate between Marxism and other theoretical approaches, such as Postcolonial theory and Critical Race Theory. In Marxists' analyses, race has often been conceived as a mere ideological dispositive belonging to the superstructure, functional to the fragmentation of the working class, an understanding that

has often been adopted by labor studies in their analyses regarding migrant workers' organization, as well as by unions in their effort to organize workers. This theorization has limited the understanding of racism as going beyond a mere ideological construct, representing a material force in the everyday lives of negatively racialized subjects. If White Marxism has long ignored or underestimated the role of racism for the very existence and reproduction of capitalist mode of production, the complex relation between race and class, together with the social and psychological consequences of racism, was examined by other Black and anti-colonial intellectuals, who focused on the origins and evolution of this relation, as well as on its function and nature. As suggested by Reiland Rabaka (2009), the Black radical tradition, or what he defines as "Africana critical theory"[13], represents a rich resource to counter the unwavering race-blindness of "conventional critical theory" and to reflect on the intersection of systems of oppressions, through the thinking of "intellectual-activists" who have dedicated their intellectual and political life to the fight for social and racial justice. Among them, the thinking of W.E.B. Du Bois, Franz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, Stuart Hall and Cedric Robinson will be here analyzed, being aware that many other Black, anti-colonial and African intellectuals crucially contributed to the debate.

W.E.B. Du Bois can be considered as a pioneer in the debate regarding relations between race and class oppression, as well as being the first well-known Black Marxist and among the most important US sociologist and intellectuals of 20th century. While known for his contributions regarding Black people in the US, the relevance of W.E.B. Du Bois as a sociologist, for its innovative methodology, rigorous analyses and radical perspectives is often underestimated, in a manifestation of the epistemic racism still prevalent in social sciences today (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Ndlovu 2022; Rabaka 2009). In the early 20th century, reflecting on the position of Black workers in relation to the broader (white) working class he argued:

> "Theoretically we are part of the world proletariat in the sense that we are mainly an exploited class of cheap laborers; but practically we are not a part of the white proletariat to any great extent. We are the

[13] According to Rabaka (2009:5) "Africana Studies has consistently offered the black radical tradition its highest commendations and its most meticulous criticisms. It is, also, the academic discipline that most inspired Africana critical theory's unique method—"unique" especially when compared to other forms of critical theory that emerge from traditional disciplines— because Africana Studies is a transdisciplinary discipline—that is, a discipline that transgresses, transverses, and transcends the academic boundaries and intellectual borders, the color-lines and racial chasms, and the jingoism and gender injustice of traditional single phenomenon-focused disciplines, owing to the fact that at its best it poses problems and seeks solutions on behalf of Africana (and other struggling) people employing the theoretic innovations of both the social sciences and humanities, as well as the political breakthroughs of grassroots radical and revolutionary social movements."

> victims of their physical oppression, social ostracism, economic exclusion and personal hatred" (W.E.B. Du Bois 1921 cited in Green, Smith 1983:266).

In the context of the first Pan African convention, stressing the centrality of racial oppression Du Bois (1900) famously coined the definition of the "color line" as the "problem of the twentieth century […] the question as to how far differences of race-which show themselves chiefly in the color of the skin and the texture of the hair-will hereafter be made the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization."

In Black Reconstruction in America, Du Bois (1935) highlighted the centrality of slavery to capitalist development of United States and stressed the complementarity of Northern industries and Southern slavery. Furthermore, he acknowledged enslaved laborers as political actors who played a fundamental role in the American civil war, by entering a "general strike against slavery" and transferring their labor "from the Confederate planter to the Northern invader, in whose army lines workers began to be organized as a new labor force" (ibid: 175-181). Finally, Du Bois, similarly to other authors mentioned in the following paragraphs, rejected the economic reductionism of traditional Marxism and went beyond an analysis of the economic function of racism, exploring the psychological and social effect of racism in the United States. He famously coined the expression "double consciousness", to define the experience of Black people in the US.

> "One feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body […] The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (Du Bois: 1903:3)

Franz Fanon (1963, 1964, 1986) examined not only the birth and purpose of race and racism, in relation to imperialism and colonial domination, but also the relationship between race and class and the psychological consequences of racism for racialized subjects. Fanon pointed to the need for Marxism to be "stretched" to investigate the system of power existing in the colonies, where the overlapping of the categories of race and class made it necessary to rethink the traditional conceptualization of base and superstructure. While race was conceived by traditional Marxism as part of the superstructure, and therefore influenced but not influencing the economic base, Fanon maintained that in the context of imperialism and colonial domination race was a structural element in the definition of the economic base.

> "When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species. In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich**.** This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem." (Fanon 1963:40).

Fanon stressed how the inferiorization of a group of people on the basis of a constructed racial identity had been a necessary tool to justify their enslavement, coercion and domination for the purpose of capital accumulation, through labor exploitation and the appropriation of land and resource. Racialization represented therefore a key phase of capital accumulation in colonial-imperialist domination.

> "Racism stares one in the face for it so happens that it belongs in a characteristic whole: that of the shameless exploitation of one group of men by another which has reached a higher stage of technical development. This is why military and economic oppression generally precedes, makes possible, and legitimizes racism." (Fanon 1964:37-38)

Yet, race, conceived as a social formation, is not fixed but rather evolving according to the needs of capital accumulation. Indeed, according to Fanon, while in a first moment racism was justified with biological arguments, and the domination and exploitation was imposed through violence, killings and enslavement, in a second moment, with the evolution of the system of production, the need of capital evolved so to transform racism in a subtle mechanism through which the negatively racialized subjects internalized, racist thinking to such an end that they started seeing themselves as inferior (so-called "inferiority complex") through the process defined by Fanon as "epidermization". As he illustrates:

> "Progressively, however, the evolution of techniques of production, the industrialization, limited though it is, of the subjugated countries, the increasingly necessary existence of collaborators, impose a new attitude upon the occupant. The complexity of the means of production, the evolution of economic relations inevitably involving the evolution of ideologies, unbalance the system. Vulgar racism in its biological form corresponds to the period of crude exploitation of man's arms and legs. The perfecting of the means of production inevitably brings about the camouflage of the techniques by which man is exploited, hence of the forms of racism. It is therefore not as a result of the evolution of people's minds that racism loses its virulence. No inner revolution can explain this necessity for racism to seek more subtle forms, to evolve. […] For a time, it looked as though racism had disappeared. This soul-soothing, unreal impression was simply the consequence of the evolution of forms of exploitation. Psychologists spoke of a prejudice having become unconscious. The truth is that the rigor of the system made the daily affirmation of a superiority superfluous. The need to appeal to various degrees of approval and

> support, to the native's cooperation, modified relations in a less crude, more subtle, more "cultivated" direction. It was not rare, in fact, to see a "democratic and humane" ideology at this stage. The commercial undertaking of enslavement, of cultural destruction, progressively gave way to a verbal mystification." (Fanon 1964: 35-37)

The understanding of race brought forward by Fanon complicates traditional Marxist analyses in that it urges to rethink the relationship between class as a material force and race as an ideological one, exploring the materiality of racial oppression, as well as its economic function. Furthermore, thanks to his investigation in the social and psychological nature of racial oppression and through the introduction of the concept of zones of being and non-being, Fanon is able to highlight the distinctive nature of racism, as a denial of people's humanity. Some theorists have reinterpreted the concept of zone of non-being defined by Fanon as one defining nature of colonial-racial power, also nowadays (Grosfoguel 2018). Ultimately, Fanon challenges traditional Marxism arguments according to which race belongs to the realm of superstructure and racial identification represents a form of 'false consciousness' which needs to be overcome to reach the real economic contradiction. Fanon voiced his disagreement on this issue answering to Jean Paul Sartre's claim advanced in the Black Orpheus (1948) according to which the "Negritude" was only an initial stage in the path towards the universal and real fight of the working class. According to Fanon, on the other hand, Black pride was already part of the struggle toward liberation, which needed to take into account the specificity of those participating to it, "approaching those struggling for freedom from the particular nexus-point that defines their lived experience as potentially revolutionary subjects" (Hudis 2018:210).

On this issue, a central contribution was brought by Aime Césaire, among the proponents of the Negritude together with Leopold Sédar Senghor. In 1956, Aime Césaire, sent his resignation letter to the French Communist Party. Alongside his disappointment regarding the Party's lack of distancing from Stalin's Soviet Union, was a more fundamental issue, that is still resonating today. His letter is dense of fundamental concepts, among which that of "fraternalism", by which he describes the attitude of White communist claiming to be brothers in struggles while treating Black people, together with other people of color and colonized people, as inferior, as well as the need of autonomy of the anti-colonial and anti-racist struggle from the class struggle of the proletariat.

> One fact that is paramount in my eyes is this: we, men of color, at this precise moment in our historical evolution, have come to grasp, in our consciousness, the full breadth of our singularity, and are ready to assume on all levels and in all areas the responsibilities that flow from this coming to consciousness.

> The singularity of our "situation in the world," which cannot be confused with any other. The singularity of our problems, which cannot be reduced to any other problem. The singularity of our history, constructed out of terrible misfortunes that belong to no one else. The singularity of our culture, which we wish to live in a way that is more and more real. What else can be the result of this but that our paths toward the future — all our paths, political as well as cultural — are not yet charted? That they are yet to be discovered, and that the responsibility for this discovery belongs to no one but us? Suffice it to say that we are convinced that our questions (or, if you prefer, the colonial question) cannot be treated as a part of a more important whole, a part over which others can negotiate or come to whatever compromise seems appropriate in light of a general situation, of which they alone have the right to take stock. (Here it is clear that I am alluding to the French Communist Party's vote on Algeria, by which it granted the Guy Mollet-Lacoste government full powers to carry out its North African policy — a circumstance that we have no guarantee will not be replicated in the future.) In any case, it is clear that our struggle — the struggle of colonial peoples against colonialism, the struggle of peoples of color against racism— is more complex, or better yet, of a completely different nature than the fight of the French worker against French capitalism, and it cannot in any way be considered a part, a fragment, of that struggle. This is not a desire to fight alone and a disdain for all alliances. It is a desire to distinguish between alliance and subordination, solidarity and resignation. It is exactly the latter of these pairs that threatens us in some of the glaring flaws we find in the members of the French Communist Party: their inveterate assimilationism; their unconscious chauvinism; their fairly simplistic faith, which they share with bourgeois Europeans, in the omnilateral superiority of the West; their belief that evolution as it took place in Europe is the only evolution possible, the only kind desirable, the kind the whole world must undergo; to sum up, their rarely avowed but real belief in civilization with a capital C and progress with a capital P (as evidenced by their hostility to what they disdainfully call "cultural relativism"). All these flaws lead to a literary tribe that, concerning everything and nothing, dogmatizes in the name of the party. It must be said that the French communists have had a good teacher: Stalin. Stalin is indeed the very one who reintroduced the notion of "advanced" and "backward" peoples into socialist thinking […] In the case of Stalin and those of his sect, it is perhaps not paternalism that is at stake. It is, however, definitely something that resembles it so closely as to be mistaken for it. Let us invent a word for it: "fraternalism." For we are indeed dealing with a brother, a big brother who, full of his own superiority and sure of his experience, takes you by the hand (alas, sometimes roughly) in order to lead you along the path to where he knows Reason and Progress can be found […] I believe I have said enough to make it clear that it is neither Marxism nor communism that I am renouncing, and that it is the usage some have made of Marxism and communism that I condemn. That what I want is that Marxism and communism be placed in the service of black peoples, and not black peoples in the service of Marxism and communism." (Césaire 2010 [1956]:145-152).

An advancement to the understanding of the relationship between race and class was also brought by the work of Stuart Hall, who can be considered one of the intellectuals at the intersection between Marxism and postcolonial theory (1980, 1985, 1986, 2019[1992]). Hall maintained that the relation between racism and capitalism could not be considered one

of necessity, but rather should be investigated in its historical specificity. Racism, he maintained, cannot be considered as "necessary to the concrete functioning of all capitalisms" (1980:338), in that it cannot be found in the same shape and degree in all capitalist formations. On the other hand, racism, while possibly existing before capitalism, had been reconstituted and reshaped to serve the purpose of capital exploitation, and have since then evolved accordingly. The point of inquiry for Hall is not as much to delve into the origin of racism but rather to understand:

> "the concrete historical 'work' which racism accomplishes under specific historical conditions – as a set of economic, political and ideological practices, concretely articulated with other practices in a social formation […] they are practices which secure the hegemony of a dominant group over a series of subordinate ones, in such a way as to dominate the whole social formation in a form favourable to the long-term development of the economic productive base". (ibid:338)

Building on the work of Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, among others, Hall rejects the economic reductionism of classical Marxism, maintaining that not everything can be explained in relation to one's place into the relations of production, and that ideologies are not "a simple form of false consciousness" but rather systems of meaning through which material conditions of existence are lived and experienced (ibid:334). Ideologies are not therefore simply theoretical but have material consequences, are "material relations". Racism can thus, in this sense, be understood as an ideological force, influencing class structure and class consciousness. Being class structured also according to race, class relations become for a certain segment of the racialized population also race relations, and race becomes the "modality in which class is 'lived', the medium through which class relations are experienced" (ibid:341). This affects the entire class, in that also white working class come to frame its experience in relation to race. Ultimately, Hall refuses both "economic" and "sociological" explanations to race and racism, maintaining that racism cannot be understood neither simply in relation to its economic function, nor as a purely socio-cultural formation. Hall (1997) famously defined race as "a floating signifier" in order to stress its always changing nature, which could not be considered as fixed in time. His engagement with the topic, in dialogue with Althusser and theorists of postmodernism, has particularly relevant consequences in relation to struggle. Indeed, by rejecting economic reductionism Hall rejects also classical Marxist claims of the necessary class nature of struggle, investigating the different possibilities of articulation of a struggle, in relation to one's social position.

Lastly, a fundamental intervention on the subject was brought by the seminal work of Cedric Robinson (2000[1983]) on racial capitalism, "Black Marxism: The making of the Black Radical Tradition". The concept of "racial capitalism" was first proposed by two South African Marxists in a paper published in 1976[14], where they had used it to define the specific racial nature of South African capitalism, considered as an exception to the normal functioning of capitalism. Robinson turned their argument upside down, maintaining that racial capitalism, rather than an exception to be found only within South African capitalism, was rather the norm of capitalism. "Black Marxism" offers a critique and reconceptualization of Marxism taking into account the mutual co-constitutive relationship between capitalism and racism, underscoring the Eurocentric nature of Marxism, while at the same time shedding light on the "Black radical tradition", which includes both the struggles forgotten by Marxism to be included in the history of class struggle, and the theorization of some prominent Black radicals, among whom Robinson identifies W.E. Du Bois, C.L.R. James and Richard Wright. According to Robinson (2000 [1983]), racism, which he also calls "racialism", did not originated in the encounter of Europe with non-European peoples but was already present within Europe, representing a material force in the development of capitalism.

> "The tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate-to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into "racial" ones […] Racism, I maintain, was not simply a convention for ordering the relations of European to non-European peoples but has its genesis in the "internal" relations of European peoples. As part of the inventory of Western civilization it would reverberate within and without, transferring its toll from the past to the present. In contradistinction to Marx's and Engels's expectations that bourgeois society would rationalize social relations and demystify social consciousness, the obverse occurred. The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force, then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism. I have used the term "racial capitalism" to refer to this development and to the subsequent structure as a historical agency". (ibid: 2-26)

[14] Racial capitalism as a term was first coined by two South African Marxist scholars, Martin Legassick and David Hemson in 1976, in the paper "Foreign investment and the reproduction of racial capitalism in South Africa". The two authors used the term "racial capitalism" to investigate the political economy of South African, looking at the ways in which capitalism in South Africa was building upon racist policies of apartheid and racial segregation. They maintained that, contrary to arguments according to which apartheid obstacled economic growth, racist policies in South Africa developed side by side with capitalism, fostering each other and producing a racial division of labor. The segregation produced by apartheid allowed to maintain two co-existing social formations, that of whites and that of blacks, engaging in different ways with South African capitalist economy. Whites were fully-proletarianized and accessed the labor market as the prototype of the Marxian category of working class, as free laborers selling their labor power, while blacks where semi-proletarianized, migrating from the reserves to the cities to work within the capitalist economy, while their reproduction took place outside of it, within the non-capitalist communal black peasant community. Through their analysis, Legassick and Hemson argued that South Africa represented an exception to normal capitalism, in that capitalist and pre-capitalist economy coexisted.

Marxism is criticized for its Eurocentric nature, both in its assumption and in its revolutionary scope. Indeed, Robinson challenges the foundation of Marx's theorization, according to which capitalism emerged from the universalization of the wage-capital relation, stressing how the largest number of laborers outside of industrial Europe continued to be under different forms of labor relations, classified as unfree by Marxism, such as serfdom, servitude, slavery, etc., that co-existed with wage-labor relation. Hence, different modes of production could coexist within capitalism. Among them, slavery, conceived by Marx as a pre-capitalist phase of primitive accumulation, was conceived by Robinson as integral to capitalist development.

> "The creation of the Negro was obviously at the cost of immense expenditures of psychic and intellectual energies in the West. The exercise was obligatory. It was an effort commensurate with the importance Black labor power possessed for the world economy sculpted and dominated by the ruling and mercantile classes of Western Europe […] the Atlantic slave trade and the slavery of the New World were integral to the modern world economy. […] Certainly, slave labor was one of their bases for what Marx termed "primitive accumulation." But it would be an error to arrest the relationship there, assigning slave labor to some "pre-capitalist" stage of history. For more than 300 years slave labor persisted beyond the beginnings of modern capitalism, complementing wage labor, peonage, serfdom, and other methods of labor coercion. Ultimately, this meant that the interpretation of history in terms of the dialectic of capitalist class struggles would prove inadequate, a mistake ordained by the preoccupation of Marxism with the industrial and manufacturing centers of capitalism; a mistake founded on the presumptions that Europe itself had produced, that the motive and material forces that generated the capitalist system were to be wholly located in what was a fictive historical entity." (idid.:4)

As a consequence, the conceptualization of the European industrial working class as the revolutionary subject par excellence, in a world where most of the laborers were located outside of Europe and most labor relations were still unfree and not industrial, entailed a great degree of Eurocentrism. Building on W.E. Du Bois' argument, Robinson argues that resistance to capitalism should not be conceived only in relation to the revolutionary actions of the industrial proletariat and not only in realm of the wage-capital relation, but its roots can be found in the revolts of enslaved Africans, which characterized the history of global capitalism since its inception in the 16$^{th}$ century. If the aim of racial capitalism was that of reducing enslaved Africans to their race, erasing their history, language and culture, it was precisely from their origins and culture that the seeds of opposition emerged. Building on W.E. Du Bois and C.L.R. James, Robinson reconstructs the history of Black struggle in the American Continent, arguing that the erasure of history of past struggles is itself part of the

colonizing project to dehumanize enslaved subjects. For one thing, Black radicalism preceded Marxism and its struggles emerged in forms different from class struggle, being rooted as much in the culture and epistemology of enslaved Africans as in the experience of oppression. For another thing, the conceptual framework introduced by racial capitalism urges to reconsider conceptualizations of class and race, looking at their mutual co-constitutive relation. While Marxism conceived the white industrial working class as the subject of revolutionary struggle, W.E. Du Bois offered a reading of Black history in the US whereby the slave revolts are re-conceptualized as strikes and therefore Black enslaved subjects are re-defined not as slaves but as workers and revolutionary subjects.

Overall, despite some differences, all the above-mentioned works point on the one hand to the entanglement between racism and capitalism and, on the other hand, to the inadequacy of White Marxism in grasping the materiality of racism as a force autonomous from class relations. Racism, according to some, was born as a result of the need to justify the brutal exploitation and extermination of Indigenous, first, and African people, later, with the colonization of the American continent. According to others, like Robinson, it was already present within Europe for the internal management of the European population and as a dispositive to control labor and mobility. In both cases, contemporary forms of racism based on White supremacy (see next paragraph for a definition) have been affirmed in the past 500 years, during which racism also developed its own internal dynamics, differentiated according to different socio-historical contexts, while at the same time still attached to its original function, not of mere exploitation but of dehumanization of racialized subjects. Contributions of the afore-mentioned authors have been crucial not only in complicating understanding of the relations between class and race, but also in shedding light on the psychological consequences of racism, and thus going beyond economic reductionism characterizing a great part of traditional Marxism, and better grasping the complexity of social reality. Given the contemporary relevance of debates regarding the nature of the relationship of race and class, of racism and capitalism, as well as of the relationship existing between identity and class politics, these contributions are a precious tool to be able to point to the fallacies of Marxists' interpretations compromised by racism and coloniality, without yet abandoning completely Marxian categories of analyses, which can be better reinterpreted through the lenses of Black and African Marxist tradition.

## 2.2. Theorizing racial capitalism today: White supremacy, intersectionality, coloniality and global apartheid

The interventions reported above, together with other dozens of contributions[15] of theorists and activists, pointed to the need to complicate Marxist analyses going beyond the "primacy of class" and to consider racism and colonialism as structural elements of capitalism, at a time when Marxism and class politics were still holding a prominent role within Western and non-Western societies[16]. However, nowadays Marxism and class politics have become somehow marginal in mainstream politics, which have become increasingly characterized more in terms of identity than of class, while at the same time being irremediably compromised by the neo-liberalization of societies. Debates on race, especially in the US and the UK, evolved dramatically in the past decades, with a growing corpus of literature focusing specifically on race as its main subject of analysis, often being inspired by some of the authors mentioned above, such as Stuart Hall and Franz Fanon. While in other contexts, such as the Italian one, the analysis of racism, both at the academic and at the political level is still at its early stages, as it will be further examined in the second part of this work, the purpose of this section is to examine some of the main concepts and contemporary tendencies in the Anglophone world, and more specifically the US, that holds a dominant position in theorizations regarding race and racism[17]. While it is not possible here to make justice to the work of all those who contributed to contemporary understandings and re-readings of history in light of the racial-colonial structures of modernity, in what follows some of the concepts emerging from debates more useful for the

[15] See Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Ndlovu 2022, Satgar 2019, Bakan, Dua 2014, Rabaka 2009, Mellino, Pomella 2020, for in-depth accounts regarding the contribution of Black and anti-colonial thinkers.

[16] For instance, a great number of struggles against colonialism were framed in terms of anti-imperialism and often adopted Marxist, as well as socialist projects shaped the formation of new states in the African continent in the post-independence period.

[17] As highlighted in the previous section, one of the main arguments of both Du Bois' and Robinson's analysis of (racial) capitalism was the centrality the transatlantic slave trade for the development of global capitalism. While for Marx slavery belonged to the phase of primitive accumulation, the two authors argued that it was rather integral to capitalism, and more specifically, to the development of Europe and the United States as leading capitalist economies. If Robinson claim that racialism was inherent to European civilization well before the rise of capitalism has been subject to critiques (Satgar 2019), it is nonetheless true that the United States were funded on colonial violence, racism and dispossession, built on the quasi-total extermination of Indigenous communities and the forced labor of enslaved Africans. Thus, US capitalism represent the emblem of the fallacy of Marxian assumptions, regarding free wage labor as the basis of capitalism, and racism as a residual of premodernity. At the same time, the racism prevalent within unions and communist parties of the US in the 20th century was yet another demonstration of Marxism inability to grasp racialized subjects' needs, going beyond its economic reductionism. The inherent racist structure of the United States, taken together with the relative privilege of US citizens and scholars in relation to those of the Global South, also thanks to the spreading of English as a global language, allowed US academia and activism to become a leading reference in relation to analyses of race and racism. Starting from W.E.B. Du Bois, passing through Claudia Jones, Angela Davis, Kimberlè Crenshaw, bell hooks, Malcolm X, Patricia Hill Collins, etc. the contribution of Black intellectuals has been fundamental in providing conceptual tools to analyze systemic racism, the relation between capitalist exploitation and racism, the interconnections between multiple systems of oppression, such as racism, patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, heteronormativity, etc.

present analysis will be explored. Building on these debates, the second part of the chapter will be focused on analyses regarding contemporary theorizations of racial capitalism.

### 2.2.1 Contemporary debates on race: White Supremacy, Anti-Blackness, and Intersectionality

Since the 1970's, Critical Race Theory (hereafter CRT) in the United States has played a central role in promoting an understanding of racism as a structural phenomenon, as a system of power supported by economic, political, legal and institutional infrastructures. Among the central elements of CRT are: the definition of racism as an ordinary experience for most of the people of color; the idea that color-blind approaches favor whites, conceptualized as non-racial; the fact that a vast segment of the population benefits from racism and thus there is little interest to eradicate it; the idea that race is a social construct, whose meaning shifts according to convenience; the idea various groups are racialized differently and their categorization changes over time; the idea that race and other system of oppression are intersecting (Delgado, Stefancic 2012). While emerging from the realm of law, CRT later expanded to many other disciplines, being at the same time characterized by an active commitment toward racial and social justice (Delgado, Stefancic 2012). The relationship between CRT and Marxism has not been smooth, due to the race-blindness, at best, or explicit racist colonial stance, at worst, of what has previously been defined as White Marxism. Indeed, the debate between CRT and Neo-Marxist recalls the debate going on between "White" Marxists and "Black" Marxists in the early 20th century[18] regarding the primacy of race over class or vice-versa. On the other hand, Neo-Marxists have criticized CRT for focusing too much on race forgetting the role of class, both in relation to conditions of exploitation and as representing a common ground for solidarity, thus limiting the potential of organizing between white and non-white working class (Cole 2009; Walton 2020). Yet, going beyond the surface, different authors have shown how a common ground between Marxism and CRT can be found, precisely by looking at the work of the Black radical tradition illustrated above (Walton 2020; Bakan, Dua 2014).

Among the most discussed concept is that of White Supremacy. According to CRT theorists as well as other authors (Martinez 1998; hooks 1984), it represents one of the most useful concepts to overcome an understanding of racism as an individual behavior aimed at the discrimination of people according to their skin color, by grounding it to its historical

[18] Keeping in mind that White and Black are here standing for theoretical and political approaches rather than skin color.

and economic roots. White supremacy does not here describe the explicit racism of white supremacist groups. Instead, it refers to:

> "a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings." (Ansley 1997 cited in Walton 2020:81)

As further illustrated by Elisabeth 'Betita' Martinez (1998), the definition of White supremacy is clearer than that of racism, in that it makes explicit the existence of a relation of power (supremacy) and those who are benefitting more from that relation (whites). Further, it helps to interpret acts of racism by locating them in relation to the functioning of White supremacy as a system of power. The pyramid of White supremacy (fig.1), first elaborated by Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Non-Violence in 2005, shows that White supremacy can be thought as a spectrum, where some of its manifestations are more acceptable than other but, ultimately, they are all part of the same system of power, centered on whiteness.

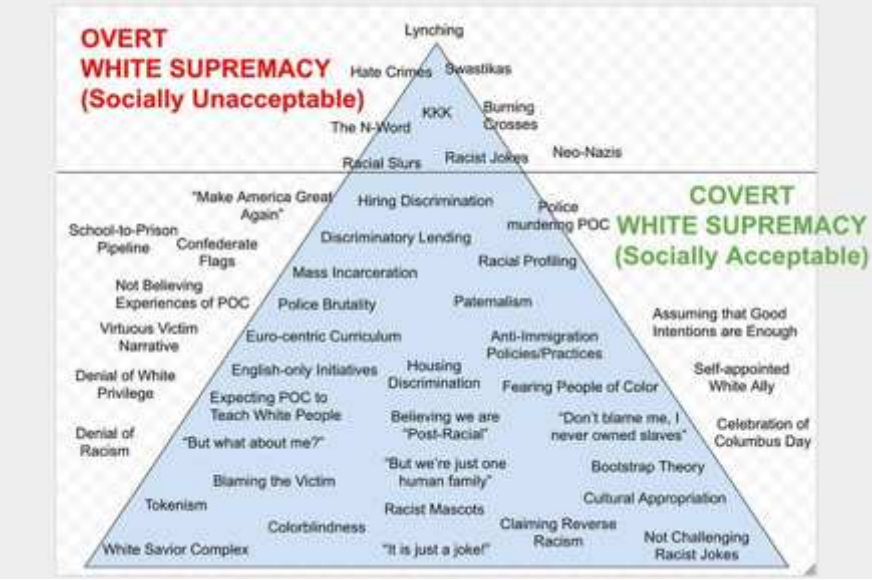



*Figure 1 Pyramid of White supremacy elaborated by Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Non-Violence. Source. Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Non-Violence.*

According to Neo-Marxist critiques, the concept of White supremacy does not center exploitation as the origin of processes of racial hierarchization, thus moving away attention from the sphere of production. For these reasons, Cole (2009) suggested replacing it with "racialization", a concept that, however, while underlying a process that is taking place, does not allow to discern the origin and the aim of that same process. Finally, the concept of white

supremacy is criticized in that it would limit the possibilities of solidarity between white and non-white people, accusing the former of being "white supremacists" irrespectively of their class, life's conditions, etc. The concept of White supremacy in the US has come together with the idea of a racial hierarchy that places white people[19] at the top, and Black people at the bottom, and it has thus proved fruitful to understand the stratification of racialized groups and the ways in which they can themselves enact racism against each other.

Yet, due to the specificity of the forms of racism experienced by Black people in the US, being characterized by the collective inter-generational traumatic experience of enslavement while at the same time being subject not only to white-people racism but also of non-white-people racism, some authors have recently suggested to reconceptualize anti-black racism as an ontologically different form of racism, defined as anti-blackness (Wilderson 2020). According to the growing corpus of literature defined as "Afropessimism", but also shared among activists and political groups in the US, the discrimination and violence suffered by Black people is exceptionally different if compared to other forms of racial discrimination. This differentiation is mainly mobilized against non-Black people of color, such as for instance, Palestinians under Israeli colonial occupation or Latinx detained in the context of US immigration policies, who are criticized for drawing similarities between their oppression and that of Black people in the US (Olaloku-Teriba 2018). According to Frank B. Wilderson III (2020), through the slave trade, the Black subject has been created as the opposite of Human, as the emblem of Slave, embodying social death. Therefore, the violence to which Black people have been, and continue to be, subjected is not comparable to any other form of violence, in that it has been gratuitous and superfluous. For this reason, Wilderson (2020:219) maintained that "you can't make an analogy between the violence immigrants, Native Americans, and workers are subjected to and the violence that attends to Black people."

As noted by Anni Olaloku-Teriba (2018), this approach draws on a series of parallels and simplifications grounded in an understanding of 'race' and blackness as globally coherent constructs. Furthermore, by reducing Blackness to slavery, it also subsumes "Africanness" to an "Americanized version of Blackness", and ultimately generalizes the US experience, an important but very specific one, to the entire world (ibid.:5). Intellectuals belonging to the Black radical tradition, among which some coopted by Afropessimist

[19] The debate here extends to what and what cannot be considered "white". According to some, whiteness is a shifting category whose borders varies in time. For instance, it has been said that Irish, as well as Italians, especially Southern, became white following their socio-economic status improvement, but were not considered white from the beginning. The same have also been said for Jews. On the other hand, according to Kehinde Andrews (2018) what affected Irish was to be defined as xenophobia rather than racism.

literature, such as Fanon[20], grounded (anti-black) racism in the need of exploitation of African labor, first, and land, later, and aimed at building alliances with all the peoples subjected to imperialism and colonialism recognizing the common matrix of domination. On the contrary, Afropessimism with the idea of ontological Blackness, creates divisions between "ethnic Blacks" and non-Black people of color, defined as "White junior partners" in that they are considered co-responsible in the reproduction of anti-blackness (Wilderson 2020:94).[21] While it is true that anti-black racism is endemic also non-white communities, affirming that "not to share in the experiences which are generalised among a given group is to be implicated in the oppression of that group" prevents the possibility of developing a "genuine solidarity", ultimately fostering the fragmentation of experiences, the incommensurability of different forms of oppressions and the development of a hierarchization of oppressions, giving birth to what has been defined as "Oppression Olympics"[22] (Olaloku-Teriba 2018; Martinez 1998).

In order to overcome this impasse, it can be useful to recall one of the most relevant concepts in contemporary debates regarding race and its intersection with other systems of oppression: that of "intersectionality". While term was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the idea was already present in the work and writings of Black feminism, to underline the specific position at the intersection of multiple systems of oppression experienced by Black working class women in the US. For instance, Claudia Jones, a Black communist feminist from Trinidad, in 1949 defined this condition as "super-exploitation".

> "The super-exploitation of the Negro woman is thus revealed not only in that she receives, as a woman, less than equal pay for equal work with men, but that the majority of Negro women get less than half the pay of white women… the low scale of earnings of the Negro woman is directly related to her

[20] On this matter Olaloku-Teriba (2018) noted how Fanon's reference text of Afropessimism have been Black Skin, White Mask, while they have generally avoided other works where he investigated more in depth the interconnections between racism, imperialism and colonialism.

[21] "Junior partners are people who are Human but not White hetero males. For example, people of color and White women who are targets of White supremacy and patriarchy, respectively, and, simultaneously, the agents and beneficiaries of anti-Blackness. This category also includes LGBT people who are not Black and Indigenous communities. They are "partners" because, as with White hetero males, anti- Blackness is the genome of their paradigmatic positions and because they suffer at the hands of contingent violence rather than the gratuitous or naked violence of social death." (Wilderson 2020:94).

[22] According to Martinez "For a Latina to urge recognizing a variety of racist models is not, and should not be, yet another round in the Oppression Olympics […] To criticize the exclusively Black-white framework, then, is not some resentful demand by other people of color for equal sympathy, equal funding, equal clout, equal patronage or other questionable crumbs. Above all, it is not a devious way of minimizing the centrality of the African-American experience in any analysis of racism. We urgently need twenty-first-century thinking that will move us beyond the Black-white framework without negating its historical role in the construction of U.S. racism. We need a better understanding of how racism developed both similarly and differently for various peoples, according to whether they experienced genocide, enslavement, colonization or some other structure of oppression. At stake is the building of a united anti-racist force strong enough to resist White Supremacist strategies of divide-and-conquer and move forward toward social justice for all." (Martinez 1998:33)

> almost complete exclusion from virtually all fields of work except the most menial and underpaid, namely, domestic work".

Furthermore, Jones highlighted the centrality of Black women in the struggle for Black freedom, while at the same time pointing to the inadequacy of the Communist Party to effectively include them as equal members.
The issue was further elaborated by the Combahee River Collective (CRC), a Black women and lesbian collective funded in 1974, that in their statement in 1977 maintained:

> "The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. […] We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously […] We need to articulate the real class situation of persons who are not merely raceless, sexless workers, but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working/economic lives. Although we are in essential agreement with Marx's theory as it applied to the very specific economic relationships he analyzed, we know that his analysis must be extended further in order for us to understand our specific economic situation as Black women. We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources. We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and anti-racist revolution will guarantee our liberation. We have arrived at the necessity for developing an understanding of class relationships that takes into account the specific class position of Black women who are generally marginal in the labor force, while at this particular time some of us are temporarily viewed as doubly desirable tokens at white-collar and professional levels".

Few years later, Kimberlè Crenshaw (1989:1), a member of the CRC as well as of CRT, coined the concept of "intersectionality" to define the intersection of race and gender that characterizes the "multidimensionality of Black women's experience". Building on the experience of Black women in the US in the context of legal litigation regarding claims of discrimination, Crenshaw maintained that the refuse of Courts to look at the specific discrimination suffered by Black women as being at the intersection of race discrimination and gender discrimination resulted in their exclusion from their possibility to secure their rights. Courts, in trying to assess whether there was a discrimination, would look either at

sex discrimination or at race discrimination, but not at the intersection of the two. In other instances, Black women would see their appeal recognized, but they would be not recognized as representatives of their group, due to the specificity of their experience. Crenshaw highlighted how:

> "The point is that Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional. Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination […] I am suggesting that Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men. Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination-the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women-not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women." (ibid.)

In the past decade, the concept of intersectionality acquired a great popularity both in the academia and within activism. While it was originally formulated to better frame gender and race discrimination in the context of legal litigations, it has been later expanded to a variety of fields, sometimes losing sight of its original meaning. With time, intersectionality became more used to classify the intersectionality of identities, i.e. meaning that a subjectivity can be defined in relation to multiple identities (such as "woman", "Black", "Lesbian", etc.), rather than of systems of oppression. As a consequence of this misinterpretation, intersectionality became a way to divide, rather than unite, struggles, by maintaining that only those sharing the same experience could struggle together, reproducing the afore-mentioned "oppression Olympics". More recently, Angela Davis (2016), referring to the great popularity achieved by the concept of intersectionality in the academia, suggest reconducting it to its origins within activism, by placing more attention rather than to the intersectionality of identities, which brings with it the risk of fragmentation, to the "intersectionality of struggles". With this she means to lay down the ground for the building of coalitions able to unite apparently distant subjects, by focusing on the similarities of the structural conditions of oppression they experience. Diametrically opposed to the argument of Wilderson, Davis centres her analysis on the need of alliance

between Palestinians under Israeli apartheid and Black people in the US, both undergoing, with all the due differences, systemic and institutional racism, police brutality and structural discrimination. Finally, while it is crucial to understand different systems of oppression as well as the different impact these have on subjects, as maintained by Martinez (1998):

> "We don't need more competition among different social groups for the gold medal of "Most Oppressed." We don't need more comparisons of suffering between women and Blacks, the disabled and the gay, Latino teenagers and white seniors, or whatever. Pursuing some hierarchy of oppression leads us down dead-end streets where we will never find the linkage between different oppressions and how to overcome them." (ibid.:33)

### 2.2.2 Theorizing racial capitalism today: reproduction, coloniality and global apartheid

As highlighted by Robin G. Kelly (2000) in his foreword to Black Marxism, the work of Cedric Robinson did not gather much attention at the time of its publication. However, the concept of "racial capitalism" has recently regained attention both at the academic and at the political level, for its ability to convey the racial nature of capitalism, increasingly visible not only in the US but also within the contemporary European space.

Contributing to the debate illustrated in the previous paragraph, Gargi Bhattacharyya (2018) suggested that a reconceptualization of "racial capitalism" can be helpful in order to overcome the limitations of what she defined as a debate reduced more to a "battle between competing affiliations and, sometimes, oppressions" (Bhattacharyya 2018:11) than an actual analysis of the interconnections between systems of power. Building on Robinson's work, Bhattacharyya (2018:102) defines racial capitalism as "the mode of capitalist development that has occurred through the coincidence of the emergence of modern racism alongside key phases of capitalist expansion". Trying to expand the scope of Robinson's conceptualization of "racial capitalism", she places it in conversation with feminist theory, among which a specific reference is to the work of Silvia Federici and Maria Mies, and theories of postcolonial capitalism, with reference to Kanyal Sanyal. Bhattacharyya highlights how:

> "differentiating processes that have played a key role in capitalist development have been socially enacted as racialisation. The double process of incorporating some populations as workers or potential workers, while expelling others as non-workers or occasional workers or invisible workers, disciplines the boundaries of economic space allocating lesser (let us say 'racialised') status to excluded groups." (ibid.:54)

By placing into dialogue these two strands of literature, the author suggests reconceptualizing the working class by taking into account, on the one hand, the division between productive and non-productive work and, on the other hand, the process of proletarianization which, however, does not always result in the inclusion of the dispossessed within the capitalist economy. Building on Maria Mies' work, she maintains that the logic underlying processes of patriarchal domination can be helpful in understanding the functioning of contemporary racial capitalism, in that they both rest on the "the attribution of the status of non-worker" to some segments of the population and the "superexploitation of non-wage labourers (women, colonies, peasants)", which in turn allows the exploitation of wage laborers. Reproductive labor is therefore re-conceptualized beyond the household, to include all forms of labor and inputs, human and non-human, allowing the reproduction of wage labor. Proletarianization is examined by looking at the process of primitive accumulation, recalling David Harvey's definition of "accumulation by dispossession", which does not only produce "workers" but also results in a share of the world population being at the same time dispossessed and excluded, becoming what Sanyal (2007) defined as "surplus population". The "surplus population" while deemed not economically productive, can be seen as contributing to the reproductive role. Racial capitalism not only results in a racial division of labor, but also in the exclusion from the labor market of a segment of racialized population.

Therefore, racial capitalism can account for different modes of "exploitation, expropriation and expulsion" of some segments of the population, which in turn become "racialising processes" (Bhattacharyya 2018:239-241). Processes of precarization can be considered as an outcome of "racialised exclusion", such as in the case of people illegalized in the context of border regime (ibid:149). Processes of bordering and mobility control can indeed be seen as an "incarnation of racial capitalism" preventing the movement of a share of world population to exclude them, or include them differentially, from the access to increasingly scarce resources, among which also wage labor. Processes of bordering are not aimed at preventing movement per se, but at filtering, selecting, hierarchizing and differentiating the entry of a certain population within the economic realm. The infrastructure of the border regime allows for the normalization of racist and colonial violence, which is rendered unquestionable through its bureaucratization:

> "The normalisation of violent racist practices under cover of 'bordering' inevitably infects social and political space, most of all through the incursion of threatening and sometimes violent border control

> activities, such as immigration raids, into 'civilian' space. […] When it is argued that antiborders politics is the antiracist politics of our time, this is not a displacement of the experiences of long-racialised groups. It is a warning that what is done in the name of the border reveals the repertoire of state violence against any or all of us. Techniques of bordering represent the tendency of racial capitalism towards expulsion and offers a repertoire of expelling and containing techniques that enjoy political legitimacy and render racialised exclusion unremarkable**.** One aspect of this performance centres around the construction and communication of emergency, an emergency where people in movement represent only one symptom in a wider panoply of signals of danger" (ibid:145).

Ultimately, Bhattacharyya's work represents a fundamental contribution to contemporary theorizations of racial capitalism. By bringing together multiple realities existing within racial capitalism, it helps expanding the scope of analyses beyond exploitation, highlighting processes of hierarchization of the world population according to a "logic of race" aimed at expropriation, exploitation and, to a certain extent, expulsion from the capitalist economy.

The colonial-racial origin of the border regime has been thoroughly explored by Nandita Sharma (2017, 2020), who investigated the emergence of immigration controls following the abolition of slavery (see paragraph 1.1.3) and their strengthening following the process of decolonization during 20th century. Sharma (2020: 164) defined the contemporary system of international mobility control as a system of "global apartheid", where "nationality became a major vector of inequality, injustice, and indifference."
While the association between the contemporary system of immigration controls put in place by nation-states and the system of apartheid regulating South Africa from 1948 until 1991 could appear as extreme, Sharma points out that:

> "a system of global apartheid does not work to physically separate People but to construct Nationals and Migrants as separate "types" of people along a hierarchical scale. We would do well to recall that those classified as Black or Coloured in apartheid-era South Africa did not necessarily live apart from Whites. Indeed, they often lived and worked in the homes of those classified as White. However, Black people especially were positioned by the South African nation-state as being citizens of various "Bantustans" and were thus made noncitizens in South Africa. This was done precisely to deny them national rights in South Africa." (ibid: 293).

It is here useful to recall that the first theorization of racial capitalism was precisely based on South African capitalism (see par. 2.1.2, ref. 14), which rested on differentiation between white and Black African labor, not only in ideological terms but in material conditions of existence. With the Bantustans policy, South African state allowed for the segregation of Black Africans as citizens of separated political entities defined as Bantustans, who were

allowed to enter South African state only to sell their labor power while the cost of social reproduction was entirely sustained by the Bantustans' governments and the non-capitalist economy existing within those communities, forcing them to be "migrant workers" within the State. This allowed the cost of Black labor to be kept low, thanks to the externalization of the costs of reproduction, while at the same time establishing further barriers not only between Black and white labor, but also between other non-white workers, such as those of Indian origin (Legassick, Hemson 1976).

The similarities between South African apartheid and the segregation of migrant labor within contemporary societies had been further investigated by Michael Burawoy (1976) in his analysis of the "function and reproduction of migrant labor", through the comparison with the experience of Mexican farmworkers in the US. According to the author, migrant labor can be defined as resting on the legal and institutional enforcement of the separation between two elements of the reproduction of labor under capitalism, i.e. between processes of renewal and maintenance of labor. Hence, what is relevant to examine when looking at migrant labor:

> "is not how migrants adapt to their new environment but how structural, particularly political and legal, constraints make permanent "integration" impossible. The issues are not ones of assimilation and acculturation but of enforced segregation through such "total" institutions as the compound and labor camp and the corresponding persistence of race and ethnic differentiation" (ibid:1051).

As in the case of African workers forced segregation in the Bantustans during apartheid, the separation between Mexican workers and their families, enforced through legal constraints by the State, allows for the separation between their day-to-day maintenance and the process of renewal of labor force, carried out by their families back in their country.

> "Against this background, the significance of migrant labor lies in the separation of the processes of maintenance and renewal, so that renewal takes place where living standards are low and maintenance takes place within easy access of employment. Thus, wages earned by migrant workers are lower than those of domestic workers, because the former require fewer resources to sustain the renewal process than the latter." (ibid:1082).

Feminist theories have further deepened the understanding of the process of reproduction, going well beyond its mere economic costs stressed by Burawoy, exploring the entanglement between patriarchy, capitalism and racism. What is fundamental to stress here is that, as also

argued by Bhattacharyya, processes of social reproduction are central to understandings of contemporary racial capitalism.

To conclude, racial capitalism represents a fundamental theorical framework to understand contemporary systems of exploitation, expropriation and expulsion, from the economy as well as from the world all-together. The racial-colonial origin of capitalism continues to define its contemporary shape, yet through different mechanisms. As maintained by Anibal Quijano (2000), following the end of historical colonialism, the system of power at its heart, coloniality, expanded on a global scale. The border regime, as a system of global apartheid, can be seen in continuity with systems of labor mobility control and hierarchization of populations on which colonialism and various forms of unfree labor (from slavery to indentured servitude) were based, yet made unquestionable through the bureaucratization of procedures and the apparent race-blindness of legal mechanisms. At the same time, it should also be pointed that the border does not impact in the same way migrants racialized in different ways, and that historical hierarchies of racialization, systematized since the 15$^{th}$ century to allow for the colonization of different parts of the globe by European powers, as well as for the enslavement and deportation of millions of Africans to America, continues to shape contemporary dynamics of subordination and oppression. Racial capitalism ultimately helps going beyond the limited category of 'exploitation' to explore the ways in which racial-colonial power impacts the lives of people within and beyond the sphere of production, until the point of defining who "is made to live and who is left to die, who is disposable and who is not" (Mbembe 2019) allowing to define racism as "state-sanctioned and/or extralegal production and exploitation of group differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death" (Gilmore 2008).

### 2.3 Decolonizing contemporary anti-racist struggles

Since the times when Du Bois, Césaire, Fanon, Robinson and others were moving their critiques to White Marxism and to Western Communist Parties, the global panorama has dramatically changed. Following the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, neo-liberal capitalism made its entrance in the world. On the one hand, this implied a further globalization of capital, as well as its financialization, together with the increasing restriction placed on the movement of formerly colonized people, dispossessed from their means of subsistence, now attempting to seek 'refuge' in the territories of former colonial powers, or more broadly, in Western countries. On the other hand, the rise of neo-liberalism saw also

the proliferation of what has been defined as the "non-profit industrial complex" (Lethabo King, Osayande 2017:79, INCITE! 2017) and the progressive professionalization and institutionalization of social justice movements. As a consequence of these processes, the past decades saw a growing focus on migrants' rights activism, which however has been increasingly de-politicized and characterized in humanitarian terms. Migration also brought colonial-racial fractures from the margins to the center of postcolonial West, and specifically, Europe. Thus, even if the global panorama has changed, some of the attitudes of White Marxism are still present nowadays and shaping the approach of labor movements, unions, NGOs, and political collectives in their relationship with racialized-migrant subjects.

### 2.3.1 From struggle to aid: NGO-ization of resistance, white saviorism, Non-Profit Industrial Complex and Humanitarianism

NGO-ization as a term was first used to define the progressive bureaucratization, institutionalization and professionalization of the feminist movement, with a specific focus on Latin America (Alvarez 1999). Later, the term has expanded to describe more broadly the ways in which the rise of neo-liberalism affected the capacity of social movements to struggle for social, economic and racial justice. NGO-ization emerged together with the dramatic rise in private and public funding being 'donated' to NGOs to provide a wide range of social services, giving birth to what has been defined as "the Nonprofit Industrial Complex" (Lethabo King, Osayande 2017:79). While in the Global North the action of NGOs has been mostly developed in partnership with governments in order to provide a wide range of social services on their behalf, in the Global South, foreigner NGOs often became the arm of foreign governments to exert political and economic influence in the name of development aid programs. In the first case, the rise of funded activism impacted dramatically on existing movements' ability to push for radical change, being often partially co-opted or becoming non-profit organizations, reducing confrontation and transforming their relationship with institutions with one more focused in "brokering resources and promoting the organization rather than substantive policy change" (Mosley 2012:853, Samimi 2010). Furthermore, through professionalization, activism became increasingly compartmentalized, focusing on distinct sets of issues, addressed as if they were independent from each other. In the second case, foreign NGOs funded by foreign governments penetrate within Global South countries in order to gain control of increasingly larger sectors of economy, society and politics. In addition to that, a part few exceptions, NGOs develop their

programs as external actors providing a service without first interrogating recipients about the need or the organization of that service as well as without requesting feedback and being accountable to the recipients, rather than donors, once the service has been provided.

Arundhati Roy (2014) reflecting on the rise of funded NGOs in India and their impact in relation to mass movements, following the implementation of structural adjustment programs in the 1980's, brilliantly defined this process as the "NGO-ization of resistance". As she illustrates:

> "NGOs give the impression that they are filling the vacuum created by a retreating state. And they are, but in a materially inconsequential way. Their real contribution is that they defuse political anger and dole out as aid or benevolence what people ought to have by right. They alter the public psyche. They turn people into dependent victims and blunt the edges of political resistance. NGOs form a sort of buffer between the sarkar and public. Between Empire and its subjects. They have become the arbitrators, the interpreters, the facilitators.
>
> In the long run, NGOs are accountable to their funders, not to the people they work among. They're what botanists would call an indicator species. It's almost as though the greater the devastation caused by neoliberalism, the greater the outbreak of NGOs. Nothing illustrates this more poignantly than the phenomenon of the U.S. preparing to invade a country and simultaneously readying NGOs to go in and clean up the devastation […]
>
> Apolitical (and therefore, actually, extremely political) distress reports from poor countries and war zones eventually make the (dark) people of those (dark) countries seem like pathological victims. Another malnourished Indian, another starving Ethiopian, another Afghan refugee camp, another maimed Sudanese…in need of the white man's help. They unwittingly reinforce racist stereotypes and reaffirm the achievements, the comforts and the compassion (the tough love) of Western civilization. They're the secular missionaries of the modern world. Eventually–on a smaller scale, but more insidiously–the capital available to NGOs plays the same role in alternative politics as the speculative capital that flows in and out of the economies of poor countries. It begins to dictate the agenda. It turns confrontation into negotiation. It depoliticizes resistance. It interferes with local peoples' movements that have traditionally been self-reliant. NGOs have funds that can employ local people who might otherwise be activists in resistance movements, but now can feel they are doing some immediate, creative good (and earning a living while they're at it). Real political resistance offers no such short cuts. The NGO-ization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered, reasonable, salaried, 9-to-5 job. With a few perks thrown in. Real resistance has real consequences. And no salary."

As maintained by Roy, the role of foreign NGOs can be compared to that of missionaries during colonialism, being driven by the same civilizing mission, hidden behind a display of compassion. While it cannot be generalized to the entire spectrum of foreign NGOs, the racist attitude inherent in most of their programmes is clearly exemplified by a large number of communication and fundraising campaigns, displaying racialized subjects,

and often children, as passive victims in need of help. In 2012, Teju Cole coined the expression 'white savior industrial complex' to define the growing industry of non-profit organizations based on the display of suffering of racialized subject aimed at raising funds while at the same time reinforcing the colonial dichotomy of civilized-uncivilized. As he points out:

> "One song we hear too often is the one in which Africa serves as a backdrop for white fantasies of conquest and heroism. From the colonial project to *Out of Africa* to *The Constant Gardener* and Kony 2012, Africa has provided a space onto which white egos can conveniently be projected. It is a liberated space in which the usual rules do not apply. A nobody from America or Europe can go to Africa and become a godlike savior or, at the very least, have his or her emotional needs satisfied. Many have done it under the banner of "making a difference."

The case examined by Cole as a starting point of his analysis is the movie Kony 2012 - produced by US director and founder of the NGO Invisible Children Jason Russel - to promote his humanitarian campaign aimed at the arrest of Ugandan war lord Joseph Kony. As Cole and other authors (Mengestu 2012; Kagumire 2012) have highlighted, that video represented the emblem of the White savior complex, whereby Western citizens are portrayed as the only one in the position of 'saving' thousands of children from death by promoting the 'Invisible Children' campaign, thus ignoring decades of struggle of Ugandan activists and journalists to bring Kony to justice. As Dinaw Mengestu (2012) stresses:

> "What makes Kony 2012 especially frustrating, however, is that the film traffics in a sentimental and infantilizing version of Africa that is so prevalent we don't even notice it. The idea behind a name such as "Invisible Children" is on par with the sentiments of the first colonists who claimed to have discovered the New World and Africa: We didn't know about it, therefore it didn't exist."

As already mentioned in the first chapter when discussing the role of anti-trafficking discourse, white saviorism tends portraying racialized subjects as either victims or perpetrators, in need of a white hand help, leaving structural factors unnamed and unexplored. Ultimately, as Cole (2012) suggests, the White Savior Industrial Complex is not about promoting justice, but about simplifying reality allowing for "big emotional experience that validates privilege." Analyses regarding the role of foreign NGOs in the perpetuation of white savior complex have been so far mostly developed with regard to the intervention of Western NGOs and white voluntaries, or voloun-tourists as they have been defined by some observers (Bandyopadhyay, Patil 2017), in countries of the Global South,

with a specific focus on the African continent. However, in the past years, this lens has been increasingly deployed to interpret the approach of Western NGOs and individuals to migrants and refugees (Obasuy 2020). Indeed, it can be maintained that the role played by a large number of NGOs in the context of migration can be thought as representing the two sides of NGO-ization above-mentioned. Through the unification of the colonial approach proper to foreign NGOs in the Global South and the bureaucratization and professionalization of activism in the Global North, the NGO-ization of migrant rights' activism in the past decades is a central element to understand contemporary forms of racial capitalism in Western Europe.

Another lens of interpretation often used to analyse the politics of migration activism within postcolonial West, intersecting with the above-mentioned dynamics while not fully overlapping with them, is that of humanitarianism or as Didier Fassin (2012) defined it, of the "humanitarian reason". In his work, Fassin investigates the birth and development of humanitarianism as a dispositive functional to the legitimization of practices and politics of control, exploring its manifestation in different contexts such as in the aftermath of natural disasters, during conflicts, in assisting the 'ill' or the 'poor', as well as in the context of migration and asylum policy. Humanitarianism, as he argues:

> "is a mode of governing that concerns the victims of poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and exile, as well as of disasters, famines, epidemics, and wars— in short, every situation characterized by precariousness. It involves nongovernmental organizations, international agencies, states, and individuals […] independently of the goodwill of the rescuers, constructs an unequal relationship between the one giving aid and the one being aided. The fact is attested in any number of places where the urgency of a disaster reduces the condition of victims to their bare physical existence and prompts ambiguous impulses of pity and solidarity. The recipients are not blind to the way they are being treated, particularly when they are from disadvantaged backgrounds, as the stigma of poverty intensifies the stigma of misfortune". (Fassin 2012:193).

The humanitarian reason, on which humanitarianism rests, therefore represents a "morally driven, politically ambiguous, and deeply paradoxical" force (ibid.:xii), motivated by the need, urgency and moral imperative to save human lives, while at the same time constructing compassion as an instrument of control and reproduction of inequal power relations. Humanitarianism represents a reconfiguration of "the politics of precarious lives" (ibid.:5), based on a display of compassion in the public space, which always presuppose a relation of inequality between the giver of humanitarian aid and the receiver. Finally, the politics of humanitarianism is embedded in the politics of gratitude, by which its recipients "are

expected to show the humility of the beholden rather than express demands for rights" (ibid.:4).

For instance, in relation to the politics of asylum, Fassin proposed an example representing the epitome of humanitarian reason, whereby suffering becomes necessary not only to validate help, but for the full recognition as human beings. In the context of asylum applications in France, Fassin highlighted how, in the last decades, the reduction of the rate of asylum granting was motivated by the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (Ofpra) on the basis of an increase in "bogus asylum seekers" and, as a consequence, further evidence was requested to asylum seekers to prove the truthfulness of their claims. Hence, the display of suffering became an integral element in the process of asylum application, to be demonstrated with medical reports, assessing the nature of scars as well as the intensity of psychological suffering descending from war, trauma, torture and displacement. At the same time, humanitarian NGOs operating in refugee camps disseminated at the borders of Europe as well as in the Mediterranean Sea, often reproduce the same dynamics. Their action is mostly oriented towards assistance and their communication and fundraising campaigns reproduce the white savior complex above descripted, through the display of suffering of racialized children, women and men. Pity and compassion, rather than solidarity and anger, represent the fundamental sentiments they attempt to elicit. Mostly, they do not call for direct action - being it lobbying governments to take action, organizing demonstration, strikes, boycotts, etc.- but only economic contributions. In this sense, humanitarianism tends to depoliticize social and economic issues by representing them just as a "humanitarian emergencies" requiring immediate action, without investigating in depth the root causes nor acting on them, and hence allowing for the proposition of an endless emergency. However, as William Walters (2010) rightly points in its investigation about the emergence of specific frontiers as "humanitarian borders", while there is abundant evidence on the ways in which humanitarianism can be co-opted and reproduced by systems of oppressions "perhaps it would be more insightful to approach humanitarianism [..] as a field which exists in a permanent state of co-option, infiltration but also provocation with the state (but also with other supranational and international entities as well)." (ibid.:148-149).

### 2.3.2 Decolonizing European anti-racism

In the past decade, following the so-called 'refugee' crisis in Western Europe, humanitarianism, white saviorism and NGO-ization have become increasingly relevant in relation to the politics of solidarity towards migrants and refugees. As a response to the growing racist discourse of the far-right, the European 'left', through its parties, unions, NGOs and charitable organizations, increasingly adopted an approach whereby solidarity has been grounded on the victimization of migrant subjects and the response, rather than that of struggle for economic, social and racial justice, has been that of humanitarian assistance. In a recently edited volume on the subject, Tommaso Palmi (2020:13) has called for the need to "decolonize the discourse and the practices of European anti-racism" (*author's translation from Italian*). As he argues in the introduction:

> "The humanitarian one became in all regards an industry, in which the racial dispositive operates continuously through the valorization and hierarchization of differences. The underlying rhetoric is often the same of the so-called radical left and social movements. Alternating a tragic and victimizing discourse with a paternalistic one, the migrant subject is metabolized to respond positively to the criteria of management and control of international migration. What is proposed as integration is nothing more than the specific placement of migrant within a broader chain of exploitation and value extraction." (*author's translation from Italian,* Palmi 2020:9).

The ways in which humanitarian management of migration favors, rather than countering, the exploitation of its subjects has been further examined by Nick Dines (2023) who used the expression "humanitarian exploitation" to investigate the intertwining between humanitarian management and labor exploitation in the agricultural sector of Southern Italy. As already argued by Dines and Enrica Rigo (2015), and further explored in the second part of this work, humanitarianism affected the ways in which labor issues, and therefore also struggles, have been conceived in Italy in the past decades, pushing towards what they defined as "the refugeeization of the workforce". Migrant workers have been therefore increasingly conceived as subjects in need of humanitarian assistance rather than as workers fighting for their rights, with considerable consequences for labor organizing and union approaches.

According to Palmi (2020), the violent racism of the far-right and the paternalist-humanitarianism of the left can be seen in this sense as just two side of the same coin, rooted in the colonial-racial foundation of Western European societies. Yet, to affirm that they emerge from the same background does not mean that the consequences of their politics are

identical. Especially in the past years, European countries saw a rising attack on humanitarianism and solidarity towards migrants and refugees, which have been increasingly criminalized and prosecuted. Racist discourse and actions became so violent that even affirming someone's right to live became a radical action. However, the unwillingness to consider racism as the foundation of Western European societies and economies prevented, apart for some exceptions, a response different from a decontextualized and de-historicized proclamation of the universality of human rights, as well as a deceiving understanding of racism as a primitive force fostering hate between lower classes manipulated by the far-right, making racism just a matter of education and class. The rhetoric of "welcoming" and interculturality has further hidden the ways in which racialized social relations are constantly reproduced in our societies through the subaltern inclusion of racialized-migrant subjects, often favored by utilitarian arguments in support of migration.

The call for a decolonial anti-racism is therefore grounded on the fierce rejection of the approach of victimization and stigmatization of the migrant subject, which tends describing migrants only in binary terms, either as criminals or as victims without agency (Palmi 2020). In this context, their faculty to speak is denied or instead allowed only by a third party, represented by the white Western subject. As illustrated by Miguel Mellino (2020), until recently, voices considered at the forefront of antiracist movement in Italy, did not belong to racialized subjects. By shedding light on this issue, Mellino is not aiming to propose an essentialist understanding of political representativeness, whereby each can be represented only by those who share their same identity, with regard to race, gender, class, ethnicity, etc. However, the structural marginalization of racialized subjects within the 'anti-racist' movement represents just another demonstration of the profoundness of racism, which reproduces racist dynamics of power within movements themselves. The attitude of "fraternalism", defined by Aime Césaire in 1956, already mentioned in the first part of the chapter, still manifests itself in the tendency of white anti-racist, migrant rights as well as labor movements in Europe to speak for and on behalf of the 'migrant subject'. As maintained by Césaire in his letter of resignation from the French Communist Party:

> "we cannot delegate anyone else to think for us, or to make our discoveries for us; that, henceforth, we cannot allow anyone else, even if they are the best of our friends, to vouch for us. If the goal of all progressive politics is to one day restore freedom to colonized peoples, it is at least necessary that the everyday actions of progressive parties not be in contradiction with this desired end by continually destroying the very foundations, organizational as well as psychological, of this future freedom, foundations which can be reduced to a single postulate: the right to initiative. I believe I have said

> enough to make it clear that it is neither Marxism nor communism that I am renouncing, and that it is the usage some have made of Marxism and communism that I condemn. That what I want is that Marxism and communism be placed in the service of black peoples, and not black peoples in the service of Marxism and communism." (Césaire 2010 [1956]:149)

Instead, contrary to what advocated by Césaire more than 70 years ago, it still appears too often legitimate not only to deprive racialized/migrant subjects from the right to initiative and the right to speak - making Spivak famous question Can the Subaltern Speak? still relevant today - but also to teach them the ways in which they should struggle and what is more important for them. Yet, as maintained by Palmi (2020:11) "it won't be us, from the highness of our white and colonial paternalism, to show racialized subjects the necessary tools to raise themselves from their material and subjective conditions." (*author's translation from Italian*).

To decolonize European anti-racism means therefore, on the one hand to question the assumptions underlying traditional Marxist understandings according to which race represents a secondary element in relation to class, and, on the other hand, to strengthen the self-critique of contemporary European anti-racist movements, from the more humanitarian to the more radical, regarding the space they leave for racialized-migrant subjects to speak for themselves as well as to the ways in which they reproduce colonial-racial dynamics within their movements.

Despite the tendency above analyzed, there have been instances of anti-racist struggles and movements where the center of the stage has been occupied by migrants and racialized subjects. The most radical anti-racist movements have been those emerging from the self-organization of migrant workers and refugees themselves, struggling against discrimination, exploitation, killings, for their right to stay, to live and to move. In France, from the Sans-Papiers movement to the gilet noirs, in Spain from the movement of sin papeles to the #RegularizacionYa, in Italy, from the struggles of African farmworkers to that of racialized Italians, from the struggle of asylum seekers detained in the Greek Islands waiting for their asylum application to be examined to the everyday struggle of migrants in detention centres across Europe, from the movement against deportation in UK and Germany to the struggle of the mothers of those who died crossing the Mediterranean, these have been just some of the movements that have been putting forward a radical critique of contemporary racial capitalism, rejecting not only the violently racist discourse of the far-right, the exploitation of employers and the segregation imposed by the State legislations, but also refusing a narrative reducing them to passive subjects in need of humanitarian

assistance. Instances addressed during demonstrations in multiple areas of the European and Mediterranean spaces have clearly shown a refusal to be reduced to bare existence, pointing to need of freedom, documents and recognition of dignity. While some of these have been defined as 'spontaneous' protests and others as organized movements, adopting multiple strategies of struggles from occupying public spaces to strikes and boycotts, all have been characterized by a high level of awareness regarding the consequences of colonial and neo-colonial practices in the countries of origin as well as the colonial-racial foundation of the discrimination which they experience in the postcolonial West.

While in some European countries, such as Spain or France, the anti-racist movement and the sans-papiers movement have been characterized by a larger presence of racialized-migrant subjects in leading positions, in Italy, this started to happen only recently.

In the past decade an increasingly central space has been occupied by "Black African"-migrant-farmworkers who have been at the forefront of countless instances of mobilization, some of which has been among the most important mobilizations taking place in Italy in decades. However, while some of this have been self-organized, others have been organized by collectives, unions, sometimes reproducing the patronizing dynamics above mentioned. Nevertheless, through their mobilization – from the first immigrant strike following the killing of South African refugee Jerry Masslo in 1989 until the struggles for self-determination in 2023 - they have shown that racial, labor and status issues cannot be divided or hierarchized because they are all connected. They have shown, through their demands, that the racial-colonial issue is a fundamental one to understand contemporary dynamics of exploitation, expropriation and expulsion fro racial capitalism. That their Blackness represents a mark within Europe which is difficult to overcome. They have shown once again the centrality of race in the construction of modernity and the materiality of oppression of contemporary racial capitalism. Finally, they have shown that they reject humanitarian assistance, and they rather prefer to be allowed to live freely and with dignity that being assisted. It is therefore by looking at the conditions from which these struggles emerged that the research intends to investigate contemporary realities of racial capitalism within Italian agricultural system and the forms of resistance to them.

**Conclusion**

The concept of racial capitalism, as theorized by Robinson first and by Battarcharrya later, represents a fundamental tool to grasp contemporary systems of oppression beyond the

limited category of labor exploitation. Indeed, the literature developed by Black Marxist thinkers and other decolonial Marxists has been central in shedding light on the ways in which capitalism, racism and colonialism have been historically connected in such a way that their "historical work" (Hall 1980:338) cannot be separated neither when investigating their history nor when looking at their contemporary shapes. As it has been argued, this impacts not only forms of exploitation, expropriation and exclusion but also forms of struggle. Indeed, if the "White Left" as well as the "White labor movement" in the West has traditionally conceived class struggle as the fundamental one, as recalled by Césaire, the struggle of colonized and racialized people against racism and colonialism cannot be considered as just being a section of that struggle, but it rather has its own autonomy. Yet, rather than considering race and class as distinct and opposing categories it is necessary to understand "race as the modality through which class is lived" (Hall) and "to articulate the real class situation of persons who are not merely raceless, sexless workers, but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working/economic lives" as Black intersectional feminists have argued in the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977). This literature, while largely ignored by both migration studies and labor studies investigating migrant farmworkers exploitation and resistance, appears instead as a precious tool in deciphering racialized migrant workers experiences and struggles in the context of contemporary racial capitalism. Through this theoretical perspective, the present research intends investigating, to reformulate Fanon famous sentence regarding the need to stretch Marx's analysis in the colonies, the ways in which race and migration status are to be considered as causes for the subaltern inclusion of racialized migrants within European agriculture, and thus how this two elements and the way they affect migrants experience before and during their employment in agriculture should be taken into consideration not only by scholarly analysis, but by unions and other political movements engaged in the topic as well. Indeed, an approach that focuses on the position within the working sector as "farmworkers" leaving unnamed and un-touched the root causes of migration as well as of the marginalization and discrimination experienced in Western European societies, appears to be failing not only to understand social reality but also to favor processes of organizing.

# CHAPTER 3

# TOWARDS A DECOLONIAL METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The adoption of a decolonial lens of investigation cannot only be concerned with the theoretical framework but should necessarily extend to the epistemological and methodological approach adopted, requiring a deep reflection on the very idea of doing research and producing scientific knowledge, as it was developed by Western social sciences in the past centuries. Indeed, as stressed by various authors (Lander 2002, Smith 1999, Quijano 2000), social sciences have been implicated in the colonial project since their inception. Therefore, in order to lay the foundation for the decolonization of methodologies, the present chapter will first critically engage with the colonial legacy of social sciences and their methodologies, building on the analysis developed by authors belonging to the coloniality/modernity paradigm (Lander 2002, Quijano 2000) as well as scholars of decoloniality, such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos[23], Linda Thuiwai Smith and Bagele Chilisa. Then, some theoretical approaches internal to Western social sciences but calling for the deconstruction of some of their key assumptions, such as the theory of knowledge/power of Michel Foucault (1980), the standpoint feminist theory (Harding 1987) and the militant research approach will be analyzed. These theories question the distinction between researcher and object of research, the concept of objectivity and neutrality of research, highlighting the situatedness of every form of knowledge and its implications in the construction of power relations. The end of the first section will be dedicated to analyzing theories of decolonial methodologies, among which the paradigm of Epistemologies of the South proposed by Santos (2018) and decolonial methodologies, as illustrated by Smith (1999), Chilisa (2012), Vivetha Thambinathan and Elizabeth Anne Kinsella (2021).

Following the analysis of various epistemological and methodological approaches going towards the decolonization of research methodologies, the second part of the chapter will be focused on analysing the methodology of the present research. I will first explore my positionality in the context of research together with the evolution of research questions.

[23] Despite the orientation of intellectual work in relation to the liberation from racism, patriarchy and coloniality, Santos have been publicly accused of sexual harassment in his University, Center de Estudios Sociaes as well as of authoritarianism and appropriation of other's work, implemented through patriarchal mechanisms (see Viaene et al. 2023 for an in-depth account of the issue). I have chosen to reference his work, despite these serious accusations, because I believe that it offers us a clear representation of the contradiction so present in the academia, between theory and practice. Our contemporariness gives us the possibility to shed light on Santos' contradictions, while we are unaware of the contradiction that might have been present also in other famous intellectuals, historians, politicians, but have not been shared or when shared, they have not been given relevance to be able to stand the taste of time. In this sense, I consider important to mention his contribution while at the same time stressing these contradictions rather than simply censoring it.

Then, I will discuss challenges and opportunities of embracing militant research by being an "activist-researcher". Finally, in the last part of the chapter I will describe the research design and the methods employed both to gather and to analyze data.
With this chapter I intend to lay the ground for the decolonization of research and its methodologies, while being aware that, also given my positionality in relation to the context of research, this is a long journey which I have just begun.

## 3.1 Decolonizing methodologies

"Decolonizing methodologies" is the title of a seminal book of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) exploring the colonial legacy of anthropology and calling for the decolonization of social science methodologies, with the aim of transforming them from a tool of oppression of formerly colonized indigenous communities to an instrument for their liberation. Any attempt to decolonize research methodologies must therefore commence with a critical analysis of their colonial foundation. Indeed, the coloniality of knowledge represents one of the central elements of coloniality of power and one of the key reasons of its persistence following the end of formal colonialism. Hereafter, the colonial foundation of Western scientific thinking will be explored, followed by an analysis of the deconstruction of some of its key assumptions put in place by poststructuralist theory, feminist theory and theorist of militant research. In the last section, some approaches accounting the decolonization of epistemologies and methodologies will be discussed.

### 3.1.1 The coloniality of Western scientific thinking

Colonialism as a historical fact has not been simply characterized by the violent conquest, domination and extermination of a large part of world's population enacted by European powers. Indeed, what has made the colonial model of power so effective and long-lasting, has been represented by its impact on the colonization of knowledge production, under the hegemony of the West. According to Anibal Quijano (2000:541), in order to enact this process, the colonizers: first "expropriated the cultural discoveries of the colonized peoples most apt for the development of capitalism to the profit of the European center"; second, "they repressed as much as possible the colonized forms of knowledge production, the models of the production of meaning, their symbolic universe, the model of expression and of objectification and subjectivity"; third, "in different ways in each case, they forced

the colonized to learn the dominant culture in anyway that would be useful to the reproduction of domination, whether in the field of technology and material activity or subjectivity, especially Judeo-Christian religiosity". As highlighted in the second chapter, colonization was accompanied by the categorization and hierarchization of world population according to different races, whereby the European "white race" was placed at the top. As a consequence of this classification, people characterized by different histories, cultures, languages and knowledges were reduced by colonial thinking to their phenotypical characterization, crystallized in the definition of race: first, they were dispossessed of their cultural and historical identities, secondly, they were reduced to being "inferior races capable only of producing inferior cultures" (Quijano 2000:552) and condemned to be the past of Europe, its Other, its opposite. Europe created itself as the universal and the norm, in contrast with the rest of the world, which was defined in its specific, finite experience (Said 1978). In this process, cultural and social histories were articulated as temporal hierarchies, with European modern experience as the natural point of destination in the process of development. The process of construction of the idea of modernity was enacted together with the process of colonization, as highlighted by the modernity/coloniality paradigm (Quijano 2000; Lander 2000).

The coloniality of knowledge (*colonialidad del saber)* represents thus an integral part of the colonial project, being at the same time the premise for the legitimation of violence and conquest and the foundation of the longevity of the colonial model of power following the end of historical colonialism (Quijano 2000; Lander 2000). As it has been argued by Edward Said (1978), scholarship played a central role in the construction of Western discourse about the Other. Indeed, Western social sciences were created in a specific geographical and temporal context: in the mid of the XIX century in the context of industrialized societies. They rested upon some assumptions: the separation between past and present (being past the subject of history and present the subject of social sciences); the separation of social reality in specific categories (society, politics and economy), being each of them the subject of a discipline (sociology, political science and economy, and anthropology representing the study of the "Other") characterized by their own methods, subjects of analysis, intellectual traditions and university departments (Lander 2000). The historical establishment of scientific disciplines within Western academia rested on two fundamental assumptions. First, that there is a universal trajectory for the people of the world, leading to the Western experience as the final point of destination. Secondly, and precisely due to the universal character of the European historical experience, the conceptual

categories, concepts and perspectives developed to understand it are not only universally valid but normative concepts used to measure the "development" of other people on the planet (Lander 2000). What differentiate Western culture from the "Others", making it not assimilable to other cultures, and not even definable as a specific culture, lies therefore in its claim to universality, based on the presumed objective character of its science, and characterizing Western knowledge as the only real knowledge.

Boaventura De Sousa Santos (2018) defines the epistemological model underlying modern social sciences as "Epistemologies of the North". This model has been based on the distinction between scientific knowledge and non-scientific knowledge, that brought with it the monumentalization of knowledge and the devaluation of other forms of knowledges, giving birth to an "epistemicide" defining "Eurocentric epistemological North as the only source of valid knowledge [and] the South, that is, whatever lies on the other side of the line, as the realm of ignorance". According to Santos (2007, 2018), the differentiation operated by Western scientific thinking can be better understood as the result of the abyssal line. The abyssal line is a physical as well as epistemic line, created during the time of historical colonialism as the line dividing the metropole from the colony, dividing social reality into "systems of visible and invisible distinctions", whereby the invisible distinctions are setting the foundation for the visible ones, establishing a double standard of evaluation. Abyssal thinking is a direct consequence of the division operated by the abyssal line. Indeed, some of the social and epistemic foundations of Western modern thought, such as modern law and modern science, are characterized by internal visible distinctions (between legal and illegal, between truth and falsehood) hiding invisible distinctions, which however are founding elements of the visible ones (between the realm of law and that of lawlessness, between knowledge and beliefs).

> "The other side of the abyssal line is the realm of beyond legality and illegality (lawlessness), of beyond truth and falsehood (incomprehensible beliefs, idolatry, magic). These forms of radical negation together result in a radical absence, the absence of humanity, modern sub humanity. The exclusion is thus both radical and nonexistent, as sub-humans are not conceivably candidates for social inclusion. Modern humanity is not conceivable without modern sub-humanity. The negation of one part of humanity is sacrificial, in that it is the condition of the affirmation of that other part of humanity which considers itself as universal" (Santos, 2007:9-10).

Today, despite the end of historical colonialism, the system of power established by colonization is still representing the foundation of the social and economic organization of the world, defined either as coloniality (Quijano 2000) or simply as another phase of

colonialism (Santos 2018). Therefore, while the abyssal line cannot be identified with a territorial line, is to be characterized as an epistemic line, manifesting itself in the countless fractures between abyssal and post-abyssal realities. For instance, the border regime and immigration legislation can be considered an example of the abyssal line in our contemporary time. On one side the realm of law, whereby what is legal and illegal applies to actions but not individuals, often overlapping with what is considered just and unjust. On the other side, subjects defined as "illegal" are considered less than human, but belonging to the a-legal, are subjected to treatments which would not be imaginable for those on this side of the line.

Even though each discipline has been implicated in different ways in the colonial project, they have all played a part. Among them, anthropology has been the discipline most directly involved. Born in the colonial territories and characterized by the distinctive method of ethnography, anthropology has been defined as "the science of imperialism par excellence" (Smith 1999:67):

> "The ethnographic 'gaze' of anthropology has collected, classified and represented other cultures to the extent that anthropologists are often the academics popularly perceived by the indigenous world as the epitome of all that it is bad with academics" (ibid).

Since its inception, it operated in close contact with colonial structures of power promoting the differentiation between "primitive" and "civilized" societies as well as the conceptualization of linear time underlying the idea of development and progress. Furthermore, anthropological research, despite being based on ethnography and participant observation, and therefore on the full immersion of the researcher in the context of research, did not take into account, until recently, the role that the researcher's subjectivity, socialization and biases, as well as the relation of power between researcher and the "researched", played in shaping research findings. In the 1980's, following growing critiques, pointing to the colonial foundations of anthropology (Asad 1973), the discipline was forced to rethink its history and come to terms with its colonial past, a fracture central in shaping the evolution of contemporary anthropology and ethnographic research, as well as a triggering factor for what was to be defined as the "reflexive turn", further explored in the following paragraphs.

### 3.1.2 Deconstructing Western social sciences founding assumptions: post-structuralism, standpoint theory and militant research

Even though heavily influenced by European colonial and imperial history, Western thought cannot be considered as a homogenous field of knowledge. Indeed, there have been, throughout the history of social sciences and philosophy, numerous thinkers questioning the assumption of universalism, truth and objectivity at the core of Western scientific thinking. These have however been developed as an internal critique that, while advancing the complexification of social reality and questioning some of social sciences' founding assumptions, has not gone as far as to question the very status of scientific and academic/intellectual knowledge vis-à-vis other forms of knowledges, as well as the legacy of colonialism in the realm of knowledge production (Santos 2018).

One of the most relevant ruptures in Western thought developed by Western intellectuals was brought about by post-structuralist debates emerging in France in the 1980's, and, more specifically, by the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault analysis of the relationship between discourse, knowledge and power, had indeed profound implications on the very conceptualization of knowledge production. According to Foucault (1980:27), power and knowledge (which he defines as the couple *power/knowledge*) are deeply interconnected and "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations". Central in constructing the relation between power and knowledge is discourse. Foucault's definition of discourse goes beyond its standard definition as a set of related sentences, entailing the process of meaning-making as integral to the practice of discourse. This conceptualization rejects the traditional differentiation between language and practice, defining discourse itself as a practice: discursive practice, the practice of creating meaning. According to this theorization, while social facts and things exist beyond discourse, it is discourse that fills them with meaning, and therefore knowledge exists only in relation to discourse. This means that while certain facts exist throughout different times and cultures, is the interpretation given to them that makes them what they are. For instance, in his study about madness, Foucault maintains that are the practices, knowledge, institutions, treatments and prescription applying to those considered as mad that create the subject of the mad person, and not *vice versa*. Therefore, a specific categorization rather than discovering its subject creates it in the very process of categorizing. Foucault

(1980:131) therefore rejects the idea of the existence of "Truth", replacing it with the concept of "regimes of truth", changing overtime and sustained by different discursive formations:

> "Truth isn't outside power […] each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth; that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish between true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned […] the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (ibid.).

Even though Foucault was concerned with the analysis of the construction of the "other" within Europe and the origin of all those institutions which played an integral role in the construction of alterity (hospitals, asylums, prisons, etc.), the issue of colonization and its role in the constitution of the "colonial subject" as the "Other" of Europe par excellence have been dramatically absent from its investigation (Spivak 1988). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988:66), in her seminal contribution regarding the politics and possibilities of representation of subaltern subjects, engaged with the contribution of post-structuralist theorists, maintaining that "some of the most radical criticism coming out from the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as the Subject". Furthermore, even though Foucault's theories have been used by some to highlight the colonial project and the construction of "the West" (see Hall 1992), they have also been deployed to dismiss decolonial theories as obsolete in that addressing issues already explored by Foucault, thus reinforcing a Eurocentric epistemological perspective (Suarez-Krabbe 2012).

A second contribution to the internal deconstruction of social sciences' presumed objectivity and neutrality was brough by feminist theories in the 1980's, which highlighted that what had been produced in the realm of philosophy and social sciences had mostly been developed by men adopting a "male gaze", a lens of interpretation reproducing the point of view and interests of patriarchal society. As the proponents of the "feminist standpoint theory" argued, this was an epistemological, methodological, political and philosophical approach aimed at investigating the relationship between knowledge production and power, by placing under the lens of investigation the work of social theorists and researchers themselves (Harding 1987, 2004; Collins 2004). The aim was to show that every form of knowledge was socially and politically situated, and that the position of the researcher in the cultural, social and political context influenced not only the final results and the accuracy of the research, but the very research questions, hypothesis and theoretical framework. They argued for the explicit visibilization of the researcher, stressing that the assumed universality

and objectivity of research was achieved through the hiding of the researcher her/himself who, rather than representing the "universal experience", belonged to a specifically privileged position within society. Hence, they maintained:

> "The best feminist analysis goes beyond these innovations in subject matter in a crucial way: it insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of research. That is, class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint." (Harding 1987:9)

In the same period, "the logic of a standpoint" was also developed by other social justice movements in the Global North, claiming that the point of view on society deriving from a specific place of oppression allowed to achieve a deeper understanding about that society, delivering a representation considerably different from that of the dominant view, often represented as the only valid. Therefore, standpoint theories promote the production of knowledge from the point of view of oppressed people, whose position grants them a privileged perspective on the actual functioning of the dominant society. As Sandra Harding maintained in an edited volume published in 2004, highlighting the debates emerged following three decades of circulation of the theoretical, epistemological and methodological perspective of standpoint theory:

> "to the extent that an oppressed group's situation is different from that of the dominant group, its dominated situation enables the production of distinctive kinds of knowledge. Each oppressed group can learn to identify its distinctive opportunities to turn an oppressive feature of the group's conditions into a source of critical insight about how the dominant society thinks and is structured. Thus, standpoint theories map how a social and political disadvantage can be turned into an epistemological, scientific, and political advantage." (Harding 2004:7)

Both post-structuralism and feminist theory played a pivotal role in questioning social sciences presumed objectivity and neutrality, thus opening the floor for what was defined as the "reflexive turn", particularly affecting sociology and anthropology. This also opened the floor for the emergence of innovative methodologies and research methods, aimed at countering the distinction between the researcher and the subjects of research, henceforth variously defined as participants, co-researchers, etc. As a consequence of this theoretical and epistemological shift, researchers started interrogating themselves on the possibility to create an objective study of a social phenomenon, in light of the subjective positioning and inherent biases of the researcher. While in a first moment anthropology and

its main methodology, ethnography, were the most affected by this transformation, in more recent years reflexivity has become a central feature of qualitative research, aimed at assessing the role played by the researcher's subjectivity in the process of research. However, while following the reflexive turn, anthropologists and social scientists were induced to further reflect on the role of their subjectivity in the process of research, the ways in which asymmetrical power relationships shaped by race, class, gender, and nationality exists and are reinforced by the act of doing ethnographic research were not adequately explored (D'Amico-Samuels 1997). As suggested by Deborah D'Amico-Samuels (ibid.), while the colonial legacy of anthropology started being investigated in-depth, the same cannot not be said for the contemporary implications of researchers' race, class, gender and nationality in defining and affecting the process as well as final product of research. Most of the times, the race, class, gender and/or nationality of the researcher has been stressed by authors belonging to marginalized groups, and quite rarely by those holding privileged positions (ibid.). Even when implemented, reflexivity has been more an academic exercise further favoring a separation between the Self and the Other, and rarely aimed at a deeper reflection on the very notion of doing (ethnographic) research as an act of power. Instead, in order to effectively pursue the "decolonization of anthropology" (Fay 1997), the very notion of research as it has been conceived by Western academia should be radically questioned.

On this point, D'Amico-Samuels (1997) argues that the concept of fieldwork, as a field of investigation separated from other areas of social life where the ethnographers can consider themself as neutral subjects and their racial, class, gender and national identities can be momentarily suspended, urges a deep reconsideration. Reflecting on the very notion of fieldwork, D'Amico-Samuels (ibid:72) poses questions which "no anthropologist who has lived through the discipline's reinvention or through about it with reference to the colonial encounter would consciously answer yes […], but the point is what does the field *unconsciously* allow us to do and think?". As she maintains, being the field often defined by the privilege of the researcher in relation to a socially and economically disadvantaged social groups, the existing asymmetrical power relations cannot be ignored in that they rest on political, social and economic structures allowing for the "creation of the roles of researcher and researched in the first place." It is precisely the "ideology of the field" that allows for the fictious separation between anthropologists' social position and the political-structural inequalities which are investigated. The reflexive turn has pushed for the role of the anthropologist to be explicit in the process of writing. However, the fact that what is done "in the name of fieldwork is to use what other people know to become something we were

not before, personally and materially" is often left unnamed. Hence, what should be more under investigation, rather than only self-reflexivity on the ground, is what happens when the anthropologist comes back from the field, meaning how the considerations developed in that context effectively shape their lives. Ultimately, rather than continuing to reproduce a distinct set of values and actions between what is defined as fieldwork and what is considered as private life, a politically and ethically coherent anthropology should agree that the "field is everywhere" and agree to scrutinize one's role and position within society in the same way as others' are examined (ibid.).

Similarly, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) called for a "militant anthropology" characterized by "the primacy of ethical", whereby the traditionally 'neutral' role of the anthropologist is questioned in favor of a morally, politically and ethically committed anthropology opening the space to be at the same time "anthropologists, comrades and *companheiras*"(ibid: 420). As Scheper-Hughes highlights, this should not stop at the level of writing, but it entails a full commitment to "the subjects of our writings, whose lives and miseries provide us with a livelihood" (ibid.) not only by restituting research results, but also by sharing the economic benefits of our research and publications to support struggles.

In the past decades, militant ethnography became a shared approach to studies regarding labor, migration and social movements, aimed at merging scientific analysis with political engagement (Boni et al 2020). Militant ethnography bears some analogies with other approaches such as militant research and activist research, all sharing the commitment for an 'engaged research', whereby researchers are not mere spectators but are themselves involved in the struggle, critically reflecting on their positionality, role and reciprocal influence between theory and action. According to Colectivo Situaciones (2007), militant research aims at questioning both the traditional way of doing research as conceived by academia and the way of doing political militancy. It is a reciprocal action from theory to practice, which appears fundamental to question our own assumptions, not only in relation to research but also in relation to political action. Indeed, as maintained by the authors, academic research and political militancy often share similar attitude towards their subjects, who are objectualized through the attribution of an intention grounded in theoretical or ideological assumptions. In this sense, militant research (from Spanish, *militancia de investigación*) can be though as:

> "a double movement: to create ways of being militants that escape the political certainties established a priori and embrace politics as research (in this case, it would be 'research militancy'), and, at the same time, to invent forms of thinking and producing concepts that reject academic procedures, breaking

> away from the image of an object to be known and putting at the centre subjective experience (in this case, it would be 'militant research')." (ibid:74).

Militant research therefore does not simply consist in the fact of being politically engaged in the context of research, but to create an exchange between research and militancy, in a way beneficial to both of them.

The above illustrated contributions represented a fundamental step in questioning the presumed objectivity and neutrality of social sciences, shedding light on the relationship between knowledge production and power as well as on the urgency to rethink the role of the researcher. At the same time, in order to further our journey towards the decolonization of Western social science and their methodologies, in what follows some epistemological and methodological approaches developed to overcome the colonial legacy of social sciences, defined as Epistemologies of the South and decolonial methodologies, will be explored.

### 3.1.3 Epistemologies of the South and decolonial methodologies

According to Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018), most of the above-mentioned contributions, even if representing an attempt of deconstruction carried out by counter-hegemonic Western thinkers, are internal to the epistemologies of the North. These are defined as abyssal epistemologies, reproducing the distinction operated by the abyssal line, while the epistemologies of the South are defined as post-abyssal. However, the definition of "North" and "South" is not simply geographical, in that the Epistemologies of the North are also present in the Global South, due to the deep influence and aftermath of epistemic colonization, and the Epistemologies of the South can be found also "in the geographical North (Europe and North America) in many of the struggles waged there against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy" (ibid:1-2). The relevance of Epistemologies of the South is represented by their contribution to counter the epistemic violence represented by the systemic exclusion, silencing, obliteration and distortion of forms of knowledges, histories and struggles of those who have been defined simply as "Others" in relation to the universal (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). Santos (2018) defines the Epistemologies of the South as those epistemologies concerning:

> "the production and validation of knowledges anchored in the experiences of resistance of all those social groups that have systematically suffered injustice, oppression, and destruction caused by

> capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. The vast and vastly diversified field of such experiences I designate as the anti-imperial South. […] The objective of the epistemologies of the South is to allow the oppressed social groups to represent the world as their own and in their own terms, for only thus will they be able to change it according to their own aspirations. […] Their aim is not to study knowledge or justified belief as such, let alone the social and historical context in which they both emerge (social epistemology is a controversial concept as well). Their aim, rather, is to identify and valorize that which often does not even appear as knowledge in the light of the dominant epistemologies, that which emerges instead as part of the struggles of resistance against oppression and against the knowledge that legitimates such oppression. Many such ways of knowing are not thought knowledges but rather lived knowledges. The epistemologies of the South occupy the concept of epistemology in order to resignify it as an instrument for interrupting the dominant politics of knowledge. They are experiential epistemologies." (ibid: 1-2).

The theorization of Epistemologies of the South helps overcoming the limitations of Western social sciences' epistemologies and methodologies, to propose the valorization of alternative forms of knowledge. This framework rejects the hierarchization of knowledge between scientific/academic knowledge and other kind of popular/common/experienced knowledges, maintaining that the answer to the "epistemicide" promoted by the Epistemologies of the North and their monoculture is represented by the concept of "ecologies of knowledges", that is, systems of knowledges including scientific knowledge as well as other kinds of knowledge, such as artisanal knowledges. Artisanal knowledges are defined as various kinds of knowledge which however share one common feature, to be created not as knowledge separated from other social practices but as integral to them. The revaluation of artisanal knowledges pushes for the demonumentalization of knowledge, that is, the attempt to deconstruct the artificial superiority of Western scientific thinking v*is-à-vis* other forms of knowledge (Santos 2018). Epistemologies of the South also question the concept of neutrality of research, and its connection with objectivity in the context of social sciences. Indeed, while neutrality refers to the realm of moral and political values, objectivity defines the autonomy and rigor of the research. While social sciences methodologies have often called for an emotional detachment of researchers, identified only with their mind, Santos (2018) stresses the importance of the corporeality of knowledge, well-illustrated by the concept of "corazonar"[24] (Guerrero Arias 2010), standing for a fusion between reason and feelings and for the importance of emotions in defining social action, thus including research.

[24] Corazonar is a concept belonging to Peruvian Andean indigenous communities, see Patricio Guerrero Arias (2010) for an in-depth analysis of the subject.

Epistemologies of the South, rather than valuing research relevance only in relation to academic debates, consider fundamental the extent to which it contributes to strengthening struggles against oppression, representing together with objectivity, the two fundamental criteria on which to assess the value of research, defined as two-fold criterion of trust (Santos 2018). Epistemologies of the South take struggle not as exception but as a central element of human and social life and thus privilege knowledge born in struggle and experience over merely theoretical knowledge. For this purpose, struggle is defined not only as conventional organized struggle in the form of demonstrations, mobilizations, strikes, etc. but also in the form of "everyday forms of resistance" and "silent struggles" (Scott 1985), taking place every day among oppressed people. Furthermore, being epistemic violence a central way through which domination and coloniality is expressed, the struggle for epistemic freedom becomes also central one (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). In terms of methodologies, the Epistemologies of the South rejects "extractivist methodologies" through which modern social science extracts "information research objects in very much the same way as mining industries extract minerals and oil from nature" (Santos 2018:14), and call for the development of non-extractivist methodologies, privileging the knowing-with rather than the knowing-about.

The need to decolonize methodologies in order to decolonize the contribution of social sciences has also been stressed by authors who have focused on carrying out research from the perspective of indigenous people. These works fall within the framework of Indigenous Research Methodologies (IRM), considered one of the methodological approaches useful to develop a decolonial methodology. Among them, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), in her seminal work "Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People", after critically analyzing the negative impact of Western scientific research on Maori people in New Zealand and contextualizing it as part and parcel of the colonial project, proposes to develop an Indigenous Research Agenda, also building on the revindications brought forward by the Indigenous People Movement starting from the 1960's. The Indigenous Research Agenda should be based on some key elements, defined by Smith as self-determination, mobilization, transformation, healing and decolonization. The Indigenous Research Agenda, proposed by Smith building on the specific experience of Maori, is concerned with allowing indigenous peoples transformation from being researched to being researchers. Smith highlights what she defines as "twenty-five indigenous projects", which can be read as guidelines for the creation of decolonized methodologies. Among them, we can find for instance storytelling, representing, naming, claiming, and so on, all pointing

to the need of prioritizing indigenous knowledge and world views. In addition to that, Smith highlights the importance of "researching back", that is to turn the gaze, in order to study historical and contemporary practices of colonialism and domination, giving priority to worldviews and experiences of the "colonized".

Similarly, Bagele Chilisa (2011:14) in her work on Indigenous Research Methodologies maintains that:

> "Decolonization is thus a process of conducting research in such a way that the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalization are given space to communicate from their frames of reference. It is a process that involves 'researching back' to question how the disciplines – psychology, education, history, anthropology, sociology, or science – through an ideology of Othering have described and theorized about the colonized Other, and refused to let the colonized Other name and know their frame of reference."

Chilisa presents various Postcolonial Indigenous Research approaches, among which the one based on the indigenization of conventional research - through which the coloniality of Euro-Western research is critiqued - and the one based on relational indigenous research paradigms - centered on indigenous worldviews concerning relations between humans, animals, nature and spirituality. As Smith, Chilisa calls for the need to transform conventional methods of research in order to decolonize research by giving priority to the relational rather than the individual. For example, she suggests replacing conventional interviews with what she defines as decolonized interviews, whereby the interview are carried out in the form of a conversation involving more than one participant, so that the relation between various participants is valued, and the aim of the interview process is that of favoring a conversation centered on what the participants consider as valuable.

Another contribution to the development of a decolonial methodological approach, which can be particularly useful for non-indigenous researcher is that proposed by Vivetha Thambinathan and Elizabeth Anne Kinsella (2021), who suggest engaging with the four following practices in order to decolonize research methodologies: 1- exercising critical reflexivity; 2- reciprocity and respect for self-determination; 3- embracing Other(ed) ways of knowing; 4- embodying a transformative praxis. Critical reflexivity is fundamental in order to reflect on the researchers' epistemological assumption, their positionality in the context of research and countering power imbalance between researchers and research participants. However, critical reflectivity goes well beyond a mere "confession of privilege" and aims at deconstructing Western-centric assumptions in relation to research. Reciprocity

is not limited to the act of reporting back to the community but involves the entire relationship between researcher and participant, as grounded in trust, respect and the sharing of an anti-colonial understanding. At the same time, self-determination stands for the recognition of the capacity of oppressed group to speak for themselves and thus to criticize an "altruistic" understanding of research as an act of giving voice or empowering. Listening affectively is conceived as a central element of decolonial methodologies, which should thus include both rational and emotional listening. Embracing Other(ed) ways of knowing is central to a decolonial methodological approach in that it brings together the revaluation of ways of knowing that have been systematically marginalized with a critical analysis of the underlying assumption of Western research. These ways of knowing can be given space by actively collaborating with research participants in order to understand their world views, as rooted in cultural, historical and social experience. Lastly, embodying a transformative praxis stands for the commitment to decolonization not only in research but in life, as a central frame shaping everyday actions. The researcher should be a researcher-activist and the relevance of the research should not be assessed only in relation to academic standards, but also in relation to our contribution to the struggles of people against colonial systems of power.

All the above illustrated theoretical, epistemological and methodological approaches represent a fundamental contribution in order to develop research which aims to be decolonial not only in theory but also in practice. The proposed approaches share the commitment for a research methodology based both on a critique of Western conventional research and on the development of alternative methodological approaches. A key point in the critique of Western methodologies concerns their presumed objectivity, which is widely criticized as a tool to affirm Western scientific superiority. On the contrary, decolonial methodologies, as feminist methodologies, point to the situatedness of every form of knowledge, thus including social sciences. In this sense, it becomes fundamental to explicit the place from which someone is doing research, thoughtfully reflecting on the implications of researching from a specific position of privilege. Furthermore, another central contribution of Epistemologies of the South and decolonial methodologies, shared also by other approaches such as that of militant research, is the need to consider the relevance of research not only in terms of academic standards, but also in relation to the improvements it promotes on the life and struggles of participants. Finally, the need to decolonize methodology entails the entire process of research, from the purpose of research to the ways in which it is carried out, written and disseminated. As a process, it is not exempt from

challenges, emerging from the tension existing between the need to deconstruct and overcome academic standards, while at the same time working within academia. It is on discussing these contradictions and exploring the concrete challenges and opportunities met while attempting to develop the present research following the above-mentioned methodological approach that the next few paragraphs will be focused.

### 3.2 Setting the context: research questions, positionality and methods

The above paragraphs have focused on the analysis of some theoretical standpoints regarding Western scientific thinking, social sciences and the need to decolonize our methodologies. The following paragraphs will be dedicated to analysing the role that those methodological approaches and theoretical reflections have played in shaping the present work, carefully exploring the evolution of my research questions, awareness in relation to my positionality in the context of research, as well as discussing challenges and opportunities of being an "activist-researcher". In the last part of the chapter, the methods employed to carry out the research will be exposed.

#### 3.2.1 Exploring the evolution of research questions while becoming aware of my positionality, structures of power and contradictions in the context of research

I arrived in the province of Foggia with the purpose of writing my MA dissertation thesis on the 17th of June 2019. I remember that day vividly. Before arriving, I had tried to establish contact with some of the organizations, unions, political collectives operating in the area. I read about the exploitation of "African" agricultural workers in the area, about the so-called "ghettoes" as well as about the work of various organizations. I had read and observed through the lens of academic works, social media and newspapers the struggles of African farmworkers in Southern Italy. I was excited and at the same time scared about not being able to meet my own expectations. In terms of my research questions, I was concerned with understanding the challenges to the organization of migrant farmworkers as a united subject of struggle considering the ways in which labor was multiplicated through a multiplicity of racial, status, gender, and class devices, preventing its organizations. While acknowledging the various forms of oppression to which racialized migrant workers were subjected, this question was implicitly assuming that the only true and relevant forms organization were those based on class, and thus influenced by what has been defined in previous chapter as "White Marxism".

I was also persuaded by Gramsci's writings regarding the struggles of subaltern social groups, considered at the margins of History and the same time attempting to 'write' their own history. I was particularly influenced by this passage, and trying to conceive my mission as that of an "integral historian".

> "The history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. There undoubtedly does exist a tendency to (at least provisional stages of) unification in the historical activity of these groups, but this tendency is continually interrupted by the activity of the ruling groups […] Every trace of independent initiative on the part of subaltern groups should therefore be of incalculable value for the integral historian. Consequently, this kind of history can only be dealt with monographically, and each monograph requires an immense quantity of material which is often hard to collect." (Gramsci 1934 in ed. Hoare and Nowell-Smith 1971: 206-207).

My initial assumptions were quite superficial, naïve and presumptuous. However, I was not characterized by any ideological closure preventing me from changing my ideas. It was by being immersed in the "field" until the boundaries between the field and my own life would become blurred to the point of disappearing that I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the reality on the ground, stripping myself from inherited prejudices, false assumptions and naïve beliefs.

I first went to the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone with some members of the union Flai-Cgil in June 2019. That was the first time I entered a so-called "ghetto". It was the summer of 2019, and thousands of people were living there, due to the tightening of immigration legislation promoted by the Five Star Movement-League Government with the approval of so-called 'Security Decrees' in October 2018. Entering for the first time in Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement, I perceived the dissonance between what I had read and heard about it and what I was seeing, hearing and experiencing. Informal settlements were often described by media as characterized by "inhumane" living conditions, inhabited by people subjected to "modern slavery" and abuses. The lens of victimization was the prevailing one, so I was expecting to find a funereal environment. What first impressed me was instead the vitality of the place, with countless informal economic activities: clothes magazines, café shops, restaurants, bars, discos, mechanics, electicians, furnitures' shops, churches, mosques, through which the settlements' inhabitants attempted to reconstruct a small multicultural African city at the margins of Europe. In the following months and years, the enormous suffering hidden behind that apparent vitality would become clear to me, but that first day my reaction was one of astonishment, not for the segregation and marginalization which I expected already, but for the creativity of forms of 'r-existance'

which were put in place to overcome it, or at least, momentarily forgetting it. Since then, I have been been frequenting Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement for more than four years, living inside the settlements for some months between December 2019 and March 2020, and between July 2021 and November 2021.

Many of the consideration mentioned in previous paragraphs, with specific reference to Epistemologies of the South and decolonial methodologies, entered my mind first in an experiential way, through the dialogue and exchange with people living inside the settlement, and only later through the work of the above-referenced authors. Experiential knowledge has been crucial in designing and conducting the present research, and guided my work throughout the entire PhD, posing numerous methodological, ethical and political questions. Indeed, a great deal of the present research has been shaped by the knowledge I acquired while I was not researching. Through exchanges with people living there with very little formal education I was able to deconstruct the dichotomy created by Western thinking between "scientific" and "popular" knowledge, attributing to the former greater value than to the latter. I understood that I had only to learn and nothing to teach, and that having achieved a higher level of formal education did not make my knowledge anyhow superior to that of people who had experienced in their real life most of the things I read in books. I realized that the lack of a highly organized movement did not mean that there wasn't a political consciousness. Sitting and chatting with people I learned the deep awareness and understanding of the colonial past and neo-colonial dynamics afflicting countries of origin - particularly pronounced in people coming from West Francophone Africa - and shaping the relationship between Europeans and Africans. Following the submission of my dissertation in September 2019, I continued to go to Borgo Mezzanone, not to research but just to engage with what was becoming for me a life school.

In the first months, when that reality had not yet become predominant in my life, so that I could still clearly experience myself inside vs myself outside, I perceived the materiality of the abyssal line each time I went out from Borgo Mezzanone. It was as if my own self was divided into two pieces, and once I went I out I could not make any more sense of what surrounded me. I could not reconciliate the discrepancy between two worlds, so close to each other and yet so far away in distance, two value systems, two modes of being in the world. What struck me most was to see how the world outside, read Italian-white-middleclass, would move on as if nothing happened, as if they were not aware of that fracture, of that bleeding wound. And those who were aware of it treated it more like a

political banner to highlight their progressive positions than a container of life, suffering, hopes, illusions, and delusions.

My experience and knowledge of the informal settlements of Borgo Mezzanone, first, and Torretta Antonacci, later, cannot be separated from my positionality, as a white middle-class Italian woman. As maintained in previous paragraphs, race, gender and class all play a role in defininig not only the "subject" of reasearch but also the relation between the subject and the researcher, which must be taken into account in order to develop a complete analysis. Making explicit the positionality of the researcher in the context of research represents a fundamental step in the deconstruction of the presumed objectivity of social sciences, as well as in the attempt to decolonize social research. Through the analysis of our encounter with what has been defined as the "Other", it is possible to also achieve a deeper knowledge of ourselves, not in psychological introspective terms, but in relation to the position of power and privilege that we are holding within societies, which was apparently hidden to ourselves until a specific moment in time, when we started gaining deeper awareness.

It was by being there continuosly that I was able to better grasp the meaning of words such as "whiteness", "race", "coloniality", "privilege" which until that time I had understood only in theoretical terms. In this process of awareness, theory and experience merged, with the former helping me to decifer the latter, and the latter giving shape to the former.

I experienced my whiteness through my relation with a social reality which was predominantly racialized as Black, and where I was the one considered as being out of place. A white European woman presence in an informal settlement populated by mostly Black West African men did not go unnoticed, expecially when it overcame the boundaries in terms of time and space allowed for outsiders. If white use to think themselves as non-racial, as the norm, this certainty falls apart in the moment in which they are immersed in a reality in which they are a clear minority. However, while that makes us aware of our own racialization, by itself is not enough to understand the power attached to whiteness. As I will illustrate more in depth in chapter four and seven, that power becomes clear when interacting with institutional actors and public services in Italy as a white person, as well as when travelling to Black majority countries where both institution and population continue to privilege whiteness in light of their colonial history and the system of power centered on global coloniality. The same can be said for the privileges descending from nationality and migration status, which are unnoticed until we are confronted with the experience of those who are not holding those privileges, and whose experience is shaped by forced (im)mobility and the constant threat of deportation. However, in informal settlements located at the

margins of Europe and existing as a result of European migration policies and racial regimes, the disillusionement with whiteness was much more palbable, compared to what I experienced in Senegal and Gambia. At the beginning, I aroused more suspicion than adoration, making visible the legacies of colonialism and of contemporary practices of extracting resources and information without any regards for the privacy, desires and aspirations of those involved. Whites were rightly equated with people pretending to be nice while hiddenly following their personal interest. The questions that I got, either explicitly or implicitly, were always the same:

> "What was I doing there? Was I a police informant ? A journalist? A prostitute?"

I was believed to be one of these, or all at the same time, by some of the settlements' inhabitants. If being considered a police informant or a journalist were well-founded suspicions based on a history and present of interest-driven relations, being considered a "prostitute" was clearly related with a patriarchal conceptualization of single women as inherently available for men's use. I was asked several times, especially when I lived in Borgo Mezzanone settlement having a house by myself, if I was "working", how much I charged, and if twenty euro were enough. The commodification of my body was the most painful aspect, placing me in a position not of power but of subordination. However, it also represented a great source of awareness of the meaning of being a woman in a patriarchal society, allowing me to understand how my own experience had been characterized by patriarchy until that time, without I wouldn't even realize it. Nonetheless, being white and Italian was still a privilege also in my subordinate position as a woman, which would protect me from being violently harassed, beaten or raped, as it instead happened to many of the women I met while I was there. This, by showing me how gender oppression would intersect with racial and class oppression, made the claims of intersectionality a tangible reality. By being there, physically, with my body and all the contradictions it entailed, I was able to experience and fully understand many of the theoretical concept described in these pages.

My research questions changed due to the experiential knowledge I achieved in these four years and following the deconstruction of my own internalized assumptions both in relation to my position and in relation to Western social sciences. Yet, I did not change only my research question but rather my entire approach to research. Studying in the UK, due to the constant critical analysis of scholarly works, I was convinced that for a study to be valuable it needed to demonstrate or counter some specific theories. This approach sees

reality as merely functional to prove a theory and ultimately objectualizes people stories and experiences. On the contrary, in line with the paradigms of militant research, Epistemologies of the South and decolonial methodologies described above, the aim of the present research is neither to generalize the knowledge acquired in relation to the experience of West African farmworkers in Southern Italy to theorize a common experience shared by all the racialized subjects employed in the agricultural sector nor to counter or prove any theory. I don't think that the purpose of social sciences should be to demonstrate things, such as natural sciences use experiments to demonstrate or invalidate hypothesis and previous theories. On the contrary, social sciences can be relevant in advancing points of view and perspectives which have been neglected, in developing in-depth analysis of topics which are often talked about superficially or only through a Western gaze. I did not choose this topic because I thought that it would have been the best-case study to demonstrate a theory. I rather chose these theories because I thought they were the best to illuminate the complex dynamics taking place in the province of Foggia, which can be considered as the quintessential representation of a system of exploitation and oppression based on the exploitation of racial and status differences, rooted in European and Italian migration policies and wide-spread racism. I decided to carry out this research to be able to offer a different lens of interpretation to a topic that is highly investigated in the context of Italian and European literature, as well as present in mainstream media, but often missing the point of view of those involved in first person. By that I do not mean that previous analyses, already explored in the literature review, have not brought relevant arguments to the debate. However, the world views and understandings of those who inhabit these marginal, and yet central spaces, have often not been at the core of the very design of the research, but have been used to advance a specific thesis of the author. On the contrary, what I attempted to do was to center my research on the worldviews and perspectives of those directly involved.

As a consequence, the research questions changed from being concerned with what would have been considered interesting in terms of academic debates to what was actually relevant to understand and describe the reality on the ground and how it was experienced by West African migrant farmworkers living in two of the largest informal settlements of the province of Foggia. I thus decided to shift my focus from questions involved with the lack of realization of a potential reality in terms of workers' organization, based on the assumption of a phantomatic hidden class unity, to questions concerned with offering an account as much as possible detailed of the ways in which systems of oppression were actually reproduced and forms of resistance put in place.

The theoretical framework of racial capitalism has been central in highlighting the continuity of a socio-economic system based on the racialized exploitation and reproduction of differences. Nevertheless, the present works is not an attempt to test the thesis of racial capitalism. I will propose hereafter some of the questions that guided my analysis.

- In which ways the theoretical framework of racial capitalism can be helpful in framing contemporary systems of oppression involving regimes of mobility, labor exploitation and racial differentiation in the context of globalized agriculture?
- Which are the infrastructures of contemporary agricultural racial capitalism and how are they reproduced?
- In which way conceiving class as a primary category of analysis in describing experiences of oppression and resistance of migrant farmworkers favored the downplaying of the role of colonialism and racism in defining their experiences? In which ways the concept of exploitation can be expanded to include racial-colonial oppression?
- How the relation between actors of oppression and resistance evolved in light of the increasing NGO-ization of resistance and interdependence, also in economic terms, between institutional and non-governmental actors?
- Which ones have been the forms of resistance and struggle put in place by racialized migrant farmworkers in the context of Italian agricultural sector and how they have accounted for the multiplicity of forms of oppression?

### 3.2.2 Challenges and opportunities of being an "activist-researcher"

As described in paragraph 3.1.2 and 3.1.3, a central feature in the process of decolonizing research lies in the assumption of responsibility on the side of researcher, who decides to abandon her presumed neutrality and contribute to the struggle against structures of oppression. The terms "militant research" and "activists research" have acquired increasing popularity in the past few years, highlighting the willingness of the researcher to be engaged in first person in the fight against oppression, while at the same time questioning the conventional structure of academic research aimed at differentiating between researcher and object of research. However, as maintained by Charles R. Hale and others (2008) in the edited volume "Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship" it is necessary to critically engage with these definitions and practices, in order to highlight both advantages and contradictions inherent to these approaches. Indeed, as the

authors maintain, there have been instances of "activist or action research that, despite lofty egalitarian rhetoric, end up reinforcing patriarchal structures, ideology, and practice". Furthermore, it is fundamental to consider whether these practices are race critical and critically assess the extent to which "activist scholarship, carried out by predominantly white scholars in Third World settings, or among communities of color in the North, is capable of countering the structured hierarchies of racial privilege" (Hale 2008:20). According to the authors, while it is not possible to propose an overarching definition of activist research, this can be described as an approach characterized by a deep awareness of the existing contradictions and fault lines and by the willingness to critically engage with them, yet without expecting them to disappear. Indeed, the combination of research and activism does not derive from an inherent affinity between the two, but rather from the willingness to engage with contradictions and developing critical scholarly analysis for the purpose of social good.

In the context of the present work, I have encountered multiple contradictions that have proved at the same challenging and inspiring to further elaborate on the complex relationship between activism and research. From the very moment in which I arrived in Foggia, I was motivated to engage not only through research, but also through direct involvement, being aware that research by itself would have not been enough to bring a valuable contribution to the struggle of those living in informal settlements and working in the surrounding agricultural fields. However, as it will be further explored in chapter eight and nine, the province of Foggia has a peculiar structure in terms of social and political actors concerned with the issue of migrant farmworkers. Indeed, there is a very high level of "NGO-ization of resistance" as well as of "professionalization" of non-governmental organizations and unions involved, merged with the lack of independent and grassroot activist groups permanently based in the province, with very low rates of involvement of migrant activists. This means that there is very little space for someone willing to be involved as a voluntary in a group seeking not only to offer assistance, but also to develop political actions with a broader scope. An exception to this panorama is represented by the network *Campagne in Lotta* (Fields in Struggle), which however is not permanently based in the city, as further explored in chapter 9.1.3.

Since my arrival in Foggia, I have tried to find my place, becoming increasingly aware, as months passed by, of the rivalries among various groups, as well as of the vested interested of many of those who claimed to be willing to assist and support migrant workers

living in informal settlements. I experienced, often in informal ways, the coloniality of forms of assistance rooted in the desire to possess peoples like objects and defend the territory.
In this complex context, I decided to articulate my commitment in an independent way, starting by supporting people living in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone in their daily struggle with public offices, such as Immigration Office, Post Office, Municipal Office, etc. It is only after about two years that I was able to structure with some lawyers a full functioning free legal support center, while at the same time collaborating with some inhabitants of the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone for the creation of the Italian-African Farmworkers Association. At the same time, in the informal settlement of Torretta Antonacci, I started a collaboration with the union USB and with the association *Terra e Libertà*, also formed by settlement's inhabitants. While in-depth reflections on the role of these organizations will be developed in chapter eight and nine, it is here relevant to discuss the implications of my political engagement in the process of research, and *vice versa*.

Doing research as part of a PhD degree, while at the same time being engaged in activism, represented at the same time an opportunity and a challenge. The large degree of freedom I held during my PhD in relation to the organization of the research work allowed me to be fully involved in activism, which became a full-time commitment. On the one hand, this granted me a privileged perspective in relation to the discriminations put in place by public offices, further describer in chapter seven, and to the attitude of some NGOs and unions operating in the province of Foggia, further explored in chapter eight and nine, which I observed during my everyday activities. On the other hand, considering the ever-increasing bureaucratization of migration this meant an enormous dispersal of time spent while contacting offices, writing emails, gathering documents, etc. The process of bureaucratization of migration and consequently, the tendency of migration activism to also become increasingly bureaucratized, will represent a central reflection in the next chapters, in that it configures itself as one of the most powerful devices put in place by governments to reduce the ability to carry out collective actions and struggles, through the individualization of the right to residence and the interposition of various actors between the subject and institutions, such as lawyers, NGOs, etc. Furthermore, being in charge of someone's legal case is an extremely delicate affair, that can cause anxiety and distress. Representing a time consuming and exhausting activity, being able to carry it out while at the same time writing the dissertation meant the sacrifice of free time, weekends, and rest days with considerable impacts in terms of general well-being. Furthermore, it is fundamental to highlight that while activism can benefit enormously from engaging with

critical theories, these can also generate frustration and despair. Indeed, on the plan of theoretical elaboration it is much easier to clearly distinguish systems of oppressions, structures of power and desirable forms of resistance. However, when engaging with realities on the ground, we encounter multiple contradictions, ambivalences, and ambiguities. Systems of oppression are made of single individuals, characterized by different attitudes, and not necessarily fully embodying the institution for which they are working. The same can be said for unions and NGOs, whose members can share different opinions in relation to the work of the organization and manage to navigate these differences. Lines between oppressor and oppressed are often more blurred in reality than how we theorize, and this also makes it harder to implement effective strategies to fight oppression. At the same time, while it is relatively easy to theorize about what should be done, it is much more complicate to implement it. Writing has the power to transform things, to donate a grandeur to something that, if experienced every day, appears full of flaws and contradictions. This is especially true for forms of organization and resistance, which, when described by scholars often close to that specific movement or organization, tend to highlight only the positive sides and hide the negative ones. In this way, we obtain accounts of forms of collective organization and resistance which differ substantially from the reality. Ultimately, reality is much dirtier than theory, and achieving coherence in action is much more complex than in theorization.

Being involved in activism and research at the same time meant covering at the same time two positions, which can at times be conflicting. If being involved in activism can render easier the access to the "field", it can also raise multiple doubts and ethical questions regarding our position, especially in a context where research is associated with intrusion, and it is often looked with suspicion. In this sense, it is fundamental to set boundaries between research and activism, so that, while overlapping, the two activities can be clearly distinguished. Not every experience, information and form of knowledge acquired through activism can be used in the context of research. Furthermore, not being a neutral actor can influence the interaction with various institutional and non-institutional actors for the purpose of research. At the same time, the challenges encountered while doing activism should be highlighted, in order to avoid reproducing an idealized description of activism and struggles.

Finally, our own racial, class and status privileges are involved both in activism and in research. Critical theory has proved fundamental to better understand my positionality, my privilege and what it entailed. By critically engaging with theories analysing race, racism

and white privilege, I was able to better situate myself and ponder about the ways in which my own actions might reproduce structures of power. Also in this case, however, engaging in theoretical reflections is less arduous than experiencing these contradictions with our bodies, and overthinking about our positionality can sometimes be detrimental to action. For instance, during my core MA course in London we had multiple discussion regarding racism and white privilege, which saw the contraposition between a group of Black and Brown students from the United States and a group of White Western and Eastern European students. The professor who tutored the course was not able to manage the conflict in a constructive way, so it ended up escalating. The US students, in light of their historical and social context, conceived whiteness as structurally associated with power and being white was considered as an inherent guilt. On the other hand, for some of the European students, among whom one who was from Kosovo and had grown up in Germany as a refugee, being white was not automatically associated with privilege. At stakes there where different conceptualizations and level of awareness in relation to white privilege and racism, which reflected the differences between United States and Europe. If taking part to that class was extremely useful in the long term, in that it allowed me to experience first-hand many of the contradictions and frictions present in our societies when discussing about race, in the short term inhibited my actions. Indeed, when I first arrived in Foggia, just a month after the end of that experience, I was paralyzed by overthinking about what I should have done so not to mistake and unconsciously behave as a stereotypical white. Without rushing and by being immersed in the context of informal settlements, I allowed for people living there to show me the direction with their requests. I was always demanded support with documents, so I decided to focus on that.

Few years later, during a summer school, the same professor who tutored our MA course observed that by highlighting my commitment in the context of legal support of racialized migrant I was to a certain extent reproducing the structure of power based on whiteness. She made a comparison with peace corps in Palestine, who used white people as a shield for Palestinians in order to avoid shootings and attacks by Israeli militaries. In that way, she maintained, while shielding Palestinians, they were reproducing the idea that Palestinian lives mattered less. Thanks to various years of involvement in the field, the comment did not paralyze me, as it instead had happened following my MA degree, but rather gave me food for thoughts, functional to improve my everyday actions.

Merging theorization and activism permitted me to see anti-racism as a journey, in which we can learn every day from our mistakes, without yet allowing our reflections to inhibit our

actions. Indeed, while it might be true that by doing certain things, such as offering legal support and accompanying racialized migrants to public offices, we can unwillingly reproduce a structure of power based on whiteness, it is also true that in the short term those actions are needed, so that the achievement of our long-term goals should not inhibit our short-term ones. Ultimately, being willing to engage with contradictions is the basis for an approach merging activism and research, while being aware that multiple challenges persist.

### 3.2.3 Research design

Given the above premises, the present research has been carried out through the development of a multi-situated ethnographic analysis, accounting for the experience of West African farmworkers working in the province of Foggia and living in the surrounding informal settlements, developed between June 2019 and October 2023. This was joined by a study concerning two of the countries of origins, namely Senegal and Gambia, developed during a four-months period of study and research abroad.

The definition of West African farmworkers as a category of analysis is clearly subject to various critiques, as being too general including people with extremely different histories, cultures, languages, ethnicities, and so on. As it will be further explored in chapter four, West Africa includes a wide range of people from Senegal to Nigeria, who, despite considerable differences, can be said to share similar histories in relation to the history and contemporary shapes of racial capitalism. Furthermore, most of those residing in informal settlements and employed in the agricultural sector in the province of Foggia are from Western African countries, among which in particular Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Ghana, which are also among the most represented nationalities in terms of sea-arrivals on the Italian shores in the past decades. I have chosen to focus on West African more in general rather than on a specific nationality (such as Senegalese, Gambian, Guinean, Malian) or on a specific ethnicity (pulaar, mandinka, wolof, etc.), so to avoid the exclusion of a relevant section of farmworkers and informal settlements' inhabitants. Furthermore, limiting the analysis only to some national or ethnic groups would have dramatically affected the possibility of exploring forms of resistance and collective organization, which, so-far, have not seen the prevailing participation of a specific nationality or ethnicity.

As previously suggested and further explored in following chapters, the province of Foggia can be considered as the representation of a series tendencies regarding migration, racism and agriculture which are present at the national level, but are more emphasized there.

For one thing, Foggia province is the first province in Italy for agricultural production, detaining among the highest shares of labor relations with non-EU migrant workers. These are nevertheless underestimated in official reports due to high numbers of undeclared labor relations (Caruso, Corrado 2021). Furthermore, Foggia province is characterized by the presence of the largest rural informal settlements of Italy and Europe, inhabited by mostly West African farmworkers. These settlements have been taken as the emblem of labor exploitation and *caporalato* by institutions and media, leading to the allocation to Apulia Region of 114 on 200 million euros of National Recovery and Resilience Plan for the overcoming of informal settlements. At the same time, informal settlements are the most visible representation of the consequences of border regime, defined by Nicholas De Genova as the "obscene supplement of border spectacle", making racial segregation a living reality in the 21st century. Informal settlements' management has also represented the emblem of the emergency-driven humanitarian approach to agricultural migrant labor, on the side of both institutions and non-governmental actors, defined by Nick Dines and Enrica Rigo (2015) as the "refugeezation of the workforce". For another thing, the province of Foggia is characterized by the presence of various non-governmental actors, among which unions, non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations, charitable institutions, and political collectives, variously involved in the representation of migrant farmworkers. Many of these actors have turned the exploitation of migrant agricultural workers into a veritable profession, implementing in the past decades multiple projects funded by national and European funds. This has favored a progressive institutionalization of unions and non-governmental actors that gave up on their role as institutions counterparties, becoming to a certain extent implementors of national and European policies on labor and migration.

Finally, during the past decade, the province of Foggia has been the theatre of multiple forms of mobilization and resistance put in place by West African migrant farmworkers. These have been either self-organized or supported by unions and political collectives and have been concerned with a wide range of issues among which: the right of residence, the right to housing (involving both demonstrations against evictions and for the assignment and management of Regional Guesthouses), for workers' rights and against racism.

The context of the province of Foggia thus highlights the overlapping of various forms of oppression experienced by racialized migrant workers. These cannot be explained only through the framework of labor exploitation, but rather call for the adoption of a broader lens, considering processes of labor exploitation, racial discrimination, illegalization, ghettoization and precarization, in line with the theoretical framework of racial capitalism.

Furthermore, this context results ideal to study the intersection between forms of resistance, self-organization and forms of NGO-ization of resistance.

The choice of dedicating a chapter to the study of context of origins is rooted in the urgency of considering migrants not only as "immigrants" but also as "emigrants". As maintained by Abdelmalek Sayad (1999), traditional sociological migration studies have often been developed following methodological nationalism, according to which migrants have been considered mostly from the perspective of receiving societies, reproducing the gaze of nation-states. On the contrary, in order to better grasp the life and working experiences of migrant workers it is fundamental to adopt a broader lens of analysis, including also the contexts of origin. In order to do so, while at the same time developing collaborations with scholars and universities situated in the Global South, I have decided to carry out a period of study and research abroad in Senegal and Gambia, in collaboration with the *Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire* (IFAN) (Fundamental Institute of Black Africa) of the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar (Senegal), under the tutorship of Dr. Cheikh El Hadji Abdoulaye Niang and Dr. Saliou Ngom. Both the research institute and tutors have been chosen in light of their affinity with my research topics, theoretical, epistemological and methodological framework. Indeed, *IFAN* not only represents a vanguard in relation to the production of decolonial knowledge on the African continent, following suit the contribution of the Senegalese scientist and intellectual Cheikh Anta Diop, but it does also promote interdisciplinarity and exchange among various disciplinary fields.

During the period abroad, I have deepened my knowledge of West African history based on the work of some West African scholars, among whom Cheikh Anta Diop, while at the same time exploring the literature on Senegalese migration produced by Senegalese scholars adopting the perspective of emigration societies.

From a point of view of field research, I have decided to focus both on exploring societies of origins' perspectives in relation to migration - by looking at the experience of family members of emigrants as well as migrant returnees - and on delving into racial capitalism infrastructures of (im)mobilities. In relation to the latter, the aim has been that of shedding light on continuities between European management of migration in Europe and abroad, as based upon a mix of securitization and cooptation of non-governmental actors as implementers of European migration policies. However, unfortunately, by being in Senegal and Gambia for only four months, I could not fully adhere to the principles of militant research and decolonial methodologies above described, with specific regard to the co-construction of knowledge and direct involvement in the context of research.

### 3.2.4 Implementing decolonial methodologies through qualitative non-extractive methods

The methodology employed to carry out this research builds on the contributions above illustrated among which, in particular, poststructuralism, militant research, standpoint feminist theory, epistemologies of the South and decolonial methodologies. Each of this epistemological and methodological approach has influenced the methodology of the present study. Foucault's theorizations highlight the relationship between knowledge, discourse and power, pinpointing to the urgency of examining the ways in which structures of powers are produced and reproduced through discourse and categorization. Standpoint theories call for the need to make explicit the position from which one is carrying out the research, by placing him/herself into the same framework of analysis, highlighting privileges and discriminations. Militant research together with epistemologies of the South and decolonial methodologies, define as a fundamental criterion to evaluate research not only its academic relevance, but also the relevance it holds in relation to the struggle of the research participants and call for the involvement of the researcher as an activist. Epistemologies of the South and decolonial methodologies stress the importance of critically analysing the colonial legacy of Western research methodologies and overcome them through the development of research methodologies centered on the worldviews, experiences and needs of those who for too long have been marginalized and oppressed. They thus call for the use of participative research methodologies allowing research participants to be actively involved at every step of the research process, as well as to the readaptation of traditional research methods, such as interviews.

The challenge encountered in carrying out and writing the present thesis has been that of being as much as possible coherent with my methodology, while at the same time respecting time and structure limits imposed by PhD, as already highlighted in par. 3.2.2. Writing a PhD thesis meant that I had to respect certain parameters in terms of structure, organization and authorship. These can be seen as limits in attempting to fully decolonize methodologies and research, in that they made it harder to give a less academic structure to the dissertation and to involve research participants in the planning of the research from the beginning to the end. As previously highlighted, the research questions and, consequently, the subject of research, underwent transformation through my being immersed in the context of rural informal settlements in the province of Foggia. This transformation was shaped first by what I understood as being relevant to West African farmworkers living in Foggia

province informal settlements by being there and engaging in informal conversation and, later, by explicitly asking to researcher participants which issues they considered as the most relevant and urgent to be addressed. These were identified as the issue of documents, of racism, exploitation and housing, of the interest-driven approach characterizing most of the non-governmental actors and unions involved in the area as well as on the lack of unity in relation to the struggle of African farmworkers for their emancipation. The setting of these issues characterized the basis for the structure of the dissertation.

In order to carry out the research I have employed the following research methods. These methods were chosen for being characterized by non-extractiveness, engagement and the promotion of collaboration of researcher participants, while being aware that my journey towards the decolonization of research methodologies has just started and therefore it is far from complete.

1. Engaged participant observation;
2. Decolonized interviews or conversations;
3. Auto-ethnography;
4. Semi-structured interviews;
5. Document analysis (including newspapers articles, Facebook post, press releases, official documents, etc.);

**Engaged participant observation**

Participant observation has often been equated with ethnography. However, while ethnography also involves other methods, such as interviews (Hockey and Forsey 2012), participant observation was defined a specific method characterized by the full immersion of the researcher in the context of research for a long period of time for the purpose of understanding cultural frameworks of those who were defined as “natives” (Malinowski 2014 [1922]). Participant observation considered the researcher as both a participant, who could experience the culture and values of the society that he was studying, and a detached observer, who could carry out unbiased evaluations due to its position as an outsider. The major risk for anthropologist was considered that of “going native”, thus becoming too embedded into the society object of study and unable to analyse it (ibid.). Participant observation was a method integral to the colonial project, used to deepen the knowledge of indigenous peoples in order to further crystallize distinction between native and Western values, cultures, morals, and facilitate colonial domination.

Nowadays, it is necessary to reflect on the history and legacies of participant observation before using it as a research method. For one thing, the call for a decolonization of anthropology and methodologies mentioned in previous paragraphs must be applied also to participant observation, in order to really give relevance to worldviews and perspectives of research participants. This does not mean to simply try to understand through observation their interpretations regarding a certain set of issues defined as relevant by the researcher, but rather to involve research participants in defining research priorities. Secondly, the division between observation and participation, whereby the latter is merely functional to the former and begins and ends for the purpose of research, must be challenged. For this purpose, it can prove useful the definition of "engaged participant observation", offered by Daniel Robey and Wallace T.F. Taylor (2018), even if it was formulated for a quite different research context. According to the authors, while participant observation conceives scholars as entering as observers, adopting participant roles for the purpose of research and exiting as observers, engaged participant observation is concerned with scholar-practitioners who enter as participant, adopt a role as observers and continue to be participant at the end of the study. In the context of engaged participant observation, the scholar and the practitioner/activist are not separated but they are represented by the same subject. In this way, the researcher is able to develop studies engaging not merely with theoretical debates but with practical and political issues, that are deemed relevant by research participants.

As a method, engaged participant observation involves informal conversations, which should be distinguished from decolonized interviews or conversations as explored in the following paragraph. Informal conversations are casual conversation taking place between the researcher and research participants in those settings where engaged participant observation is carried out.

As part of present research, engaged participant observation has been conducted in the context of informal settlements, public offices, official meetings and demonstrations. Engaged participant observation has been carried out with the aim of shedding light on structures of oppression as well as forms of resistance. It has represented a fundamental method first to understand the issues at stake and, later, to explore forms of oppression and discrimination as perpetrated in the everyday interaction by public employees, random citizens, as well as non-governmental organizations and unions' representatives. It has also represented a crucial method to better grasp the forms of resistance, organization and mobilization of West African migrant workers, by participating to demonstrations taking place both in Foggia and in Rome, organized by different unions and political collectives

such as: *Unione Sindacale di Base*, *Lega Braccianti*, Flai-Cgil, *Rete Campagne in Lotta*. Furthermore, engaged participant observation has been crucial to better assess processes of self-organization of West African migrant workers living in informal settlements through the creation of associations.

**Decolonized interviews or conversations**

While engaged participant observation represents a fundamental tool to explore the forms of oppression and resistance of migrant farmworkers, interviews are central to further explore research participant perspectives in relation to the issues under investigation.
However, while interviews have traditionally been a central method for qualitative research, it is fundamental to consider how the process of interviewing, with its colonial legacy, can reinforce power unbalance between researcher and participants. As highlighted by Smith (1999), even when the researcher herself belongs to the indigenous community and frequents the same social environment as the researcher participants, the act of interviewing brings with it a legacy of formality and rigidity, making it harder for the researcher participants to feel comfortable and express their opinions and perspectives. For this reason, it is possible to attempt "decolonizing" interviews by transforming them from being a pre-designed dialogue where the researcher/interviewer defines the questions to be answered, the points to be investigated and distinguishes between which knowledge is relevant and which is not, to a conversation involving one or more research participants discussing freely about their experience and highlighting the elements which they consider more relevant (Chilisa 2011). This process, defined as "decolonized interviewing" or conversations, has been fundamental to counter the unease caused by the use of traditional interviewing methods in the present context of research, characterized by a clear unbalance of power given by my positionality.
I have thus carried out thirty-three conversations with researcher participants living in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone and Torretta Antonacci, from Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, as well as five conversations with participants living in Senegal and Gambia. Conversations have been developed by starting from one of the topics previously highlighted as relevant by research participants during the process of research design.
Conversations with migrant farmworkers have not been recorded in order to avoid creating unease among participants, and the names of participants have been substituted with pseudonyms.

**Auto-ethnography**

If the previous methods have been fundamental in shaping the research in line with the perspective of research participants, auto-ethnography represented a central tool to analyse the ways in which my positionality interacted with explored structures of power. Indeed, auto-ethnography can represent a fruitful method to investigate coloniality (Hernandez-Carranza et al 2021). Auto-ethnography has been defined as a research method merging ethnography with autobiography, connecting "the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (Ellis 2004: xix). Auto-ethnography has been criticized for being self-referential, by centering the voice of the researcher both as a researcher and as a participant. However, the criticisms regarding reliability of auto-ethnographic method can be overcome by triangulating data gathered through auto-ethnography with other methods (Anderson, Glass-Coffin 2016).

In the context of the present research, auto-ethnography allowed me to reflect on my experience as a white middle-class Italian woman in the context of research, highlighting the ways in which structures of power which representing a source of oppression for research participants represented for me a source of privilege. At the same time, autoethnography was crucial explore my own practice of activism as part of the analysis carried out in relation to white saviorism, NGO-ization of resistance and bureaucratization of activism, as explored in chapter eight.

**Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are one of the most common qualitative research methods, characterized by a structure which however is not rigid such as in the case of structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews can variate from being a more structured set of open-ended questions to being a track, containing various topics that should be addressed during the interview. This method has been used to interview institutional actors, NGOs and unions' representatives as well as to carry out phone interviews have been carried out with visa applicants or family members of visa applicants to the Italian Embassy in Dakar, which have been focused on their experience of accessing the embassy, applying for a visa, etc.

In the context of Senegal and Gambia, I have interviewed representatives of the following organizations, for a total of fourteen interviews:

- Institutional actors: Ambassador of the Italian Embassy in Dakar (Senegal); Consul of the Italian Embassy in Dakar (Senegal); Consul of Italian Honorary Consulate in The Gambia, representative of Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development in Dakar;
- NGOs and inter-governmental organizations: IOM The Gambia, Caritas The Gambia, Cospe Senegal, Cooperazione per il mondo in via di sviluppo Senegal (COMI), Arci Culture Solidali Senegal (ARCS), Comunità Impegno Servizio Volontariato Senegal (Cisv), Inca-Cgil Dakar;

The interviews have been carried out without posing a fixed set of questions but rather following a track and addressing the following topics:

- activities and projects developed by the organization in relation to migration;
- attitude in relation to the topic of irregular migration;
- evaluation of Italian and European policies regarding migration and mobility.

Fifteen phone interviews have been additionally carried out with visa applicants, acquaintances of visa applicants as well as member of the civil society in Italy and in Senegal concerned with the issuance of visa in the Italian Embassy in Dakar. These research participants have been selected by writing a message on Facebook to people who had commented voicing their complaints under Italian Embassy Facebook posts.

The interviews were focused on their experience with the Embassy, the challenges they encountered in obtaining an appointment with the embassy, as well as the actions they carried out to denounce or resist Italian Embassy actions.

In relation to the province of Foggia, I interviewed representatives of the following organizations, for a total of twenty-one interviews:

- Unions: Flai-Cgil Nazionale, Cgil Puglia Immigrazione, Flai-Cgil Foggia, USB, USB Lavoro Agricolo, Fai-Cisl Foggia, Sindacato Autonomo Lavoratori Africani;
- Employers' organizations: CIA Capitanata; Ciala-Ebat.
- NGOs: AIIMS; INTERSOS; IOM; Casa Sankara - Ghetto Out; Cooperativa Arcobaleno; No Cap; Caritas Cerignola; Oasi2;
- Institutional actors: Apulia Region referent for Immigration policies; National Labour Inspectorat Foggia;

Also in this case, I have not posed a fixed set of questions, but I have explored the following topics with the interviewees:

- activities carried out by the organization on the subject of migrant labor exploitation; relationship between informal settlements, labor exploitation in the context of agriculture, racism and national immigration legislation;
- implications of the criminalization of labor intermediation;
- differences and challenges encountered in the organization of migrant farmworkers and mechanisms of representation (for unions only);
- evaluation of regional temporary housing projects for migrant workers.

In total, I have carried out fifty semi-structured interviews, which have all been recorded. While Conversations have been referenced in text with the abbreviation Conv., interviews have been referenced with the abbreviation Int., while informal conversations gathered in the context of engaged participant observation have been referenced with the abbreviation Inf. Conv.

**Document analysis**

Document analysis is commonly used in qualitative research as a means of triangulation of data, in combination with other methods. It can be defined as a "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both printed and electronic […] Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (Bowen 2009:27).

In the context of the present research, document analysis has represented a fundamental method used to analyse different kind of documents both with a theme-based and a discourse-based approach. In some instances, document analysis, with specific reference to the analysis of social media pages and blogs, has been used as a substitute for semi-structured interviews for those actors who were unavailable for interviews.As part of the present research, I have analysed the following types of documents:

- Official documents regarding European and Italian projects of fundings about migration;
- Websites, social media pages, press releases of institutions, inter-governmental organizations, NGOs, unions and political collectives;
- Newspapers articles, written and video-reportages accounting for migrant farmworkers' experience in the province of Foggia;

- Italian and European legislation on the subject of migration and labor exploitation.

**Data analysis: thematic and discourse analysis approach**

The data gathered according to the above illustrated methods have been elaborated on different levels, using both a thematic and a discourse analysis approach.
Thematic analysis is a widely used method of data analysis in qualitative research consisting in regrouping gathered data according to recurring themes, focusing on the content of the delivered message. The discourse analysis approach, on the other hand, goes beyond the mere analysis of content by exploring the ways in which language takes part in producing and reproducing specific structures of power. Discourse analysis as a method of analysis has largely been inspired by Michel Foucault theories but it has later expanded, generating multiple approaches to discourse analysis. While some of these approaches, such as discourse theory, conceive all social phenomena as discursive constructions and claim that any social phenomena can be analyzed through discourse analysis (Laclau, Mouffe 2001 [1985]), other approaches focus on investigating the relationship between discursive and non-discursive practices. Among them, critical discourse analysis (CDA) explores the ways in which unequal power relations between different social groups are reproduced through discursive practices. The aim of CDA is to "unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language in use" (Wodak 1999:7). According to one of the main proponents of this theory, Norman Fairclough (1992:2), CDA develops a "three-dimensional analysis" of discourse: the analysis of "language texts", i.e. the discourse fragment; the analysis of "discourse practice", that is the way in which the text is produced, distributed and consumed; and the analysis of "discursive events as instances of socio-cultural practices", that is the underlying socio-historical conditions. Each of these dimensions is analysed through a specific type of analysis: description for language text, interpretation for discourse practice and explanation discursive events. CDA also points to the ideological nature of discursive events, meaning that discourses are embedded in ideologies and contribute to the reproduction of asymmetrical power relation (Fairclough 1992). According to Fairclough (1992:2), the "power to control discourse is seen as the power to sustain particular discursive practices with particular ideological investments in dominance over other alternative (including oppositional) practices". Power can thus be conceptualized both in relation to differentiated access to discourse events and as "unequal

capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed". In this sense, discourse is both the site and the stake of power struggles.

Critical discourse analysis can be used not only to interpret how structures of power are reproduced through discourse, but also how discourse becomes a site of struggle and discursive practices become involved in process of political subjectivation (Hall 1985; 1986). Stuart Hall (1985), building on Louis Althusser, maintains that concrete individuals are constituted as subjects of specific ideology through the process of interpellation. In order to better illustrate the functioning of interpellation, Hall (1985) recalls his personal experience. Having been "interpellated" as "Black", "colored", "immigrant", "West Indian" throughout his life, according to different circumstances and contexts, Hall reflects on these forms of interpellation asking:

> "as a concrete individual am I indeed any of these interpellations? Does any of them exhaust me? In fact, I am not one or another of these ways of representing me, though I have been all of them at different times and still am some of them to some degree." (ibid:108-109).

This means that his interpellation as "Black", "colored", "immigrant", "West Indian" was the result of a specific ideology. However, ideology and interpellation are useful not only to grasp the discursive construction of power, but also of resistance. Indeed, according to Hall ideology also plays a role in the process of subjectivation, by making intelligible material conditions of existence. In this sense, someone who is interpellated as Black by dominant discourse can re-signify that interpellation, transforming it into a form of self-identification. According to various scholars, critical discourse analysis can represent an effective method for the decolonization of research methodologies when used in combination with decolonial theory. In this way, CDA can help to investigate the ways in which racial-colonial distinction and hierarchies are produced and legitimized also through discourse (Camero de Lima et al 2019; Ahmed 2017).

In the context of the present research, the analysis of qualitative data has been developed both through thematic analysis and discourse analysis. The relevance of discourse analysis rests on the centrality of the discursive construction of inferiority and subalternity during colonialism and coloniality, as explored at the beginning of the chapter. Hence, discourse analysis has proved particularly relevant to critically investigate the ways in which racial-colonial forms of domination are perpetrated nowadays also through discursive practices. Critical discourse analysis has thus been used to explore: the discursive construction of irregular migration and "caporalato" as moral emergencies by institutions,

non-governmental organizations and unions; the ways in which racism is reproduced through discursive practices; the way in which unions and political collective use language to reproduce specific ideas of representation, organization and resistance; the ways in which re-signification and self-identification represents a form of resistance.

**Conclusion**

Following the first chapter dedicated to the review of the literature and the second to the theoretical framework, the present chapter has been focused on establishing the methodological approach of the present study. As maintained in the introduction, given the theoretical foundation of the present research, rooted in the awareness of the racial-colonial foundation of modernity and capitalism, the methodological approach could have not been left untouched. As explored in the chapter, the colonial project has dramatically affected the realm of knowledge production, and vice versa. Indeed, the coloniality of knowledge can be considered as one of the founding elements of historical colonialism and contemporary global coloniality. The development of social sciences in the West has taken place together, and has been functional to, its colonial expansion. Different disciplines have been variously implicated in the colonial project, but they have all played a part. Anthropology, characterized by the distinctive methodology of ethnography, has been at the same time the discipline more involved in the "colonial encounter" (Asad 1973) and the one that has undergone a more critical coming to terms with its colonial past. However, the journey towards the decolonization of social science is far from over. As maintained by various authors, decolonizing methodologies does not only entail to be aware and reflect on the oftentimes present power asymmetries between researcher and researcher participant as rooted in centuries of racial-colonial oppression, but also to challenge them by implementing participatory research methods and by devoting ourselves to their struggles independently from the purposes of research. In short, as maintained by Chilisa (2011:14) "decolonization is a process of conducting research in such a way that the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalization are given space to communicate from their frames of reference". This requires critical reflexivity and commitment on the side of the researcher, being open to embrace other(ed) ways of seeing, understanding and perceiving the world. The methodology chosen to carry out the present study has tried to be as coherent as possible with this theoretical framework, while at the same time highlighting underlying challenges. Attempting to decolonize research methodologies while at the same

time working within the academia is not exempt of difficulties, specifically when this attempt is carried out as part of a PhD imposing specific structures and time limits. However, highlighting these challenges also represents a fundamental step in the journey towards decolonization.

# PART 2

## CHAPTER 4

## "BEFORE" THE BORDER: MIGRATION AND RACIAL CAPITALISM IN WEST AFRICA

West Africa represents, both historically and contemporarily, one of the central areas in the development and reproduction of racial capitalism. It is indeed here, in the coasts between Senegambia and the Gulf of Guinea, that the first steps in the direction of the establishment of a global economic system based on the exploitation of racialized labor were moved.

The aim of this chapter is to trace a line from the origin of racial capitalism in the region to some of its contemporary manifestations, in order to stress the continuity between earlier systems of oppression and domination experienced by people racialized as Black in West Africa with contemporary one. This appear to be a necessary step before moving to the following chapters, dedicated to the experience of oppression and resistance of West African farmworkers in Italy. Indeed, this chapter will allow to contextualize their experience from a historical, social and political point of view, further highlighting the inadequacy of considering the category of "immigrants" as a homogenous one.

In the first part of the chapter, some of the social and political realities existing in West Africa before the encounter with European colonization will be briefly illustrated, without any intent to be exhaustive but offering references for further analysis. Then, the encounter of West Africa with European powers, first the Portuguese and later the British, French and Dutch will be explored, looking at the founding moments of the establishment of racial capitalism, through the enslavement and deportation to the American continent of 15 to 60 million slaves. The implication of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in the theorization and hierarchization of human races where the "Black African" occupied the lowest position will be also explored, together with its legacy in the present. The focus will be then moved to the period of the colonization of the African continent, following the so-called "Scramble for Africa" in 1885, investigating some of the common features of French and British colonialism in West Africa, especially in relation to their legacy in the post-independence period. In the conclusive paragraphs, the contemporary manifestation of racial capitalism in West Africa will be explored, by looking at the continuing influence of former colonial

powers, as well as of new actors, such as private multinational companies, international and supernational institutions, as well as NGOs. Migration management and polices of border externalization on the side of European Union will be identified as one of the core elements in the reproduction of neocolonial relations between Western Europe and West Africa and in defining racial capitalism in the 21st century.

The second part of the chapter will be dedicated to the research on the field carried out between December 2022 and March 2023 in Senegal and Gambia.

The analysis will start with a reflection on my own positionality as a white European woman in the context of Senegal and Gambia, discussing the experience of my privileges both in terms of race and nationality, through an auto-ethnographic account. Subsequently, I will briefly explore the socio-economic context of the two countries and Senegalese and Gambian youths' desire to mobility. This will be done by building on interviews conducted during my staying as well as participation to a conference and public discussion organized in Ziguenchoir (Senegal) on the subject of irregular migration.

The analysis will then move on to explore how the fight against irregular migration has become a central element of the involvement of EU and EU Members states in the region. Thus, various projects implemented by European NGOs as well as by the International Organization for Migration in partnership with the EU aimed at countering "irregular migration" will be analyzed, both from an economic point of view, trying to offer an estimation of the expenditure, and from a socio-political one, looking at the impact of public funding on the operates of supposedly independent organizations.

Finally, the last part will be dedicated to exploring the major, yet unnamed, cause of irregular migration, that is, the lack of legal routes. This will be done by looking at the ways in which legal routes are not only prevented through legislation, but also through the implementation of illegitimate practices aimed at preventing the so-called regular migration. The analysis will focus on the example of the Italian Embassy in Dakar -serving not only Senegal but also Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Cape Vert and The Gambia. It will be shown how, through the externalization of visa services to private multinational companies and its digitalization, the Embassy has succeeded in making visa appointments largely inaccessible for most of the applicants thus preventing, or strongly limiting, "regular" migration.

### 4.1 Situating West Africa in the history of racial capitalism

West Africa can be defined as the western portion of the African continent. While from a geographical point of view it does also include countries of the Maghreb located on

the Western side of the African continent, from a political and social point of view, nowadays West Africa has often become identified with the Economic Community of West African States, founded in 1975 in Lagos, with the signature of the Treaty of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nowadays ECOWAS counts 15 members, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

West Africa is a vast region, characterized by countless differences and specificities. So, it is not the purpose of the following paragraphs to generalize a history which is instead very variegated. Yet, for one thing, it seems necessary to briefly mention relevant historical political and social communities existing in the region before colonialism, in order to counter, through grounded historical accounts, the presumed "lack of history" at the core of the so-called civilizing mission of European colonial powers starting from late 15th century. This will be done by briefly mentioning some of the most relevant experiences of social and political organization, while at the same time referencing, for an in-depth analysis, the work of scholars who have dedicated their academic life to the revaluation of African history[25]. For another thing, the intent of the present section is to highlight historical continuities that made of West Africa a central pillar in the creation, development and sustenance of racial capitalism at a global level. West Africa, together with West Central Africa, has been the center for the development of the Transatlantic slave trade which has been defined as the founding step in the development of a global system based on the exploitation of racialized labor. The subsequent colonization of the African continent will be also investigated, with a focus on West Africa, as well as the period following independence in the 1960's, still characterized by forms of neocolonial relationship between West Africa and Europe, with the aim to shed light on the ways in which racial and colonial domination continue nowadays, though in different forms.

### 4.1.1 Pre-colonial West Africa and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Before European colonialism, West Africa, also defined as Western Sudan (from the Arabic *Bilad al Sudan*, meaning the Land of the Blacks), had seen the emergence of some of Africa's largest empires - the Ghana Empire, Mali Empire and Songhai Empire- as well

[25] Among the scholars and historians who dedicated their academic and political life to the revaluation of African history Cheikh Anta Diop represents one of the most relevant examples. Diop was born in Senegal in the province of Diourbel in 1923. Since its high school he researched on the history of Senegal and elaborated an alphabet to transcribe African languages. In 1946 he moved to Paris where he studied at the Faculty of Letters and Chemistry. He is famous, among other things, for having argued of the African origin of Egyptian civilization and more broadly, for having studied in depth African history. I was able to deepen my knowledge of the work of Cheikh Anta Diop thanks to a visiting to the fundamental Institute of Black Africa, University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, where Diop worked for large part of his life.

as of a multiplicity of kingdoms, such as Great Fulo, Mossi Kingdom, Hausa, Akan (or Ashanti), Wolof, Benin, Ife, Oyo (Rodney 2018 [1972], Diop 1987).

The three empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai can be though as succeeding to one another, following similar paths of evolution (Rodney 2018 [1972]). The Ghana Empire, called by its inhabitants Wagadou, emerged in nowadays North-West Mali, South Mauritania and East Senegal around the 5th century and lasted until the 12th century, reaching its peak between the 9th and the 11th. The Mali Empire, funded by Sundiata Keita in 1240 following the defeat of the king of Susso, reached its peak between 13th and 14th century with the emperor Mansa Musa, and extended in an area comprising nowadays Mali, Gambia, Senegal, Guinea Bissau and Guinea. The Songhai Empire, formerly a kingdom belonging to the Mali empire and limited to the area of Gao (Mali), became an empire in the late 15th century. This happened following the expansion carried out by its sovereign, Sonni Ali, through the conquest of territories, at the East until Agades (nowadays Niger) and Kano (Northern Nigeria), and West, until Oualata (South Mauritania) and Macina (West Mali) (Diop 1987). In the Southern part of West Africa, in the Gulf of Guinea and Benin, various political and social realities existed in the middle age. Among them, the Kingdom of Benin, the Kingdom of Akan and the kingdom of Ife.

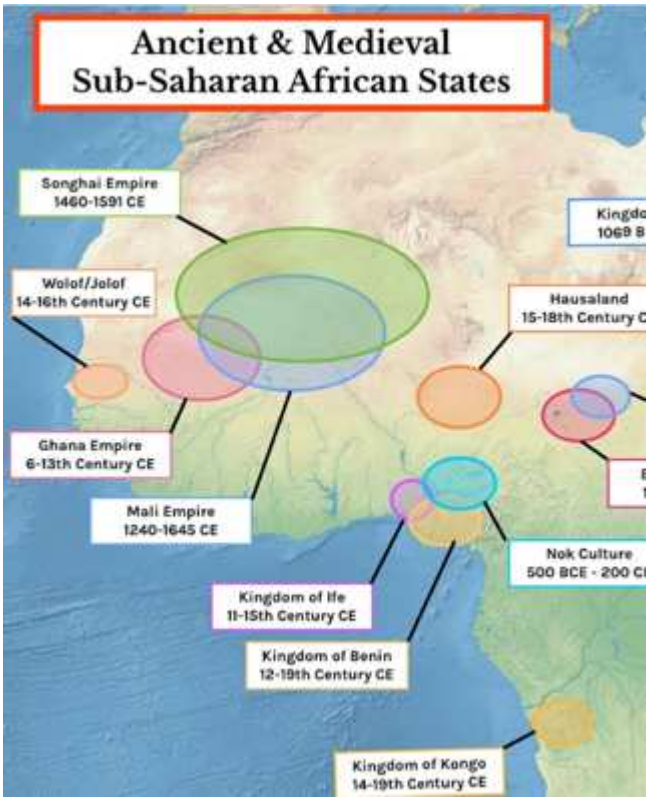



*Figure 2 Kingdoms and Empires of Precolonial West Africa. Source: World History Encyclopedia.*

At the border of these kingdoms and empires, tribal communities emerged, so that, according to Cheikh Anta Diop (1987), it is possible to talk about a "monarchic Africa" and a "tribal Africa". While the former was characterized by aristocratic collectivism, the latter was characterized by clanic collectivism (ibid:74-75). In his work "Precolonial Black Africa", through his peculiar interdisciplinary approach, merging the use of historical sources, with oral sources and anthropological research, Diop developed an in-depth analysis of some of the main structures of the above-mentioned empires and kingdoms, examining their political and economic organization, the

influence of Islam, as well as their intellectual and technical levels. Through the analyses of the functioning of monarchy and nobility, military and administrative organization, as well as trading routes, currencies, universities and teaching methods, technical expertise developed in a wide range of areas, from medicine, to architecture, agriculture and manufacturing in some of these empires (Songhai, Ghana, Cayor and Mali), Diop developed a comparison between European and African political, social and economic organization at the time, brilliantly deconstructing the colonial assumption according to which Africa did not have any civilization nor complex social organization. While it is not possible for the purpose of the present work to examine the rich history precolonial Africa, we suggest consulting the work of Cheikh Anta Diop (1987), Joseph Ki-Zerbo (1972) together with the Collection developed by UNESCO of the General History of Africa published in eight volumes from 1981 to 1993, under the editorship of some major African historians (Ki-Zerbo 1981; Mokhtar 1981; El Fasi 1988; Niane 1984, Ogot 1992, Ajay 1989; Bohaen 1985; Mazrui 1993).

Contrary to common assumptions perceiving Black Africa as the cradle of slavery, Diop highlights that, while the use of slave labor was widespread, that was quite common in that period also in Europe and elsewhere, with the difference that at the time slaves appeared to be enjoying more rights and freedom in Africa than in Europe (Diop 1987). At the time in which these empires were ruling, the relationship between Black Africa, Maghreb and Europe was not defined in terms of race. While slavery was widespread in the region, it was not yet defined in racial terms, and the relationship between Whites and Blacks could not be reduced to a relationship of masters and slaves. Indeed, as he argues:

> "[a]ll the white minorities living in Africa might own Black slaves, but slaves and white masters alike were all subjects of a Black Emperor; they were all under the same African political power. No historian worth his salt can permit the obscuring of this politico-social context, so that only the one fact of Black slavery emerges from it." (Diop 1987:92).

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in West Africa, reaching modern day Senegal and settling in the Island of Gorée in 1444. Subsequently, they reached the Gulf of Guinea and contemporary Ghana, in search of gold for the abundance of which the area and the Akan Kingdom were famously known (Hartman 2007). The Portuguese gave birth to what has been defined by Walter Rodney (2018 [1972]:198) as the "European Slave Trade", in order to distinguish it from other types of slave trade that took place before or were still taking place in other parts of Africa, such as the so-called "Arab Slave Trade", which

accounted for the transportation across the Sahara and selling of about 7 to 14 million people from Sub-Saharan Africa to the Arab world taking place from the 7th to the 19th century (Gordon 1989, Segal 2001).[26] The European Slave Trade was at the beginning directed mostly to European cities and within Africa itself, while only starting from mid 16th century it became focused on the Atlantic route towards the American continent. As Saidiya Hartman (2007) illustrates:

> "The Afro-European trade in slaves did not begin in Ghana as it did elsewhere with Africans selling slaves and Europeans buying them. It began with Europeans selling slaves and Africans buying them. The Portuguese started out as middlemen in the internal slave trade. They kidnapped and purchased slaves from Kongo and Benin and sold them on the Gold Coast. For each slave sold to African merchants and royals, the Portuguese received three to six ounces of gold. Slaves fetched better prices on the Gold Coast than they did in Lisbon. The gold transported from El Mina spurred the traffic in slaves and rewarded the Portuguese with the premier place in the Atlantic slave trade for its first two centuries. By 1600, the Portuguese had enslaved and exported nearly half a million Africans. In the first century and a half of the trade, the majority of slaves were shipped to the Atlantic islands and to Europe. By 1700, two million Africans had been captured, seized, and sold as slaves to European traders from all nations. The Gold Coast entered the slave trade as an exporter of slaves at the end of the seventeenth century."
> (ibid.:96)

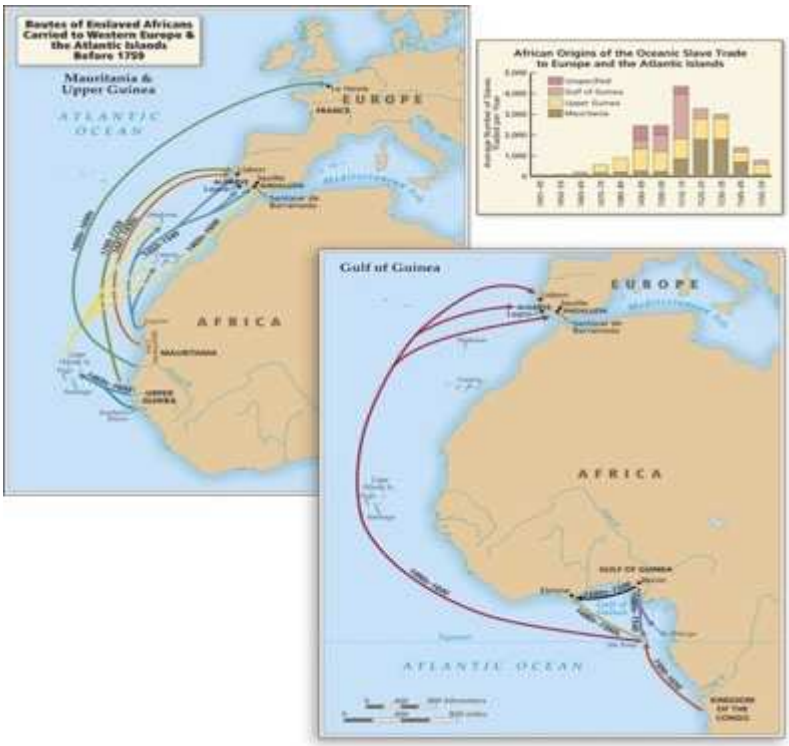



*Figure 3 The routes of slave trade before the transatlantic slave trade. Source: The Atlas of Transatlantic slave trade.*

Hence, until the 17th century, most of the slave trade was happening within Africa and between Africa and Europe. As a matter of fact, before expanding to the Americas, some of

[26] According to Rodney one of the main differences between the "Arab slave trade" and the "European Slave trade", aside from the number and the period of time, was represented by the use of enslaved subjects. While in the Arab world the use of enslaved subjects was more in the domestic sphere, in the European slave trade it was functional to capitalist production.

the first sugar plantation supplied by slave labor were set by Portuguese and Spanish in Sao Tomè, Principe, Madeira and the Canary Islands.

Following the colonization of Americas, Spanish colonizers initially supplied the demand of labor required by sugar cane plantations through the forced labor of indigenous peoples. Yet, starting from in the mid-16th century, following their dramatic extermination due to exploitation, war, diseases, and displacement, the Spanish government started looking other sources of labor, both in Europe and elsewhere. It was the priest Bartolomé de Las Casas who first suggested the replacement of Indian labor with African labor (Robinson 2000 [1983]). The first ship transporting enslaved Africans[27] to the Americas departed from Sao Tomé and arrived in Santo Domingo in 1525. In the following three-hundred and forty years, the trans-Atlantic slave trade would expand involving most European powers, with British, French, Portuguese and Dutch occupying the firsts positions, deporting a total number of Africans ranging from 12 million to 60 million, and reaching its peak in the 18th century, with about 30.000 of enslaved Africans deported each year for more than three and a half centuries (Eltis, Richardson 2010). Initially enslaved people were sold to Europeans by African elites, and they were war captives and criminals. However, as the Transatlantic slave trade raised, kidnappings and selling into slavery became more and more frequent, involving not only people external to one's community but also close family members, to repay debts, punish crimes, get rid of those considered as insubordinate (Hartman 2007).

The theorization of the existence of a hierarchy of human races, of which the "Black race" was considered to be at the lowest level, was developed in this historical period for the purpose of morally justifying the enslavement of millions of innocent people. As maintained by Robinson (2000 [1983]:4):

> "[t]he creation of the Negro was obviously at the cost of immense expenditures of psychic and intellectual energies in the West. The exercise was obligatory. It was an effort commensurate with the importance Black labor power possessed for the world economy sculpted and dominated by the ruling and mercantile classes of Western Europe".

The concept of race would evolve consistently in the following centuries, adapting to different social, political and economic context, being as Stuart Hall (1997) defined it a "floating signifier" which can transform itself overtime. Yet, the various pseudo-scientific theorizations regarding the hierarchy of races developed between 16th and 20th century, while

[27] We here prefer the use of the word enslaved person rather than slave in that, as suggested by many authors, it places the focus on the process of enslavement, rather than reducing the subject to his condition (Kilomba 2010).

differing in terms of numbers of categories, they all placed Black African at the bottom of racial hierarchies. This has been explained with the need to justify the super-exploitation of Black Africans during the slave trade and colonization of the African continent (Andrews 2018; Robinson 2000 [1983]). Indeed, as already mentioned in the second chapter, according to some authors and intellectuals, the pervasiveness and intensity of anti-Black racism can be understood only in relation to the history of slave trade, which has transformed the Black subject in the epitome of slave (Wilderson 2020).

The Transatlantic slave trade has been considered as the largest forced displacement of human beings in world history, which has resulted in dramatic consequences for both the African continent and the African diaspora made of descendants of slavery, dispersed all around the world. Aside the economic and demographic impact of slavery on the African continent, deep social consequences have resulted from the enslavement and deportation of millions of people. From a point of view of social cohesion and trust, scholars have suggested that the slave trade might have been seriously implicated in the origin of mistrust in Western Africa. Indeed, contrarily to other forms of conflicts where internal cohesion of a community can enhance security for the individuals, in the case of the Transatlantic slave trade, individuals could protect their freedom through the selling of other members of their own community either to slave merchants or to Europeans in exchange of weapons (Nunn, Wantchekon 2011).

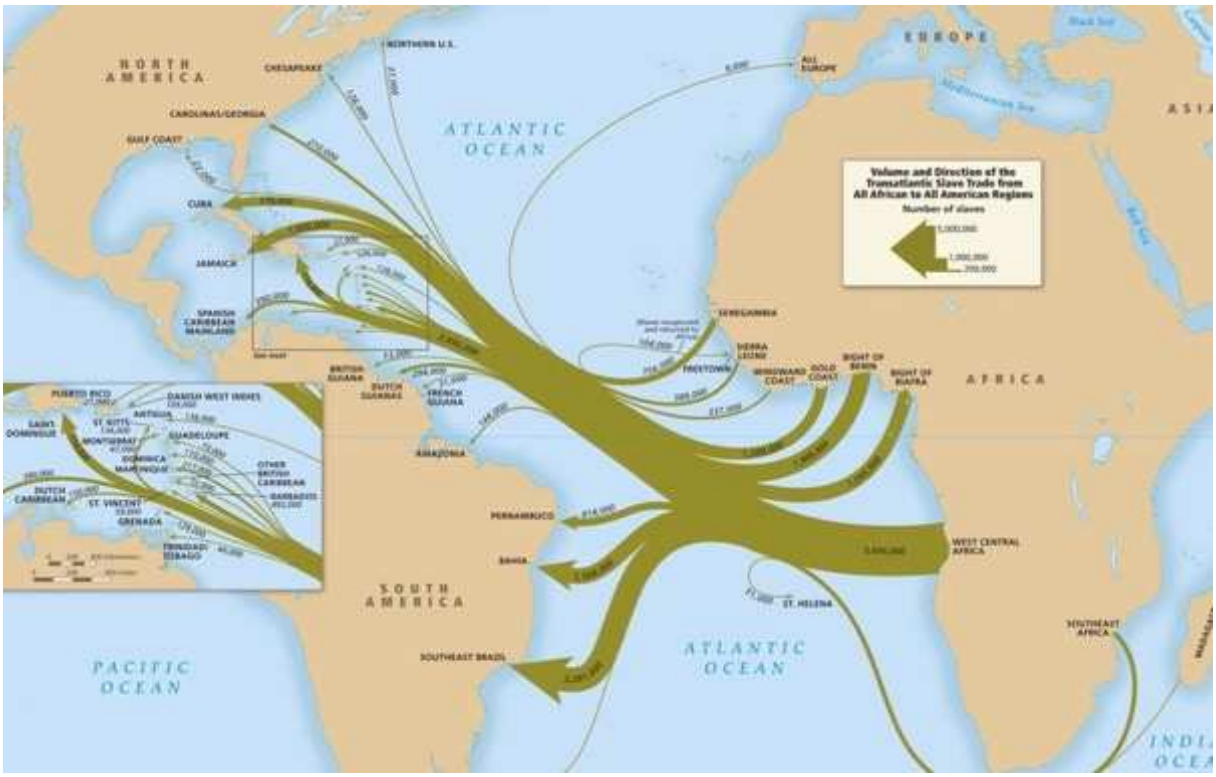



*Figure 4 The routes and numbers of the Transatlantic Slave trade. Source: The Atlas of Transatlantic slave Trade.*

For the descendants of slavery, the social and psychological consequences have been immense, as extensively analyzed by authors, intellectuals, politicians, and activists of the African American diaspora (Coates 2015; Du Bois 2013 [1935]; Gilroy 1993; Hartman 2007; Kilomba 2010). While a common Black and African subjectivity did not exist prior to the transatlantic slave trade, in that Africa was characterized by an immense variety of languages, culture and forms of social, political and economic organization, it was through the Transatlantic slave trade that it came into existence. For the enslaved Africans, the loss of origins thus created the basis for a new identity.

Saidiya Hartman's work on the memories of slave trade between US and Ghana is particularly interesting in that it tries to problematize the idealized idea of Africa which can be found in some African American works, allowing for a dialogue between the two shores of the Transatlantic slave trade. Went to Ghana looking for traces of her enslaved ancestors, Hartman arrives to the conclusion that there is no common African history to recall. If the Blacks in the Americas recall their origins as slaves in an attempt to unite and reappropriate their history, in Ghana slavery remains a dishonor and descendent of enslaved people prefer to hide their origins. Indeed, while the African continent in general, and West Africa more specifically, has undoubtedly suffered as a whole the consequences of slave trade, Hartman observes how in contemporary Ghana the memory of the slave trade became just a business opportunity dedicated to the African American diaspora. Narratives and testimonies are thus shaped more to reflect what African American tourist would like to hear than what has actually happened. Recalling one's belonging to the Asante Kingdom or the Dahomey Amazons, argues Hartman (2007), means hiding one's real origins and forget that there were rulers and ruled, oppressed and oppressors.

> ""Remembering slavery" became a potent means of silencing the past in the very guise of preserving it, since it effectively curbed all discussion of African slavery and its entailments—class exploitation, gender inequality, ethnic clashes, and regional conflict […] The heirs of slaves wanted a past of which they could be proud, so they conveniently forgot the distinctions between the rulers and the ruled and closed their eyes to slavery in Africa. They pretended that their ancestors had once worn the king's vestments and assumed the grand civilization of Asante as their own. They preferred to overlook the fact that the Asantehene (king of Asante) had helped to shove their ancestors onto slave ships and refused to admit royal power emanated from "the abuse of human beings and things." It was comic and tragic at the same time. The children of slaves were as reluctant to assume their place among toilers, laborers, and peasants as the elites." (ibid: 291).

Even though rarely mentioned, the enslavement of millions of Africans was characterized by countless acts of resistance and insubordination[28]. Instances of resistance were carried out both before capture, after capture, in the Middle Passage and once arrived in the Americas. Forms of resistance to enslavement were not necessarily acts against slavery as an institution but also against the enslavement of one's group (Diouf 2003). Kinship was at first a unifying element around which revolts were organized, and, in some instances, these were aimed to reconstruct the social order prior to enslavement (Robinson 2000 [1983]). In order to avoid rebellions, enslaved people with common origin started being dispersed in various castles in which they were kept before departure (Hartman 2007). The destruction of one's identity, origins and culture were integral to enslavement, in that destroying the memory of what was before slavery was essential to reduce acts of rebellion of enslaved people (Robinson 2000 [1983]).

### 4.1.2 The colonization of West Africa 1885-1960s

The abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the abolition of slavery in 1833 by the British Empire were the result of centuries of rebellion and resistance carried out by enslaved people and of campaigns from the abolitionist movement. Yet, between the abolition of the slave trade and the end of slave labor relations more than 50 years would pass, so that an effective substitute could be found by European powers (Sharma 2017). It can be said that if slavery as an institution was formally abolished in most of the European countries and former colonies during 19th century, it persisted in other shapes. As maintained by Sharma (ibid.), and already highlighted in the first and second chapter, the establishment of coolie system and immigration controls as a mean to control the movement of labor was subsequent to the abolition of slavery and can be considered as its successor. At the same time, following the abolition of slavery and slave trade and the independence of most American colonies from former European colonizers, European powers lost the greatest source of their wealth, and thus turned to the African continent for its full colonization. By then, it had become more economically convenient to locally exploit labor and lands rather than to forcibly export labor. Walter Rodney (2018[1972]) maintains that the centuries of slave trade laid the basis for the colonization of the African continent. Indeed, if in the 15th century the difference in economic and technical development between European powers and African powers was slight, in the 19th century it was no more the case. Four hundred years of slave

[28] For an account of resistance in West Africa see Diouf 2003, for an account of resistance during the Middle Passage see Gilroy (1993).

trade and slave economy had favored an accumulation of wealth on the side of Western Europe, and an impoverishment on the side of the African continent, regardless of the personal enrichment of some African kings and rulers. The population of the continent had been stagnant, due to the great losses in human beings caused by the slave trade, and the social fabrics had been weakened. Furthermore, the relations established during the slave trade with African middlemen would prove crucial to African colonization.

> "The gap that had arisen during the period of pre-colonial trade gave Europe the power to impose political domination on Africa. […] Before the nineteenth century, Europe was incapable of penetrating the African continent, because the balance of force at their disposal was inadequate. But the same technological changes which created the need to penetrate Africa also created the power to conquer Africa." (ibid.:277).

As the slave trade, also the colonization of the African continent took place with the complicity of some rulers, who were then however in a clearly unequal position of power, many of them reduced to being middlemen in the European trade. Some of them even fought against the European decision to end the slave trade, paradoxically giving European powers the opportunity to sponsor colonization as a moral initiative of civilization aimed at ending the slave trade (ibid.). Colonization was implemented through the strategy of divide and conquer, facilitated by the lack of political unity and by previous centuries of internal fragmentation caused by the slave trade. African soldiers (defined as askaris) were recruited to conquer other parts of the African continent, such as it happened in the conquest of French West Africa, German East Africa and Italian East Africa.

While the propulsive thrust for imperialism in Africa was the need to exploit labor and resources for further capitalist expansion, this would not have automatically translated into direct colonial rule. However, due to conflicting interest of various colonial powers and racial prejudice against African people, European powers ultimately decided to divide Africa into colonies. As Rodney maintains:

> "It was economics that determined that Europe should invest in Africa and control the continent's raw materials and labor. It was racism which confirmed the decision that the form of control should be direct colonial rule." (ibid.:85)

If the slave trade had been justified through the definition of African peoples as belonging to an inferior race, the colonial expansion was justified by the possibility of redemption and the urgency of the civilizing mission. In 1885, European powers met in Berlin to divide the

African continent in areas of European influence, in what would have become known as "The Scramble for Africa". Yet, this was an agreement only among European colonial powers, and it did not represent the state of affairs on the ground, where the African continent was still largely free from colonial rule and unknown to the European colonizers, except from its coastal areas. As a consequence of the Berlin Conference, West Africa was mainly divided between the British and the French, except for Portuguese Guinea (contemporary Guinea Bissau), Togoland and Kamerun, ruled by the German until 1919, and Liberia, which was, together with Ethiopia, the only independent African state. French West Africa (*Afrique Occidental Française*, AOF) was created in 1895 and initially comprised contemporary Senegal, Mali, Guinea and Ivory Coast. It was later expanded to include Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Benin and Togo. On the other hand, the British Empire in West Africa placed under colonial rule contemporary The Gambia, Ghana (then called the Gold Coast), Sierra Leone, Northern and Southern Nigeria.

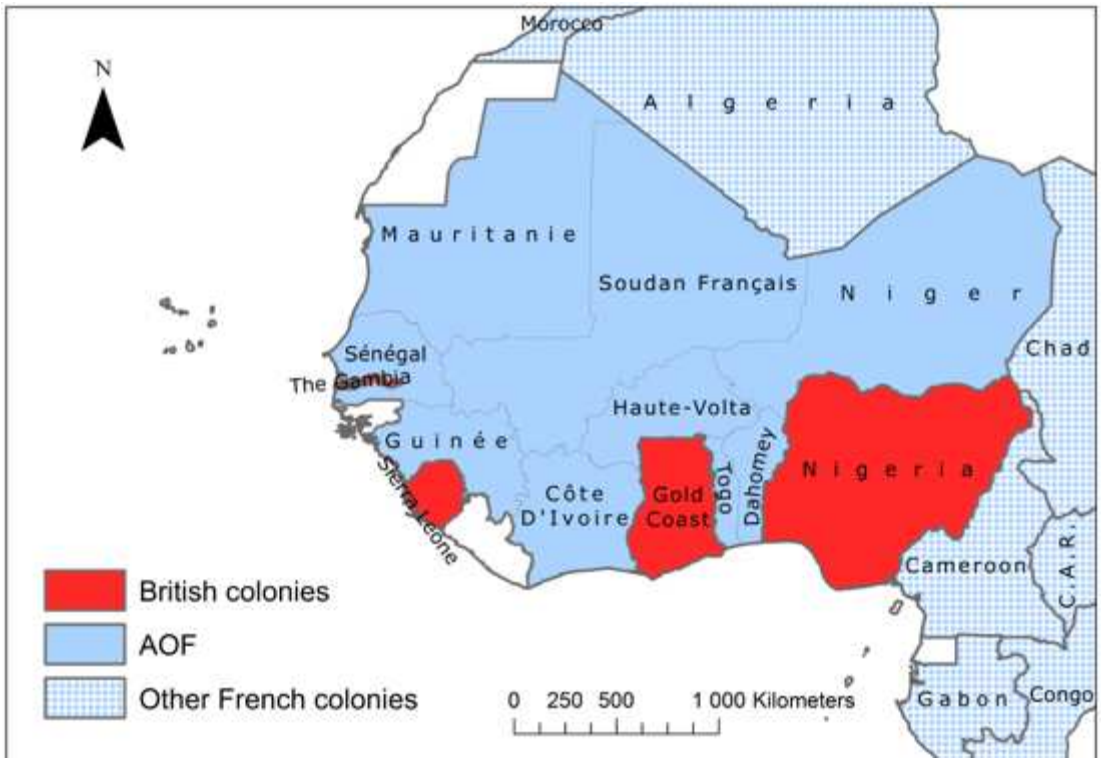



*Figure 5 British and French Colonies in West Africa. Source: Cogneau et at 2018.*

As the silencing of resistance during the slave trade was functional to a representation of European powers as superior and invincible, the same happened with the colonization of the African continent. Yet, multiple instances of resistance were put in place

by kingdoms, communities, individuals and workers, to resist colonization and exploitation. While they could not stop colonization from taking place, they were the ferment that continued until independence was achieved in the 1960's. Records of resistance are present in the oral history of most of the West African countries, while multiple written records have been produced in the past decades. Resistance to colonial rule acquired many shapes. It was at first, resistance from conquest, through direct fight and armed resistance organized by pre-existing kingdoms. It was then in some cases in the form of non-violent resistance through non-collaboration with colonial authorities in relation to colonial education and colonial administration, such as refuse to pay tax, etc. It was also in the form of strikes other forms of workplace resistance in that, as we highlighted, the colonial project was first and foremost a project of labor and resources exploitation. For instance, in Senegal, according to Papis Chomaka Fall (2020), resistance against colonization can be divided into two phases: the first, which was carried out in the form of armed resistance, involving different leaders, such as Elhadji Omar[29] and Lat Dior Ngoné Latyr Diop[30], lasted from 1850 to 1880. The second, that followed the awareness of French military superiority, started around the 1890's until the 1940's, and was characterized by non-violence, the rejection of any collaboration with the French colonizers and attachment to traditional values and traditional education. Emblematic figures of this second phase of resistance are Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Aline Sione Diatta.

It has been widely theorized about the difference between French and British colonial rule, maintaining that while French preferred direct rule, British favored indirect rule. At the same time, more recent studies have questioned this clear-cut division, trying to shed light on the commonalities between the two colonial powers in the management of their colonies, while at the same time investigating their divergencies (Mamdani 1996). Some differences have been highlighted in the realm of education, tax collection and labor (Cogneau et al 2018) as well as in British large use of ethnic division to favor fragmentation and colonial rule (Ali et al 2019). However, despite the differences between French and British rule, some common elements can be highlighted in relation to the impact of colonialism on the economic, political and socio-cultural sphere in West Africa.

[29] Founder of the Toucouleur empire, leader of the Tijaniyya tariqa, fought against the French for the control over Senegal river, sieging for 97 days the Fort of Medina, in modern day Mali. He later reached an agreement with the French and expanded.

[30] The last sovereign of the kingdom of Cayor, who fought against colonization of Senegal until his death during a battle in 1886, fiercely opposing the construction of the Saint Louis-Dakar railway as well as the project of intensive cultivation of groundnut.

The colonization of the African continent resulted in the full exploitation of its resources and labor on the part of the colonizer. While the slave trade and slavery were formally abolished, forced labor and slave labor persisted, together with waged labor which was introduced with so low salaries that were hardly sufficient for the workers' subsistence. As maintained by Rodney (2018 [1972]), if under capitalism workers were exploited all around the world, African workers under colonial rule were more fiercely exploited, with the exploitation justified in racial terms and rebellion repressed thanks to the monopoly of power and military superiority of the colonial power. Furthermore, the economic exploitation in the colonies was directed to the "expatriation of surplus produced by African labor out of African resources" (ibid.:297). In West Africa, the conversion from the trade in slaves to the trade of agricultural products, so-called "cash crop revolution", took place in the coastal areas before the full colonization of the continent, and later expanded to the internal areas following colonization (Austin 2009). Differently from the plantation economy developed in the American continent, cash crops were mainly cultivated by local farmers and then sold to the colonial trading companies. Some of these companies had been directly involved in the slave trade, and had then transferred their capital to the agricultural trade in the 19th century, following slave trade abolition (Rodney 2018 [1972]). The main agricultural exports were cotton (prevalent in Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea), cocoa (prevalent in Ghana and South-Western Nigeria), palm products (prevalent in South-Eastern Nigeria) and groundnuts (prevalent in Senegal and Gambia). Other areas which were not characterized by agricultural exports, were sources of labor supply to the neighboring countries, such as Burkina Faso to Ivory Coast, and Mali to Senegal (Austin 2009).

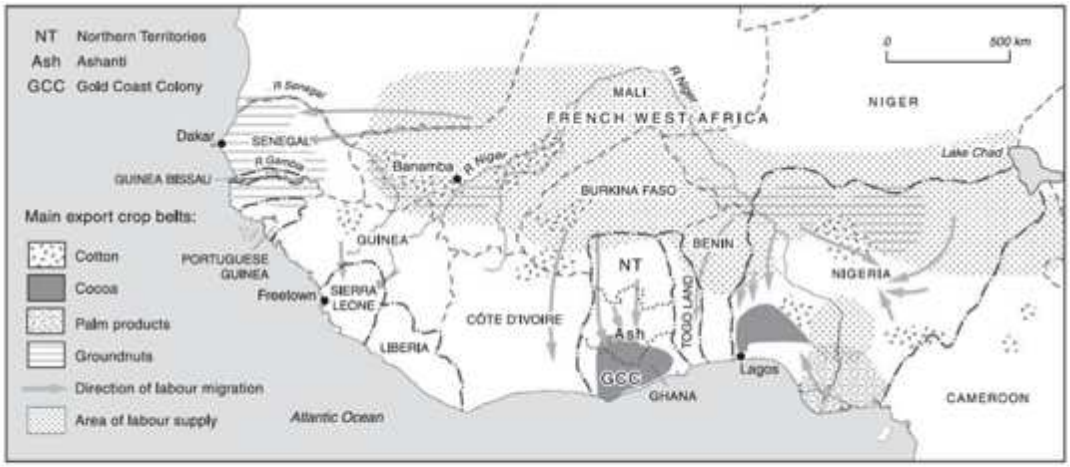



Figure 1. West Africa in 1914. The political boundaries shown are as of 1914; the bolder lines distinguish territories belonging to different colonizers, while the less bold lines distinguish different colonies of the same power. The countries have been given their postcolonial names except for the German colony of Togoland, whose territory today comprises the republic of Togo and part of Ghana. Guinea-Bissau was Portuguese. The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Nigeria were British colonies. The others were French.

*Figure 6 French West Africa with indication of majorly cultivated crops. Source: Austin 2009.*

The creation of export-oriented economies meant that West African colonies mainly exported raw material at a low price and imported manufactured good at a high price, with the gap between the two increasing during colonial period (Rodney 2018 [1972]). As during the slave trade, the trade between Europe and West Africa was unequal and benefitted almost exclusively the Europeans, with traditional economic structures, internal trade and external trade with other partners, such as the Arabs, dramatically affected.

From a political point of view, national states existing nowadays are the direct result of the colonial division. Lines were drawn without any regard of the pre-existing social, cultural, religious and political realities. While French West Africa was administrated as a federation (Afrique Occidentale Française), British colonies were divided into single independent units. According to Mahmood Mamdani (1996), contemporary structures of power in Africa must be understood in relation to colonial period. Indeed, he maintains, direct and indirect rule while long considered as different modes of colonial power, can be better seen as complementary forms of despotism, centralized and decentralized, involving the enforcement of separation between the rural and the urban as well as between different ethnicities. In line with what highlighted in previous chapters with the definition of racial capitalism, Mamdani rejects the definition of South African apartheid as an exception, defining apartheid as the "generic form of the colonial state in Africa" (ibid:8). However, he argues, if with the end of colonialism the new independent states were "deracialized", they were not democratized and thus continued to be characterized by despotism, reproducing, even though in different forms, the segregation of the rural from the urban and of different ethnicities among them. The contradictory nature of ethnicity as a "dimension of both power and resistance" (ibid.) and the ways in which ethnicity and tribalism were manipulated in order to favor colonial rule represents one of the more profound legacies of colonialism. Indeed, many of the contemporary conflicts taking place in the African continent, and more specifically in Western Africa, can be read through this lens, as a consequence of the fragmentation and crystallization of different ethnic identities for the purpose of colonial domination. If this phenomenon has been considered more relevant in former British colonies (Ali et al 2019), it must be acknowledged that also Francophone countries in West Africa have seen the emergence and crystallization of ethnic divisions and conflicts, such as Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso, often fomented and exploited by politicians for ruling purposes.

From a social, cultural and psychological point of view, as illustrated by Franz Fanon (1963, 1964, 2008 [1952]) colonial societies have been created through violence and their

social order has been maintained and constantly reproduced through the display and use of violence. Both the colonizer and the colonized were affected by this violence. The colonizers, as perpetrators, were constantly aware of their own actions and were frightened by a possible upheaval of the colonized, to avoid which they imposed a clear division between their world and the colonized one, maintained by police and military forces. However, the violence perpetrated in the colonial context was not only physical but also epistemic, taking place through the definition of colonized as "a sort of quintessence of evil" (Fanon 1963: 41). This second form of violence penetrated within the colonized mind, by developing a complex of inferiority in relation to the colonizer (Fanon 2008 [1952]). Being that the differentiation between the colonizer and the colonized world was defined fore and foremost by "belonging to or not belonging to a given race" (Fanon 1963:40), the development of a complex of inferiority on the side of colonized was tightly related to its racialization as a Black subject. Fanon (1952: xv) defined this process as the "internalization or rather the epidermialization of this inferiority". As a consequence of it, the Black subject developed over time a desire to be white and put in place a series of actions aimed at bringing them closer to whiteness. From assimilation to the colonizer's language and culture to sexual and affective desire directed only to whites, from the changing of one's own physical appearance to resemble whites to the rejection of one's own social and cultural roots, in "Black Skin, White Masks", Fanon (2008 [1952]) examines all the consequences of the internalization of this complex of inferiority, perpetuated through colonial racism and its consequences on the psychological well-being of Black subjects. This form of violence was the more subtle and difficult to eradicate, which did not cease to exist also following the end of colonialism.

### 4.1.3 Contemporary relations between Western Europe and West Africa: between neo-colonial politics and coloniality of the imaginaries

Despite the end of formal colonialism, Europe still holds a central position in West Africa, from a both political, economic and social point of view. While former British colonies have experienced higher degrees of liberation from the former colonial power, the same cannot be said for former French colonies, the majority in West Africa, which still experience strong political and economic influence from France. At the same time, other forms of control of resources and political systems have been developed by powers different from the old colonizers. These have been implemented through private multinational

companies - through the exploitation of natural resources and land grabbing - or by international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and The World Bank - through the implementation of economic policies, such as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). A central role is also being played by other international and supernational institutions, such as the United Nations, as well as by the European Union in more recent years. In many West African countries, the dreams of liberation accompanying the years of decolonization was dramatically broken following the establishment of authoritarian regimes in which local elites replaced the role of colonizers operating, as maintained by Mamdani (1996), a deracialization but not a democratization of power. Furthermore, wide-spread corruption and conflicts[31], both representing a legacy of colonialism, affected the area since the time of independence. From an economic point of view, many West African countries remained stuck to the colonial economic system, based on the export of their natural resources at low prices and the import of finished goods at high prices.

In the years after independence, former colonial powers' external intervention has been extremely invasive, through the support of coup d'état and killings of the most revolutionary leaders, such as Patrice Lumumba assassinated in 1961 in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Thomas Sankara killed in 1987 in Burkina Faso. In one of his most famous speeches, pronounced at the African Union meeting in Addis Abeeba, few months before his assassination, Sankara lucidly analyzed foreign debt as an instrument of neo-colonialism in the African continent.

> "We think that debt has to be seen from the perspective of its origins. Debt's origins come from colonialism's origins. Those who lend us money are those who colonized us. They are the same ones who used to manage our states and economies. These are the colonizers who indebted Africa through their brothers and cousins, who were the lenders. We had no connections with this debt. Therefore, we cannot pay for it. Debt is neo-colonialism, in which colonizers have transformed themselves into "technical assistants." We should rather say "technical assassins. They present us with financing, with financial backers. As if someone's backing could create development. We have been advised to go to these lenders. We have been offered nice financial arrangements. We have been indebted for 50, 60 years and even longer. That means we have been forced to compromise our people for over 50 years.
>
> Under its current form, controlled and dominated by imperialism, debt is a skillfully managed reconquest of Africa, intended to subjugate its growth and development through foreign rules. Thus, each one of us becomes the financial slave, which is to say a true slave, of those who had been treacherous enough to put money in our countries with obligations for us to repay. We are told to repay, but it is not a moral issue. It is not about this so-called honor of repaying or not […] We cannot repay

[31] 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War; 1989-1996; 199-2003 I and II Liberia Civil War; 1991-2002 Sierra Leone Civil War; 1997-1999 Guinea Bissau Civil War; 2002-2007 and 2010-2011 I and II Ivory Coast Civil War.

because we don't have any means to do so. We cannot pay because we are not responsible for this debt." (Sankara 1987).

If the years preceding and following independence saw the prominence of the Pan-African movement, in the last decades a new wave of Pan-Africanist leaders have emerged. Nowadays, especially in former French colonies, such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal and Guinea, political and military leaders have brought back to the center of the debate the need for the African continent in general, and for French West Africa more specifically, to free itself from the domination of their former colonial power and Western influences.

Aside from its material presence in neocolonial policies, involving monetary politics, extraction of resources, private investments, etc., Europe still holds a central position in the imaginary of people in West Africa. Even if a new generation of Pan-Africanist activists is emerging, pointing to the revaluation of African identity and to the importance of fighting to build a new future for Africa, many youths, especially among the poorest and more marginalized sections of the population, still dream about Europe as a land of possibility. This, together with increasing instability and conflicts in the region[32], climate change and drought in the Sahel, dramatic economic conditions, privatization of healthcare and education, inflation and rising cost of life, have pushed thousands of people to leave their countries in search of better living conditions. Following the eruption of Libyan Civil War in 2011, increasing numbers of people reached Europe through the Mediterranean, mainly arriving in Italy, but also in Greece and Spain. It can be estimated that between 2011 and 2023 more than 500.000 thousand people from West Africa have reached Europe by sea, among which the more represented nationalities have been Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Guinea and Ivory Coast, being about 50.000 people only in 2023 (UNHCR Data Portal 2023). It is following the increase in arrivals, accompanied by its continuous spectacularization operated by media outlets and by a mounting racially motivated fear of invasion of European citizens instrumentalized by politicians, that the European Union dramatically increased their investments in the African continent with the aim to stop, or rather filter, the movement of people. Through the implementation of policies of border externalization, financed either by the European Union or by its member states, the borders between Europe and Africa have continuously been pushed South, first to Northern African countries, such as Libya and Tunisia, and later down, to Niger, Mauritania and Senegal. As

[32] Various countries in West Africa have seen the emergence of conflicts, terrorism, and wide-spread violence in the past years. Among this, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Mauritania and Northern Nigeria have been experienced in the past decade increasing terrorist attacks, as well as conflicts between different social group in relation to access to resource, such as between farmers and herders.

it has been demonstrated by multiple investigations and analysis developed in the past decade, this not only affected the movement of people willing to go to Europe, but radically shaped the entire region, strengthening the power of authoritarian leaders, promoting corruption and strongly affecting local social and economic realities as well as limiting the freedom of movement also within the ECOWAS region.

In some countries, like Niger, new laws were entirely drafted under the diktat of EU in order to declare smuggling, a central economic activity in the country, as illegal. Other countries, such as Libya, Morocco, and more recently Tunisia, were offered billions of euros in exchange of becoming the gatekeepers of Europe. At the same time, along with militarized policies of border externalization a series of action have been put in place in order to discourage so-called "illegal immigration", by placing a conditionality on visa quotas in relation to countries' rates of irregular immigration or to the signing of deportation readmissions' agreements. Lastly, numerous projects of sensitization and local development have been financed by the EU and its member states in the past decade with the aim to reduce the "unauthorized" movement of people, with dubious results. Thus, migration management can be said to represent one of the core ways in which neo-colonial relations between Western Europe and Western Africa are reproduced and a central feature of racial capitalism in the 21st century.

### 4.2 Notes on migration from Senegal and Gambia: between white privilege, coloniality, and the European dream

The previous paragraphs have been focused on examining the historical roots of racial capitalism in West Africa and the legacy of colonialism as manifested through neocolonial relations between Western Europe and West Africa. As highlighted, migration management and border controls represent a key feature of the ways in which neocolonial relations are reproduced. In what follows, I will first explore the legacy of colonialism by reflecting on my personal experience as a white European woman in Senegal and Gambia, examining through an auto-ethnographic account the privileges that are still attributed to white Europeans, as representing both a legacy of colonialism and an expression of the structural inequalities underlying contemporary functioning of racial capitalism. In the second section some of the reasons underlying the migration journey undergone by thousands of Senegalese and Gambian youths in the past decade will be explored.

### 4.2.1 Notes on white privilege from a white European woman in Senegal and Gambia

Being as a white European woman in Senegal and Gambia allowed me to experience the power attached to whiteness, helping me to better understand the meaning of "white privilege". Before, it was just a definition that I understood in academic and political terms, but I could not yet feel it. I had already experienced more clearly the meaning of being white in the context of the rural informal settlements surrounding Foggia. If white use to perceive themselves as non-colored, as the norm, it is just because they live in a white majority country or environment. It is enough to be immersed a Black majority environment to clearly perceive the essence of our color. The fact that also white people are racialized. However, my presence in the informal settlements of Foggia province and my work with public offices in the area, which I will investigate more in depth in the following chapters, while making me aware of my white privilege in my relationship with institutions, did not give me the sense of value attached to whiteness by people racialized as Black, which I instead understood through my staying in Senegal and Gambia. In this sense, I would say that, through the confront with the European reality, people who migrate from West African to Europe partly decolonize their mindset, and the internalized complex of inferiority described by Fanon is partly deconstructed thanks to the confront with the European reality. Indeed, as it happened during the First and Second World War when soldiers from the French African colonies after having seen the weakness of Europeans dying on the battlefields in the context of the war, were able to deconstruct the idea of Europeans as invincible and lay the ground for the decolonization of their countries, in the same way nowadays migrant once they reach Europe and are faced with the harsh reality deconstruct their idealized vision of Europe.

Since the first day of my arrival in Gambia, while walking on the streets, children continuously called me "Toubab, Toubab, Toubab". The word Toubab in wolof, toubabo in Mandinka and Toubaco in Pulaar, the three main languages of both Senegal and Gambia, is used to identify white people, as people of European descent. While in Dakar central areas people are quite used to the presence of whites, so that even children do not bother to call you when they see a white person, the same cannot be said for Gambia, as well as rural areas in Senegal. Largely, the white presence in Gambia is limited to seaside areas (Senegambia) and in touristic areas (such as Serrekunda Market, in Banjul Great area) so that it is uncommon for white people to be seen out of those spaces, and, as a consequence of that, their presence does not go unnoticed. However, while the identification as a white per se is understandable in a context where most of the population is Black, what is extremely

instructive is the meaning attached to whiteness, which forces us to reflect not only on its historical meaning but also on the ways in which that meaning is reproduced nowadays, making the famous sentence of Fanon "in the colonies, you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich" a still living reality.

I entered Senegal with my Italian passport. At the airport I was asked few questions (Where do you stay in Dakar? Why are you here?) and my passport was quickly stamped for a 90-days free tourist visa. The easiness with which I could travel from Italy to Senegal, while taken for granted by most of European citizens, is itself a powerful representation of the contemporary shapes of racial capitalism, distributing so unequally the right of movement across the globe, with maps of mobility overlapping with old maps of colonial divisions. During my stay, I was asked countless times "Why don't you bring me with you to Italy?", "Could you help me with an invitation, please?" "How can I come to Italy?", and so on. To all these questions, I was forced to reply that Italy does not really allow to enter through invitation, and even if that was be possible, the inviting person would need to proof a series of things, regarding income, housing, etc. that I could not provide. I repeated countless times that no, to go to Italy for you is not easy how it was for me to come to Senegal. That visas are very complicated to get, and I did not yet know how much complicated it was only to access the Italian Embassy in Dakar. I went there with my husband, a Fulbe Gambian national original from Basse area, in northern Gambia, living in Italy. From Dakar we went to The Gambia by bus. When we reached the border between Senegal and The Gambia, at Ambdalai border post, I noticed that on the Gambian side of the border the symbol of IOM (International Organization for Migration) was standing together with that of The Gambia and that of Japan, in a banner citing "Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) – This Project is funded by the People of Japan". Thanks to further investigation on the role of IOM in the Gambia, which I will discuss more in depth in the following paragraphs, I would understand that IOM is playing a crucial role in collaborating with the Gambian Department of Immigration, not only providing equipment but also in terms of operative systems and training to further strengthen border controls. Differently from Senegal, where immigration controls are mostly limited to border areas, The Gambia is filled with police check points where immigration officials in yellow uniforms are working side by side with police, checking travelers' documents. These controls are aimed to check the documents of both Gambian nationals and foreigners, with

a special regard to the control of the regular status of foreigners residing in The Gambia, such as Guineans, who are required to pay a residence permit.

*Figure 7 MIDAS banner at Amdalai border post. Source: photo by the author.*

It is through the encounter with immigration officials in The Gambia that I could have a clear sense of my privilege as a white European citizen. Since I entered the border at Amdalai, I was very rarely checked my passport, despite crossing multiple times check points within the country, with my husband being checked his own documents. He himself complained, questioning the attitude of immigration officials to check the documents of someone who they knew was a Gambian citizen and not checking those of someone who was clearly a foreigner, myself. Having the experience of police controls in Italy, he would know that in Europe those who appear to be foreigners, according to racial assumptions regarding one's origin, have countless chances more to be checked, compared to those who are believed to be citizens, i.e. whites. He was disappointed by the fact that him, as a Black African citizen, could not be well respected neither in his country of origin nor in Europe, while white European citizens would be defended both in their country of origin and in a foreigner African country. Indeed, thanks to his presence I could understand many things that would have remained obscure if I was alone, by lacking a meter to compare my experience, as a white European, to his experience, as Black Gambian. He could also illuminate of how differently people perceived his own status before going to Europe and

after going to Europe, as well as before and after being in couple with a white European woman. As maintained by Fanon (1952) being in a relationship with a white is perceived as a step closer to whiteness, and thus closer to success and achievement. While I have never felt this in the context of our relationship, I indeed felt several times both in Italy and in The Gambia the fact of being desired simply because I was a white woman.

After being for about a month in The Gambia, something happened that made it clear that yes, my skin color and my nationality were not just two variables, but rather defining features of my experience to access spaces and possibilities. We were travelling from Basse (northern Gambia) to Banjul, the capital city. At Bansang check point we were stopped by the police and immigration officers. The privilege that I had experienced until that day gave me the boldness to think that nothing could have gone wrong, and that they would have easily checked the passport and let us go. Yet, when the immigration officer took my passport and checked the stamp, said I was given 30 days from my date of entry, pointing to an incomprehensible pen sign which was standing for a 30. He started calculating saying "It should expire on January the 30th after you can extend it." He stopped "Astafrullahi[33]. From November 30 till now...we are in January. It is already expired!". I started being confused, saying that it was not possible, because we, as Italian citizens, were given 90-days free visa in The Gambia, an information I checked before departure, and I was sure of. In reality, I had not conducted any extensive research regarding Gambian Immigration law, but I had only superficially controlled Italian websites regarding visa requirements. Nevertheless, I started arguing with the officer, saying that I was sure I had right to 90-days free visa and, in any case, that sign of my passport was not clear and the officers at the border had not informed me of anything. This superficiality and arrogance was by itself a sign of my taking for granted a right to stay in The Gambia descending from my nationality, as being part of the "First World". The officer called his boss, an Immigration Commissioner who spent more than 10 years in Italy working with Immigration Department at Fiumicino Airport. Because I was an Italian and he had been in Italy for so many years, he wanted to help me to solve the issue. However, due to my attitude of non-cooperation, characterizing my relationship with authorities also in Italy, we were conducted to Bansang Immigration Office, few kilometers away, where the Commissioner was waiting for us.

Once we entered his office, he started saying that he just wanted to explain us we made a mistake and leave us to go but, due to our behavior, he was forced to receive us in

[33] Arabic word meaning "I seek God forgiveness" it is used as an intercalation when something it is unintentionally said that does not correspond to reality.

the station. He explained that in The Gambia there was nothing like 90 days visa, but there were only 7-,14-, 21-, 28- and 30-days visa, which could be given to visitors at entry and eventually extended for a total maximum of 90 days. I tried to say that I didn't know, and I was not informed of that, but he argued that "Ignorance of the law is never an excuse". He went on saying "I worked in Fiumicino airport for more than 10 years, and I have seen countless Gambian citizens arriving with a valid visa and still be rejected at the border, with the motivation based on law. I have seen how Italian police treats Gambian citizens. How they discriminate my fellow citizens. I have been in jails, and I have seen how Gambians are suffering in Europe. Nonetheless, I wanted to help you because I have many Italian friends, but you disrespected me so now I will show that I can treat you on the same way that your people treat mine". He went on saying: "we have all the right to send you back to your country, your visa is expired, and your behavior show us you are not suited for our country. I can now send a report saying that you are a persona non grata in The Gambia and you should leave the country within 24 hours. You are now an illegal immigrant in this country, and you know very well how illegal immigrants are treated everywhere".

Every time he repeated this sentence, I felt like someone was hitting me in the face, I felt on my body the absolute unfairness of any immigration law giving the power to single individuals to decide about the destiny of another human being, irrespectively of her dream, projects, expectations. For few seconds I came a bit closer, even thought still far away, to feel the unfairness of being sent away form a country where you want to stay.

I tried to valorize my experience as someone helping Gambians in Italy to acquire legitimacy in his eyes, to explain that, even if I was an Italian, I also did not agree with the way in which Italy treated migrants, and Gambians more specifically, and that I tried my best to prove it every day through my engagement in activities of legal support and advocacy.

After begging the Commissioner for forgiveness, we were left to go, without even being required to pay for visa extension. Before leaving us, the Commissioner told me "'I am a Muslim and I believe in destiny. So maybe you had to learn something and this was the only way for you to know it. Maybe there were no other possibilities and this was meant to happen. Now go to the officer and apologise. Take my number in case you have any problems along the road."

It was indeed a very instructive experience. Despite my everyday experience with the unfairness of immigration law in Italy, I was never subject to that law, but just a helper from a position of privilege within the system. In The Gambia, in front of this Commissioner, for a few minutes, I experienced being on the other side of the border. I believe that his

experience in Italy motivated him to show me that I should not feel that too privileged, that the day will come when what Europeans did to Africans would come back to us. But that day was not yet arrived, and my being white and European was still a powerful weapon to save me from being subject to injustice. In the following days, I kept being worried when seeing immigration officers and I immediately went to the Gambian Immigration Department to extend my visa and apply for a residency permit, which I obtained in few weeks, without the need to demonstrate anything about the reasons why I was in The Gambia or my means of subsistence.

Apart from the interaction with immigration controls and police, another form in which I experienced my white privilege was through the attitude that people had in my regard, either when I wanted to do something or when I entered some spaces. As mentioned earlier, this feeling was stronger in rural areas, where the presence of white people was much rarer than in large urban areas, such as Dakar.

In the village of Sare Jatta and in the city of Basse, in Gambia Upper River Region, I experienced through the interaction with a variety of people, from family members of my husband to strangers, the power attached to my body, as a white person.

Once arrived in the village of Sare Jatta, I was treated with a level of regard which was neither motivated from the mere fact of being a stranger nor of being in a relationship with a member of the village. It was indeed purely connected to my color and nationality. I perceived colonial tropes emerging in the idea repeated countless times, that I should rest and I should not work, either in the countryside or helping in the house. Centuries of exploitation by white Europeans had necessarily instilled the idea that whites didn't like to work. I was treated differently, continuously put on a pedestal, which I did not appreciate. Different people asked me to take a picture with me, to share it on their status or put it as a screensaver in their phones. This was mostly a way to show to others that they had come close to a white, and this gave them some sort of superiority in relation to others who did not. Another episode making clear the value attached to my white body took place in a village near the city of Kolda, in Casamance Region of Senegal. We went to an event organized by a very famous fouladou artist, Ndongo Dara J, in his village, Sare Mamadou Pakawu. The artist was celebrating his increasing popularity, demonstrated by the receiving of a plate from YouTube signaling the achievement of more than 100.000 subscribers to his YouTube Channel and more than 1 million views to one of his last videos. As soon as we entered the village, I was at the center of the attention, with people murmuring "Look, look a Toubaco". But while I was then, after almost two months between Senegal and Gambia,

quite used to not go unnoticed, what was going to happen made me feel so uncomfortable for the undeniable privilege attached to whiteness. The artist was in his bedroom, crowded with fans looking to get a picture with him. We entered the room to introduce ourselves and greet him, without any intention to be given priority only because I was a white European but waiting our turn as everyone else. However, that wasn't the case. After looking at me with interest and curiosity, all the people inside the room were sent out and I was asked to sit. They offered me food and water. I was told to sit, to rest and to behave as if I was at home. Later in the night, when the concert was concluded, Ndongo Dara J took me by the hand and walked out of the concert area towards his house with all the fans following us and cameras in our front. Being someone who doesn't like to be at the center of attention, this experience was particularly unpleasing to me, even though all those attentions were a sign of regard. Yet, all those attentions were given to me merely because I was a white. I had never experienced so clearly the powerfulness of racial thinking and the materiality of white privilege.

*Figure 8 extract from the video of Ndongo Dara J concert in Sare Mamadou Pakwau. Source: YouTube.*

### 4.2.2 Dreaming of Europe: Senegalese and Gambian youths' desire of mobility between economic and social factors

In Senegal and Gambia, especially in rural areas and peripheries, in the past decades, thousands of, mostly male, youths left their homes to reach Europe. While in the 1990s it

was still possible to travel to Europe through flight, following the closure and securitization of Schengen Space, other "irregular" routes have become relevant (Gueye 2023). Routes from the coastal areas of Senegal, Gambia and Mauritania to reach Canary Islands (Atlantic Route), popular in the first decade of 2000, have been replaced during the years 2011-2018 by the Libyan route (Central Mediterranean Route). However, following the spread of information regarding the harshness and insecurity of the route through Libya, as well as due the partial closure of that route following agreements between Italy and Libya in 2017, in the past few years more people have come back to the Atlantic route. *Barça ou Barzakh* (Barcellona or Death) is the maxim in wolof symbolizing the will to stake everything to reach Europe. The reasons underlying departure are various: economic, climatic, of social. In Senegal, for instance, there are different types of youths who chose to leave the country, either by land or by sea: those who come from rural areas, without any formal training; those who live in urban areas and have multiple qualification but still cannot find any satisfying opportunity of employment in line with them; those who have been experiencing a strong marginalization from the society, such as the talibe[34], and see no other possibility than leaving the country (Conf. Ziguenchoir 2023). Nevertheless, the choice to leave is often not an individual one but a social one, involving all the family as well as the broader community, and, despite different experiences, most of the youths share the same perception of Europe. Going to Europe does not represent only a way to earn a better living, but also the emblem of the achievement of success. Europe is often perceived as a homogeneous entity where there is no unemployment, no poverty, no marginalization: a promised land. The coloniality inherent in this conceptualization of Europe is clear. This conception of Europe is continuously reproduced by those who went there and "made it". Numerous investigations have been produced on the role of illusion in the process migration, both in relation to other contexts (Sayad 1999), as well as on the Senegalese migration to Europe (Gueye, Deshingkar 2020; Ngom 2017; Tandian 2016) so that we suggest referencing these works for further analysis.

As Prof. Doudou Gueye maintained during the conference "Risks related to irregular migration and opportunities in Senegal and neighboring countries", taking place in Ziguenchoir on the 18th of February 2023:

[34] The talibe represent a phenomenon strongly present in Senegal whereby children and youths are taken by their family to learn Q'uran in some schools called daraa, where they will leave in community. However, while other quranic school exists, the daraa have been harshly criticized for the ways in which masters treat their disciples, forcing them to beg money and food in the streets, being subjected to corporal punishment in case in which they will not bring anything. Senegal represents a hub for this form of "training", where children are taken also from the surrounding countries such as Gambia and Guinea Bissau.

> "If someone leaves and finally makes it (Alhamdullilah) and he buys, for example, a solar panel for his family house or he buys his parents a new phone, the neighbor will also support their son to leave. It is also for these small privileges that choices of departure can be made. The best person of the family will be chosen to go and support the family. The social representation attached to migration is very positive in our society, and thus is prompting people to leave." (*author's translation from French*)

Furthermore, building a house is considered as a fundamental step along the process of achieving higher social status through migration. Indeed, the achievement of higher social status is not inherent to the fact of being in Europe but is also connected to what is been sent back. Building a house represents one of the major investments of many of the migrants from Senegal and Gambia, especially when coming from rural areas. Yet, the building of a house represents a sacrifice for migrants in Europe, costing them a stable investment of their salaries. In the rural areas of Senegal and Gambia, it can be clearly identified which compound has people who travelled to Europe in the past years, by looking at the houses, either in construction or newly built.

*Figure 9 House under construction in the village of Sare Jatta built by an emigrant in Italy. Source: photo by the author.*

As Charlotte Bakoum, who worked for the Italian NGO COSPE in a project of psychosocial support for returnees, maintained during the same conference:

"We should not talk about success because most of the time is a fake success. You will see people taking pictures in front of someone else car and sending it to their family, or people eating pasta every day (I hope Italians here will excuse me) and send money to their family and they think everything is fine. I met many migrants say that life is very hard. We should stop seeing Europe as an Eldorado, as a place where there isn't any problem. There are problems like everywhere in the world. We should start to say the reality." (*author's translation from French*).

If social status is one of the reasons pushing people to move, economic factors are also undoubtedly relevant in the decision to depart. As mentioned in previous paragraphs, West Africa represents one of the areas more negatively affected by racial capitalism in the last 500 years. If the stagnation in population following the Transatlantic slave trade is being overcome with fast demographic growth in the past 50 years, the continuing influence of foreign powers in the economic and political sector, either by former colonial powers (such as in the case of Senegal) or by international organizations pushing for the privatization of welfare services (such as IFM, World Bank) as well as private companies implementing extractive economic activities thanks to the complicity of local government, together with the growing desertification of the Sahara and increasing conflicts, create an economically unfavorable economic environment. Furthermore, following Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine, many of the countries of the area, largely dependent on food imports, saw the prices of food commodities growing exponentially, with salaries remaining low. In this sense, different government policies can have a major impact in favoring population access to basic goods (CILSS 2022; Omasanjuya 2023). For instance, many Gambian citizens are now complaining that the current government of Adama Barrow, who succeeded to Yahya Jammeh twenty-two years rule, is making things worse, due to lack of price control on staple foods, like rice, oil, onions, and sugar (Sonko 2022). In Senegal, on the other hand, there is a form of price control, but prices are still very high for most of the population, especially in urban area, such as Dakar, where food and housing are extremely expensive. As a consequence, the Senegalese youths, representing more than 70% of the total population, are highly dissatisfied with Macky Sall government, who is said to advance the interests of France and the elites.

Khady is a 23-year-old Senegalese woman. She lives in Dakar, but she is originally from Touba. She is married and has just recently born her first son. Before being pregnant, she had worked for many years as a domestic worker in Dakar. Every day, she watches French TV series, portraying the world on the other side of the border. She dreams about going to Europe, to France. She says:

> "When Abdul grows a bit, I will leave and go to France, so I can find a good work and take good care of him. Here is very hard, everything is so expensive, and the salaries are so low. When I worked as a domestic worker, I used to earn about 40.000 to 50.000 CFA a month [about 75 euro]. But you cannot do anything with that sum here in Dakar, only a room can cost you up to 70.000 CFA [about 105 euros]. If you go to the market, a chicken can cost you up to 3000 or 4000 CFA [4.5 -6.1 euros]. You can spend up to 10.000 CFA [15 euros] in a day only to eat!" (*author's translation from French*, Conv. with Khady, Dakar (Senegal), Nov. 2022)

Similarly, Amadou is a 30-year-old Gambian man, living in Banjul but originally from Basse. He is working in a bus company as a controller and ticket seller. He is married and have two kids, of eight months and three years. His wife works as a teacher in a secondary school.

> "I would like to go Europe so I can build my life well, build a future for my family. You know here is not easy, I earn about 6000 dalasi and every month I have to pay 3500 for the house. It is left only 2500 dalasi, and a bag of rice is 1700. If I go Europe I will work without rest, so I can buy a land, build my own house and take good care of my family. If someone help me to go Europe, I will give him 100 euro a day!" (Conv. with Amadou, Banjul (Gambia), Dec. 2022).

Another relevant element pushing people to consider travelling to Europe is the positive change rate between Euros and local currencies, either Franc CFA or Dalasi. Indeed, if 20 euros are not that much in Italy or France, they can make a huge difference when converted into local currencies. While Franc CFA rate of change with Euro is quite stable at 655 CFA for 1 Euro, due to its pegging to Euro, Dalasi is more fluctuating, ranging from 56 to 72 Dalasi for 1 Euro, with the rate of change varying considerably also according to different money transfer companies. As Mohamed, a young man from the village of Sare Jatta, told me:

> "Africa is not good, no work, no money. I know that Europe is not easy, that you have to work hard, but I want to go there. You see, here even if I work every day, I can maybe get 2000 dalasi in a month. In Europe, even if you are exploited, if they pay you 20 euro in one day, you know how much it is here. It is up to 1200 dalasi! Africa is too hard. I want to go Europe." (Conv. with Mohamed, Sare Jatta (Gambia), Jan. 2023).

The central role of remittances in the development of West African countries has been highlighted by numerous publications (Adams et al 2013; Al-Mouksit, Robilliard 2019; Tapsoba, Hubert 2022). For the purpose of the present work, it is enough to note that

according to 2021 World Bank data, in Senegal, remittances made up to the 9.6% of GDP, while in The Gambia they accounted for 26.8% of GDP, making The Gambia the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa[35] more dependent on remittances. Indeed, by simply going to a money transfer office, spread all around The Gambia from urban to rural areas, the relevance of remittances for the subsistence of the population can be clearly perceived. It is interesting to note the sharp increase in remittances in relation to GDP from 2016 (when they represented 9.6 % of the GDP) to 2021, with an increase of 17 percentual points, corresponding to the years of migration of thousands of Gambian youths to Europe through the Libyan route. However, one of the major issues is represented by the low rate of investment of remittances, which are mostly spent for consume, thus generating a vicious circle in which the emigrants are sustaining with their income their extended families, which in turn become completely dependent on them for subsistence. As a consequence, in case of loss of job, injury or death of the migrant worker, the family can be thrown back to a condition of extreme poverty. The complete dependence on those who live in Europe is also connected with the social representation of Europe as a land of opportunity where money is earned easily and without too much work. According to Lamin, a Gambian citizen living in Italy:

> "We (the migrants) are like a charity. We work tirelessly to send all our earnings at home. But, when people receive the money, they do not think how we get them. They just spend them and come to ask for other money" (Conv. with Lamin, Foggia, June 2022).

The positive social representation of Europe as a land of success and wealth, also affects love relationships. Indeed, for a man to go Europe represents a marker of social and economic status, which would allow him to easily find a wife.
According to Mamadou, a Gambian from the city of Basse living in Italy since 2016, once in Europe it very easy to find a girlfriend but it is very hard to find a genuine love.

> "When you are in Europe, everyone likes you, everyone is showing you interest. But it is not genuine. They have an interest. I was staying with a Gambian woman few years ago. At the beginning I was really in love, but I later understood that she did not love me, she loved my money. She was continuously asking me money, for food, for clothes, for parties. I felt like she was using me. So, I break up with her, and now I don't think I will stay with any other girl in Africa." (Conv. with Mamadou, Basse, Jan. 2023).

[35] According to the World Bank, Sub-Saharan Africa includes the entire African continent except for Northern Africa.

Saliou is a young man in his twenties, from the village of Sare Jatta. To earn a living, he is selling fuel in old glass bottles in his village. He has never travelled outside The Gambia. However, when he goes to music events, which usually take place in the area featuring various fouladou artists, he pretends he is living in Spain, and he is just there for few months. In this way, he says, it is easier to find a girlfriend.

According to Fatoumata, a 35-year-old hairdresser from the city of Basse, things are changing. While before women were only looking for men who were in Europe, thinking that they would take good care of them, now many girls and women are opening their eyes. However, according to her, a big responsibility lies on the side of the future bride's families, who are ready to "give away" their daughter to improve their social and economic status.

> "I was married for 13 years with a man who was in Spain. I never saw him. He used to tell me to wait him. But after 13 years, I saw all of my friends starting to have children, building their families, and I was just there waiting. Also, we used to have many problems, because he would accuse me of going out with other men. But after so many years, what did he expect? And he was surely doing the same, but I didn't know it. So, I decided to divorce him. Now I am married with someone who is staying here, we are helping each other, and I am happy like that. Many girls now understand that to have a man in Europe is not easy, because he will accuse you of cheating him and creating you many problems. And you don't know what they are doing there." (Conv. with Fatoumata, Basse, Dec. 2022).

As Modou, a young Senegalese of 30 years old from the city of Ziguenchoir maintained in his speech during the 18th of February 2023 Conference in Ziguenchoir, love, work and emigration appear all connected to an idea of success, seeming so hard to achieve.

> "My name is Modou, I have pursued three different training here in Ziguenchoir, unfortunately, I cannot see the advantages of remaining in Africa. I have all these different certified competences, I have driving license, and still, at almost 30 years, I don't have a job, I don't have a wife, I don't have children and not even a girlfriend. [laughs from the public]. I had my BAC [secondary school certificate] in 2018, until 2023 it has been 5 years, and still nothing. I see my friends all the time leaving to go Maroc or Spain, why shouldn't I leave? I tried three times to emigrate, asking visas, but I did not succeed. They do not ask only passport, but hundreds of papers. But I did not lose hope, I will try again." (*author's translation from French,* Modou speech during Conference Ziguenchoir 18th February 2023)

### 4.3 Contemporary shapes of racial capitalism in Senegal and Gambia: EU's fictious fight against irregular migration and the closure of legal routes

The multiplicity of stories, desires and hopes for mobility characterizing youths in Senegal and Gambia, clashes against the walls erected by Europe in the past three decades to make not only regular migration to Europe harder, but also mobility within the West African region more controlled. As highlighted in the previous chapter and well documented in the report The Big Wall (Zandonini et al 2021), European Union and various European government have financed third countries in the Sahel and North Africa in an attempt to stop the movement of people. Yet, what they have succeeded in, rather than stopping their movement, has been to increase the rate of death along those routes.
In the following paragraphs the multiple shapes of EU's fight against irregular migration in Senegal and Gambia will be explored, analyzing both the side of sensitization as implemented by NGOs and intergovernmental organizations, such as the IOM, and its counterpart, represented by the closure of legal routes implemented by EU Embassies, focusing on the role of the Italian Embassy in Dakar.

#### 4.3.1 EU's fight against irregular migration in Senegal and Gambia: between repression, sensitization, and the complicity of NGOs and IOM[36]

In Senegal and Gambia, EU's fight against irregular migration has taken multiple shapes. From one of repression and control, involving the training of police officers by their Italian or Spanish counterparts and the supply of equipment, to one of development and sensitization, through the realization of projects by European NGOs and international organizations aimed at the development of economic and training opportunities offering "an alternative to migration" or initiatives of sensitization and persuasion regarding the "risks of irregular immigration". It is on the latter, certainly less violent but not less relevant at the level of communication and social perception of the phenomenon, that the following analysis will be focused. In relation to the Italian context, this has acquired a new relevance following the approval of the decree-law 20/2023, further explored in chapter 5.2.3, by the Italian Government which at art. 1 par. 5 recites:

[36] The following analysis has been developed building on interviews, official documents regarding public financing, as well as analysis of social media and website pages of both NGOs and International Organizations (IOM). Interviews have been carried out with representatives of four Italian NGOs (Cospe, ARCS, COMI, CISV), the Italian Agency for Development, IOM The Gambia, while it was not possible to contact, despite multiple attempts, IOM in Senegal.

> "in order to prevent irregular immigration, with the decrees of which at the present article, quota are assigned, on a preferential basis, dedicated for the workers of those States which promote, also in collaboration with the Italian State, media campaigns concerning the risks for personal safety descending from the entry within irregular migratory networks" (*author's translation from Italian*).

If the ambiguous and colonial role of development and cooperation agencies in various African countries has been already analyzed in depth by numerous investigations (Abbas, Niyiragira 2009; Goudge 200; Kilcoyne 2021; Langat 2008) what appears particularly interesting for the purpose of the present analysis, is the role played by mostly Italian NGOs in the implementation of EU and Italian migration policies. Indeed, on 64 European and International NGOs operating in Senegal listed on the Platform PFONGUE[37], the 13 Italian NGOs[38] present have all implemented at least one project related to migration, including the contrast of irregular migration and promotion of legal pathways. Most of the project have been financed either by the European Union, through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), by the Italian Ministry of Interior, or by the Italian Agency for Development (AICS). However, as also maintained by the authors of The Big Wall, the lack of a common database makes it extremely hard to gather all the data related to public expenditure on the subject (Zandonini et al 2021).

The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund is a European Commission fund, set up every seven years (2007-2013; 2014-2020; 2021-2027)[39] defining multiple funding opportunities targeting four main objectives, related to "common European asylum, legal migration, countering irregular migration and enhance solidarity between member states". The third objective is indeed "to contribute to countering irregular migration and ensuring effectiveness of return and readmission in third countries" [40]. Among the projects funded by AMIF 2014-2020 in line with this objective is *"Nouvelles Perspectives - mythes et réalités, contre-discours et narration partagée pour une meilleure connaissance des risques et des alternatives à la migration irrégulière" (*New perspectives – myths and reality, counter-discourse and shared narratives for a better knowledge of the risks and alternatives to irregular migration). This project has been developed by the Italian NGO Cospe

[37]Plateforme des ONG européennes au Senegal – Platform of European NGOs in Senegal available at https://www.pfongue.org/-Liste-des-membres-.html

[38] ACRA, ARCS Culture Solidali, CIPSI, CISV, COMI, COOPI, COSPE, CPS, Green Cross Italia, IPSIA, ISCOS, LVIA, VIS.

[39] For in depth account regarding the expenditure of AMIF Funds outside the EU, see ECRE, UNHCR 2022.

[40] The four key objectives of AMIF funds as listed by the European Commission are "to strengthen and develop all aspects of the common European asylum system, including its external dimension; to support legal migration to the Member States, including by contributing to the integration of third-country nationals; to contribute to countering irregular migration and ensuring effectiveness of return and readmission in third countries; to enhance solidarity and responsibility sharing between the Member States, in particular towards those most affected by migration and asylum challenges" (European Commission 2023)

(Coperazione per lo sviluppo in Paesi Emergenti – Cooperation for development in developing countries) in collaboration with the Belgian Federation Europeenne Des Journalistes, the Italian Associazione Carta di Roma, the French NGO operating in Senegal Village Pilote and the Senegalese Diaspora association G2 Senegal Valdera APS. The project was launched on the 1st of February 2021 and ended of the 31st of May 2023, for a total budget of €706,086.58, of which €635,477.92 funded by the EU through the 2019 AMIF call. The project was developed as an answer to the 4th topic of the call, under the name of "Awareness raising and information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration in selected third countries and within Europe" (European Commission 2019). The underlying idea of the call is that irregular migration is often caused by the lack of information regarding the journey and the country of destination, and therefore that by providing "trusted, factual, balanced information on the risks of irregular migration – during the journey (dangers of migrating irregularly) and after arrival (hardship of living in the EU irregularly and return)" as well as by empowering "credible voices in countering migrant smugglers' narratives on irregular migration and the diasporas' narratives on living irregularly in the EU" it is possible to "change of perceptions and behavior of third country nationals pondering irregularly migrating to the EU and key influencers of their decisions" (ibid.). The main aim of the project *Nouvelles Perspectives* is that of sensitization, of both the Senegalese youths "candidates of irregular migration" as well as media outlets of both Senegal and receiving countries (among which Italy and Belgium, etc.). This goal has been implemented through the organization of meetings, public discussions, events, and social media campaigns on the subject of irregular migration, as well as workshop bringing together Senegalese and European journalists, in order to train them to develop appropriate communication strategies about migration, based on reliable information. What appears interesting to analyze for the purpose of the present work is the extent to which this project, despite its apparently positive intentions, risks perpetuating EU narrative of "irregular migration" as a choice depending on individuals and their communities, rather than on the lack of legal routes to enter the EU. Through *Nouvelles Perspectives*' social media pages (now renamed *InForma: Migrations Afrique de l'Ouest,* following the implementation of a new project), content is regularly published regarding the risks of irregular migration, the difficulties that can be encountered once in Europe, as well as the experiences of people who are trying to build their future in Senegal, in perfect line with the afore-mentioned requirements of AMIF call. A series of slides posted between 2022 and 2023 on *Nouvelle Perspectives*' Facebook page illustrate the disadvantages of irregular migration, by mentioning for instance, the number of people dead

or dispersed while trying to reach Europe, the costs of the trip and the relative investments that could be done in Senegal with the same amount of money, or finally, the rate of poverty in Europe, affecting particularly migrants, as it is possible to observe in the following figures.

***Figure 10 Nouvelles Perspectives' slides posted on Facebook page on the 25th of January 2023.***
***1st slide:*** *Poverty in Europe;*
***2nd slide:*** *Did you know that in 2019, 20,9% of European population was at risk of poverty and exclusion? Among them, half were third country migrants aged between 20 and 64 years old. Poverty and social exclusion are much higher for foreigners in French, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium and Sweden.*
***3rd slide:*** *Did you know – in 2019 35% of foreigners in Greece, 13.7% in Italy and Spain, were in a situation of material deprivation.*
***4th slide:*** *This means that they cannot face unpredicted expenses, such as, take a week of holiday afford a meal of meat, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every two days.*

***Figure 12 Nouvelles Perspectives' slides posted on Facebook page on the 9th of December 2022.***

***1st slide:*** *Do you know the truth about the migration route?* ***2nd slide:*** *According to UNCHR, since 2014 12057 migrants died during their journey in Africa. 25240 migrants died in the Mediterranean Sea.* ***3rd slide:*** *Migrants who survive and try to cross the sea are often abandoned by their smugglers and sent back to Libya. 2022 – 16502 repatriated migrants; 2021 - 30990 repatriated migrants; 2020 – 12000 repatriated migrants; 2018-2019 – 16000 repatriated migrants.* ***4th slide:*** *Migrants who survive and try to cross the sea are often abandoned by their smugglers… More than 23000 migrants are missing around Italian and Spanish shores. More than 18000 migrants died at sea close to Italian and Spanish shores. 460 people among the disappeared were children, in 2014.*

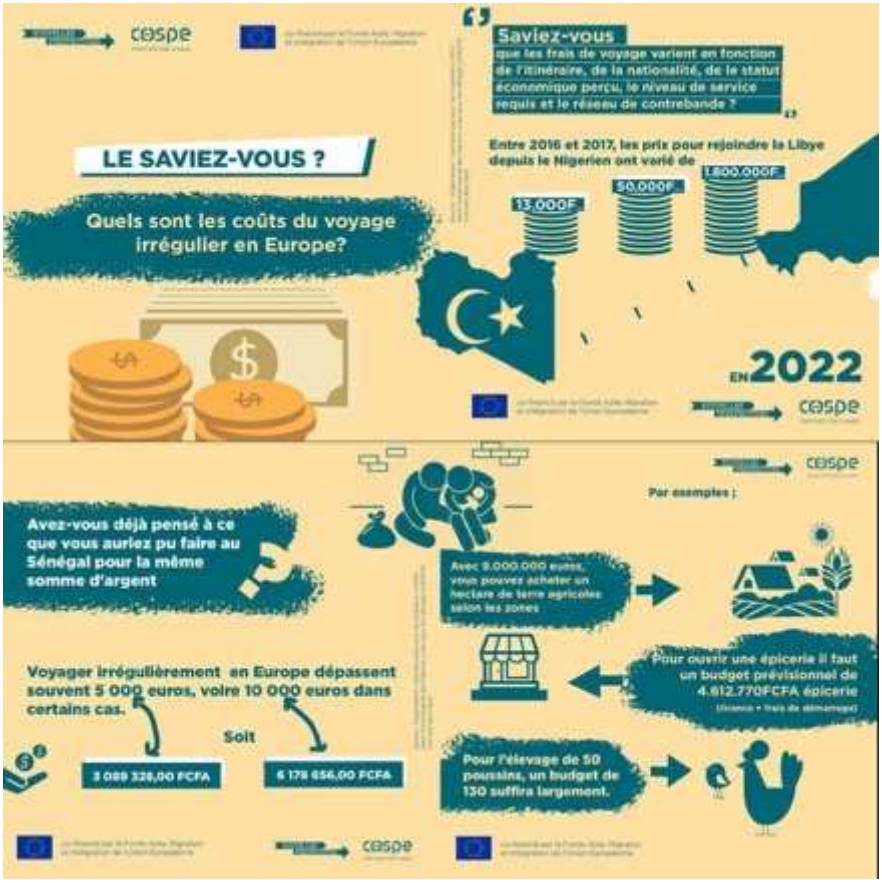



***Figure 11 Nouvelles Perspectives' slides posted on Facebook page on the 18th of January 2023.***

***1st slide:*** *Did you know? Which are the costs of the journey to Europe?* ***2nd slide:*** *Did you already though what you could have done in Senegal with the same amount of money? Travel irregularly to Europe can cost up to 5000 euros (3.089.328,00 Franc CFA) and even 10.000 euros in some cases (6.178.656.00 Franc CFA);* ***3rd slide:*** *Did you know that the tariffs vary according to the itinerary, nationality and the perceived economic status, the requested quality of service and the smuggling network? From 2016 to 2017, the price to reach Libya from Niger varied between 13.000 Franc CFA – 50.000 Franc CFA and 1.800.000 Franc CFA.* ***4th slide:*** *With 9.000.000 Franc CFA you can buy an hectare of cultivable land; to open a grocery store you need about 4.612.770 Franc CFA (license + starting costs); to start a chicken farm a budget of 130 (?) will be quite enough.*

Regardless of the reliability of the information circulated, what appears to be striking is the lack of contextualization of the raised issues. In every slide, the stem of European Union appears, next to the phrase "co-financé par le Fond Asile, Migration et Integration de l'Union Europèenne" (co-financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of European Union). However, the causes of the deaths along the journey and in the Mediterranean, of the expensiveness of the journey (if compared with standard price for flight tickets) as well as of the higher rate of poverty and deprivation among migrants in Europe are left unnamed. This favors a reproduction of a narrative according to which irregular migration is a choice unrelated to EU visa and border externalization policies. Yet, as highlighted in former paragraphs, and as it will be further examined in the followings, irregular migration towards the EU is consequent to the progressive closure of regular routes following the creation of Schengen Space. As a matter of fact, the coordinator of the project *Nouvelles Perspectives*, Khadim Faye, during our interview clearly pointed to the direct relationship between border closures, visa policies and irregular migration.

> "To solve many of the problems related to irregular migration we should facilitate the movement of people. Even history show us that if you facilitate the mobility of people there will not be those forms of migration. Because they are a consequence of strict closure of the European Space. Indeed, before the establishment of visa regime in the 1990s, there was a Senegalese migration from Senegal to France, in Marseille, it was a seasonal migration. But once, they installed visa, etc. people who went there could not come back, so they decided to stay [...]. Our government should work with European governments to favor the obtainment of visa and why not, developing forms of circular migration, as there were in the past […] Every time they place a barrier, people will find another way to overcome those barriers. Following the year 2000 and the economic crisis, the youths in Senegal believe that is necessary to migrate to improve their lives." (*author's translation from French*, Int. with K. Faye, Dakar, Mar. 2023).

Further, it must be said that, during the Conference and the following public discussion organized in Ziguenchoir as part of the *Nouvelles Perspectives'* project, the issue of the arbitrariness of the regularity or irregularity of migration was raised by various speakers.
The coordinator of the NGO Cospe in Senegal, Giovanni Barbagli, intervened during the public discussion, by questioning the very approach of his own organization to the issue of irregular migration:

> "I hope there is no representative of Cospe here who can hear me, if not I will be immediately fired. [laughs from the public]. Ah, it is recorded [laughs from the public]. I have a provocation, a provocation that should stimulate some reflections. We always talk about the negative aspects of migration (either regular or irregular), so I am asking my-self whether there aren't also positive aspects of migration.

> There are about 180.000 to 240.000 people who should enter every year Senegal labor market, could they be effectively absorbed? Are, for instance, the remittances of migrants so irrelevant in this country? I am thinking whether we should not also intervene in a different way, starting not only to talk about regular routes, but creating regular routes for those who want to leave, either for curiosity or to find, or look for, a better life abroad. Wouldn't it be appropriate? And if we started, by any means, whether NGOs or some government agencies, pressuring those who reject 97-98% of visa applications every year?" (*author's translation from French*, G. Barbagli speech, Conf. Ziguenchoir, February 2023*).*

However, when during our interview I recalled the subject, by asking him to expand on the issue, he somehow avoided the question, by stating:

> "Irregular migration has many risks not only for the personal safety, but also at the economic level, for the family, who can lose all their savings […] We also inform on the possibilities of regular migration, but these are not many […] It is not that we can change many things. What we can do is to raise this issue as civil society organizations, to say that regular routes for migration should be expanded. Obviously, our position on migration is very clear. To move from a country to another is a right. Unfortunately, this right is often not respected and by enacting it people can put their personal and economic safety at risk. On our part, we try to give accurate information." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with G. Barbagli, phone, Feb. 2023).

While during the conference he was taking a clear position on the contradiction between the ways in which the issue of irregular migration is approached, also by his own organization, and the real causes, during the interview, in which he was speaking as a representative of Cospe, he did not feel entitled to fully highlight that contradiction.
Similarly, other representatives of Italian NGOs operating in Senegal, to the question regarding the contradiction between EU immigration policies, the funding of several projects concerning migration and the role of NGOs in the implementation of these projects have answered similarly, by mentioning it without feeling entitled to take a clear stance.
Sara Gianesini, country representative of the NGO CISV, maintained:

> "CISV point of view is that migration is a fundamental right of every human being on this earth, and this is something which cannot be neglected. What we try to do is to plan the projects to raise awareness, and not always it is easy due to the way in which calls are written. Not to say that migration is something negative, as unfortunately we can ear sometimes, but that migration is a right […] In the last decade, Italian Cooperation Agency and the EU focused on the subject of migration, with the inclusion of this UN Agency that before was only a very large Inter-governmental organization, IOM, and after 2016 it has become part of the UN system, seeing as a consequence a large rise in the funding on this issue in West Africa. Most of the funds arrive from the EU, whether they channel it through IOM or to member States, and hence to their agencies, such as the French or the Italian. The raise in funding on this issue

> can be seen as a will on the side of EU to support the Global South, and this is a controversial issue. I cannot say many things about it. CISV as many other Italian NGOs, took a clear position on this, by saying that migration is a fundamental right. [Interviewers' question: controversial in the sense that EU approach on the subject is hypocrite?] This, I cannot say it…" (*author's translation from Italian,* Int. with S. Gianesini, Dakar, Mar. 2023).

This hesitation can be considered a consequence of what has been previously defined as the "NGO-ization of resistance", whereby resistance becomes a 9 to 5 job, pressure groups become institutionalized and more accountable to their funding institutions than to their target groups. What becomes clear by looking at the panorama of Italian NGOs operating in Senegal, is this increasing tension between their definition as Non-Governmental Organization and their role as implementers of EU and Italian government policies. As highlighted by Gianesini, if there is an attempt to draft the projects in line with the organization vision, this is increasingly hard, due to their dependence on governmental funding bodies, either European, Italian, or international. The fact that NGOs' representatives are employed by the organization also makes it harder for them to openly express their point of view, when it could compromise the organization's image in its relationship with its funding bodies. However, in some instances, other NGOs' representatives felt free to express their concerns on this ambiguity. As Liliana Petri, country-referent for the NGO ARCS states:

> "We have gone from being proud of being Non-Governmental Organizations to not only accept being civil society organizations, but even establishing our actions always more and almost exclusively on the basis of EU or Italian political objectives. So, on the objectives of those who give us money… how sad. For someone like me, who still believes in the possibility of a social and epochal change, this is so sad!" (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with L. Petri, Dakar, Mar. 2023).

To clarify this statement, Petri proposes as an example the programs aimed at assisting the voluntary return of migrants from Europe.

> "The past decade was characterized by a focus on voluntary returns, so that all the funds were on that subject and all the NGOs were developing projects related to returnees, supporting them to come back home and develop their project. Right now, the focus is shifting and increasingly there is an interest to support the investment of the diaspora. So, as a consequence, all the NGOs are also moving in that direction." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with L. Petri, Dakar, Mar. 2023).

The coordinator of the project *Nouvelles Perspectives*, Khadim Faye, further expanded on the issue of the relationship between funding bodies and NGOs actions:

> "The project we [European NGOs] develop are financed by European governments, and they are the one who set the agenda. The agenda of the EU is to limit irregular migration and to promote the return of migrant who are in Europe. So, our governments should also develop migration policies which answer to our needs […] But coming back to your question, yes, at the level of Senegalese society, there are some initiatives of advocacy, such as the Remidev, *Reseaux Migration et Developpement*, and they often develop initiatives of advocacy towards the Senegalese government but also the European Union, to favor mobility within Africa and between the South and the North. This kind of organizations are more active in terms of advocacy than the European organizations in Senegal, but their action on the ground sometimes is limited because they are not receiving funds from the EU. There are sometimes anti-global organization, such as the CNCD in Belgium, Rosa Luxemburg in Germany, that support them." (*author's translation from French*, Int. with K. Faye, Dakar, Mar. 2023).

In addition to European NGOs, another actor playing a controversial role in relation to the issue of irregular migration is the International Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM, created in 1951 by United States and Western Europe under the name of Provisional Intergovernmental Committee for the Movement of Migrants from Europe (PICMME) as an intergovernmental organization, transformed its status in 2016, becoming a UN "related organization" (Pécoud 2018). This status represents an exception in the United Nations panorama, resembling some of the functions of UN specialized agencies, without yet being under the oversight of UN General Assembly and without having to align its mandate to UN charter (Cullen 2019). As maintained by Miriam Cullen:

> "Operationally, the IOM is more comparable to a private subcontractor than a traditional intergovernmental organization. It prides itself on its cost-efficiency and champions its decentralization as a feature which permits flexibility. Capital flows into the IOM are secured through ad hoc donations, mostly from states and inter-governmental organizations, to fund specific projects. Accordingly, the IOM has a commercial interest in the management of migration." (ibid:2-3)

IOM is still underexplored by scholarly investigations, even if the attention of scholars and activists has increased in the past few years following its ever-central role in the field of migration management, globally recognized through its role as a coordinator for the Global Compact for Migration in 2018. As maintained by Antoine Pécoud (2018) in one of the few publications on the subject:

> "the nature of IOM often seems difficult to capture. While it cooperates with UN agencies and is often perceived as part of the UN system, it is merely a 'related agency' (and only since 2016). It is an intergovernmental organisation, but at times seem to function like a private company, while also competing with civil society groups and NGOs. Its focus is on migration, but it also performs other tasks that have little to do with migration (like rebuilding regions affected by natural disasters). It is called an organisation *for* migration, but does much *against* migration, for example, by returning unwanted migrants to their country or preventing unauthorised migration." (ibid:1622).

IOM's mantra is that of promoting "safe, regular and orderly migration"[41], now also adopted by United Nations in their 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and through the signature of the Global Compact for Migration. However, while they propose a win-win solution narrative about migration which would favor both migrant and governments, their actions are quite ambiguous due to their involvement in multiple projects which appear to favor the reproduction of border enforcement rather than the mobility of people.

In West Africa, IOM is involved in multiple ways, through bilateral agreements with West African and European governments, through the IOM Development Fund as well as through the EU-IOM joint initiative funded by the European Trust Fund for Africa.

The EU-IOM joint initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration is a project funded by the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (ETFA), for a total amount of approximately 490 millions euro. Of these, 84,9 million have been allocated in West Africa for "Strengthening the management and governance of migration and the sustainable reintegration of returning migrants" in the Gambia (3.9 million euro), Mali (15 million euro, of which 3.2 by Spanish Cooperation), Mauritania (8 million euro), Burkina Faso (8.3 million euro), Nigeria (15 million euro), Niger (15 million euro), Senegal 27.9 million euro (of which 10 millions of French Cooperation and 9.5 millions of Spanish Cooperation) (European Union, 2023). On their dedicated website, the EU-IOM Joint Initiative present themselves as "the first comprehensive programme to save lives, protect and assist migrants along key migration routes in Africa", enabling "migrants who decide to return to their countries of origin to do

[41] "**Orderly Migration:** IOM defines orderly migration as "the movement of a person from his or her usual place of residence to a new place of residence, in keeping with the laws and regulations governing exit of the country of origin and travel, transit and entry into the host country." This definition underlines the State's right to regulate entry as a basis for being able to ensure migrants' proper treatment, granting rights, enforcing law, managing relationships with host communities.
**Regular migration:** Regular migration is defined as "migration that occurs through recognized, authorized channels". The regularity of migration does not only refer to the method used to cross a country's border, as migrants can enter into a country through regular channels but find themselves in an irregular situation after a certain period.
**Safe Migration:** There is no common definition for the concept of "safe migration." When using the term, it is important to understand that a migrant can be in an unsafe situation while or after having migrated through regular channels; and conversely, a migrant can be in a situation that is both safe and irregular. "Safe migration" is not a static concept. The situation of migrants can change from safety to unsafety throughout the various phases of their migratory process. Moreover, while the concepts of 'orderly' and 'regular' migration have a normative character, the concept of "safe migration" primarily concerns the well-being of migrants." (IOM, Global Compact for Safe, orderly migration).

so in a safe and dignified way, in full respect of international human rights standards and in particular the principle of non-refoulement."

In the section "Stories" of the website, multiple stories of suffering connected to irregular migration and success upon return, thanks to the support of the initiative, are displayed. Among them, the story of Mamadou who travelled from Senegal to Libya with his brother in order to reach Italy. However, following the death of his brother, he was deported to Niger by Algerian police and left in the middle of the desert. He was then referred to IOM center in Niger, who supported him to go back to Senegal. In his words, as reported by IOM facilitators in Senegal:

> "I am really grateful to IOM, thanks to their support, I can stand on my own two feet […] I address this message to young people and parents, to tell them that irregular migration is suicidal. Staying here and exploiting local opportunities is the best way to a better future." (EU-IOM Joint Initiative, 2022a).

Another story is that of Saikou, who left Gambia in 2015, reaching Libya and tried to cross the Mediterranean, but was caught by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and spent three months in prison in extremely hard conditions. Following that experience, he decided to go back to Gambia and once back, he received support by IOM to start a construction business. At the end of his letter, Saikou also delivers his message against irregular migration:

> "This country is very young, and there are many opportunities available for young people with skills. I am a witness of the irregular migration hardships and, looking back, I would rather have invested in my skills than in the journey to Europe. I know what it takes to get there, and irregular migration is not a solution to the problems we face in life." (EU-IOM Joint Initiative, 2022b).

In the stories section of the website, it is possible to find dozens of stories following the same narrative trope, ending with the condemn of irregular migration and reward to IOM for their support in the process of reintegration. Something similar can be found in the "Migrant as Messengers" project, whereby migrants are used in project of raising awareness on the risks of irregular migration. However, as analyzed in previous paragraphs, what is left unnamed is the cause behind the need to take an irregular journey rather than a regular one, EU responsibility in pushbacks by Libyan, Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisia police as part of border externalization policies, EU responsibility in the lack of integration of migrant in Europe due to lack of regular status, etc. IOM thus develops a narrative of condemnation of irregular migration and promotion of the success stories of those who returned, where all the structural factors remain hidden. Only the consequences are seen and displayed.

In The Gambia, according to IOM data, the EU-IOM Joint initiative has supported 7.116 returnees from January 2017 to December 2022, of which the majority returning from Libya (3700) and from Niger (1946). As maintained by Marie Stella Ndiaye, Program Manager for Assisted voluntary return and reintegration at IOM The Gambia, IOM works mostly on assisted voluntary returns.

> "Mainly the assisted voluntary return (AVR) approach is the same in all the countries, when we talk about reintegration, we take into account the specificities of the countries. Usually, the process starts where they are, the migrants will reach out to our office, for example in Spain or in Italy, asking for voluntary return, that is our main work, because sometimes of course we can discuss about the voluntariness of the process, but that is what IOM mainly do, it is only based on request of the migrants who ask to come back […] Most of the returns have been from Libya, and from Europe they were from Germany. Until October 2022, IOM was also supporting the reintegration for forced returns but, just to be clear on that, we are not involved in the movement. That is a bilateral agreement between Germany and the Gambia, but from our side we provide the post-arrival at the airport and the reintegration if they want to do it. Now is Caritas that is managing it." (Int. with M. S. Ndiaye, IOM The Gambia, Banjul, Jan. 2023).

One of the accuses that has been repeatedly moved to IOM has been that of getting most of their funds from programs of deportation, either through deportations masked as voluntary returns or because they effectively take part in the process of forced return, through post-arrival assistance (Human Rights Watch 2003; Koch 2013). Likely, it as a consequence of this wide-spread accusation that the willingness of Ms. Ndiaye to stress that "just to be clear on that, we are not involved in the movement" can be interpreted. Indeed, as the data of EU-IOM Joint Initiative in The Gambia show (fig. 13), most of the people involved in the program have been returned either from countries where the living conditions of migrants and refugees are widely reported to be so unbearable to make return the only possible option, such as Libya and Niger, or from EU countries, as a consequence of either forced returns, such as in the case of Germany, or voluntary returns proposed as the only alternative to forced returns for undocumented migrants. Thus, in both instances the degree of choice, and thus the voluntariness, is extremely limited. In this regard, it should be considered that the European Commission and Frontex Agency, now responsible for programs of return and reintegration, clearly maintain to prefer voluntary returns, due to their cost-effectiveness.

"Voluntary return is generally considered to be more cost effective than forced return […] The European Parliamentary Research Service has estimated that a forced return costs €3,414, compared with €560 per voluntary return." (European Commission 2021).

Under the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrants' Protection and Reintegration, IOM The Gambia has provided assistance to the return of a total **7,116[1] beneficiaries**.

| Host Country | Returns to The Gambia (December 2022) | | | | | Returns to The Gambia (Jan - Nov 2022) | Returns to The Gambia (Jan 2017 to Dec 2022) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | | Female | | | | |
| | Adult | Children | Adult | Children | Total | Total | Total |
| Algeria | 1 | | | | 1 | 1 | 56 |
| Austria | | | | | | 2 | 44 |
| Burkina Faso | | | | | | | 8 |
| Croatia | | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Denmark | | | | | | 1 | 2 |
| Egypt | | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Finland | | | | | | 3 | 9 |
| France | | | | | | | 1 |
| Germany | | | | | | 93 | 315 |
| Hungary | | | | | | | 1 |
| Libya | | | | | | 547 | 3700 |
| Mali | | | | | | 16 | 104 |
| Morocco | 19 | | | | 19 | 46 | 225 |
| Norway | | | | | | 1 | 3 |
| Niger | 18 | | 1 | 2 | 21 | 262 | 1946 |
| Poland | | | | | | | 1 |
| Slovenia | | | | | | | 1 |
| Sweden | | | | | | 6 | 17 |
| Spain | | | | | | | 1 |
| Tunisia | | | | | | 47 | 58 |
| Mauritania | | | | | | 29 | 540 |
| Italy | | | | | | 45 | 82 |
| **Grand Total** | **38** | **0** | **1** | **2** | **41** | **1101** | **7116** |

*Figure 13 EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration: The Gambia Summary of Returns Eligible Under JI. 31st December 2022. Source: IOM The Gambia.*

In The Gambia, IOM appears to play a crucial role not only in programs of "return and reintegration" but also in the very management of migration within The Gambia. Indeed, they entertain close collaboration with the Gambian Government and Gambian Immigration Department (GID), playing a key role in strengthening border controls as well as drafting Gambian Immigration policy. As Mr. Stephen Matete, Program Coordinator of Migration Management at IOM The Gambia, illustrates:

"Our focus is to facilitate migration but, at the same time while doing this, the idea is to also support the government in terms of any security threats. In so doing, we also try to facilitate opportunities for socio-economic development within the countries, particularly in border regions. In 2018, we worked with the Gambian government to come out with quite a comprehensive border management assessment for the entire country, in terms of the challenges and the areas to be addressed, and most of the issues that came up were about policy and legislation support. The only Immigration Act of The Gambia dates back to 1965, things have changed from that period of time, so that it is very needed to enhance that review process of immigration policy for the country. And another area where we are also focusing is about improving infrastructure to support border management" (Int. with S. Matete, IOM The Gambia, Banjul, Jan. 2023).

In terms of border management, IOM supports the GID by offering them a software to store, analyze and manage data relative to entries and exits through the four land borders, as well as to manage data relating to residency permits, through the Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS). The software has been installed in four border posts, while other three are on the way. According to MIDAS brochure, the software represents "a cost-effective alternative to more expensive commercial options" which can enable "States to more effectively monitor those entering and exiting their territory while providing a sound statistical basis for migration policy-related planning". MIDAS is present in at least 21 countries worldwide, according to latest data available, of which 17 are in the African continent. Even though both Mr. Matete and IOM brochure of MIDAS assure that IOM is only providing the software and the data are in the hands of the governments, further research should be carried out on this issue to assess whether data are effectively encrypted and are not accessible by IOM.

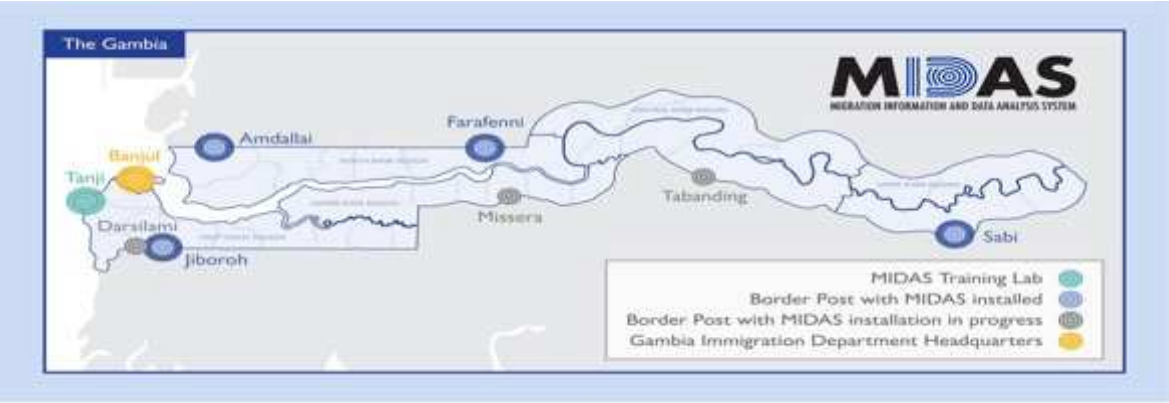



*Figure 14 Border posts and immigration offices in The Gambia with MIDAS technology. Source: IOM The Gambia.*

IOM The Gambia is also active in a series of other activities, from training of Immigration officials on multiple subjects - from document fraud to "organized immigration crimes and assistance to vulnerable victims"- to "interagency cooperation and elaboration" in order to support governments' response mechanisms in relation to criminal activities. Indeed, MIDAS is also connected with INTERPOL Alert lists, so that "security threats can be mitigated" (Int. with S. Matete, IOM The Gambia, Banjul, Jan. 2023).

It is thus re-proposed the narrative of a win-win solution for migration, whereby it would be possible at the same time to increase border controls, facilitate migration and promote development in border regions.

### 4.3.2 Which legal ways? Privatizing visa services, making them inaccessible. Notes from the Italian Embassy in Dakar[42]

As analyzed in previous paragraphs, European Union spent billions of euros in trying to stop, or rather filter, migration from the African continent, either through militarization, border externalization as well as through initiatives of sensitization and local development. The investment in border externalization and militarization have made the investment in humanitarian rescuing of migrants and assisted voluntary return programs necessary, while at the same time demonstrating, as a self-fulfilling prophecy, the actual dangerousness of irregular routes. However, neither IOM nor European NGOs have raised their voices to point at the hypocrisy of these policies and the ever-increasing closure of regular routes.

The contradiction between discourse about irregular migration and the lack of regular routes is made clear by the example of the Italian Embassy in Dakar. Indeed, as we have seen, the Italian Cooperation Agency (AICS) has spent various millions of euros in different projects aimed at limiting irregular migration. At the same time, the Italian Embassy in Dakar appears to be creating so many obstacles in accessing visa services that some of the interviewees defined them as one of the main push factors towards irregular migration.

The Italian Embassy in Dakar is serving for Senegal plus other five countries of the area (Cape Vert, Gambia, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Guinea). Since 2017, the visa service has been outsourced to the company Visa Facilitation Service Global, operating in Senegal providing visa outsourcing service to other European (France, Netherlands, Portugal, Norway, Belgium and Luxembourg) and non-European Governments (Canada). Their contract was supposed to end in 2022, and indeed a public call has been launched in April 2022 to look for a new provider. The call was won by the company BLS International Services Limited on July 2022, which took the management only in July 2023, after the present research was carried out. The analysis will therefore focus on VFS, while being aware that, despite a change in the company managing the service, the level of inaccessibility has not changed. VFS Global has been established in 2001 and it is nowadays considered the largest Visa outsourcing company at the global level, with "over 2,800 application centers, operations in 141 countries across five continents and over 187 million applications processed to date […]. The current portfolio companies generating total sales of

[42] For the present section, interviews have been carried out with the Embassy personal, the Ambassador Giovanni De Vito and the Consul Alessia Quartetti, while the visa outsourcing (VFS) company manager in Senegal, Mr. Walid Chamaky has not replied to our email, and once contacted by call, has refused to release interviews. Fifteen interviews have been carried out with visa applicants and family members of visa applicants, while four interviews have been carried out with representatives of unions or civil society organizations.

approximately EUR 19 billion and employing approximately 110,000 people" (Nsehe 2018). In 2007, the company has been involved in investigations regarding the breaching of data security of UK VFS facilities in India, Nigeria and Russia (Costelloe Baker 2007), while in 2019 it has been accused of profiting of its position by forcing costumers to pay higher fees for premium services.

The privatization of visa services on the side of Embassies represents an increasing trend at the global level. Together with the privatization of reception centers for asylum seekers and deportation centers for people defined as illegal, the privatization of visa and consular services represents a founding element in defining contemporary structures of racial capitalism. While the privatization of detention centers has been thoughtfully examined, the topic of visa services' outsourcing and privatization is still underexplored at the academic level. Yet, some contributions have highlighted how the privatization of visa and consular services gives rise to multiple issues, including, but not limited to, the arbitrariness of the process and lack of accountability, corruption, malfunctioning, lack of security regarding personal information and biometric data (Sánchez-Barrueco 2018, Infantino 2010). More specifically, María-Luisa Sánchez-Barrueco (2018) examined the outsourcing of visa services from Spain to the company VFS Global, highlighting how visa outsourcing represents an integral element of externalization policies in the Schengen space.

The main issue faced by anyone willing to access of Italian Embassy services, from visa application to documents' legalization[43], is the very access itself, that is, the possibility to have an appointment. In order to take an appointment with the Embassy it is required to go on the website of the company VFS Global, create an account and then log in and take an appointment. However, the appointment window is only open on Friday from 3 pm (Senegal time), for a time of few minutes. Scrolling the Facebook page of the Italian Embassy in Dakar, under every post having the most disparate subjects from the Ambassador visit to Guinea Bissau to the inauguration of a new collaboration with a Senegalese University, it is possible to see dozens of comments of complaint regarding the impossibility to take an appointment and some even clearly pointing to the existence of an illegal business of appointments' selling, involving both the Embassy and VFS global. Indeed, according to the interviewees, it is necessary to pay from 200 to 600-700 euros for an appointment to some intermediaries which are believed to be collaborating with the company. Without paying that amount, it is said to be impossible to take an appointment through the company

[43] Starting from the 23rd of March 2023, Senegal joined Aja Convention on Apostille, and as a consequence, legalizations are no more required. However, considering that the interviews have been conducted in February and March 2023, at that time the access to legalization service was still an issue concerning the Embassy.

website. In few cases, some Italian citizens residing in Italy were able to get an appointment by writing to the Embassy through a lawyer and threatening them of legal action. Most of the requested appointments are for family reunion visa, for which the Ministry of Interior has already issued the authorization.

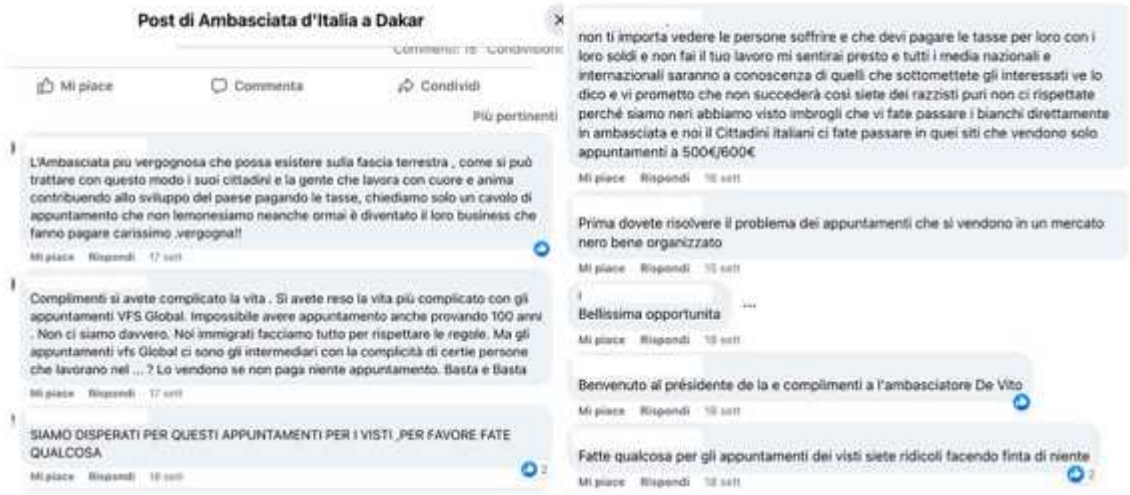



*Figure 15 Comments under Italian Embassy in Dakar Facebook page. Source: Facebook. In the following, an English translation of each comment*
*Comment n.1. This is the most shameful Embassy existing on heart, how can you treat like this your citizens and people working with heart and soul to contribute to the development of the country, paying taxes. We only ask an appointment, we are not begging, no it is become a business, which they make you pay a lot. Shame on you!*
*Comment n. 2. Thanks, you made our life more difficult. You make our life more difficult with VFS Global appointments. It is impossible to have an appointment, even if you try 100 years. It is really not good. We immigrants we do our best to respect the rules. But VFS Global appointments, there are intermediaries selling them with the complicity of some people working in ....? They sell, if you don't buy, no appointment. Stop and stop.*
*Comment n.3 We are desperate for these appointments, please do something.*
*Comment n. 4 You don't care to see people suffering, and paying taxes for them with their money and you are not doing your work. You will hear soon all the national and international media they will know about it, I tell you and I promised it will not go like this, you are pure racist, you don't respect us because we are Blacks, we saw the whites can access directly in the Embassy and us, Italian citizens you force us to pass on this website where they sell appointments 500 to 600 euros.*
*Comment n.5 Before you have to solve the problem of appointments which are sold in a well well-organized black market*
*Comment n. 6 Do something for the visa appointments, you are ridiculous, you are pretending like nothing is happening.*

As it is possible to note, many of the comments point to the unbalance between the Embassy, denying them access unless a sum of money is paid to obtain an appointment on the black market, and their contribution Italian economy, through the payment of taxes. In comment 4, it is also highlighted the issue of discriminatory treatment between whites and Blacks, who are denied access to the Embassy even when they are Italian citizens.

Hamza, a Senegalese born naturalized Italian citizen, is living in Grosseto, Italy. He has tried since more than 2 years to take an appointment to reunite with his family, yet without success.

> "It is more than two years that I am looking for an appointment for family reunion, and I cannot find it. In the meanwhile, my last child is born with a malformation, so that I wanted him to come here to be properly looked after. I knocked on every door to get an appointment, but I could not find. They only proposed me to buy it, but I don't think it is fair. I don't want to pay for an appointment. I am an Italian

> citizen, so the last born he is also an Italian citizen, I only need to transcribe the birth certificate. But unfortunately, I sent thousands of emails to the embassy, I called, I went there, but nothing. When I went there, they gave me a paper, they said I have to call the number, or send an email, or go on the website. I sent thousands of emails, they answered only two times with the list of documents I have to carry along. I have everything already. They said they will give me an appointment, now it is more than a year, but they never give me […] When I was in Senegal, I tried every Friday to take an appointment, but every time you are about to finish the registration it disconnects. I gave up, I don't have any hope. I tried everything, but if you don't pay it is impossible" (*authors' translation from Italian*, Int. with Hamza, telephone, Mar. 2023).

Jean is a Senegalese citizen living in Italy and trying to apply for citizenship, for which he is required to present some documents legalized at the Italian Embassy. He maintained that, while trying to book and appointment for legalization, he came to know about the business. He tried to report it to the Embassy but never received a reply.

> "The problem with the Italian Embassy has been going on for too long now, and also local authorities in Senegal ignored the thing because what is clearly going on is an illicit traffic. Appointments for a visa are sold for almost 500 euros, it is a shame for Italy, Italy is my second nation now. What the Embassy is doing is not normal. I needed an appointment to legalize some documents to apply for citizenship. When I came to know they were selling the appointments, I immediately wrote to the embassy and to the society managing the appointments, VFS, but none answered. I accused directly VFS, if they want, they can report me, I have proofs. I contacted a lawyer here in Italy, he wrote to the Embassy, but none answered." (*authors' translation from Italian*, Int. with Jean, telephone, Mar. 2023)

However, following those emails, Jean claimed to have been contacted by someone through a private number, asking him where he wanted to get with the accusations moved to the Embassy and threatened him to stop.

The other interviewees have all given similar testimonies, regarding the impossibility to access consular services, either for visa request or legalization, and the need to pay intermediaries to be able to have an appointment.

However, the Italian Ambassador in Senegal, Giovanni De Vito, once interviewed, denied all the allegations and maintained that people complaining about problems and corruption are trying to defame the Embassy as well as the Senegalese workers employed by the Embassy.

> "What is important for you to know is that we are clearly against any kind of intermediator, facilitator, mediator, offering services and then going around claiming that he can obtain appointments. We are totally against it, and we invite to report to police anyone who request any kind of remuneration for

> presumed services. It is extremely important for you to know it and to say it. Because it represents a violation not only of Italian, but also of Senegalese law. Defamation is widespread, on social media but also on other media outlets […] We have been accused on social media by people that then go to people like you saying that there are issues in accessing the Embassy, there is no issue, if you see even today there are dozens of people, the issues are related to the fact that there is a high risk of illegal immigration, high risk of document fraud, and there is an excess of demand, compared to the objective capacity of this structure to satisfy it. And unfortunately, there is a strong tendency to call, to report, we are rejecting all these kinds of parallel solicitations, because we want to use the official channel allowed by EU regulation." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with G. De Vito, Italian Ambassador in Senegal, Dakar, Jan. 23)

According to the Consul Alessia Quartetti, the two main issues are the lack of personnel and the high rate of document falsification, imposing on the Embassy an extremely attentive examination of documents.

> "The problems are related to the fact that only one structured employee and two local employees are working in the visa office, and in Italy there are 110.000 Senegalese citizens who want to reunite with their families […]
> [De Vito adds: "and 18 million Senegalese citizens and 120 million citizens of the area who want to go to Italy"]
> […] in 2022 we received 10.000 visa applications, examined about 8.000 and released about 6.500 visas […] If we had more employees, we could process up to 30.000 visas a year." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with G. De Vito and A. Quartetti, Ambassador and Consul of the Italian Embassy in Dakar, Jan. 2023).

Regarding the accusation moved in relation to the activity of VFS and the lack of access to the appointments, Quartetti maintains that "EU regulation mandates to externalize visa service once the threshold of 10.000 visa a year for three consecutive years is reached, which the Embassy cannot manage directly, so in 2016 the service was externalized" (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. A. Quartetti, Consul of the Italian Embassy in Dakar, January 2023). Nevertheless, EU common policy Community Code on Visas (EU Reg. 810/2009, EU Reg. 1155/2019) does not appear to mandate the externalization of consular services but rather to establish the possibility of cooperation between members states and external service providers and the norms regulating this cooperation.
In order to explain the few quotas available on the VFS website, Quartetti compares the mechanism of appointments' management to that of football ticket selling:

> "Having 24 appointments, this is the flux that the embassy can manage. Like if they put on sale tickets for the Champions' League final at 3 pm and at 3.01 pm all the tickets are sold out. It is the same mechanism, everyone wants the ticket, everyone wants the appointment." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with A. Quartetti Consul of the Italian Embassy in Dakar, Jan. 2023).

Yet, if watching a football game is a leisure activity organized by private companies, being able to have access to an appointment to request a visa is a right, especially if an authorization has already been given by competent authorities in Italy. Thus, the comparison made by Quartetti is instructive of the low regard held by the Embassy in securing the respect of rights, which are completely subsumed to a market logic.
Ultimately, according to the Ambassador De Vito, the issue is not that of access to Embassy's services, but rather it should be found in Italy, where so many people have been regularized so that now they can request for family reunion.

> "Something that should be considered is that there is an increase in these requests, descending from a series of Italian norms that allowed many Senegalese, or Gambians, or people with other citizenship, to be regularized. Some norms, such as that of the regularization of labor relations, also imply the regularization of juridical status of these people, and so once they obtain the residency permit, they submit the request for family reunion. If there had not been the flux decree, if there had not been the measures about the regularization of labor relations, there would have not been all this increase of requests. Also, researchers like you, or members of civil society, should explain that there isn't a delay on the side of appointments, but rather we should say "Thank you Italy" that you are regularizing us, allowing our juridical position to emerge. In other countries in Europe, this juridical situations do not emerge, in other countries irregular migrants are expelled. In Italy, in the past years, *clandestini*[44] or how we want to call them, have been regularized. So, the effort should be that of explaining that to find the appointment is just the end of an issue, at the heart is the possibility of regularization." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with G. De Vito, Italian Ambassador in Senegal, Dakar, Jan. 23).

If the Ambassador De Vito connects the high rate of requests of family reunion visa, a right under Italian and EU regulation, to the regularization of "illegal immigrants" in Italy and affirms that he doesn't see any problem in the functioning of the Embassy, but only sees a "high risk of illegal immigration and high risk of document fraud", according to many interviewees, irregular migration is precisely caused by the malfunctioning of Italian Embassy, which is not seen as casual but as deliberate. As Mor, on the interviewees who

[44] The word *clandestini* can be translated in English as "illegal immigrants" with a strongly pejorative connotation in Italy and it is mostly used by the far right when trying to attack migration.

indirectly experienced the difficulty in accessing the Embassy through one of his family members, maintains:

> "When the EU started saying to many embassies not to issue visa, except those who have money, it is then that people started to take boats. They thought to reduce immigration, but they made it worse. 35 years ago, when I emigrated, it was different. You could go to an Embassy, if they refused you the visa, you would go to another one. For instance, I applied France's visa, they rejected it. So, then I applied Belgium visa, and they gave me […] At least when you had visas, you would know who was entering and how many where them. But now you cannot control them. Before they were 500 people a year, now 15.000. They though that by rejecting visas immigration would drop, but it increased." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with Mor, telephone, Mar. 2023).

Similarly, Daniela, who involved in the issue of the Italian Embassy in Dakar following her adoptive son's willingness to reunite with his wife, argues:

> "If the Prefecture issues 1000 authorizations, and the Embassy can process only 3 a week, I think that something is not functioning. Or it is done to favor the black market of appointments? Or maybe they want to create obstacles? Because the lawyer told us that this issue is not only for family reunions, but also for work visas. If people who have an authorization are prevented to take the visa, I think that they want to obstacle them from coming here. […] So, I believe this is a way to obstacle legal migration and promote illegal migration and, after, crying crocodile tears on the graves of those who died at sea. And if you wanted to fight immigration, in this way you only increased it, tripled it, quadrupled it. To do your interests as a State, that is, the exploitation of illegal immigration." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with Daniela, telephone, Mar. 2023).

On the side of actions of protest and resistance, aside from individual stances such as writing to the Embassy through a lawyer threatening a legal suit or accusing the Embassy and VFS on social media, some meetings with the Embassy have been conducted by a network of Senegalese associations and unionists, which however did not bring about many changes.

Abdoulaye Sall, a Senegalese citizen who lived in Verona (Italy) for more than 30 years, has long been a militant of the Verona Migrant Collective. Since he moved back to Senegal in 2016, he has tried to support his fellow citizens in accessing consular services, as a member of the Senegalese Association of returned migrants. However, while in the past through meetings with the Ambassador they were able to find solutions, according to Sall, since the new Ambassador Giovanni De Vito arrived in 2020, things have gotten worse.

> "We had many meetings with the embassy, with a network of associations of Senegalese migrant returnees, association of Italian translators, Senegalese unionists. We had meetings in 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021, the last with this new ambassador who is there, but really things are not improving. The Ambassador who was there before, Francesco Paolo Venier, who died last year, was someone who really loved Senegal, he always met with people, trying to discuss and solve problems. When he retired, De Vito came, in 2020. I can assure you that, since he came, things have gotten worse, none can access services, it is a real mess! […] Before they used to have up to 60-70 appointments a day, now the maximum is 5 to 10 […] We told him that VFS is selling appointments at 200.000, 300.000, 400.000 CFA, but he says no, it is not like that, that he needs profs. But we know how things are going, even if we have receipts, how we can prove it?" (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with A. Sall, telephone, Mar. 2023).

According to Sall, the only solution would be to organize a demonstration in front of the Ministry of Foreign affairs in Italy.

> "We contacted the Farnesina (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), I even tried to discuss with Guinean and Gambian associations, because their embassy is also the one in Dakar, to organize something in front of the Farnesina, but we didn't have enough people. We sent many letters, we spoke with CGIl and CISL, we have many people working there, but the only solution is to make a demonstration in front of the Farnesina, to call journalists, RAI, is the only thing, because we pay taxes, we have right that our children, wives, family members come here to stay with us […] it is incredible, people who are working and paying their taxes, cannot have their family next to them. It is not possible!" (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with A. Sall, telephone, Mar. 2023).

On the other hand, what surprises is the lack of public denounce on the side of Italian NGOs and unions. If the NGOs examined in the previous paragraphs have not taken any public position on the issue, nor organized any action of sensitization or protest, unions, and especially CGIL, with its office INCA present in Dakar, adopted a quite soft position on the issue, avoiding direct condemnation, and preferring an attitude of comprehension and collaboration with the Embassy. Indeed, as maintained by Vanessa Marchese, president of INCA Senegal:

> "Regarding visas, we have a role of observers, we verify irregularities and, in case, we report them to the authorities. We are always in contact with the embassy. For instance, there have been some scandals in relation to the external service provider. The Embassy was unlucky to end up with this company. We noticed some issues related both to appointments, like the website is not working properly, and also the business around it. The website management and maintenance are clearly a responsibility of the company, but for the business around it, until we don't have a proof that the company is involved, nothing can be done. And until now, we did not have any proof. We also noticed abuses in the process

> of dossier deposit, because the company doesn't have the right to refuse a dossier. If you have an appointment and you bring the main documents required, such as photo, passport, flight booking and health insurance, even if the dossier is empty, only the embassy can reject it […]. Since last year, we created a Réseau, made of many Senegalese of diaspora, unionist of CGIL, CISL, UIL, diaspora associations [ndr 2021]. It is the first of its kind. So far, we had two meetings with the Ambassador and regular meetings with the Embassy, we also move in the direction of Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We are trying to improve the situation, when we go there, we explain the main issues. As part of the activity of the Réseau, I wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, asking to increase the investments for the Embassy […] We are working, even though our actions are a bit invisible, we don't care. You will not hear about us, we are very calm, we are not there to shout, we are more experts, so we don't need visibility. We are not interested they talk about us, we are more in the action" (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with V. Marchese, INCA, Dakar, Jan. 2023).

INCA Senegal was also the coordinator of two "projects of pre-departure civic linguistic orientation and training finalized to the entry for family reunions" respectively FORM@, from November 2017 to October 2019, funded by a 2016 AMIF call for a total amount of 2.994.506,49 million euros, and Form@2, financed by a 2019 AMIF call, going on from 2020 to 2022, for a total amount of 1.3 million euros. While FORM@ was active in 11 countries, FORM@2 was active in 5, among which Senegal.

According to Marchese, the aim of the project FORM@2 was that of "accompanying to regular and responsible immigration". It was dedicated to holders of authorization of entry for family reunion, who had the possibility to have a free support, both for a short Italian language and civic education course, and also for assistance to the preparation of visa dossier.

> "The training is of 10 hours divided in two days, which even if it seems small, it is ok because the users are mostly semi-illiterate women, who cannot stay outside of the house for too long. We give them basic knowledge of Italian, for the airport, Italian laws, we explain that in Italy there is equality between man and women, that the permit once they will have it is their own, that in Italy school is mandatory, etc. Things that seem stupid but if we don't tell them none will." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with V. Marchese, INCA, Dakar, Jan. 2023).

Ibrahim Niane, who is a CGIL representative in Brescia, also maintained that the three confederate unions CGIL-CISL-UIL sent multiple requests of meeting to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but never received a response. At the same time, he argues that, from their headquarter in Brescia, they used to send direct requests to the Embassy for appointments, and the Embassy normally gives them.

Therefore, while both CGIL and INCA have a role as interlocutors and intermediaries with the Embassy, no public stance has been taken on the issue and in Italy no news regarding a public condemnation of the violation of rights of thousands of Senegalese citizens, as well as citizens of the other five countries covered by the Embassy, can be found. This approach of cooperation with institution and avoidance of conflict on the side of unions as well as other non-governmental actors, appears to be a central feature in the reproduction of structures of oppression under racial capitalism. The self-definition as an expert or technician, working in silence without being interested to take a public stance against the malfunctioning of public administration, represents an attempt to depoliticize issues that are the result of political choices. Further, as it will be further examined in following chapters, what can be highlighted about the relationship between European NGOs, unions and institutions is an increasing tendency of European NGOs and unions to develop projects entirely funded by EU and Italian governmental, and in turn adopting an attitude of cooperation and avoid denouncing public services' malfunctioning, abuses, corruption, and rights' violations.

**Conclusion**

Through the present chapter we have tried to propose an overview of the evolution of racial capitalism in West Africa, one of the places that has been at the center of the development of racial capitalism and its expansion and the global level, suffering among the most profound consequences. If in the past racial capitalism was based on the enslavement and colonization of racialized people in West Africa for the purpose of labor exploitation, nowadays mechanisms of control and management of global labor supply have become more subtle.

As we have tried to illustrate in former paragraphs, while policies of externalization and restriction of the freedom of movement in West Africa take many different shapes, among which the more expensive and violent are certainly those of border militarization and externalization through the cooperation with third countries governments, the cooperation between institutional actors and non-governmental actors also represents a relevant feature in this panorama, especially on the side of neutralization of conflict. Indeed, as it has been shown in the previous paragraphs in relation to the fight against irregular migration in Senegal and Gambia, all those actors of Italian civil society operating in Senegal which in light of their role as Non-Governmental Organizations they were supposed to denounce

Italian and European policies of restriction of freedom of movement, appear instead to be reproducing EU narrative of "fight against irregular migration" through the implementation of EU funded projects, developed according to EU guidelines and objectives. In this sense, if we had previously defined "NGO-ization of resistance" the tendency of resistance and pressure groups to be increasingly professionalized and to structure their action according to donors' interests rather than their reference groups, we can now talk of a "governmentalization of NGOs" which appear always less independent from governments both in their fundings and in their objectives.

At the same time, also the case of the Italian Embassy in Dakar is extremely instructive of the contemporary functioning of racial capitalism. Indeed, as already maintained in the second chapter, following the formal abolition of slavery and colonialism, these have been replaced by the establishment of the border regime, as a "system of global apartheid" (Sharma 2005), where discrimination and segregation are enacted through the implementation of national and international regulation. The supposedly race-blindness of legal mechanisms, together with processes of bureaucratization, allows for the discharge of responsibility in the act of rights' violation, justified through contingent factors or even denied in absence of clear evidence.

Furthermore, as it is also seen across European countries and it will be further explored in following chapters, the digitalization of procedures in public services represents a double-sided issue. If on the one hand it is said to make the procedure more efficient without the need to be physically present, on the other hand, it can create an insurmountable barrier, in the moment in which the online service is not properly working and the access through online platform is affirmed as being the only possible. As the testimonies reported in the previous paragraphs show, the externalization of the service of visa appointments to a private company which manages requests of appointments only online, and the unwillingness of Italian Embassy to acknowledge malfunctioning in the process and take a step, represents an insurmountable barrier for visa applicants, who are forced to pay high prices in the black market of appointments or instead renounce to reunite with their families in Italy.

# CHAPTER 5

# DEFINING ITALIAN AGRICULTURAL RACIAL CAPITALISM: RACIALIZATION, AGRICULTURE AND THE SUBALTERN INCLUSION OF MIGRANT WORKERS

In order to define the shape of contemporary Italian agricultural racial capitalism it is first necessary to contextualize and examinate the specificities and history of Italian racial capitalism. Indeed, if racial capitalism can be used as a framework to explore the entanglement between racism and capitalism, this has to be done by taking into consideration the specificity of each context of analysis. Most of the literature mentioned in chapter two has been produced with regard to Northern America, and, while there are similarities, there are also differences in the histories of race and coloniality in Italy, as well as in the contemporary shapes of racial capitalism.

Internal and external colonialism have played a major role in the construction of Italian national identity and economy since the unification of Italy in the 1860's, representing a specific declination of racial capitalism in the Italian context. If until the 1980's Italy remained a country of emigration, considered as a pool of cheap labor and its inhabitants constructed as racially inferior in both Northern Europe and Northern America, following its economic development, increasing number of people started choosing Italy as their migratory destination. In the late 1980s', with Italy's transformation from a country of emigration to a country of immigration, Italian government began to approve a series of reforms aimed at regulating the entry and stay of non-European citizens. While freedom of movement within the EU was granted to European citizens following the signature of Schengen Treaties, the entry of non-European citizens was restricted and their right to stay further regulated. Starting from the approval of decree-law 1998/286, Italian politicians would make of immigration the core of their political propaganda, reforming regulations each time a new government came to power. The evolution of the normative framework went hand in hand with the shifting patterns of racialization, according to which different national and racial group were categorized. Following 2011 Libyan civil war and the surge in sea arrivals from the African continent, Italy recorded a peak in racially motivated aggression and killings at the expenses of migrants of African origin, mostly racialized as Blacks. The surge in sea arrivals, taken together with the lack of reforms of immigration legislation, turned asylum claims into the only tool available for regularization. This favored

the far-right narrative regarding bogus asylum seekers and was at heart of the restrictive reforms that started being adopted from 2017, strongly limiting the right to asylum.
As maintained by various scholars (Dines, Rigo 2015; Dines 2023), in the past decade the issue of migrant labor in the agricultural sector has been deeply intertwined with the asylum process and the humanitarian management of migration. The province of Foggia as become an attractive pool for rejected asylum seekers and holders of international and humanitarian protection, who moved there both in order to work in the agricultural sector and to seek refuge from the increasingly restrictive immigration legislation that made hundreds of thousands of people undocumented. In the past decade, the province of Foggia has been considered as the emblem of *caporalato* and migrant labor exploitation. However, the reason underlying this classification does not simply lie on the actual rate of exploitation but also on the media representation that often equates rural informal settlements with exploitation and *caporalato*.
In the following pages, we will explore the entanglement between these three dimensions of Italian agricultural racial capitalism, that are the racial-colonial history of Italy, the implementation of institutional racism through restrictive and exclusionary immigration policies, as well as the shape of its agricultural system of production.

## 5.1 Racism and coloniality in Italy: Italian colonial past, internal colonialism and contemporary racism

Internal and external colonialism have played a major role in the construction of Italian national identity and economy since the unification of Italy in the 1860's, representing a specific declination of racial capitalism in the Italian context. In the following paragraphs, following an analysis regarding the role of racism and coloniality in the building of Italian national and racial identity, the focus will be moved on exploring the contemporary shape of racism in Italy.

### 5.1.1 Unifying Italy by excluding the "Other": internal colonialism, Italian colonial mission and internal racism

In order to trace the origins of contemporary forms of racism and racial capitalism in Italy, Miguel Mellino (2012a:87) suggests looking at the "coloniality of Italian national formation", that is, considering the ways in which the process of national formation has been

inscribed into global coloniality and thus analyzing how "race, racism, and racialization have fractured the Italian national space ever since the birth of the nation." Indeed, as maintained by Mellino:

> "it is not possible to understand contemporary Italian racism against postcolonial migrants, namely contemporary racialization processes of international migration within the national space, without taking into account the cultural, political, and economic construction (i.e., the role within historical Italian capitalism) of its main predecessors: historical racism against the southerner and the colonial Other (during the early liberal and Fascist period), the Jew (in the later Fascist period), and the southern migrant worker (in the second post-war republic)." (ibid.)

If in other European countries colonization took place after the creation of a nation-state, in Italy the very process of unification was an expression of internal colonialism, with Northern Italy colonization of Southern Italy. Internal colonialism and racism against Southern Italians have long been central to debates regarding the specificity of Italian post-colonial experience. Antonio Gramsci theorized extensively about the centrality of Southern Italy in the building of Italian capitalism, as well as on the role of anti-Southern racism in dividing the working class and preventing socialist revolution. As he argued:

> "Northern bourgeoisie subjugated Southern Italy and the islands, reducing them to colonies for the purpose of exploitation; the Northern working class, by emancipating itself from capitalist slavery, will free Southern peasant masses, subdued to bank and to parasitic Northern industrialism" (*author's translation from Italian*, Gramsci 1987:377)

Gramsci's thoughts on the Southern Question and internal colonialism were organized in the unfinished work "Some aspects of the Southern Questions" which, together with other writings from the Prisons' Notebook, inspired many anglophone postcolonial authors, giving birth to the Subaltern Studies. In "Some aspects of the Southern Question", Gramsci maintained that the conceptualization of Southerners as "biologically inferior beings" had been central to the unification project and, in post-unification Italy, it had been functional to dismiss Southern economic underdevelopment as a consequence of the inherently "lazy" and "barbaric" nature of southerners, rather than as a result of unequal capitalist development related to Northern extractivist economy. According to Jane Schneider's (1998) edited volume "Italy's "Southern Question: Orientalism in one Country", discourses on Southern Italy from unification to present days have been based on a mechanism of inferiorization of Southerners similar to that described by Edward Said in Orientalism,

whereby the process of Othering was centered on the reproduction of a stereotyped and essentialized image of "colonial" subjects, centered upon dichotomies.
As maintained by Camilla Hawthorne (2022:8), who wrote one of the first books analyzing the entanglement between blackness and citizenship in Italy, Italian citizenship was connected from the very first beginning with shifting racial boundaries.

> "Since the origins of the Italian nation-state itself, the process of constructing the ever-shifting racial boundaries of Italian citizenship has been bound up with notions of Blackness, Mediterraneanness, and the production of space. Following the Risorgimento project of Italian national unification, which lasted from 1848 until the incorporation of Rome as Italy's capital in 1871, citizenship was defined in relation to both southern Italians and Africans. The consolidation of the geobody of Italy out of a patchwork collection of city-states and empires into a nation-state was intertwined with processes of internal colonialism. Southern Italy was understood by northern Italian elites through an Orientalist lens of cultural and civilizational inferiority due to its perceived geographical and racial proximity to the African continent (i.e., the so-called Southern Question). This racial mapping must also be understood as a response to northern European racial theorists' dismissal of the Italian peninsula as a site of racially impure, degenerated Mediterraneans. And, in a foreshadowing of the ways that Black Italians today draw on diasporic resources from Black Americans, these debates about southernness and Mediterraneanness in Italy also unfolded in relation to struggles over racism, nationalism, and citizenship in the United States. Giuseppe Mazzini, a politician, journalist, and leader of the Italian unification movement, once declared that Italians were the "the negroes of Europe"—a metaphor intended to highlight the subjugation of Italians and rally support for the nationalist cause. Across the Atlantic, in the United States, southern Italian immigrants were systematically classified as racially proximate to Black Americans (due to the transnational influence of the same racial theories that orientalized southern Italy during and after the Risorgimento), and were only fully incorporated into the category of whiteness around the mid-twentieth century."

The racial categorization of southerners as inferior co-existed, also in contradictory terms, with that of Eastern and Northern African populations, and it underwent transformation from the liberal period to the fascist one. Following unification, Southerners' inferiorization was a way for Northern elites to dismiss Northern European categorization of Italy as a racially inferior country, in light of its geographical and cultural proximity with Africa, by arguing that two races were present in Italy, the Aryan and the Mediterranean one (Hawthorne 2022).
However, at the beginning of the 20$^{th}$ century, Italy embarked in its journey towards racial unification by directing outside his national territory "Italian racial uncertainties", through the Libyan colonial campaign (ibid:106). Until the early 1930's, racial purity was not yet sanctioned, and interracial relationships were conceived as a way to further consolidate

Italian imperial aspirations, with Italian men in the colonies often involved in extramarital relationship with local women, both consensual and non-consensual, so-called *madamato.* It is in this context that hyper-sexualizing representations of Black women were produced and circulated, and colonization was represented through erotic and sexual metaphors. However, following the invasion of Ethiopia in 1936, Mussolini decided that no space was to be left for claims regarding Italian racial inferiority, and in 1937 interracial relations were forbidden, and various regimes of segregations introduced in the colonies. With the publishing in 1938 of the Manifesto of Racial scientists (or Race Manifesto), the existence of a pure Italian race belonging to the Aryan one was affirmed, while at the same time any theory suggesting a common origin shared by European Mediterraneans and African Mediterraneans was dismissed as dangerous. Therefore, as Hawthorne maintains:

> "the earliest attempts by the Fascist state to legally calcify the racial categorization of Italians as white Aryans actually emerged *first* as a strategy to contain the Mediterranean contact zone, and only then served as the model for the 1938 racial laws targeting the Jews (as well as Romani and Sinti populations) as Italy's "internal enemy"" (ibid. 109).

Even though the birth of Italy as a nation was tight to colonialism and racism since its inception - with the very process of unification characterizing itself as an expression of internal colonialism and followed just a decade after by the colonial mission in Eritrea - the legacy of Italian colonialism has been dramatically absent from the public debate until recently. Italian society has not yet come to terms with its past, absolving itself from the crimes perpetrated in the colonies both during the liberal and the fascist period, as well as from the promulgation of racial anti-Semitic laws, considered as a mere outcome of the alliance with Nazi Germany. The mith of "*Italiani Brava gente*" ("Italians, the good people" or the "good Italians") has survived until nowadays as a process of historical revisionism aimed at rejecting the perpetration of war crimes and genocide by the Italians during colonial campaigns in Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Libya and during the Holocaust. This can be considered as part of the process of "de-fascistization" of fascism, which took place following the end of Second World War, in order to rehabilitate Italian ruling classes which had participated to fascism and continued to be part of the Italian political elites (Mellino 2012a). If until the 1990's there was an actual lack of research and historical works investigating the history of Italian colonialism, nowadays there has been a flourishing of scholarly investigations, so that the removal of Italian colonial past from Italian public debate cannot be anymore considered as a consequence of a lack of evidence, and it does

instead represent a deliberate decision to obscure Italian colonialism and its legacy (Mellino 2022).

In this context, while it is fundamental to historically account for the atrocities committed by Italy in the colonies, it is also necessary to explore the ways in which racialized people have been dehumanized and objectified by Italian propaganda for the purpose of colonial domination. It is therefore crucial to "de-provincialize Italian modern history" by exploring the ways in which race and racialization have played a central role in the foundation of Italy as a modern nation-state, defining both the relationship between Northern and Southern Italy and between Italy and its colonies (Mellino 2012a).

### 5.1.2 Racism and anti-racism in postcolonial Italy: from Jerry Masslo killing to contemporary forms of everyday racism.

As a result of the collective refusal to come to terms with Italian racial-colonial history, following the Second World War and just until very recently, race became an unspeakable word in the Italian public debate. It was even debated whether to introduce the word "race" at art. 3 of Italian Constitution, where it is maintained that:

> "All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions.".

During the drafting of the Constitutional Chart, some proponents maintained that due to its negative connotation and false claims to biological difference, race should be deleted from the text, replaced with other words, such as ethnicity or lineage. Others, on the contrary, argued that precisely in light of the historical legacy of the word in the Italian context, and the willingness of the newly constituted Republic to dissociate itself from the crimes and horrors of Fascism, it was necessary to use the word "race". Nevertheless, until very recently, not only race was not commonly used in the Italian public debate, but also in-depth reflections regarding the historical roots of contemporary racism were not present in the public debate. If in the UK and France, for instance, the debate about race, colonialism and racism became central thanks to the contribution of citizens from the colonies who were able to voice their own perspective, in Italy the issue of underlying racism inscribed in the Italian social fabric started emerging only in the 1990's, thanks to the struggle of migrants (Mellino 2022). However, according to Hawthorne (2022:121) "Italy has always defined itself in

relationship to Blackness via the Mediterranean, even before Italy became a major destination for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa".

While awareness regarding Italian racism emerged starting from 1990's, it would take about three decades before the language and practice of anti-racism started being decolonized, and an understanding of racism as a system of oppression historically rooted on the hierarchization of human species in races for the purposes of exploitation, rather than as a general form of discrimination against foreigners, would start making his way into the anti-racist movement as well as in academia. Indeed, as already mentioned in the first and second chapter, Italian antiracism has long been characterized by a race and color-blind, pietist and humanitarian attitude that has prevented it from both centering the voices of racialized people and from achieving an understanding of racism beyond a mere tool of class division. Anti-racism has often been equated with the fight for migrants as a whole, without developing any in-depth analysis regarding the ways in which different migrant communities are differently affected by racism. Therefore, the focus of both activism and academia had been placed, until recently, on denouncing or investigating both restrictive immigration legislation and occupational segregation of migrant workers within Italian economy. These perspectives, while fundamental for the insight given on the functioning of borders and labor market, often missed to situate the experience of migrants in Italy in a historical and global perspective, also accounting for different degrees of discrimination and exclusion from the public space in light of different racial categorizations. While the intersection between status, race, class and gender started being investigated in the academic field with the spread of postcolonial studies (Mezzadra 2008; Mellino 2012b), this deeper political awareness entered the public debate only very recently, with the adoption of concepts such as "racial capitalism", "white supremacy", "institutional racism", "white privilege" which had, until that moment, been absent from Italian anti-racist activism (Mellino 2022).

Following the globalization of Black Lives Matter protests in 2016, increasing numbers of Afro-Italians and children of migrants, started being at the center of the stage in protest against racism, sharing their personal experience and shedding light on the violence of Italian racial system, particularly affecting people of African descent. As a matter of fact, following the surge in sea arrivals from Libya starting from 2011, racist attacks become increasingly more visible in the Italian scene, documented thanks to the use of modern technologies, allowing for the recording and sharing of videos of forms of discrimination, abuses and killings. The years between 2016 and 2018 recorded a peak in racist violent

attacks and homicides, mostly at the expenses of Black Sub-Saharan African citizens, considered as the emblem of "illegal immigration" and demonized by the far-right anti-immigration propaganda. In those years, there were multiple racially motivated murders or attempted murders, such as the heinous killing of Emmanuel Chidi Nnamdi in Fermo in July 2016, the mass shooting taking place in Macerata in February 2018, the shooting of Idy Diene in Florence in March 2018, the shooting of Soumaila Sacko in San Ferdinando (RC) in June 2018. These crimes took place in an increasingly oppressive atmosphere, characterized by an incessant anti-immigration propaganda promoted not only by the far-right party League, but also by other parties such as Five Star Movement and Democratic Party. As highlighted by the Nation Office Against Racial Discrimination (UNAR – Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali), also 2021 saw a surge in racially motivated aggression, even though data are largely underestimated.

> "The hate pyramid traced by UNAR places at the top people attacked for ethnic-racial reasons: 2021 recorded 709 cases, compared to the 545 of 2020. Of these, 499 victims are foreigners. Following, people attacked for their "skin color" can be found (137), to whom insults in line with a rigid script and dear to the racist vocabulary are addressed: "dirty n****r", "dirty Moroccan", "illegal immigrant", "go away", "go back where you come from". Words emblematic of the feeling of hate and the prejudice of inferiority based on "race"." (*author's translation from Italian*, UNAR 2022).

Just before national elections took place in September 2022, Italy experienced a racial killing similar to that of George Floyd in the United States: Alika Ogorchukwu a Black Nigerian man was beaten to death by a white Italian stranger on one of the main streets of Civitanova Marche, amid the indifference of bystanders. These racially motivated murders, together with many other attacks and forms of discriminations suffered by racialized people in Italy, raised awareness among racialized people in general, and more specifically among people racialized as Black, that they could always be considered a target of racial violence, regardless of their origin, status and length of their stay in Italy.

However, it is fundamental to recall that the history of anti-black racial violence in Italy did not start in 2016, as proved by the killing of Jerry Masslo in 1989, the shooting of eight West African migrants in Castel Volturno in 2008[45] and the Rosarno racist attacks in 2010, among many other episodes. Jerry Masslo holds a particular place in the history of Italian racism and anti-racism, in that his killing made clear the racial structure of Italian

[45] 2008 massacre in Castel Volturno saw the commando of local mafia attacking a tailoring shop. The victims were from Ghana, Liberia and Togo: Kwame Antwi Julius Francis, Affun Yeboa Eric, El Hadji Ababa, Jeemes Alex, Samuel Kwako, Christopher Adams. Joseph Ayimbora, was the only survivor of the massacre.

society as well as the relationship between racism and agricultural work. Masslo's killing was at heart of the first anti-racist national demonstration, taking place in Italy on the 7th of October 1989, leading to the approval of the first comprehensive law on immigration, so-called Martelli Law. Masslo was a South African refugee, living between Rome and Villa Literno, where, during the summer season, he was employed in the tomato harvesting. On the night of the 24th of August 1989, the abandoned farmhouse where Masslo and other of his fellow workers were living was attacked by a group of local criminals, willing to steal the workers' salary, earned in the previous two months. Masslo tried resisting the attackers and the was killed as a consequence of that. In a TV interview recorded just few days before his killing, Masslo highlighted the racial discrimination suffered by Black people in Italy, which he would have never expected coming from South Africa.

> "I escaped from my homeland, South Africa, due to racial persecution that destroyed my family, teared my loved ones, disrupted my existence. I thought that in Italy I could find a life, a hope of civilization, a welcoming community allowing me to live in peace and cultivate a dream of a tomorrow without barriers or prejudices. Yet, I am disappointed. Being Black in this country represents a limit to civil coexistence. Racism is here as well: is made of prevarications, abuses and daily violence against those who are just standing for solidarity and respect. We immigrants of the Third World are contributing to the development of your country, but it seems as if it didn't matter. Sooner or later, one of us will be killed, and then you will realize that we exist. White people exploit you, they don't give you water to wash yourself and they treat you as a dirty n****r. In the countryside, the atmosphere is tense. The bosses have become arrogant, violent and cruel. They pull out their gun for no reasons. In the villages, we are victims of aggressions, robberies and discrimination. The police do not protect us, rather they look at n*****s with suspicion. Help us, before it is too late." (Di Luzio 2008:54)

Yet, anti-black racism does not manifest itself only through violent attacks, which represent the apex of a pyramid made of everyday forms of discrimination, abuses, and stigmatization. Thanks to the centering of racialized voices, in the past few years increasing awareness has been raised on the everyday forms of racial discrimination and institutional racism suffered by racialized and/or migrant subjects in Italy. Social media have increasingly become a tool to share and denounce experiences of discrimination, exploring the interlocking between racial, class, status and gender oppression. Anti-racist activists and authors have shed light on the ways in which stereotypical representation of people racialized as Black are continuously reproduced in contemporary Italy through the deployment of colonial tropes. For instance, in 2017, the far-right group Forza Nuova repurposed for their anti-immigration propaganda a Fascist manifesto, portraying a

caricatural Black man assaulting a white woman, titled "Defend her from new invaders. She could be your mother, you wife, your sister, your daughter" (fig.16), thus highlighting the historical connection between contemporary and historical forms of anti-black racism. In this context, while Black men have often been portrayed as violent, dangerous and characterized by excessive physical strength, Black women have often been associated with lust, sensuality, and sexual availability.

*Figure 16 Forza Nuova racist manifesto. Source: Il Fatto Quotidiano.*

In the past decades, a new form of racism has also emerged in the context of migrant rights activism. This is based on the conceptualization of racialized people, and most especially those of African descent, as victims in constant need of assistance (Obasuy 2020). This has been constantly fueled by humanitarian organization offering a stigmatized representation of the African continent as inherently poor and of any person of African origin as being in a constant need of aid and charity, for the purpose of fund raising. This image is further reproduced through the non-consensual sharing of images representing malnourished Black children, often being assisted by white Western volunteers or doctors. As highlighted by various activists and authors, this form of implicit racism is not less dangerous that the openly violent racist attitude, in that it keeps denying the full humanity of involved subjects, through infantilization and patronizing attitudes.

In addition to highlighting these forms of implicit and explicit racism, the attention of the new generation anti-racist activists and racialized subjects has also continued to denounce the multiple forms of institutional racism, perpetrated by the Italian government mostly through the adoption of restrictive immigration legislation and the lack of amendment of outdated regulations, further exacerbated by the racist attitude of immigration officers. As highlighted by Hawthorne (2022), the issue of citizenship remains one of the most crucial battles for those who, despite being born and having spent their entire life in Italy, continue to be considered as "immigrants". This is due to an outdated citizenship legislation that dates back to the 1991-1992, when Italy was just entering its new phase as a country of immigration. Despite its relevance, this work will not focus on the legislation concerning the acquisition of citizenship by children born or raised in Italy, for which we suggest looking at Hawthorne's work. Instead, in the following pages an analysis of the

evolution of Italian normative framework in relation to the recognition of the right to stay will be proposed, exploring Italian immigration regulation by looking at its different phases of evolution, or involution, in light of the changing socio-political context.

## 5.2 The subaltern inclusion of non-EU migrants: the evolution of normative framework

In the past thirty years, immigration legislation has represented the core of political propaganda in Italy, being amended cyclically by every new government. Nevertheless, these amendments have often been pejorative, and have never dealt with the underlying issue regarding the implementation of a structural mechanism for the legal entry and regularization of non-EU citizens. We can highlight three main phases of the evolution of the immigration legislation in Italy: from 1986 to 2009, going from the approval of the first laws regulating immigration and the management of migration mainly through the tool of labor migration and mass regularizations, characterized by a coexistence between regularization and criminalization of "illegal migration"; from 2011 to 2018, corresponding to the phase of "refugeezation of migration", during which migration was managed mainly through asylum; and the last, on-going phase, from 2018 to 2023, that has seen the approval of increasingly restrictive legislation and criminalization of migration, merged with an attempt to re-establish Flux Decrees as the major tool for regular entry.

### 5.2.1 From the first laws on immigration to the "illegal immigration" crime: between criminalization and regularization

Until the late 1990's, Italy did not pass any law regulating immigration, and the stay of foreigners was still disciplined by Fascist law, and more specifically by law n. 773 of 1931 on public security (*Testo Unico delle Leggi di Pubblica Sicurezza*).

The first law regulating the employment of foreign workers was approved by the Italian parliament in 1986 (law n. 903/1986), under the name of "Rules regarding the employment and treatment of extra-European immigrants and against illegal immigrations". In transposition of International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions, the law established the principle of equal rights between Italian and extra-European workers legally residing in Italy, introducing the right to family reunion and access to healthcare and social assistance. At the same time, l. 903/1986 introduced the principle that would have continued to govern

Italian immigration legislation until present days, that is, the constitutive tension between "legal" and "illegal"[46] migration, embodied in the coexistence of provisions repressing "illegal immigration" and others aimed at promoting regularization. As a matter of fact, l.943/1986 inaugurated the long history of so-called *sanatorie* (regularizations) defined as emergency tools aimed at the regularization of undocumented migrants, and yet representing a structural feature of Italian immigration management (Colucci 2020). As a result of the 1986 sanatoria, 116.000 people obtained a residency permit.

In 1990, the more comprehensive law n. 39/1990, so-called Martelli Law, regarding not only the entry and stay for working reasons, but also for humanitarian and political one, was approved, following the conversion of decree n. 416 of 30 December 1989 under the name of "Urgent rules on political asylum, entry and stay of extra-European citizens and regularization of extra-European citizens and stateless persons already present on the State territory". This decree holds a central place in relation to the anti-racist struggle and recognition of migrant rights in Italy, in that it was approved as a result of the massive anti-racist mobilization that took place on the 7th of October 1989 in Rome, following the killing of Jerry Masslo. Jerry Masslo was a South African refugee who had not been granted refugee status by Italy in light of the geographic limitation of Geneva convention, which had not yet been removed by Italian regulation, despite the approval of 1967 Geneva Convention Protocol. Decree n. 416, by removing the geographic limitation, extended the right to asylum to anyone, regardless of their country of origin. At the same time, the decree introduced a series of new regulations regarding the right to stay and entry on the Italian territory, always following the tension between "legal" and "illegal" migration. Indeed, while on the one hand the law introduced a planning of entries and staying for working reasons - to be agreed in light of the needs of Italian labor market - and implemented a new *sanatoria*, it also disciplined for the first time the expulsion of migrants considered as "socially dangerous" or simply undocumented. According to art. 7, anyone in violation of the rules of entry and stay on the Italian territory could be expelled, following the decision of Prefecture further supported by an order to leave the territory within 15 days issued by Police Immigration Office. This provision would open the floor more restrictive rules, implemented by decree-law 286/1998 few years later. At the same time, as a result of the 1990 sanatoria, 215.000 non-EU citizens obtained a residency permit. In 1995, decree-law n. 489 was approved,

[46] Quote marks are here used to highlight the use of the term "illegal" as employed by regulations, media and politicians, stressing at the same time the way in which defining a certain type of immigration as "illegal" plays a central role in the criminalization of migration as a whole, hiding that the structural conditions underlying the very existence of "illegal immigration" are produced by governments.

under the name of "Urgent rules concerning immigration policies and regulation of the right of non-EU citizens to entry and stay on the national territory", with the aim to "rationalize" immigration legislation to guarantee a more effective management of immigration in Italy. While the decree was not eventually converted into law, it nevertheless implemented another *sanatoria,* involving 244.000 foreign citizens.

Following ten years of emergency driven approach to immigration, in 1998 the Italian government decided to approve a more comprehensive law, regulating every aspect of immigration. With law n. 40/1998, so-called Turco-Napolitano, the government was delegated to approve a decree including all the previous and current disposition on immigration, giving birth to decree-law n. 286/1998, under the name of "Consolidated act of regulations regarding immigration legislation and the condition of foreigners". Despite having been amended multiple times following its approval, decree-law n. 286/1998 represents until nowadays the text of reference for immigration regulation in Italy. As a consequence of Italy's application to join the Schengen Space in 1997, the Italian government was demanded to place restrictions to the entry and stay of non-EU citizen, limiting their access to visa as well as inaugurating the concept of "administrative detention" for undocumented migrants (Salerni, no date). The introduction of *Centri di Permanenza Temporanea (CPT),* with art. 12 of law n. 40/1998, represents the emblem of the dichotomy established in the Italian legislation between "legal" and "illegal" immigration, which institutionalizes the detention of people for the mere fact of not holding a valid residency permit, ultimately criminalizing undocumentedness well before the crime of "illegal immigration" was introduced in 2009. In the following decades, CPTs, later renamed first CIEs and then CPRs, have been the theatre of the worst kind of atrocities, human right violations and abuses of migrant citizens, with multiple people losing their lives as a consequence of beatings or suicides, and have been described as "black holes", where no constitutional rights are guaranteed (CILD 2021).

At the same time, law n. 40/1998 and decree-law n. 286/1998, regulate the entry and stay of foreign citizens, introducing the quota system for the entry for working purposes. According to art. 3 clause 4, the government is supposed to establish every year a limit to the entry of foreign citizens for subordinate work, seasonal work and self-employment, through the publishing of a decree, so-called *Decreto Flussi* (Flux Decree). At the same time, art. 21 introduced the sponsor mechanism, allowing for a non-EU foreign citizen to be granted an entry visa upon invitation by an Italian or documented foreign citizen, able to provide for their housing, sustenance and healthcare insurance. Finally, art. 22 regulates the procedures

and requirements to be followed for the employment of non-EU foreign citizens, also establishing at clause 10 the employment of undocumented migrants as a crime, punishable with the imprisonment of the employer from six-months to three years, and the payment of fine.

At the beginning of the year 2000, and following 9/11, Italy recorded a raise in the anti-immigration propaganda, further strengthened by the right-wing government of Silvio Berlusconi, which included the neo-fascist party *Allenza Nazionale* and the far-right secessionist party of *Lega Nord.* The Deputy Prime Minister Gianfranco Fini and the Minister of Institutional Reforms Umberto Bossi, respectively from *Alleanza Nazionale* and *Lega Nord* were precisely the two first signatories of law n. 189 of 20 July 2002, so-called *Bossi-Fini* law, amending decree-law 286/1998 and introducing new restrictive and criminalizing rules.

*Bossi-Fini* law further strengthened the dichotomy between "legal" and "illegal" immigration, establishing the non-compliance with an expulsion order as a crime and increasing the maximum time of administrative detention from thirty to sixty days. It also introduced the possibility of administrative detention for asylum seekers and accelerated procedures for manifestly groundless asylum requests. At the same time, the regular entry and stay in Italy was rendered increasingly difficult, due to the ineffectiveness of the quota system and the abolition of the sponsorship mechanism. Furthermore, law n. 189/2002 introduced the so-called "*contratto di soggiorno"* (residence contract) as a requirement to obtain a residency permit for subordinate work following the entry through *Decreto Flussi* as well as to renew the permit once expired. *Bossi-Fini* law, in force until nowadays despite some amendments, has been widely criticized for its crystallization of a link between the right of residence and the holding of a working contract. Nevertheless, the same law also implemented the largest regularization of Italian history, involving 643.000 people (Colucci 2020), thus further exposing the contradiction inherent to the dichotomy between "legal" and "illegal" immigration.

Following the fall of Berlusconi government in 2005 and the formation of a left-wing government, led by Romano Prodi, some positive interventions on Italian immigration legislation were made, mostly in transposition of European Directives on the subject of international protection (decree-law n. 251 of 19th November 2007 and decree-law n. 25 of 28th January 2008) and right to family cohesion of European citizens' family members (decree-law n. 30 of 6th February 2007). Nevertheless, Prodi government did not amend the *Bossi Fini* law, whose restrictive structure was further exacerbated with the approval of law

n. 94 of 15th July 2009, so-called "*Pacchetto Sicurezza*" (Security Set), by Berlusconi government in 2009. The major intervention brought by this law was that of implementing the full criminalization of migration, through the establishment of the crime of "illegal" entry and stay, so-called "*reato di clandestinità*" ("illegal immigration crime"), following the amendment of art. 10-bis of decree-law 286/1998. According to this provision, the mere entry or stay in the Italian territory without a visa or a valid residency permit constituted a crime, punishable with the payment of a fine from 5.000 to 10.000 euro. Furthermore, law n. 94 modified Italian criminal code, at art. 61 clause 11-bis, defining the fact of being undocumented while committing a crime as an aggravating circumstance, provision eventually declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court in July 2010 (Salerni, no date). In addition to these, the Security Set also criminalizes private citizens renting houses to undocumented migrants, who can be charged from six-months to three years in jail, and further criminalizes the aiding and abetting of "illegal immigration", punishable with incarceration from one to five years (art. 12 of decree-law 286/1998). Finally, law n. 94 also intervenes on the subject of civil registration of people without a fixed abode, establishing that the person, at the moment of request, is required to provide all the necessary elements for the conduction of assessments regarding the effective existence of the domicile.

Ultimately, the first two decades of immigration regulation in Italy were characterized by the co-existence of restrictive measures - aimed at limiting the possibilities of regular entry and stay -, repressive measures - aimed at the criminalization of irregular stay, to be prosecuted through expulsion, administrative detention and criminal charges -, as well as collective regularizations - aimed at filling the gaps and flaws of existing regulations. The fictitious dichotomy between "legal" and "illegal" immigration was therefore exposed first and foremost by the very normative interventions, which while restricting in principle the issuance of residency permits and criminalizing "illegal" entry, ultimately legitimized it through the approval of collective regularizations aimed at the issuance of working permits, involving, such as in the case of 2002, more than 600.000 people. Despite these contradictions, the anti-immigration propaganda continued to fuel political debates, through the negative stereotyping of specific nationalities as "criminals", "drug dealers", "rapists", etc. This panorama, both in relation to the management of migration and to the representation of "migrants" partly changed in 2011, following the rise in sea arrivals caused by the Libyan civil war and the new humanitarian management of migration.

### 5.2.2 The "refugeezation" of migration: the humanitarian turn and the asylum-based management of migration

As explored in previous paragraphs, until 2009 Italian management of migration was mainly carried out through working permits, either obtained through the quota system or through regularizations, which represented an integral feature to the management of migration. Furthermore, until the early 2000's, most of the undocumented persons were such as a result of overstay, following an entry with a tourist visa, rather than "irregular" entries. This panorama started changing during the first decade of the year 2000, and became consistently different in the second decade. Indeed, as a consequence of the restriction on visa issuance and the strengthening of controls at European external borders following Italy's entry in the Schengen Space, increasing number of people from the African continent were forced to take the sea to reach Italy and Europe. Following 2011 Libyan civil war and the fell of Muhammar Ghaddafi, Libya abandoned its traditional role as Europe's gatekeeper, and thousands of people started leaving from Libyan shores, directed towards Italy. While in the first-place people embarked to flee the Libyan civil war, in the following years, Libya became a central hub in the route towards the European continent. As it has been extensively studied and reported, Sub-Saharan African migrants suffered the worst, inhumane treatment in Libya, being sold as slaves, maltreated, tortured and killed. Nevertheless, despite the widely reported inhumane conditions, people continue to pass through Libya in order to reach Europe until nowadays. The surge in the arrival of people by sea, paired with the unwillingness to reform Italian immigration regulation, established a new mechanism as the predominant one for the purpose of regularization: that of asylum request. This shift changed dramatically the very approach to migration management, as well as impacting on demands for collective regularization made in subsequent years.

Until 2018, according to Italian regulation, decisions made by the Commission in charge of examining asylum applications could have the following results: granting of refugee status, granting of subsidiary protection, transmission of the documents to the Immigration Office for the issuance of a residency permit for humanitarian reasons, according to art. 5 clause 6 of decree-law 286/1998, and rejection of the asylum claim. According to National Asylum Commission data, until the year 2004, except for some instances related to war events, such as 1991 Albania, 1999 Kossovo and 2001 Iraq, the rate of rejection of asylum claims was often higher than 80%. Until the year 2004, most of the applicants who were not granted refugee status or subsidiary protection (following its

introduction in 2007), saw their claim rejected. It was only starting from the year 2004 that humanitarian protection, a residual form of protection, was increasingly granted to asylum seekers, attesting itself between 20% and 30 % of the total claims until 2018, when it was eventually abolished (Commissione Nazionale Asilo 2023). In 21 years from 1990 to 2010, 290.206 asylum requests were presented, while only in 7 years between 2011 and 2017 they were 482.467. This surge does not only signal a surge in sea arrivals, to which it is nonetheless related, but also an increasing use of asylum mechanism as the only possible mechanism for regularizing one's own juridical position. Indeed, starting from the year 2011, the quotas included in the Flux decrees started being dramatically reduced, passing from the 150.000 of 2008 to the 60.000 of 2011, to the 17.850 of 2014 (Prime Minister Decree of 3rd December 2008; Prime Minister Decree of 17th February 2011; Prime Minister Decree of 11th December 2014).

Between 2011 and 2017, there weren't major intervention on immigration legislation, except for decree-law n. 142 of 18th of august 2015, in reception of EU Directive 2013/33 regarding common rules for the reception of asylum seekers and EU Directive 2013/32 concerning standard procedures for the recognition and revocation of refugee status. There were nonetheless various regulative interventions aimed at managing specific situations of "emergency", as well as circular letters of the Ministry of Interior, intervening both on the subject of status recognition and on the subject of asylum seekers reception. In relation to the former, we can mention the Decree of the Prime Minister of 5th April 2011, granting humanitarian protection to all Northern African citizens entering Italian territory between 1st January 2011 and 5th of April 2011. This was followed by multiple circulars, extending this right to other nationals who were living in Libya and other Northern African countries when Arab springs and civil wars erupted – such as the note n. 5426/2012 of National Asylum Commission – as well as describing in detail the necessary interventions to be taken in relation to the reception of asylum seekers. The so-called "North Africa Emergency" represented the beginning of a management of migration increasingly based upon asylum procedures and governmental reception. While this shift was clearly a consequence of the surge in sea arrivals, the Italian government, by channeling all the entries through the asylum system, missed an opportunity to reform immigration law in Italy, by introducing new ways of regularization different from asylum. At the same time, due to the so-called "Dublin Regulation", approved by European Union in 2003, asylum claims had to be received by the country of first entry, thus placing an enormous weight on Southern European border countries, namely, Spain, Greece and Italy. Dublin Regulation bounded

asylum seekers who entered Italy to remain there, regardless of their will and the failure to reform Dublin Regulation represents one of the crucial elements in the perpetual reproduction of an emergency driven approach to migration in Italy and the European Union.[47]

The exclusive reliance on asylum as a tool to manage migration dramatically fueled the narrative regarding the abuse of asylum system by "bogus asylum seekers", at the core of restrictive reforms approved in 2018 and 2023. This narrative tends to blame "bogus asylum seekers", so-called "economic migrants", for raising ungrounded claims only to obtain a residency permit. As a matter of fact, there is no doubt that asylum claims have been presented by people who weren't able to successively ground their claims, and whose claims were ultimately rejected by Territorial Commissions for the Recognition of International Protection, with denials reaching about 50% of the claims between 2015 and 2016 (Commissione Nazionale Diritto di Asilo, 2023). However, as argued by Gianfranco Schiavone, former President of ASGI (Associazione Studi GIuridici Immigrazione – Immigration Juridical Studies Association), Territorial Commissions appear not be up to the task of securing asylum seekers' fundamental rights, considering that, when appealed in courts, 70% of the denials were granted a form of protection before 2017 (Facchini 2017, Caldarozzi 2017). Indeed, while in Courts the case is examined by judges, who are professionals trained for the guarantee of constitutional rights, Territorial Commissions functionaries are administrative personnel who has been selected through a public exam but has not undergone any specific university and/or professional training. Furthermore, it can be highlighted a striking disparity among various Territorial Commission in relation to the granting of a form of protection to comparable cases. As a matter of fact, thanks to my work as a volunteer legal caseworker for more than five years, I was able to trace a map of more restrictive and less restrictive Territorial Commissions, as well as Courts. While, for instance, Rome Territorial Commission and Court appear to be granting protection to higher number of cases, the same cannot be said for Milan Commission as well as Ancona Commission, holding a rather restrictive approach in granting a form of protection and detaining very high rates of denials. This experiential knowledge is backed by data released by the National Asylum Commission. Indeed, if for instance, during the year 2017, on 4153 asylum requests examined by Rome Territorial Commission, 4144 were granted a form of protection, that is in 99,8% of the cases. On the contrary, the Commission of Ancona, on 2965 requests only granted a form of protection to 987, representing the 33,3% of total

[47] For more insights regarding Dublin Regulation see Facchini 2020 and Ammirati, Sommaruga 2018

requests. As it will be further explored in chapter seven, this disparity dramatically affects the possibilities of asylum seekers, who are bounded to their first Territorial Commission even if they present a second asylum claim, so-called "*reiterata"*, ultimately turning the right to asylum into a matter of chance.

Finally, the emergency driven humanitarian management of migration that was implemented during 2011 North Africa Emergency, based on providing shelter to the newly arrived asylum seekers by inaugurating emergency shelters managed by Civil Protection, rather than increasing funds to the second reception system (at that time called "SPRAR – Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati"), represented the blueprint for the following years. According to decree-law n. 142/2015, the reception of asylum seekers in Italy was based on three phases: 1. Rescue, first assistance and identification; 2. First reception centers, where asylum seekers should be staying only for the time necessary to their identification, medical check-up and formalization of asylum requests; 3. Second receptions centers (SPRAR), established by law n. 189/2002, managed by a network of actors, including municipalities and non-governmental actors, aimed at granting not only reception but full support towards the inclusion in the economic and social fabric. At the same time, decree-law n. 142/2015 allows Prefectures to adopt emergency measures to house asylum seekers in temporary reception centers, in the case in which the arrivals of new asylum seekers outnumber the available places in both first and second reception system. However, while according to the law this procedure should be used only in case of emergency and asylum seekers should be housed in these structures for limited periods of time, since then, the management of asylum seekers reception has been based upon the funding of emergency reception centers, so-called CAS (*Centro di Accoglienza Straordinaria*) often isolated from local communities and awarded without respecting regulations regarding competitive bidding process. Hence, in 2016, more than 70% of asylum seekers were hosted in CAS, while less than 30% were hosted in second reception system[48] (Macciani 2019). As highlighted by Open Polis and Action Aid report published in 2018, the emergency driven approach to the reception of asylum seekers have caused greater expenditure of public funds and lack of transparency regarding bidding process.

The management of migration implemented in Italy between 2011 and 2017, based on asylum procedures and on the reception of asylum seekers in emergency centers funded without clear bidding procedures and with high costs, has played a fundamental role in

[48] For an in-depth analysis of Italian reception system before 2018, see Macciani 2019.

favoring the anti-immigration propaganda that has brought to the restrictive normative changes approved by Italian government in the following years.

### 5.2.3 From humanitarianism to securitization: restrictive policies and the new wave of criminalization

Following six years of emergency-driven humanitarian management of migration, centered upon asylum, things started changing in 2017. In December 2016, following the formation of a new government led by Paolo Gentiloni, Marco Minniti was appointed Minister of Interior. Few months later, on the 17th of February 2017, he co-signed together with the Minister of Justice Andrea Orlando decree-law n. 13 concerning "Urgent rules for the acceleration of international protection procedures, as well as measures for the contrast of illegal immigration". The followings are among the crucial points of the decree. First, the decree intervened on the procedural law for asylum seekers, making non-obligatory the hearing by courts in the context of asylum cases and abolishing the second level of appeal against negative decisions adopted by Territorial Commissions. This meant that, following 2017 decree, asylum seekers are no more granted three levels of appeal, as it is for any trial in Italy, even those concerning a violation of the traffic code. Even if this provision was justified by the government with the need to speed up procedures for the recognition of international protection, as highlighted by data gathered in the context of a research carried out in 2016, the extreme length of asylum procedures is largely due to administrative procedure rather than judicial ones (Caldarozzi 2017). Various organization have strongly criticized this rule, depriving asylum seekers the safeguard of their fundamental rights, establishing a discriminatory procedural law and inaugurating a dangerous precedent (Amnesty International 2017; ASGI 2017). Furthermore, according to legal experts, decree-law n.13/2017 violates the Italian Constitution (art. 111, right to fair trial and art. 24 right to defense) as well as the European Convention on Human Rights (art. 6, right to fair trial).
Decree-law n.13 2017 also intervened on the subject of "illegal immigration", ruling the strengthening of expulsions and the creation of new detention centers, so-called CPR (*Centri di Permanenza per il Rimpatrio*), to be built in every region for a total of twenty centers and 1600 places. Furthermore, it allowed for the use of 19.125.000 euros of Asylum and Migration Funds (AMIF) for the implementation of expulsion of "irregular migrants". Finally, with art. 1 clause 1 letter d), the decree institutionalizes free voluntary work as a practice for asylum seekers living within reception centers. While the decree represented

one of the worst and most discriminatory intervention on the subject of immigration legislation, it wasn't broadly criticized in the public debate, as it would instead happen the following year with approval of the so-called "Security Decree".

The restrictive policies promoted by the Minister of Interior Marco Minniti however did not stop at the approval of the afore-mentioned decree. Indeed, Mr. Minniti was the main proponent of the 2017 "Memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the fields of development, the fight against illegal immigration, human trafficking and fuel smuggling and on reinforcing the security of borders between the State of Libya and the Italian Republic". With the signature of the MoU, Italy entrusted Libya as the gatekeeper of Europe, funding the Libyan coastguard that, as proven by countless reports, has implemented pushbacks, torture and abuses. Furthermore, the system put in place by the Italian government has dramatically worsen the condition of asylum seekers and refugees in Libya, who were pushed back multiple times in their attempts to reach Italian shores, and later detained, tortured and killed in Libya detention centers (Ceretti 2023.). As a consequence of this deadly policy, arrivals from Libya dropped down from being 119.369 in 2017 to 23.370 in 2018, while the percentage of deaths on the people crossing the Central Mediterranean route doubled from being 2.4 % of the arrivals in 2017 (for a total of 2873 people dead) to become 5.5 % in 2018 (UNHCR Operational Data Portal 2023). The sharp rise in deaths was also the result of Mr. Minniti battle against international NGOs involved in operations of Search and Rescue in the Mediterranean. Also in this case, his policies anticipated the further criminalization of solidarity pursued in the following years. With the Code of Conduct, the then Minister of Interior Minniti attempted to limit the activity of NGOs, by imposing on them stricter rules and even demanding for judicial police to be allowed to enter the ships in order to carry out investigation regarding human smuggling and trafficking (Ministero dell'Interno, 2017). At the time, only four organization signed it, while those refused signing it started experiencing ostracism by the Italian government, preventing them from fully operating (Camilli 2017).

As highlighted in the first part of the chapter, the period preceding and following 2018 national election was characterized by fierce anti-immigration propaganda, promoted by the Secretary of the far-right party *Lega Nord* Matteo Salvini, and further strengthened by complicit media outlets. At the same time, the ruling Democratic Party did not take any stance against racism and anti-immigration propaganda, having played an active role in the criminalization of immigration and solidarity with Minniti policies. As a result of 2018's national elections, in June 2018 the so-called Yellow-Green government, being a coalition

of Five Star Movement and League Party, was formed. On the 4th of October 2018, the government approved decree-law n.113/2018, so-called Security or Salvini Decree, which abrogated humanitarian protection as well as implementing other restrictive and discriminatory rules against asylum seekers. Humanitarian protection, as previously mentioned, was ruled by art. 5 clause 6 of decree law n. 286/1998 which stated that:

> "The refusal or revocation of residency permit can be adopted in light of international conventions and agreements […] except for serious reasons, particularly of humanitarian nature or resulting from constitutional or international obligations." (*author's translation from Italian*)

Art. 1 of decree-law 113/2018 abrogated the last period of art. 5 clause 6, thus abolishing the permit for humanitarian reasons and forcing holders of this permit to convert it into permit for working reasons, if they satisfied the requirements. All the requests presented before the 5th of October 2018, continued to be ruled by previous regulation, and in the case in which humanitarian protection was granted, a residency permit for "special cases" was issued. At the same time, the decree introduced a multiplicity of forms of protection, such as special protection, natural disaster, etc. covering very narrow cases, which indeed were granted to only 1% of total requests in 2019 (Commissione Nazionale Asilo 2023). The abolition of humanitarian protection came as a result of Minister of Interior Salvini propaganda against "bogus asylum seekers" that he identified with holders of humanitarian protection. At the same time, conversion law n.132 of 1st December 2018, introduced at art. 2-bis of decree-law n.25/2008 a provision concerning countries designated as "safe". According to this article, asylum requests of countries designated as safe are examined following an "accelerated procedure" and, if rejected, are considered as being manifestly unfounded, thus preventing from an effective safeguard of the right to asylum as a subjective right.

Finally, decree-law n.113/2018 also revoked the possibility for asylum seekers and holders of a residency permit for humanitarian reasons to be hosted into second reception system, formerly called SPRAR, renamed SIPROIMI *(Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati)* by the decree. Furthermore, with art. 13 1st clause, the decree attempted to deny asylum seekers their right to civil registration, by stating that the permit for asylum seeking (so-called "six-months" permit) was not to be considered a valid document for the purpose of civil registration. This article was eventually declared unconstitutional by Italian Constitutional Court with ruling n. 186 of 31 July 2020, and thus abrogated. Decree-law n.113/2018 also increased the

number and type of offences impeding the granting of refugee status and subsidiary protection, and extended the maximum period of administrative detention from 90 to 180 days.The impact of decree-law n.113/2018 on asylum seekers and migrants holding a residency permit for humanitarian reasons was catastrophic. According to some estimates, more than 100.000 people became undocumented as a consequence of its approval (Villa 2018). As it will be further explored in chapters six and seven, this impacted dramatically on the province of Foggia and its informal settlements, which saw a sharp rise in presences.

In August 2019, the Five Star Movement-League government fell, following Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini motion of no-confidence. The government crisis led to the formation, on the 5th of September 2019, of a new government of coalition between Five Star Movement and Democratic Party, so-called Yellow-Red government. The newly formed government adopted various policies on the subject of immigration, some of which were effective in favoring the regularization of an increasing number of people. Following the eruption of Covid-19 pandemic and the call of civil societies organizations for a regularization of undocumented migrants (estimated to be more than 600.000), on the 19th of May 2020 the government approved at art. 103 of decree-law n. 34/2020 a regularization of migrant workers employed in agriculture, caregiving, and domestic assistance sector. However, due to excessive requirements and the slowness of the procedure, the measure did not effectively impact on undocumented migrant workers, especially in the agricultural sector. Indeed, on a total of 207.542 requests only 30.694 concerned the agricultural sector. As it will be further explored in chapter six, the regularization, favored the scam of thousands of workers by employers and labor intermediaries, while at the same time establishing forms of debt bondage, in sharp contrast with the anti-explotation and anti-*caporalato* rhetoric underlying the reform.

Due to the failure of the regularization, and following increasing pressure and criticism by human rights and civil societies organizations, on the 21st of October 2020, the government approved decree-law n. 130/2020, so-called Lamorgese Decree, from the name of Luciana Lamorgese, the appointed Minister of Interior promoting the reform. Decree-law n.130/2020 reformed Italian immigration legislation by reverting some of the changes implemented by decree-law n. 113/2018 as well as introducing new regulations. Among the main intervention of the decree-law, is the amendment of special protection as formerly established by decree-law n. 113/2018, which was reformed in order to include the safeguard of family and private life as sanctioned by art. 8 of European Convention on Human Right (ECHR). The decree also intervened on the subject of civil registration, by clearly

sanctioning the right of asylum seekers to civil registration, while at the same time introducing a three-years ID card only for asylum seekers. Furthermore, asylum seekers and holders of special protection were admitted again into second reception system, renamed SAI (*Sistema Accoglienza e Integrazione*). According to art. 19 clause 1.1 of decree-law 1998/286, as modified by decree-law n. 130/2020:

> *"*the refoulement or expulsion of a person towards a State is forbidden if there are grounded reasons to believe that the removal from the national territory entails a violation of his right to private and family life […] In order to assess the violation of which at the previous sentence, the nature and effectiveness of family relations, effective social inclusion, the length of the stay on the national territory, as well as the existence of family, cultural and social relations with the country of origin are taken into account"(*author's translation from Italian*).

Following the approval of decree-law 130/2020, the rate of granting of special protection in the context of asylum application increased from being 1% in 2019 and 2% in 2020, to 14% in 2021 and 19% in 2022, for a total of 17.957 permits for special protection granted between 2021 and 2022, compared to the 1373 of the period 2019-2020 (Commissione Nazionale Asilo, 2023). Art. 19 clause 1.2 also introduced a new procedure to be followed in order to obtain the status of "special protection", according to which special protection could be requested also through a direct application to the local Immigration office. While data relating to this second form of protection have not been published by the National Asylum Commission, according to an investigation carried out by the journal *Altraeconomia*, in 2021 1628 requests were submitted, while in the first six months of 2022 these were 6.798, recording an increase of + 317% compared to the same period of the previous year (Facchini 2022). Despite the introduction of this new channel by decree-law 130/2020, the implementation of the regulation was not homogeneous on the national territory, with various immigration offices preventing the formalization of special protection applications as well as different rates of recognition by various Territorial Commissions. While data regarding the rate of recognition are not available, building on field observation it is possible to maintain that, in the province of Foggia, hundreds of people were granted special protection between 2020 and 2023, thanks to the reform of art. 19 operated by decree-law n.130/2020.

Nevertheless, the Five Star Movement and Democratic Party coalition government also implemented extremely restrictive and repressive measures against asylum seekers of

designated “safe countries”, such as Tunisia, which were further implemented by the technocratic government led by Mario Draghi, taking office on the 13th of February 2021. On the 4th of October 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation approved a decree, designating 13 countries as “safe”[49]. At the same time, the Ministry of Interior, led during both governments by Luciana Lamorgese, implemented a series of policies aimed at curbing down arrivals from Tunisia, representing in 2020 and 2021 the first country of origin of migrants arriving in Italy through the Central Mediterranean Route (Costa, Dandoy 2022). In particular, during Covid-19 emergency, the government implemented a policy of illegitimate detention of asylum seekers on “quarantine ships”, which for Tunisians nationals often resulted in the forced transferal to a detention center following the end of quarantine, seeing their right to seek asylum systematically denied (ASGI 2021). As reported by an investigation carried out by ASGI and others, in 2020 and 2021 Tunisia represented the first country for deportations, reaching the 73 % of total deportations (ASGI 2021; Costa, Dandoy 2022). Tunisian nationals also represented more than 50% of total detainees in detention centers, so-called CPR, both in 2020 and 2021, experiencing degrading treatment and abuses, leading in some cases to killings, as it happened for the 26-year-old Wissem Ben Abdel Latif[50]. The policies of illegitimate detention of Tunisian asylum seekers implemented both by Conte and Draghi government represented a laboratory, opening the floor for the legitimation of detention of asylum seekers of designated “safe countries”, formalized by the new far right government of Giorgia Meloni in 2023.

The far-right neo-fascist government led by Giorgia Meloni was elected in September 2022, with the promise of stopping “illegal immigration” with the implementation of a “naval blockade”. However, once elected, the government saw a sharp increase in sea arrivals, reaching 144.675 in November 2023, compared to 105.131 in 2022, and was faced with the impracticability of its propaganda. As a consequence of that, and following one of the deadliest shipwrecks in Italian history taking place on the 25th of February in Cutro (Calabria), on the 10th of March 2023 the government approved decree-law n.20 containing a series of restrictive and repressive policies regarding international protection and the fight against human smuggling. The government chose to approve the decree in the village where the shipwreck took place, and was strongly criticized for that by activist groups and civil society organization. Decree-law n. 20/2023 abrogated “special

[49] Albania, Algeria, Bosnia-Erzegovina, Capo Verde, Ghana, Kosovo, Macedonia del Nord, Marocco, Montenegro, Senegal, Serbia, Tunisia e Ucraina.
[50] For further details, see Costa, Dandoy 2022; Meltingpot 2023.

protection" as formulated by decree-law 130/2020, deleting the explicit reference to art. 8 of ECHR and simply leaving a reference to the respect of constitutional and international obligations. According to the decree, all applications presented before the date of approval of the decree as well as those for which an invitation to the Immigration Office had already been scheduled, continued to be ruled by previous regulation. Furthermore, the decree established that those holding a permit for special protection are allowed to renew it or convert it into a permit for working reasons. However, Circular Letter n. 400/2023 of the Department of Public Security, Central Direction of Immigration and Border Police of the Ministry of Interior, reformulated the provision included at art. 7 of decree-law 20/2023, by stating that any residency permit for special protection issued in the context of an asylum procedure, according to art. 32 of decree-law 25/2008, whose conversion had not been requested before the 4th of May 2023, was not convertible into working permit. While it is early to assess the impact of the abolition of special protection and the illegitimate refusal of Immigration Offices to convert permits for "special protection" into permits for working reasons, it is likely that the numbers of people becoming undocumented as a result of the approval of decree-law n.20/2023 will be extremely high.

Decree-law n.20/2023 also introduced a series of norms aimed at countering "illegal immigration" and "human smuggling", by increasing the charge in case of "aiding and abetting of illegal immigration" as well as introducing a new offence under the name of "Death and injuries as a result of illegal immigration crimes", punishable with incarceration from 20 to 30 years. Furthermore, the decree expanded dramatically the cases in which the detention of asylum seekers is allowed, extending it to those who in designated border areas are considered at risk of flight, including those not holding their country passport or any equivalent document or not providing an adequate financial guarantee. The financial guarantee was established by the Ministry of Interior decree of 14th of September 2023 as being 4.938 euros. According to various court pronouncements, however, the indiscriminate detention of asylum seekers is illegitimate and represents a violation of Italian Constitution and European law (ASGI 2023).

At the same time, the government intervened on the entries for working purposes through the quota system, by establishing that governments promoting campaigns of raising awareness on the risks of "illegal immigration" will be granted preferential access to quota. Rules aimed at simplifying the procedure for the issuance of *"nulla osta"* for working purposes were also implemented. Furthermore, in July 2023 the government approved a three-years plan for quota entries, setting the limit at 452.000 new entries for working

purposes in three years. However, as already highlighted in previous paragraphs, not only the quota system has proved being ineffective due to the very nature of the mechanism, according to which employers must choose their workers from the country of origin, but it also appears to be contradictory implementing a restrictive policy aimed at rendering undocumented tens of thousands of people already present on the Italian soil, while at the same lamenting the lack of essential workers for sectors relying on migrant labor, such as agriculture and hospitality. While this policy has been promoted by the government as an implementation of Giorgia Meloni's slogan according to which "if you come to Italy illegally you will be deported", it increasingly appears to be a tool to select, also from a racial and geographical point of view, which migrants are welcome, and which are not.

### 5.3 Migrant farmworkers in the context of Italian agriculture

Previous paragraphs have been necessary to contextualize the experience of non-EU racialized migrants in the context of Italian society. As maintained in the first chapter, analysis regarding migrant farmworkers rarely take into account the multiplicity of forms of oppression experienced by migrant workers, who are conceived by taking into account the category of "migrant farmworkers" as a homogeneous one. One the contrary, it is necessary to unpack this category in order to explore the different level of oppression experienced by migrant farmworkers holding a different juridical status, race, gender, religion, etc. Analysis developed in the context of Italian agriculture, while often focusing on migrant workers original from North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, have missed to develop an in-depth analysis accounting for the ways in which racism impact their life experience within and beyond the workplace. The following paragraphs will offer a contextualization of the phenomenon of migrant workers employment and exploitation in the context of Italian agriculture, which will serve as a base for the in-depth investigation developed in the next chapters. After briefly exploring the centrality of migrant farmworkers for Italian agriculture, as reported by multiple academic and journalistic reports, the analysis will move on discussing the impact of the criminalization of illegal gang mastering, so-called *caporalato*, in the context of Italian agriculture, and concluding by introducing the province of Foggia as a center for Italian agricultural racial capitalism.

### 5.3.1 Migrant farmworkers as the backbone of Italian agriculture

Italian agriculture is among the productive sectors depending most dramatically on migrant labor. As highlighted by countless academic investigations and reports, in the past decades Italian agriculture has been based on the exploitation of migrant labor, which assured its competitiveness on the global market (Avallone 2017; Caruso 2015; Corrado et al 2017; Colloca, Corrado 2013; Peano 2017; Perrotta et al 2021; Perrotta, Rayemakers 2023). Analysis developed with regard to the Italian context have shed light on the entanglement between the exploitation of migrant labor and the restructuring of food production in the context of the neoliberal corporate food regime, taking place in Europe starting from the 1980's (Corrado 2018). From the 1990's, following the transformation of Italian agriculture and the new role of mass retailers in establishing the conditions of production, exploited migrant labor emerged as the backbone of Italian agriculture, to cut down production costs in order to compete at the global level (Corrado 2017). At the beginning. migrant workers were mostly of Northern African and Sub-Saharan African origin, who arrived in Italy with a tourist visa and later overstayed their visa. These workers used to move around Italy, satisfying the need of workforce according to the seasonality of production. Labor relations were largely irregular, being characterized by no formal employment contract and per piece payment.

Following the expansion of the European Union in the early 2000's, with the entry of Poland, Rumania and Bulgaria, there was a surge of workers original from these countries who, in certain instances, arrived in Italy during the harvesting season and went back once the season was over, while in other remained in Italy all year around. The large influx of neo-communitarian workers impacted dramatically on the Italian agricultural labor market, determining a compression of salaries descending from the excess of workforce supply.
The increasing integration of Italian agriculture into global circuits of food production, taken together with the international composition of its agricultural workforce, led some scholars to define the process underwent by Italian countryside as the "globalization of countryside" (Colloca, Corrado 2013). The globalization of countryside impacted not only systems of production, but also local communities, which found themselves from being marginal areas to become central areas in development of the new global agricultural system of production. These areas have been defined by scholars as "globalized enclaves" (Avallone 2017:25), in order to highlight both their integration into global circuits of food production and their separation from the larger community where they are physically located.

While at the beginning most of the scholarly analysis on the topic of migrant labor exploitation in the context of Italian agriculture were focused on the experience of migrant workers of Sub-Saharan and Northern African origin employed seasonally in the context of Southern agriculture (BSA et al 2012; Corrado 2011; Perrotta 2014; Ventura 2010; Pugliese 2012) in the past decade the scope of analysis has widened, with increasing attention being paid to other areas in Italy, such as Lazio (Omizzolo 2016), Tuscany (Oliveri 2015), Piedmont (Berton et al 2020; Ippolito, Bovia 2021), as well as investigating the experience of other groups of workers, such as workers of Eastern European and Indian origin. Most of the analysis developed with regard to workers of Eastern Europe have been focused on the experience of women of Romanian origin employed in the context of greenhouses in Sicilian agriculture (Palumbo, Sciurba 2015), with some other investigations being also developed looking at the different experience of Tunisian and Romanian workers employed in Ragusa greenhouses (Piro, Sanò 2017). The exploitation of Indian Sikh workers has been studied in the context of Latina horticultural production (Omizzolo 2021), while the exploitation of migrant workers of various origin has been observed both in Tuscany (Oliver 2015) and in Piedmont (Berton et al 2020).

In addition to these, scholarly investigations have increasingly shed light on the blurring of the lines between asylum seekers and migrant workers, that came into existence especially following 2011 surge in sea arrivals, determining what Nick Dines and Enrica Rigo (2015) defined as the "refugeezation of workforce". This definition does not merely account for the increasing share of asylum seekers and holders of international protection among migrant workers but also for the increasing humanitarian management of agricultural workforce, as well as for the framing of migrant labor exploitation as a human rights violation rather than as a collective political issue.

Overall, the scholarly investigations developed in the past decade have shed light on the endemic nature of migrant labor exploitation in the context of Italian agriculture, which cannot be considered as being limited neither to a specific national-ethnic group nor to a specific geographical area or type of agricultural production, leading some scholars to define exploitation as a "mode of production" of Italian agriculture (Rigo 2015).

Nevertheless, despite the exploitation of migrant labor in Italian agriculture being so wide-spread and not limited to Southern Italy, media have continued to portray migrant workers of mostly Sub-Saharan African origin living in informal settlements in Southern Italy as the emblem of migrant labor exploitation and *caporalato*.

### 5.3.2 The criminalization of *caporalato* in the context of Italian agriculture

Literature investigating the exploitation of migrant labor in the context of Italian agriculture has also explored the evolution of the system of informal labor intermediation prevailing in Italian agriculture, so-called *caporalato*, drawing attention to its increasingly globalized nature, following the large-scale recruitment of migrant workers employed in Italian agriculture since the 1990s (Perrotta 2014, Filhol, 2017). Some authors have suggested the existence of an "ethnic caporalato" in light of the increasingly dominant role of foreign *caporali* in the process of labor intermediation, often recruiting workers of the same nationality or ethnic group (Carchedi et al 2016). In this context, while some have portrayed *caporali* as "slave masters" (Omizzolo 2016), others have shed light on the ambivalent role played by labor intermediaries, being at the same time profiters of workers' state of need and mediators between them and the employers (Perrotta 2014). Following the introduction of the crime of "unlawful intermediation and labor exploitation" at art. 603-bis of Italian Criminal Code, some analyses have also been developed accounting for the juridical implications of this reform (Rigo 2015).

C*aporalato* represents a form of labor intermediation, widely spread in the agricultural sector but not limited to it, which can be traced back to the 20$^{th}$ century, whereby an intermediary, so-called *caporale*, recruits, organizes and transports the workforce on the working place for the purpose of profit. While it is often represented as the emblem of Southern Italy backwardness and as a residue of pre-modern relations of production, according to the scholar and activist Pietro Alò (2010), it can be rather thought as the protype, or even the anticipation, of post-Fordist hyper flexible and precarious relations of production. In his work, Alò locates the origin of modern *caporalato* in the 1970's emergence of a new Southern agriculture, characterized by the increase in the need of low-skilled jobs performed by day laborers. The *caporale* emerged then as an illegal but socially legitimized intermediary, who satisfied agricultural firms' need of just in time workforce, while at the same time relieving Southern population, especially women, from mass unemployment. According to Alò, hidden behind the external appearance's backwardness, there is an extremely late-modern substance, represented by the violent commodification of labor and by the subordination of the person to the productive fact (ibid.:18). By revealing the continuities between *caporalato* and contemporary forms of labor precarization and flexibilization, Alò enables to frame migrant workers' exploitation not as a residue of archaic pre-capitalist relations of production, but as deeply integrated within contemporary capitalism.

The issue of *caporalato* in the context of Italian agriculture reaffirmed itself into Italian public debate following Rosarno racist attacks in 2010 and Nardò strike in 2011. The strike in Nardò, which took place at the end of July 2011, was defined as the "first self-organized strike of migrant farmworkers" (BSA et al. 2012) obtaining wide national resonance, lasting for about two weeks and involving hundreds of workers. Striking migrant workers, supported by some local organizations, such as *Finis Terrae* and *Brigate di Solidarietà Attiva*, denounced irregular employment relations, gang masters' labor intermediation as well as low per-piece payments. While the organization of the strike itself and the conjunctures that made it possible have been extensively analyzed by activists and researchers participating to it (BSA et al 2012), for the purpose of the present analysis it is enough to stress that few days after the end of the strike, on the 13th of August 2011, the Italian government introduced a new type of offence at art 603-bis of Italian Criminal Code, named "unlawful intermediation and labor exploitation" (D.L. 138/2011). As formulated in 2011, the offence punished only labor intermediaries, so-called *caporali*, which could be sentenced from a period of five to eight years in jail. At the same time, for the act to constitute a crime, exploitation was meant to be carried out "through violence, threat or intimidation, and profiting of the state of need or necessity of workers".[51] Due to the restricted scope of the offence, few cases were brought to justice and labor exploitation within agricultural sector continued to be pervasive. In 2015, the death of Paola Clemente, an Italian women hired through a temporary employment agency in the grape harvesting in Andria (Apulia), shocked the Italian public opinion, by highlighting that labor exploitation and *caporalato* did not only involve migrant workers and could take place also through formally registered employment agencies. In 2016, following a strike of Indian Sikh workers in Latina as well as thanks to multiple journalistic investigations and civil society campaigns raising public awareness regarding the severeness of labor exploitation and *caporalato* in Italian agricultural sector, Italian parliament approved the more comprehensive law n. 199/2016. This not only reformed art. 603-bis, but also included a broader set of actions aimed at countering labor exploitation and *caporalato*. According to the reformed offence, both labor intermediaries and employers became prosecutable, while the offence was untied from the use of "violence and threats", defined instead as aggravating circumstances[52]. As highlighted

[51]"Unless the act constitutes more serious crime, anyone who carries out an organized activity of intermediation, through the recruitment of workforce or the organization of work characterized by exploitation, through the use of violence threat or intimidation, profiting of the state of need or necessity of workers, is punished with imprisonment from five to eight years and with a fine from 1.000 to 2.000 euro for each recruited worker" (*author's translation from Italian*, Italian Criminal Code, art 12, D.L. n. 138/2011).

[52] "Unless the act constitutes more serious crime, it is punished with imprisonment from one to six years and with a fine from 500 to 1000 euro for each recruited worker, anyone who: 1) recruits workforce with to be destinated to work for third

by Chiara Stoppini and Emilio Santoro (2022), a surge in proceedings for unlawful intermediation and labor exploitation was recorded following the approval of law 199/2016. From being 14 counted proceedings in the period going between 2011 and 2015, they reached the peak of 127 in 2020. If the introduction of the criminal liability on the part of employers represented an improvement compared to the previous formulation, law n. 199/2016 continued to treat the issue of labor exploitation as a criminal matter, to be countered only through judiciary actions rather than through labor, social and welfare policies. The criminalization of exploitation within Italian Criminal Code contributed to what Federico Oliveri (2015:48-49) defined as "juridification of exploitation", that is "the transposition of exploitation within juridical frameworks which assure its formal regularity, leaving untouched the essence, in terms of unfair profit and workers' rights violation" (*authors' translation from Italian*).

Following the above-illustrated evolution of regulations, *caporalato* became a central framework to represent labor exploitation in the context Italian agricultural sector. If, following the approval of law 199/2016, also employers started being prosecuted for labor exploitation, the negative social representation of *caporalato* proposed by journalistic reports, some academic investigations and institutional actors remained often centered on *caporali*. Following its criminalization, *caporalato* started being associated with criminal organization and rural informal settlements located in Southern Italy, already perceived as the emblem of *caporalato*, underwent further stigmatization as hubs of "criminality" and "illegality" (Benincasa, Mannu 2018; Sagnet, Palmisano 2015; Palmisano 2021, 2023). Particular attention has been given to the tariffs that workers are "forced" to pay to the labor intermediaries in order to get to the workplace, as well as to the providing of services within informal settlements, all considered as being managed by a hierarchical criminal organization (Fanizza, Omizzolo 2018; Sagnet, Palmisano 2015). For instance, Fiammetta Fanizza and Marco Omizzolo (2018) in their work "Caporalato: an authentic agromafia" describe *caporalato* not as a system of labor intermediation but rather as an "authentic agromafia". In the introduction of the volume, the authors maintain that, through the adoption of their lens of analysis, it is possible to highlight "how violence and illegality undermine the rule imposed by society's cultural code which should theoretically prevent

parties in conditions of exploitation, profiting of the state of need of workers; 2) uses, employs or hires workforce, also through the intermediation listed at number 1), subjecting workers to conditions of exploitation and profiting from their state of need. If facts are carried out through the use of violence or threat, it is applied the punishment of imprisonment from five to eight years and a fine from 1.000 to 2.000 euros for which recruited worker." (*author's translation from Italian*, art. 1, law 199/2016).

the accumulation of illicit capital" (ibid:4). Furthermore, they define *caporali* as the central pillar of this criminal system.

> "The gangmasters, *caporali*, are part of fully functioning criminal organizations that use mafia-like methods to impose its rules and consequently condition the trends of the agricultural season as well as the fruits and vegetables markets. Although these claims may seem excessive and perhaps alarming, they are the result of numerous investigations […] In addition to attesting to crimes, these investigations have above all revealed just how extensive and incisive the *caporali*'s power is. Their power is absolute and explained by their ability to determine harvest trends, the labourers' employment conditions, and not least, the retail price of products." (ibid.: 7-8).

Moreover, in relation to informal settlements, the authors maintain that:

> "ghettoes are logistical bases used to subjugate the immigrants and thus compromise agriculture and inhibit the growth of local economies by limiting their potential within the agricultural sector both in Italy and the European Union" (ibid:3).

Similarly to what has been maintained with regard to the anti-trafficking discourse (O'Connell Davidson 2010, Kempadoo 2005), the focus on the "individual morality" of *caporali*, conceived as part of a foreign criminal organization network, allows to locate labor exploitation outside the realm of modern global capitalism, in the hands of an "uncivilized Other". The association of *caporalato*, an informal system of labor intermediation, with organized crime and Southern Italy backwardness favored the discharge of responsibility on the side of the institutions as well as agri-businesses, allowing for the distinction between "good" and "bad" farmers, and ultimately dismissing the issue of labor exploitation as a moral problem and as a matter of public order and security. In this way, labor exploitation is portrayed as archaic and exceptional, diverting the focus from structural factors allowing for the super-exploitation of migrant labor to take place. Yet, as already maintained by various authors (Pugliese 2015; Filhol 2017; Perrotta 2014), the media and institutional representation of *caporalato* differs significantly from the reality on the ground. As pinpointed by Pugliese (2015: 13):

> "victimology - that is, the tendency of sharing only the worst situations, without contextualizing them and without referencing root causes and specific modalities- is widespread when we are dealing with immigrants, especially if irregular. The *caporale* is here identified as the villain of the drama, and the harshest sentences are wished to him, forgetting the exploitation chains' structure".

While informal settlements in Southern Italy are often taken as the emblem of *caporalato*, structural factors such as national immigration legislation and widespread racism are rarely analyzed as factors central to the marginalization and segregation of workers in informal settlement. Similar considerations can be done in relation to the definition of migrant farmworkers' labor exploitation as "modern slavery", widespread in the media and some academic analysis. While, as explored in the first chapter, it is fundamental to stress the continuity between the exploitation of migrant labor in the context of contemporary agriculture and the enslaved and indentured labor of racialized subjects characterizing the birth of industrial agriculture, the parallel with slavery in mainstream representations is done with the intention to define these forms of exploitation as external to European modernity and to offer an overdramatized representation of migrant workers as helpless victims, and of *caporali* as slave masters. Through the representation of migrant labor exploitation as contemporary slavery and thus external to modernity, these analyses also reproduce the fictious narrative according to which slavery was not part of modern capitalism and enslaved subjects were totally submissive. In this way, the depoliticization of the present serves also to further the historical revisionism at the core of the social construction of Europe, modernity, and capitalism.

### 5.3.3 The province of Foggia as a center of Italian agricultural racial capitalism

The province of Foggia is among the most studied areas in Italy and Europe by scholars exploring the relationship between migrant labor exploitation and industrial agriculture (Caruso 2022; Caruso, Corrado 2021; Caruso et al 2021; Filhol 2017; Howard, Forin 2019; Melossi 2021; Peano 2017), and it has often been taken as the emblem of migrant labor exploitation and *caporalato* in the Italian agricultural sector by media (Benincasa, Mannu 2018; Palmisano, Sagnet 2015). As a matter of fact, Foggia is among the first provinces in Italy for agricultural production and among those detaining the highest shares of labor relations with migrant workers. At the same time, it is home of some of Italy's largest migrant farmworkers' settlements (Caruso, Corrado 2021).

The province of Foggia is situated in the Apulia region, the first region in Italy for agricultural production with 156.595 registered agricultural workers (INPS 2022), 191.430 agricultural enterprises and a total utilized agricultural area (SAU, *Superficie Agricola Utilizzata*) of 1.288.000 hectares, according to 7th national agricultural census data (Istat

2020). According to the 6th agricultural census carried out in 2010[53], Foggia province represented 39% of Puglia SAU. The province of Foggia is particularly known for its tomato production, and it does indeed count for a third of the national tomato production, reaching 90% for some varieties, such as long tomatoes. Nevertheless, between 2007 and 2021 the area dedicated to the production of tomato dropped down from 23.600 to 15.000 hectares (Caruso, Corrado 2021). Following the diversification of production, nowadays Foggia is also leading on the side of horticultural production, counting 50.000 hectares of horticultural open-air production on a total of 300.000 hectares at the national level (ibid.). It produces more 30% of open-air asparagus, cabbage, peppers, eggplants, artichokes, lettuce, fennel and broccoli (bid.). At the same time, Foggia hosts the largest European facility for tomato processing, owned by the British-Japanese company Princess Foods Limited, with an annual turnover in 2021 of 113 million euros. In the first six-months of 2021, the export of agricultural products from the Foggia province recorded an increase of 62% compared to 2019, reaching the record value of 65.279.375 euro (Confagricoltura Foggia, 2021). The province of Foggia is thus fully embedded into global circuits of food production that, taken together with the large presence of migrant workers, allows to define it as "a global countryside" (Colloca, Corrado 2013).

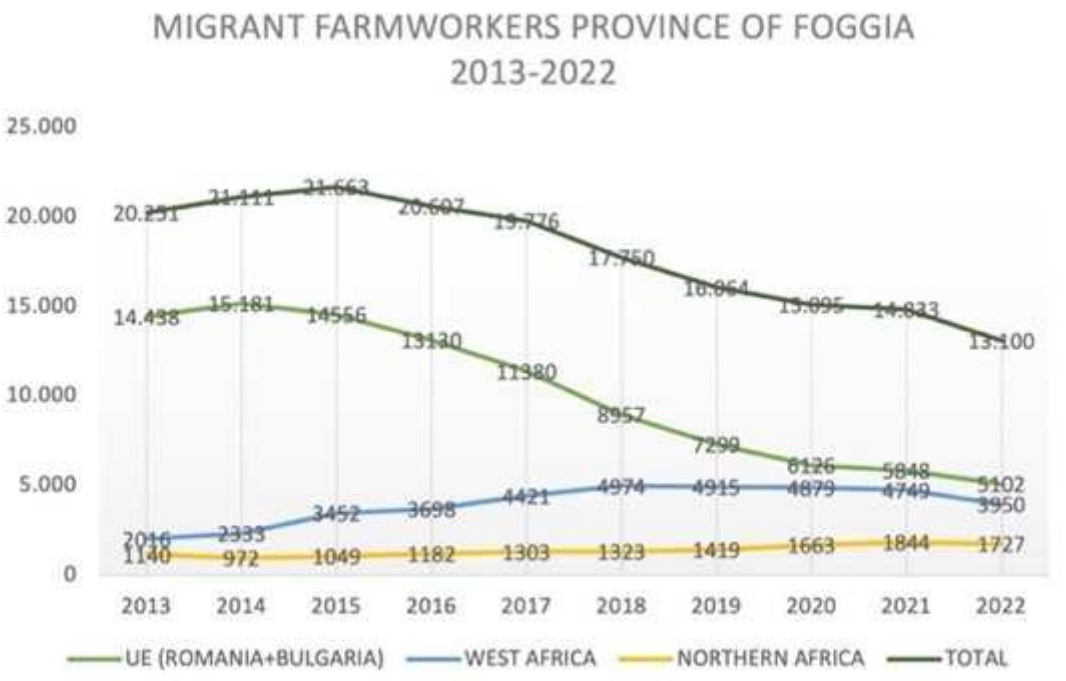
The province of Foggia detains the highest share of employment relations with migrant workers in Apulia and among the highest in Italy. According to 2022 INPS data, in the province of Foggia there were 46.147 agricultural workers representing 30% of Puglia registered agricultural workers. 28% of these, accounting for 13.100 workers were foreigners, of which about 60% were from non-EU countries. These data account for hired workers who were mainly employed in the agricultural sector[54]. As a consequence, the numbers of both EU and non-EU migrant workers are largely underestimated, due to the existence of large shares of undeclared work, as well as to the overestimation of the number of Italian workers due to the phenomenon of bogus Italian agricultural workers for the purpose of social benefits (Caruso, Corrado 2021). The proportion between European and non-European migrant workers has been shifting in the past two decades. Following the

[53] While 2010 National Agricultural census reported data broken down by Province, the data of 7th National Agricultural census have so far been circulated only on a regional scale.

[54] These data have been elaborated from INPS Statistical Observatory. It is fundamental to stress that while INPS has a specific section of its statistical observatory dedicated to agricultural work with worked days, those data are not disaggregated by nationality, so couldn't be used for the purpose of the present analysis. On the other hand, the section from which the present data were elaborated is the "private work" section, where employees in the agricultural sector are listed only if agriculture was their prevalent occupation. That means that the number of West African farmworkers is likely to be underestimated, due to the presence of workers who have been occupied in the agricultural sector for only few months in a year and have not therefore been listed. In addition to that, while the formalization of employment relations in the context of agricultural work is normally calculated according to "worked days" in this case the reference was to medium yearly age for the same reason above illustrated.

entry of Poland (2004), Romania and Bulgaria (2008) in the European Union, both the province of Foggia and Apulia region recorded a peak in migrant workers from the EU, especially from Romania, leading some authors to talk about a "rumenization" of migrant agricultural labor (Caruso 2016). However, this tendency has started reverting in the past few years, with Romanian workers employed in Apulian agriculture halving between 2014 and 2020 (Caruso, Corrado 2021). This flight has been further accentuated following Covid-19 pandemic, that led many EU workers to return to their countries of origin. Indeed, according to INPS data the number of Romanian and Bulgarian workers has dropped from being 15.181 in 2014 to 5.102 in 2022, recording a reduction of - 197 %. At the same time, it is possible to highlight an increase both in the number of registered non-EU workers and their medium wage. This data is particularly striking for West African migrant workers, especially from Senegal, Mali, Gambia and Nigeria, who almost doubled from being 2333 in 2014 to 3950 in 2022. Nevertheless, this number is still far from the actual number of West African migrant workers employed in the agricultural sector of the province, both due to the limitations of the INPS data with regard to the prevalence of occupation, as well as due to the large number of undocumented people who often work someone's else permit of stay. Nevertheless, what is more relevant is not the increase in the number of workers but the increase in the medium yearly wage, which for West African workers went from 1.505 euros in 2013 to 5.950 euros in 2022, recording an increase of +295%.

This surge is the result of different factors. On one hand, the diversification of production entailed its deseasonalization, which went hand in hand with the settling of West African migrant workers, who, from being employed mostly in the tomato harvesting, became integral to the entire production cycle of a large number of crops. At the same time, as a consequence of the implementation of law n.199/2016, large shares of workers who were irregularly hired until few years ago started being formally employed. In addition to that, the shortage of workforce experienced by the province following Covid-19 emergency determined an increase in the bargaining power of West African migrant workers, who were able to demand and obtain higher salaries. Lastly, the increase can be considered as partly descending from the fact that more than one worker is employed under the same name, due to the strengthening of law enforcement controls sanctioning the employment of undocumented workers following the implementation of law n. 199/2016.



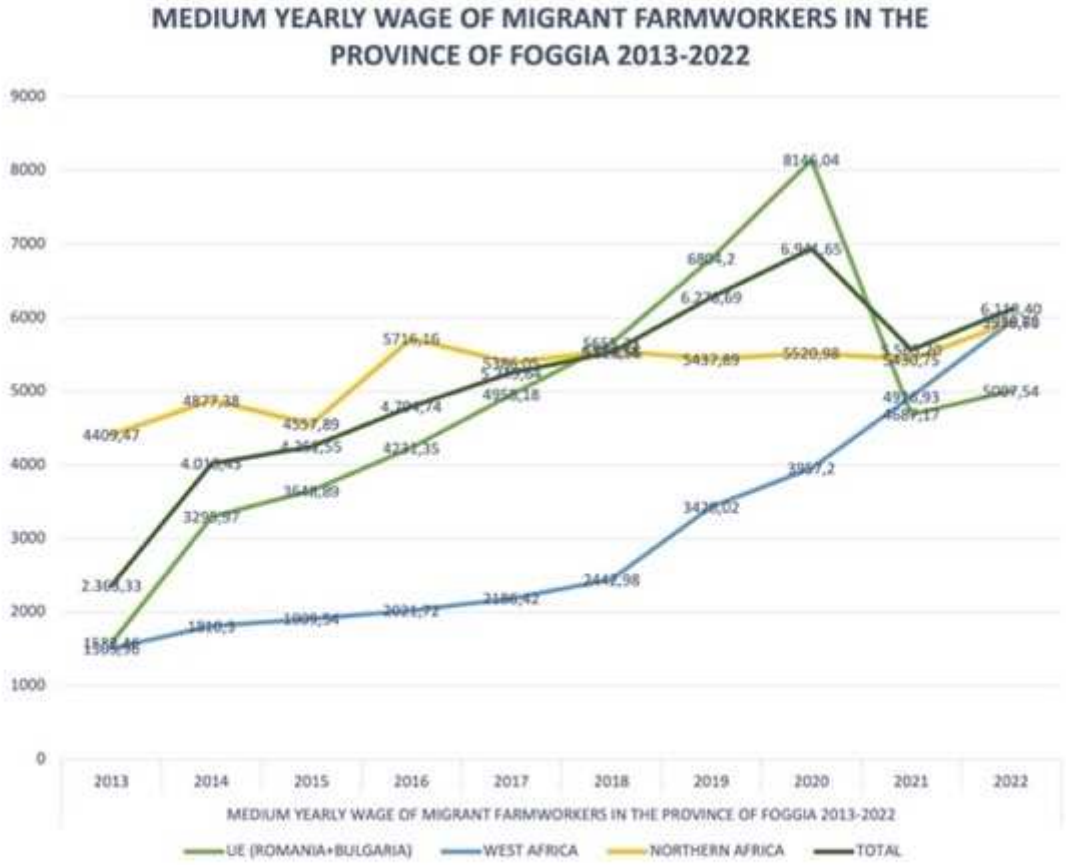




*Figure 17 1. Variation of the number of migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia, between 2013 and 2022, divided by geographical area of origin.*
*2. Variation of the yearly wage of migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia, between 2013 and 2022, divided by geographical area of origin.*
*Source: author's elaboration on INPS data.*

Nevertheless, defining Foggia province as a center for Italian agricultural racial capitalism does not simply descend from its objective relevance in terms of agricultural production and numbers of foreign agricultural workers, but also in light of the symbolic relevance of this province in highlighting the contradiction inherent to Italian system of agricultural production. Indeed, as already mentioned, Foggia has long been considered by both scholars, media and institutions as the emblem of migrant labor exploitation in the Italian agricultural sector. As it will be further explored in the following chapters, this understanding does not merely descend from the actual severeness and rate of exploitation of migrant workers in the province, which was indeed been very acute in the past. However, despite improvements recorded on the side of labor exploitation, the province of Foggia continues to be identified as the emblem of exploitation and *caporalato* due to the presence of the largest informal rural settlements of migrant farmworkers in Europe, mostly inhabited by West African workers. Indeed, according to estimates of non-governmental organizations, there are about 10.000 people living in informal settlements in the province of Foggia (MEDU 2019). At the same time, according to the estimates offered by ANCI (*Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani* - National Association of Italian Municipalities), which conducted a survey in 2022 in the context of National Recovery and Resilience Funds (PNRR, *Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza*), these are 7013[55]. According to these estimates, in 2022 the Italian Ministry of Labor and Social Policies allocated 103.583.249 euro to eight municipalities in the province of Foggia for the implementation of a plan aimed at overcoming informal settlements in agriculture, on a total funding of 200 million euro at the national level. While following the election of the new far right government in September 2022 and the reallocation of PNRR funds, the projects accounting for the overcoming of informal settlements are likely not to be developed again, the way in which they were proposed highlighted the widespread assumption according to which rural informal settlements would be a mere outcome of labor exploitation in the agricultural sector, thus ignoring the impact of migration policies and racial discrimination in furthering the marginalization of migrant workers in informal settlements.

[55] It must be noted that these data have not been generated as a result of an in-depth analysis but rather a mere questionary that was sent by the National Association of Italian Municipalities to municipalities around Italy. For one thing, the data provided by municipalities were not verified and, for another thing, various municipalities hosting rural informal settlements did not respond to the questionary and were consequently excluded both by the survey, and by the following allocation of resources. Among this, also the city of Foggia, which was at the time of the survey managed by a government commissioner, following its dissolution due to Mafia infiltration in 2020.

| TABELLA RISORSE ECONOMICHE SUPERAMENTO DEGLI INSEDIAMENTI INFORMALI PROVINCIA DI FOGGIA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| COMUNE | Regione | Provincia | N. presenze di cittadini stranieri | TOTALE |
| Carapelle | Puglia | Foggia | 10 | 1.129.164,77 |
| Carpino | Puglia | Foggia | 200 | 4.583.295,30 |
| Cerignola | Puglia | Foggia | 530 | 8.845.732,54 |
| Lesina | Puglia | Foggia | 30 | 1.887.494,29 |
| Manfredonia | Puglia | Foggia | 4000 | 53.665.905,98 |
| Poggio Imperiale | Puglia | Foggia | 173 | 3.734.550,43 |
| San Marco in Lamis | Puglia | Foggia | 70 | 1.904.153,35 |
| San Severo | Puglia | Foggia | 2000 | 27.832.952,99 |
| TOTALE FOGGIA | | | 7013 | 103.583.249,65 |
| **TOTALE ITALIA** | | | **10.955** | **200.000.000,00** |

*Figure 18 Resources allocated to various municipalities of the Province of Foggia in the context of PNRR. Source: author's elaboration on Ministry of the Interior Data.*

In addition to this funding, the province of Foggia has attracted in the past decade multiple funding opportunities aimed at financing projects implemented by non-governmental organizations, as well as by local institutions, aimed at countering the labor exploitation of migrant workers employed in the agricultural sector and living in the context of informal settlement. The investment of greats amounts of funding for projects that do not appear to have remarkable results in terms of improving the living and working conditions of migrant workers living in informal settlements, represents another element in defining the shape of Italian agricultural racial capitalism. This is based on the reproduction of emergency driven policies, which ultimately are aimed to reinforce the dichotomy between racialized migrant workers and the other workers based on the implementation of techniques of humanitarian management.

Finally, the province of Foggia has been the center of multiple initiatives of resistance and struggle of West African farmworkers that have resisted the multiple forms of oppression put in place in the context of agricultural racial capitalism. It is for all these reasons that we define it as a center in the context of Italian racial capitalism and we will develop the following analysis accordingly.

## Conclusion

The present chapter was aimed to contextualize the phenomenon of racialized migrant labor exploitation in the Italian agricultural sector by taking into consideration the different

structural factors allowing for the exploitation to take place. In order to contextualize their experience, and in line with the theoretical lens of analysis rejecting the primacy of class, the present chapter examined the structure of other systems of oppression based on migration status and racial oppression in Italy. As it has been illustrated in the first part of the chapter, racism and coloniality have characterized the fabric of Italian society since the unification of Italy in the 1860's. This was achieved as the result of a form of internal colonialism aimed at the incorporation of Southern Italy into Northern Italy economic and social structure, through the implementation of forms of economic domination as well as through the construction of Southern Italians as racially inferior being defined as being closer to Africans. With the colonial mission in East Africa and later Northern Africa, Italian national and racial identity further constituted itself in contraposition with Africaness and Blackness (Hawthorne 2022). While Italy has never fully come to terms with its colonial history, in the past decades increasing voices of African descent have taken the stage to denounce forms of racial discrimination and institutional racism intrinsic to Italian society. These have allowed to shed light on the structural discrimination suffered by racialized migrants in Italy, and most specifically those of African descent, who have experienced multiple forms of oppression in the past few decades, going from violent racial attacks and killings to the subaltern inclusion experienced as a result of Italian immigration legislation as well as the segmented nature of Italian labor market. It is therefore by also including in the analysis the evolution of the immigration normative framework in Italy in the past thirty years that a clearer picture of the phenomenon of migrant labor exploitation in the agricultural sector can be delineated. Indeed, while in the past decades the agricultural sector has experienced a "refugeezation of the workforce" (Dines, Rigo 2015), also in previous years agricultural labor was deeply intertwined with immigration policies and the segmentation of Italian labor market, and Southern Italy rural areas have often represented a place of refuge for migrant expelled from other areas of Italy and Europe. At the same time, following the criminalization of labor exploitation and labor intermediation, Southern Italy has become the emblem in the Italian public debate of the exploitation of migrant labor and *caporalato,* which has, in some cases, been compared to slavery. This narrative has promoted an understanding of migrant labor exploitation as a residue of archaic relations of production, rather than as integral to the functioning of contemporary capitalism.

In the past decade, and in light of all these intersecting dynamics, the province of Foggia can be defines as a center for Italian agricultural racial capitalism, being one of the major agricultural producers at the national level, holding among the highest shares of labor

relations with migrant workers, while at the same time having been discursively constructed in the Italian public debate as the emblem of migrant labor exploitation and *caporalato*. At the same time, the province of Foggia has been the theatre of multiple forms of mobilization and self-organization that have seen migrant farmworkers from West Africa attaining some of the most advanced forms of migrant farmworkers self-organization at the national level. It is for all these reasons that the following chapter will focus on the analysis of the condition of oppression and resistance of racialized migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia.

# CHAPTER 6

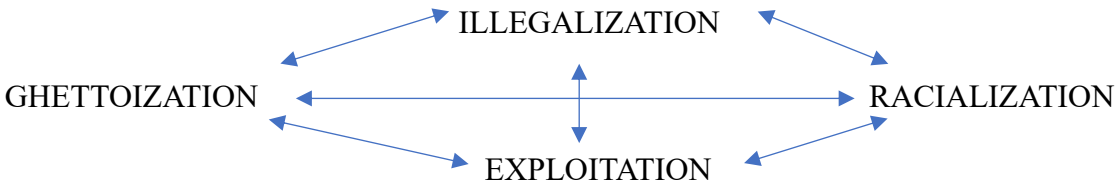
## FOGGIA AS A CENTER OF ITALIAN AGRICULTURAL RACIAL CAPITALISM: GHETTOIZATION AND EXPLOITATION

As a result of the processes illustrated in chapter five, around 2017 Foggia started assuming a central position in the panorama of Italian agricultural racial capitalism. The relevance of the Province of Foggia can be seen as the consequence of a series of factors already mentioned in the previous chapter and which will be further examined in this chapter as well as in the following ones.

This chapter and chapter seven will be dedicated to examining four processes defining the shape of racial capitalism in the province of Foggia which, while enlisted separately for the purpose of analysis, are all tightly connected and self-reinforcing. These are:

1. Ghettoization;
2. Exploitation;
3. Illegalization;
4. Racialization.

These processes define the experience of racialized migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia, and most specifically, of West African workers, influencing each other as exemplified by the following scheme.




The present chapter will focus on the processes of ghettoization and exploitation, which correspond to the most visible and analyzed component of the experience of West African migrant farmworkers in Foggia. Indeed, as already suggested in chapter five, the focus on the province of Foggia as the emblem of migrant labor exploitation and *caporalato* does not simply descend from the actual condition of labor exploitation and labor intermediation, which nonetheless has dramatically reduced in the past few years, but it is strongly connected with the presence of the largest rural informal settlements in Italy, making this condition visible. However, as it will be explored in this chapter and in the following,

informal settlements rather than a direct consequence of migrant labor exploitation respond to a series of needs, involving multiple dimensions. Hence, rather than the emblem of labor exploitation, informal settlements can be seen as a response to the processes of illegalization, ghettoization and racialization which West African workers experience on a daily basis.
The present chapter will be dedicated first to investigating the history of informal settlements in the Foggia province and the trajectories of ghettoization, and later to critically analyzing the contradiction of the anti-*caporalato* narrative and practice, and finally offering a broader definition of exploitation in light of the conceptualization of racial capitalism offered by Gargi Bhattacharyya (2018) explored in chapter two.

### 6.1 Ghettoization

When discussing about the province of Foggia, the large informal settlements surrounding the city of Foggia – such as Borgo Mezzanone and Torretta Antonacci - together with smaller ones - such as Borgo Tre Titoli, Stornarella, Pozzo Terraneo - inhabited by mostly West African workers are often taken as the emblem of *caporalato* and labor exploitation in the agricultural sector. However, informal settlements are just the more visible aspect of this phenomenon, rather than its essence.
As it will be explored in the present and following chapter, all the four issues above illustrated (ghettoization, illegalization, racialization and exploitation) are tightly connected but not coinciding with one another. The process of ghettoization itself overlaps but does not coincide with the establishment of informal settlements. On the one hand, these are the result of processes of ghettoization, marginalization and exclusion from Italian and European societies experienced by racialized migrant workers. On the other hand, informal settlements also represent an attempt to counter exclusion from a community through the construction of new community, characterized by its own rules and forms of internal social organization. Starting by looking briefly at the history of informal settlements in the province of Foggia, the analysis will later focus on the ambivalent nature of informal settlements as both places of marginalization and refuge, expanding on some life trajectories to better understand the process of ghettoization bringing people to live within informal settlements, as well as the ways in which this process it is further exacerbated and, reciprocally, exacerbates the other three dimensions of illegalization, exploitation and racialization.

### 6.1.1 Brief history of informal agricultural settlements in the Foggia province

The province of Foggia, similarly with others agricultural districts of Italy, has long been characterized by the presence of informal settlements, mostly established by migrant workers during the agricultural season and dismantled once the harvesting season was over. Starting from the 1990's, the province of Foggia saw the emergence of small encampments, often starting from old farmhouses around which wooden barracks would be built. In other cases, workers found more strategical locations, functional to connect them with various services, such as transport, food shopping and water supply. This was the case of the informal settlement which emerged next to the former sugar manufacturing of Eridiana, close to route S.S. 16 connecting Foggia with San Severo and to the now abandoned train station of Rignano Scalo, which was eventually evicted in 1996. Following the eviction, some of its permanent inhabitants settled within some abandoned farmhouses, located in the countryside, to avoid further evictions and controls by the police. It is around these houses that the then called *Gran Ghetto di Rignano* emerged in the following years. As Souleymane - one of the oldest informal settlement inhabitants living there since 1992 – illustrates, in those years most workers were not resident in the area.

> "At that time, there were no car, we used to go to work by foot, waiting along the autoroute for some bosses (*capo*) to take us and go to work. We used to live here (he indicates the area, now occupied by an abandoned petrol station), there was a shop where to buy food, we use to sleep like this, without a house or even a tin roof on our head. After the police come to throw us away, we found these old houses and we decided to settle in Ghetto. I used to come here only for the summer season, but during the rest of the year I lived in Napoli." (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Souleymane, Torretta Antonacci, Oct. 2022).

Until the early 2010's, the settlement maintained a nature of temporariness, with only few people residing inside the old farmhouses for the entire year, while the majority leaving once the tomato harvesting season was over, going either to their houses spread all around Italy or to other agricultural districts - such as Rosarno, Capobello, Saluzzo, etc. - following the seasonality of agricultural cycles. Yet, starting from 2009, the purpose of informal settlements started changing, as a consequence of both the economic crisis and of increasing pressure placed on undocumented migrants following the approval of so-called "Security package" in 2009. As described by Alessandro Ventura, in one of the few written accounts of the time:

> "When I came back to Grand Ghetto in the summer of 2009, it was hard to navigate the space, I could not anymore recognize the landmarks from my former visit. After only two summers, Grand Ghetto was completely transformed. Economic crisis and the dismissal of migrants who had found employment in the North, but more in general, the restrictions and repression on those workers who find themselves in a condition of irregularity, made it a privileged destination for new arrivals, reaching peaks of demographic concentration never seen before" (*author's translation from Italian*, Ventura 2010).

In this context, various experiences of assistance and activism took place, such as the intervention of Caritas and Doctors without Borders for water distribution, or the initiative "*Radio-Ghetto Voci Libere*" born from the collective "*Campagne in Lotta*" in order to give voice to the life experiences of oppression and resistance of the informal settlements' inhabitants.

The 1st of March 2017 represented a turning point in the history of Gran Ghetto, with the eviction of the area implemented by law enforcement agencies, with consequences that would affect the entire province of Foggia in the years to come. The eviction took place once after the area had been placed under seizure by Bari Anti-Mafia Investigation Directorate (DIA) in March 2016. The right to use the area by the migrant workers living there, once granted, was eventually revoked, allowing for the eviction to take place on the 1st of March. The day following the eviction, settlements inhabitants organized a demonstration in Foggia in front of the Prefecture, in order to denounce the eviction and demand effective alternatives to be put in place. During the same night, a fire incident burned all the remains of the houses, destroyed by bulldozers, and two Malian citizens, Mamadou Konate and Nouhou Doumbia, lost their life during the fire. The president of Puglia Region, Michele Emiliano, following the death of Konate and Doumbia in the fire incident stated: "they would have not died if they had accepted to leave", thus implicitly saying that a refusal to comply to authorities' orders should result in death.

The eviction of *Grand Ghetto* represented a sort of collective trauma for its inhabitants, many of whom rebuilt their shacks and precarious houses there. If mentioned, the word "eviction" (in Italian *sgombero*) is still able to raise concern, running from mouth to mouth as a ring-bell of alarm, recalling past experiences of violence, destruction and death. Various testimonies, among the inhabitants, recall the event with sadness and distrust, directed to those who were supposed to stand by their side and yet supported the eviction. Among them, the union Cgil has long been seen as one of the main advocates of the eviction and thus lost the support of a considerable section of settlement inhabitants.

> "We trusted them. We allowed them to be among us, to live with us. At that time here in Ghetto it was not like today, it was full of whites who use to come from various parts of Italy to support us. However, they betrayed us. You know this people of Cgil, together with these other associations, they supported the eviction. I remember them laughing there while the bulldozers were destroying the area. People were seeing all their things destroyed, we even lost two of our comrades that night. And them, they were happy about it. They said we should transfer to Casa Sankara. That is why we don't want to see them here: they are not good for us". (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Ibrahima, Torretta Antonacci, Mar. 2022).

The plan of eviction went hand in hand with the realization of a new project, which was supposed to be an alternative to informal settlements, as a way out from the so-called 'ghettoes': Casa Sankara. Casa Sankara, from the Burkinabé leader Thomas Sankara admired all-around West Africa as an example of resistance to colonialism and imperialism, was created with the intention of being a bridge between informal settlements, and more specifically former *Grand Ghetto*, and the Italian society. While the experience of Casa Sankara will be further explored in chapter eight as part of the analysis regarding the ways in which institutional and non-governmental actors cooperate in the reproduction of racial capitalism through the implementation of million-budget projects aimed at institutionalizing segregation, for the purpose of the present analysis it is enough to note that Casa Sankara emerged as a consequence of the eviction of Ghetto, or rather, the eviction of Ghetto was functional to the creation of Casa Sankara. People in *Grand Ghetto*, who saw their houses destroyed, were offered a place in Casa Sankara, where containers had been installed, even though they were not enough to host all the newly State-produced homeless people. Another institutional structure, named *L'Arena*, was inaugurated at the periphery of San Severo. While some accepted the offered alternatives, others decided to stay in what had remained of "Grand Ghetto", sleeping in cars or outside, despite the freezing temperatures.

Some of those evicted decided to move to what would have then been defined by media as "Europe largest ghetto": Borgo Mezzanone.

Borgo Mezzanone, before the eviction of *Grand Ghetto*, was made only of few shacks and some old containers, situated on the sides of the former military airport runway. Located at a 16 kilometers distance from Foggia, and about 1 km from the village of Borgo Mezzanone, the former military airport had then been used in the late 1990s for the creation of an emergency camp to host Kosovo war refugees. Then, in 2005 the Center for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (CARA) of Borgo Mezzanone was created. It was first designed with the intention, later abandoned, of creating in the same area a reception center for asylum seekers and a deportation camp. While the project later failed, the extremely oppressive architecture

of the place, characterized by a barbed wire fencing and a 24h presence of military forces, recalls this original planning, while at the same time making extremely visible the purpose of containment inherent to governmental reception structures.

*Figure 19 The entrance of Borgo Mezzanone reception center, next to the informal settlement. Source: photo by the author.*

If *Grand Ghetto* creation, similarly to other informal settlements situated in the countryside and emerging around abandoned farmhouses, can be seen as an informal response to the housing and living needs of seasonal farmworkers, Borgo Mezzanone origin is more directly related to the institutional will of implementing segregation as functional to the labor exploitation in the agricultural sector. Indeed, in Borgo Mezzanone the lines between formal and informal settlement had been blurred since its inception, being the formal reception system the very cause at the origin of the informal one. The former military airport runaway started first to be inhabited by rejected asylum seekers, who, once their asylum claims were rejected, were forced to leave the reception center, as well as by people to whom international protection was granted but no other housing and working opportunities was offered. Without any working nor language training delivered during their stay within the reception center, most of them would only find employment in the surrounding agricultural fields.

One of the oldest inhabitants of the settlement, Mohamed from Togo, recalls how the area looked like when he first arrived.

> "I arrived here in 2007. At that time, there were no shacks, not even these large containers. Only the smaller ones were there, where the Somalian are living today. After staying in the Caritas of Borgo Mezzanone for some years, I then decided to move here and open my restaurant. I then moved in the *container* where I am still living until nowadays. At that time, we were few here. But later, especially in the past years, many people started to arrive, from other parts of Italy as well as from Ghetto. So, they started to build all these shacks, and in 2019, before they started to destroy them, they reach their maximum, with all the area between the runaway and the camp full of shacks". (*authors' translation from French*, Conv. with Mohamed, Borgo Mezzanone, Nov. 2020)

Similarly, Khadim, who lived in Borgo Mezzanone in 2014 for few months during the tomato harvesting, once he returned back in 2019 could not recognize the place due to the dramatic increase in presences and shacks.

> "When I came back I could not even recognize the place. My uncle had been living here for many years, in one of this big *containers* so I already came here in 2014, during the summer season, to work in the tomato harvesting. But at that time nothing was here. No shops, no shacks, no restaurants. People were forced to go to Foggia to buy something to eat. But right now, it is like a city. You can find everything. And the time I arrived, before they destroyed that area near the camp, it was so full of houses that even locating my uncle's house was hard for me" (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Khadim, Borgo Mezzanone, Dec. 2019).

2017 *Grand Ghetto* eviction, coupled with the approval in 2018 of DL 113/2018, so-called Security Decrees, causing the expulsion of holders of permit for "humanitaria reasons" from reception centers all around Italy and the abolition of permits for humanitarian reasons, determined a sharp rise in the inhabitants of Borgo Mezzanone, with new shacks being built everyday.

Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement obtained national resonance at the end of 2018, following two events used by the then Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini as yet another tool for his never ending propaganda against "immigration". The first, taking place on the 5th of October 2018, the day following the promulgation of DL 113/2018, was the police chase of a gambian citizen, Omar Jallow, who refused to stop at a police checkpoint[56], ending in Borgo Mezzanone. Jallow was handcuffed at the police car's wheel and eventually arrested for resisting the police. The case was used by Salvini as an example of the usefulness

[56]For an in-depth analysis of the issue, see Barbaro 2019.

of the newly approved Security Decree, and he wrote on his Twitter and Facebook pages: "Thanks to the new Security Decree, these thugs will go back to their country. The fun is over also for them" (*author's translation from Italian*, Salvini 2018).

The second event was the arrest, taking place inside the settlement of Borgo Mezzanone, of a ghanian citizen accused of having participated to the rape and killing of a 16 years-old girl in Rome, Desiré Mariottini, whose death had been also instrumentalized by Salvini and the far-right in their attack to migrant and racialized communities[57]. On the 26 of October 2018, the far-right newspaper "Il Giornale" published an article titled "Rapes, decay and illegal immigrants: the bomb ghetto of the beast" (Ferrara 2018) where all the alleged sexual and violent crimes committed by racialized migrant workers in the area of Borgo Mezzanone were enlisted, in line with the process defined by Sarah Farris (2017) as "femonationalism", whereby nationalist, racist and xenofobes ideologies are mobilized together with pseudo-feminist positions in order to attack racialized groups as a whole, defining them as "uncivilized" and "barbaric", with the large use of definitions normally attributed to animals (such as pride, beast, etc.).

Due to the raising media attention, coupled with the plan of the then Ministry Salvini to bulldoze all informal settlements, Borgo Mezzanone experienced eviction in four instances in 2019 (February, March, May and July), which nevertheless did not completely destroy the settlement, but just some areas closer to the reception structure for asylum seekers. The operation of eviction was named "Law and Humanity", a name aiming to suggest that it could be possible to enforce law through violence while at the same time respecting the humanity of those involved.

The strategy used for the eviction was similar to that deployed in the *Grand Ghetto* two years before. Some areas of the settlement were first placed under seizure by DIA and later demolished in light of the "non occasional illicit activities (such as selling of narcotic substances, exploitation of prostitution, misappropriation of electricity, illegal occupation of public buildings, etc.) putting at risk public order and security" as stated by Foggia Prefettura in a press release about the eviction, issued on the 20th of February 2019. At the same time, the press release stated:

> "initiatives aimed at assuring housing alternatives to all those who are regularly residing on the national territory are underway, in accordance with Apulia Region, in order to allow the demolition of other

[57] For an in-depth analysis of the issue see Iesuè 2018.

buildings. That of today is just the first of a series of actions" (*author's translation from Italian*, Prefettura di Foggia, press release, 20.02.2019).

While eviction was eventually carried out in other three instances, with the final one taking place in July 2019, housing alternatives were not offered to those whose houses were demolished, and most of them just moved few hundred of meters, to rebuild their shacks in the areas which had not been touched by bulldozers.

*Figure 20 Eviction of Borgo Mezzanone taking place on 11th of July 2019. Source: photo by the author.*

From 2019 to 2023, no other eviction operation was carried out in the area.

In Borgo Mezzanone, an eviction planned in March 2020, aimed at removing those people unauthorizedly residing within the former reception center housing units, was cancelled due to the declaration of State of emergency in the context of Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, as no attempt or sign of eviction was made, inhabitants started building block houses, seeing their presence within the settlement as increasingly more permanent and in order to avoid fire incidents.

In December 2019, a fire incident destroyed again all the former *Grand Ghetto,* which had been rebuilt on a private land, following its eviction in 2017. As a consequence of the fire, settlement's inhabitants demanded to Apulia Region to be given alternative housing solutions within the area of the settlement. The Region, through the Ministry of Interior, first placed some tents, which were however destroyed after few days,

due to adverse weather conditions. In March 2020, due to the pressure of settlement's inhabitants supported by the union USB, about 100 temporary housing units were eventually installed by Puglia Region, in the same area which, three years before, had been placed under seizure and then evicted. The newly installed temporary housing units were defined by the Puglia Region as *Foresteria Regionale per Lavoratori Agricoli* (Regional Temporary Housing Structure/ Regional Guesthouse for Farmworkers) of Torretta Antonacci, and managed by different organizations starting from 2020, as it will be further explored in chapter nine. At the same time, the Prefecture of Foggia in partnership with Puglia Region promoted a project aimed at the reconversion of the CARA of Borgo Mezzanone into another *Foresteria,* which nevertheless was not fully implemented. After about two years in which hundred temporary housing units were placed in an area adjacent to the reception center, in August 2023 the units were finally opened to the residents. However, as it will be explored in chapter nine, the management of the structure in Torretta Antonacci and Borgo Mezzanone differs quite significantly, due to the ability of their inhabitants to organize and claim to have a voice in matters regarding their lives.

*Figure 21 Torretta Antonacci Regional Guesthouse. Source: photo by the author.*

While the various responses to the eviction of informal settlements and to the establishment of formal settlements besides the informal ones, coming from both settlements' inhabitants and from other involved actors, such as unions and NGOs, will be investigated more in depth in chapter eight and nine, it is here necessary to highlight the way in which the social construction of informal settlements as places of "illegality" and "decay"

fostered the process of marginalization and ghettoization, according to which settlements' inhabitants have been further stigmatized at the eyes of local communities. The discourse related to the "illegality" of activities carried out within informal settlements has been constantly used to legitimize their eviction both by institution and by other non-governmental actors. As it will be further explored in following paragraphs, following the establishment of *caporalato* and labor exploitation as crimes, also labor exploitation came to be framed terms of "illegality", and thus treated as an issue of public order and security. In the last years, the trend has been that of establishing formal settlements, such as that of Casa Sankara, as well as those placed within the area of informal settlements (such as in the case of Torretta Antonacci and Borgo Mezzanone), characterized by the same degree of segregation from larger Italian society compared to informal ones, but discursively legitimized through their placement in the category of "legality". In this way, the issue of ghettoization has been identified in the public discourse with informal settlements, so-called "ghettoes", thus diverting attention from the process of State-enforced segregation to its mere outcome. As mentioned in the second chapter, in contemporary racial capitalism, legal status often immigration legislation represents one of the main tools to enforce "global apartheid" (Sharma 2005), which is justified not through racial categorization but through legal status. Informal settlements thus represent just the most visible face of the process of ghettoization and segregation, which nevertheless characterizes the entire fabric of Italian and European societies, starting from the very structure of border regime.

### 6.1.2 Informal settlements: places of marginalization or refuge? Ethnography of informal settlements and trajectories of ghettoization

Informal settlements can be places of departure or arrival, transit or waiting. The life trajectories of informal settlements' inhabitants are the most different, as are the countries of origins, the age, gender, social, economic and cultural backgrounds. Media, institutions, non-governmental actors and unions mostly represent informal settlements only as places of exploitation and decay, but looking more closely informal settlements are much more than that. They have been defined as the representation of slavery in the 21st century, as "hell" on earth or as "workers' landfill" (Mira 2022; Palmisano 2023; Sagnet, Palmisano 2015). Those who enter one time will focus on the tons of garbage, spread around without any waste disposal mechanism. Or on the harshness of living conditions, with few hygienic services and wooden shacks. It is often claimed by institutions, NGOs and unions that it is

unacceptable for a "civilized country" such as Italy to host places like farmworkers informal settlement, however, the underlying meaning of this sentence is rarely analyzed.

My first encounter with informal settlements took place at the end of June 2019, when I went for my first time in Borgo Mezzanone, with one of the secretaries of the union Flai-Cgil in Foggia. The first day I went there I was just impressed by the difference between what I saw and the representation of informal settlements given by academic investigations and media. The narrative that characterized the mainstream representation was one of victimization, whereby the "enslavement" of workers and their "inhumane" living conditions were always highlighted. I was expecting to find a lugubre environment, and what first impressed me was the vitality of the place, with countless informal economic activities. Clothes magazines, café shops, restaurants, mechanics, electicians, furnitures' shops, churches, mosques, through which the settlements' inhabitants attempted to reconstruct a small multicultural African city at the margins of Europe. In the following months and years, the various contradictions and frictions, would appear clearer to me, but my first impression was one of astonishment not for the segragation and marginalization, which I expected already, but for the creativity of forms of "r-existance" which were put in place to overcome it, or at least, momentarily forgetting it.

I would have also discovered that the contradictions inherent to these places are not easily verbalized. Settlements' inhabitants usually say that "these are not places for people to live", but in some cases continue to live there even when they obtained a residency permit, and they are renting a house in the city of Foggia. In other cases, those who move out from there, usually go to spend their off days and even holidays there. This contradictory nature, as it will be further explored in following paragraphs, lies in the fact that, despite being marginal places characterized by dire living conditions, are also, the "only place belonging to us in Foggia, the only place where we can feel free", as someone who lived there told me once, meaning that are places where it is possible to escape the racism, discrimination and coloniality characterizing Italy, and more in particular Foggia.

Informal settlements of Foggia province, excluding the settlement of Roma and Sinti from Bulgaria and Romania nearby Stornarella, are mostly inhabited by West African migrants, with some exception of Somalians, Sudanese, Afghans and Pakistanis.

In former *Grand Ghetto*, normally called "Ghetto" by its inhabitants and now renamed by some Torretta Antonacci[58], the most represented nationalities are Mali, Burkina

[58] The issue of the renaming of Grand Ghetto, considered by some actors as a step toward self-determination and recognition of settlements' inhabitants, by others as mere propaganda, will be further explored in chapter nine, as part of

Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, who are at the same time those holding a position of power in relation to the control of the settlement. Other nationalities, such as Gambia, Senegal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, are also present but more marginalized in the management of power within the settlement, reproducing a certain divide, with the exception of Senegal, between Francophone and Anglophone countries in West Africa. In Borgo Mezzanone, on the other hand, the most represented nationalities are Senegal, Gambia, Nigeria, and Ghana, with the presence of small numbers of people coming from East Africa, such as Somalians, and Asia, such as Afghans and Pakistanis. The presence of these communities is directly linked to the neighboring reception center and to the malfunctioning of second reception system in the province of Foggia, whereby asylum seekers who obtained the recognition of international protection status, such as asylum or subsidiary protecion, are often not offered any alternative nor relocated in a project for second reception. In both settlements, the majority of population is male, with a 5-10% female population, slightly higher in Borgo Mezzanone and mostly represented by Nigerian women.

The two settlements also differ in relation to their internal organization, Torretta Antonacci being more hierarchically structured, while Borgo Mezzanone presenting a more fluid structure of internal power dynamics. Internal power structures within informal settlements require a specific analysis, in that they are crucial in defining processes of organization and the establishment of relations with other governmental and non-govenrmental actors, and will be explored more in depth in chaper nine.

Both informal settlements are caracterized by a large number of informal economic activities, such as restaurants, shops, bars and discos, varying according to the traditions and costumes of each community. For instance, while in Torretta Antonacci Ivorien, Malian and Burkina Faso restaurants prevail, the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone is characterized by multiple Senegalese, Gambian, Ghanian and Nigerian restaurants. The informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone is defined by settlement's inhabitants as the most "urban" and it is possible to find there a higher number of bars and discos, which, during week ends and festivities, attract visitors from both Torretta Antonacci and other informal settlements of the area, as well as from inhabitants of neighbouring villages and towns.

the strategies of resistance in the realm of representation employed by West African migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia.

*Figure 22 Senegalese restaurant interior in Borgo Mezzanone. Source: photo by the author.*

The sex-work, performed by mostly Nigerian women within those bars, as well as in their houses, represents without any doubts one of the most attracting factors for outside visitors, among whom also white Italians. However, despite the common representation of Nigerian women sex-work as uniquely linked to human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, it is possible to highlight a variety of trajectories bringing women to practice sex work. In many cases, women are experiencing a double-exploitation as both farmworkers and sex-workers, made necessary due to the centrality of women in the Nigerian household. Unfortunately, the present work will not focus on the specific experience of women within the settlement if not by offering just few remarks, being aware that this represents a relevant limit of the analysis, being sex-labor, as a part of reproductive labor, a central element in the reproduction of racial capitalism. However, due to time-limit and difficulty in gaining the trust and accessing the experience of sex workers, it was not possible to systematically include this aspect into the framework of analysis.

In light of their different history, the composition of Torretta Antonacci and Borgo Mezzanone informal settlements differ quite significantly, not only from a point of view of most represented nationalities, but also in relation to the life trajectories of their residents. Being among the oldest informal settlement of the province, “Ghetto” hosts people who have been residing in Italy for more than 30 years. Some of them had entered Italy at the time

when no visa was required, and either took part to that internal migration characterizing seasonal agriculture in Italy or worked for some decades in Northern Italy and were then forced to migrate to Southern Italy as a result of the 2008-2009 economic crisis, giving birth to the process defined as "the globalization of the countryside" (Colloca, Corrado 2013). Others entered Italy through Flux Decrees for seasonal work, especially among Burkinabè, renewing their working permit until some documents were missing and they were not able to renew it again, ending up in informal settlements in order to continue to live and work despite being undocumented. Others, despite holding their papers, continue to live in informal settlements where they work or manage some informal economic activity.

Among the first is Adama, a Guinean citizen who has been living in Italy for the past 23 years. He arrived by plane from Algeria, at a time when no visa was required. Since then, he had always lived between Foggia, Napoli and Rosarno.

> "I arrived Italy in 1989. At that time, there was no need for a visa to enter Italy. The time I arrived, I met someone who told me that near Napoli there was a place where many Africans used to live. So, I went to Napoli and after, I came to Foggia. During the first years, I used to move between Napoli (Caserta) and Foggia. I am among the first inhabitants of this settlement. When the former ghetto near the train station was evicted, I was among those who came to this side and find these abandoned rural houses. Since then, I have been living in this house, which is about 10 minutes from the ghetto, with no light, no water. In 2002, I applied for the "*sanatoria*" to get a document, with one of my bosses in this area. But it didn't go well, I even took a lawyer, but in the end I did not succeed in obtaining a paper. Before, I used to move to Rosarno during the wintertime, you see this photo I took in Rosarno, many years ago [he shows a photo portraying him with a Romanian women in a mandarin field]. We used to work mandarin and oranges. But after the problem happened there, I decided to remain here in Foggia permanently. Now it is more than ten years that I am not going anywhere. Until recently I could work without any problem even without a document, but right now it is becoming harder due to the controls". (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Adama, Torretta Antonacci, Sept. 2021)

Adama belongs to the first "generation" of West African migrant farmworkers, those who entered Italy through airplane, and were employed in seasonal agriculture, moving in different locations according to various harvesting periods. Arrived in Italy when the center of African farmworkers was the Ghetto of Villa Literno (Caserta), Adama and people with similar life trajectories, were first based in Caserta, moving to Foggia and Rosarno only for the working season, respectively in summer and winter time. In the following years, however, the center moved, and increasing number of people became permanently based in Foggia, either working all the year in the now deseasonalized agricultural sector or instead moving to Campobello or Saluzzo during the autumn, and Rosarno during the winter.

The second trajectory is that of workers living in Northern Italy who were forced to migrate South following 2009 economic crisis. Salifou is a Burikinabé citizen who entered Italy in 1999 by flight with a tourist visa. After few years undocumented, he was able to obtain a residency permit in 2003, after applying for the regularization promoted by the then right wing Berlusconi government in 2002. He had then in the province of Brescia (Lombardia Region, Northern Italy) lived until 2009, where he was employed in the manifactural sector. However, following the loss of his job in 2009, he moved in the province of Foggia, where he started being employed in the agricultural sector and living in the informal settlement of "Grand Ghetto".

> "I worked for more than six years in the same company in Brescia. I was working in a metal-working industry as a personell assigned to machines. In 2009, following the economic crisis I lost my job. My cousin lived here in Foggia, so I decided to come to work in the tomato harvesting, hoping to come back to Brescia once the season was over. At that time I didn't know this place, I had never come here before. I only heard people talking about Foggia, where they used to go to work during the summertime. I knew living conditions were very hard, but I didn't have any option. After loosing my job I wasn't able to pay my rent anymore, so I decided to come here, where I would have not paid any rent nor bills, while looking for another work. While I was expecting to come only for a season, I never went back to Brescia. For few years, I renewed my document with the agricultural contracts, and I rented a house in the area. But in 2019, they said that my contract was fake and they rejected my renewal. Since then, I have been undocumented, until recently, when I applied for an asylum request, due to the deteriorating security conditions in Burkina Faso" (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Salifou, Torretta Antonacci, Aug. 2021).

Another trajectory is that of those who arrived in Italy by sea in the first decade of 2000, and entered the asylum system. In the early 2000, the rate of rejection of aslylum requests was very high and permits for humanitarian reasons, even if present within the legislation, were hardly granted. However, following the Rosarno attacks and the so-called "vertenza Rosarno" which saw a pressure from activist groups for the recognition of a document for humanitarian reason for those who were involved in the incident and were defined as "exploited, vulnerable undeportable" (*sfruttati, vulnerabili, inespellibili*) as well as following the Lybian civil war and the declaration of the so-called "North African Emergency" (ENA, *Emergenza Nord Africa*), documents for humanitarian permits started to be granted to increasing numbers of people. Nevertheless, many of those who obtained a residency permit for humanitarian reasons were unable to renew it due to the lack of a valid proof of address or residence, and after just few years as documented, slipped away back to undocumentedness.

Among them, Moussa, an Malian citizen, entered Italy in 2011 and lived in Caserta for few years between 2012 and 2015. Not being able to renew his permit, he decided to move to the informal settlement of Grand Ghetto, where he could work and live even without a paper.

> "I arrived in Italy in 2011, after having lived in Libya for almost 3 years before the civil war erupted. Once in Italy, I was living in Napoli where I was first given a negative by Caserta Commission and later my asylum request was re-examined and I obtained a one year document for humanitarian reason. I lived and worked in Napoli for few years, coming to Foggia during the summer season in order to harvest tomato. However, after I renewed my document for two times, in 2015 I was not able to find a residence to renew it and I thus moved to Ghetto, because I didn't feel safe again to live in the city while I was not holding a valid permit. I have been living here for the past 7 years. This year, I finally started a new procedure, applying for an asylum request and hopefully I will have a document back, so I will be able to start my life again." (*author's translation from French*, Conv. with Moussa, Torretta Antonacci, May 2023).

As Moussa, many others who arrived in Italy in 2011 and 2012 were living and working in Libya until that time and they had not planned to move to Italy. However, due to the eruption of the civil war and the increasing discrimination and maltreatment of Black Africans in Libya, they were forced to leave.

Finally, a relevant portion of Torretta Antonacci informal settlement inhabitants is made of people who arrived in Italy from the entire West African region during the current phase of migration, starting from 2013, once the Lybian route was open. They are mostly from Ivory Coast, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone. Many of them arrived in the informal settlement following the rejection of their asylum claims or their expulsion from reception centers.

> "I arrived here in 2018, following the rejection of my asylum request and the expulsion from the reception center. I was living in Sicily before, and I had worked there as a shepherd for about a year. But the boss didn't want to pay me and I was living in the middle of nowhere, in the mountains, isolated from everyone. So I heard about these place in Foggia,where Africans used to live and work in agriculture, and I decided to come and try my chance. Since then, I have been living here in Ghetto, trying to earn a living by working as a day laborer without a contract. I reached a point in my life when I thought it was too much, and I didn't want to live anymore. However, thank God, I was helped to apply for a new asylum request and, this year, I finally obtained a residency permit for special protection. I feel so happy now, that I found a document. I have hope again for my future." (Conv. with Sheik, Torretta Antonacci, Oct. 23).

The informal settlement of Torretta Antonacci contains in itself the various phases of West African migration to Italy. Thanks to the stratification of experiences, it is possible to read the history and evolution of the past thirty years of racialized migrant agricultural labor in the province of Foggia, starting as a circular seasonal employment, becoming a sort of buffer-zone following 2008-2009 economic crisis, and increasingly structuring itself as a permanent agricultural district, with deseasonalization of production and settlement of both documented and undocumented workers.

The informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone, on the other hand, due to its more recent existence, hosts people who mostly belong to the last phase of West African migration, starting from 2013 until nowadays, with newcomers always arriving due to its proximity with the reception center for asylum seekers. The majority of its inhabitants have arrived from all Italy, after their asylum applications had been rejected or they had been expelled from reception centers following the approval of DL 113/2018, with the exclusion of holders of humanitarian reasons permit from accessing second reception system. Indeed, as already explored in previous paragraphs, Borgo Mezzanone started becoming densely populated following the eviction of *Grand Ghetto* in 2017 and the strenghtening of illegalization policies by Italian government in 2018.

*Figure 23 Borgo Mezzanone shack houses, October 2019. Source: photo by the author.*

Mamadou is a Senegalese citizen, coming from the region of Kaolak. He first arrived in Borgo Mezzanone in 2016, following the rejection of his asylum application in Verona and willing to start to work after years of waiting and suspension in the reception center.

> "I arrived in Foggia in April 2016. I had some friends who told me that here it was easier to find a work, even if you didn't have papers. I came with a friend from Verona. The firs day we arrived we slept in the station, because the last bus to go Borgo was already gone. The following day we went there. The first weeks I rented a room in Borgo, but after, as I was able to find a job in the countryside, by boss told me to move in one of his farmhouses. I lived there for a while, I brought with me some of my friends, and we were working together. However, one day while we were coming back from work, we were stopped by the police. As I didn't have a licence, I decided not to stop. They followed us and finally stopped us. They arrested us and we spent two days in jail. After they released us, I came to know that it were the other workers and neighbours who called the police for us, because they didn't like that blacks were staying there and were working with them. I was the first Black to work with my boss and they didn't like it. After that happened, police used to come every day to our house. We didn't' feel safe anymore because we didn't have documents. So we decided to leave and come back to Borgo. Italian people used to say people living in Borgo are bad, they blame us because we are living in the ghetto and we are not living within the city, but we don't have documents, how can we live within the city, in the middle of people? It is their fault if we are here in the ghetto, if they gave us documents we would not be living here. (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Mamadou, Borgo Mezzanone, July 2022).

As it can be highlighted from Mamadou's testimony, there are multiple causes that led him to live within the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone. If in the first place he arrived there from Verona looking for an employment, once he found a job and a house outside the informal settlement he was forced to go back as a consequence of the racism of both by its colleagues and the institutions. Following that episode, he didn't feel safe anymore living in his employer house nor driving a car to go to work, so he decided to leave farm working and built a boutique within the informal settlement. Having experienced the violence of social and institutional racism, Mamadou decided to stay in the informal settlement as a way to safeguard himself. Nevertheless, after about six years spent in Borgo Mezzanone, at the end of 2022, Mamadou finally obtained a working permit, after applying for the 2020 regularization, and moved to Genova to be employed in construction. Meeting him in Genova, he told me:

> "You know, some people don't want to leave the ghetto, they are used to the ghetto life, and want to stay there forever. But others, like me, as soon as we find a document, we leave, because that is not a life, we didn't come to Europe to live in these kinds of conditions. I want to live a good life, go to work,

have my own place to live, have rest days and be respected at work. But in Foggia, you know, it is not like that. Some are working every day, without any rest, only thinking about sending all their money to their families in Africa. And they never think about themselves, how they are living. Others, they drink too much, take drugs, stay up until the morning, and are unable to leave that kind of life. But it is not good, that is not what we came here for". (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Mamadou, Genova, July 2023).

Borgo mezzanone population increased dramatically at the end of 2018, following the approval of D.L 113/2018. In that occasion, hundreds of people arrived from around Italy, after being thrown out from their reception centers without anywhere to go, or after having been told that to renew their residency permit for humanitarian reasons they were obliged to provide a working contract.

Among them, Jewru, a Gambian citizen living in the informal settlements of Borgo Mezzanone since 2019, arrived there looking for a working contract to renew his document. His experience highlights the contradictions of Borgo Mezzanone, in the eyes of those who inhabit it.

"I have been living here for the past three years. At the time when I arrived, I had just put my document on renew in Genova. It was 2019, Salvini had already cancelled humanitarian protection. They said that only if you had a contract you could change your document to work permit, but I didn't have any job in Genova, so I came to Foggia to look for a contract. They told me that here it was not that difficult to find a job. At the time when I arrived, I lived for few months in a farmhouse in the countryside, in the same place where we used to work. It was winter and that side was so cold. Nothing was there, only *campagna (*countryside). After few months there, I could not resist anymore to live in such isolation, so I decided to move to *Casa Bianca* [an abandoned house near Foggia, hosting about 100 people] where my uncle used to live. But also there was not easy to live, without electricity, and it was hard to find a work, so I finally moved to Borgo. At the time when I arrived I could not believe a place like that could exist in Europe. It was not a place for people to live. The conditions were very bad, no water, no good light. During the winter, light used to off for many hours, and even to sleep was a problem, because of the cold. After coming back from work, you needed to heat the water in order to shower, and sometimes you came back so tired that you could not do aything but sleep. When no work was there, it was hard even to have food to eat. But you could go to some boutiques and ask for credit, and after, when you had money, you could go there to repay. That saved many people. I also suffer from a sickness that make me to fall down [epylepsia]. At the time when I arrived in Borgo, I had my traditional medicine with me, which I brought from Africa. But after some time it finished. So I started to fall down. People started to avoid me, and didn't want to take me to work because they were scared I could fall down in the workplace and they would have problems. So I suffered a lot for this sickness in Borgo. Thank God, after I was assisted by some doctors who gave me a good medicine and right now I don't fall down anymore. Right now I am not living in Borgo anymore, I live in the city of Foggia. But

everytime I have a day off I go to Borgo, because all my friends are there, and it is the only place I can feel free. If I go there I forget how people look us when we walk around in Foggia, as if we were not supposed to be there. ” (Conv. with Jewru, Borgo Mezzanone, July 2023).

*Figure 24 Inhabitant of the informal settlement building block houses in Borgo Mezzanone. April 2021. Source: photo by the author.*

While most of the people who live within informal settlements arrived there due to their precarious migration status or the fact of being undocumented, there are also people who continue living there even if documented.

This is particularly true for Nigerian women, who often hold a document as refugees but continue to live in the informal settlement in order to work.

Loveth is a Nigerian woman living in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone and managing a bar. After many years undocumented as a consequence of Security Decree, she finally obtained the recognition of her asylum claim and she was granted refugee status. Nevertheless, she continues living in the informal settlement, managin a disco-bar and going to work during the summertime.

“I have lost my two years permit in 2018 due to Salvini law. After my bar here in Borgo burned down. I thought I couldn’t make it again. But thankfully I found some people who helped me to get back my document. Now I have a document for asylum. Last summer I worked for few months in a *fabbrica* (processing company for horticultural products), but right now the work is over. I don’t have any other

> place to go so I am staying here, I manage my bar and I can earn some money to send my family in Nigeria" (Conv. with Loveth, Borgo Mezzanone, Oct. 2023).

In some cases, people holding valid residency permits are living within informal settlements in that they are unable to find better working and housing conditions.

The difficulty in finding houses to rent is tightly connected with the racial discrimination that Africans racialized as Black are experiencing in the provice of Foggia. For instance, while many people original of Morocco are living in the village of Borgo Mezzanone, it is almost impossible to find someone renting a house to "Blacks". In the city of Foggia is also very hard, and people often risk being scammed while desperately looking for a house.

> "You know for us it is so hard to find a house to rent. Not that is impossible, but it is very hard. Most of the times if they see you are a Black they will find an excuse, they will say your salary is not high enough, they will ask you many documents you cannot provide. They will not tell you directly <<we will not rent you the house because you are a Black>>, but you will understand it anyway. Both in Foggia and in Borgo they have many houses which are empty, they are not rented to anyone, but they will never rent us. *Marocchino* they are living there, but to us, no, they will not give us." (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Mamadou, Borgo Mezzanone, July 2022).

In other cases, living within informal settlements is a calculated choice, done in order to reduce at minimum expenses while at the same time maximising the income through the establishment of informal economic activities, such as the selling of food, clothes, etc.

> "I live here in Borgo because if I was living in Foggia I wouldn't be able to pay the rent all the year long. We cannot find work during the entire year, and especially in winter time the work reduces a lot. In Borgo I have a shop where I sell some food items, so during the wintertime I can still earn something to send my family back in Africa." (Conv. with Lucky, Borgo Mezzanone, Nov.23)

In addition to that, informal settlements represent a refuge for elders and people who developed psycholgical and psichiatric pathologies. While on the one hand the severeness of living conditions can further exacerbate their pathology, it is also true that informal settlements are charcterized by a degree of community ties hard to find within Italian society. In this way, those who would be marginalized or hospitalized in the outside society can have a role within informal settlmenets as dishwashers, waste pickers, etc. and being treated as part and parcel of the community.

Mohamed is a Senegalese citizen of seventy years-old. He has been living in Italy for about 30 years, in Catania, where he used to be employed in commerce. In the past, he used to live

in Ghetto only during the summer season, managing a small shop where he sold various food items and traditional medicine. However, starting from 2018, he decided to move there permanently.

> "I am staying here, I manage my shop, I sit with my friends and we chat. During the wintertime, I go to Africa for a few months, to meet my family. I have worked many years in Italy, so right now I have right to receive my retirement benefit. I hold a permit for long period, so it is not because of documents that I am staying here. I just feel more comfortable to live here than in Catania." (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Mohamed, Torretta Antonacci, July 2023).

Finally, if for some life within informal settlements can be just a period of transit, it can also represent a spiral toward further marginalization, particularly affecting people with psychological vulnerabilities, who can risk developing further psychological problems, due to substance abuse and lack of healthcare assistance. Indeed, in the past few years the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone recorded a peak in the use of subsances, such as crack cocaine, with dramatic consequence on the lives of those affected.

As the experiences above mentioned illustrate, informal settlements can represent at the same time places of marginalization and refuge. Their isolation can be beneficial to people who are undocumented and can therefore escape the constant threat of deportation as well as widespread racial discrimination characterizing Italian society as a whole, and further exacerbated in marginal rural areas. Through the reproduction of a new social order, represented by the creation of an hybrid space inhabited by different West African communities, with their frictions and contradictions, the European space is remodelled in an attempt to neutralize its racial order. However, internal fractures reproduce in the relationship between differently communities, variously divided according to religion, ethnicity, and historical fractures produced by colonization and sedimented in the post-colonial era. At the same time, the fact of living within an informal settlement, and particularly in the two largest ones, characterized my multiple negative steretopyes and narratives related to illegality, criminality and decay, can represent a further factor of discrimination, which adds to the fact of being defined as "immigrants" and racialized as "Black Africans". Those who inhabit informal settlements describe them in contradictory terms, at the same time as places which were not supposed to exist and the only places in the area where they utlimately can feel comfortable. This contradiction is inherent to the racialized social structure of Italian and European society, which achieves its maximum in peripheral areas such as Foggia, characterized by extreme segregation. Thus, informal

settlements are at the same time a consequence of segregation, its more evident representation and a response to it.

## 6.2 Exploitation

In the past decade, raising attention has been given to the issue of labor exploitation of migrant workers within Italian agricultural sector. As already mentioned in chapter fiven, the Province of Foggia has become the emblem of the exploitation of migrant workers and their precarious living conditions, with countless journalistic reports about Foggia agricultural sector, defining farmworkers as "slaves of 21st century" and informal settlements as "hell" (Mira 2022; Palmisano 2023; Sagnet, Palmisano 2015). The narrative developed by most media, institutions and some academic reports has produced an exceptional representation of exploitation within Italian agricultural sector, as a residual of archaic pre-modern relations of production, often related to the work of local criminal organizations, rather than intrinsic to the fabric of capitalist agricultural production and often caused by Italian and European legislation on migration. In this context, *caporalato* came to embody the maximum representation of evil, with *caporali* being defined as "slavers of 21st century", to be punished with merciless convictions. The representation of exploitation as exceptional and its criminalization have been functional to divert attention from structural factors, among which immigration legislation, lack of adequate social and economic policies, structural racism, etc. In the next pages, following a critique of the *anti-caporalato* rhetoric and practice in the province of Foggia, with a specific focus on its repressive side, the analysis will then offer a broader definition of exploitation of West African migrant farmworkers, going beyond the focus on exploitation as it is conceived by labor regulations, to include structural forms of exploitation, expropriation and exclusion from capitalist economy, building on Gargi Battarcaryya's (2018) theorization of racial capitalism.

### 6.2.1 Exploitation, *caporalato* and slavery. Exploring the contradictions of *anti-caporalato* discourse and practice in Foggia agricultural district

In the past decade, Foggia has nationally and internationally been represented as the center of migrant labor exploitation of Italian agricultural sector. Various journalistic reports and scholarly analysis have been published on the subject, defining migrant farmworkers as "slaves of 21st century" and focusing on the system of labor intermediation, defined as *caporalato*, considered by many as form of modern slavery (Cristaldi, 2015; Fanizza,

Omizzolo 2018; Palmisano 2018, 2023; Sagnet, Palmisano 2015). Most of these reports have offered an exceptional representation of labor exploitation and *caporalato*, as related to organized crime and representing a pre-modern form of labor exploitation. Particular attention has been given to the tariffs which migrant workers are "forced" to pay to labor intermediaries in order to get to the workplace, as well as to the extremely low per hour or per piece payment, ranging from 2.5 euro to 5 euro. Labor intermediaries, so-called *caporali,* have been represented as part of a highly organized criminal network operating together with local criminal organization, in order to manage not only the sphere of production, through labor intermediation and transport, but also the sphere of reproduction, including housing, food and leisure activities (Sagnet, Palmisano 2015). Rural informal settlements have come to be seen as the emblem of *caporalato*, being defined as "logistical bases used to subjugate the immigrants and thus compromise agriculture and inhibit the growth of local economies by limiting their potential within the agricultural sector both in Italy and the European Union" (Fanizza, Omizzolo 2018:3). Some journalistic reports have described Borgo Mezzanone and Torretta Antonacci informal settlements as "hell"[59], "workers' landfill"[60], "places where mafia and foreigners are allied"[61], and so on. The mainstream representation of *caporalato* has been characterized by sensationalism, where the focus has been placed on the most evident and brutal expressions of labor exploitation, without analyzing in depth neither their root causes nor the multiplicity of experiences hidden behind the definition of *caporalato*. In some journalistic reports, estimates regarding the presumed entity of *caporali*'s business have been developed, yet without any clear reference to reality. For instance, in a video-reportage of the online media outlet Fanpage.it published in 2018 titled "This is how we infiltrated a migrant in the tomatoes fields in the hands of *caporali* and criminals", a worker from the informal settlement of Grand Ghetto accepted to hide a camera and be an undercover reporter in order to record the work in the farms (Benincasa, Mannu 2018). At the end of the video, Hilarry Sedu, a civil lawyer interviewed on the phenomenon, offered the following estimate of *caporalato* turnover:

> "We can estimate 25 euro a day for 10.000 workers, which makes 250.000 euro a day which are going exclusively in the pockets of the *caporali*. If we multiply for the harvesting period, that is, 90 days, we

[59] "The hell of Rignano Garganico" is the title of one of the paragraphs of Sagnet and Palmisano 2015 book Ghetto Italia, and the same expression has been used by the author, Leonardo Palmisano on an article published on the 8th of January 2023 on the local newspaper, Corriere del Mezzogiorno titled "Among Bulgarians and *caporali*: welcome to the hell of Torretta Antonacci".

[60] On the 17th of August 2022, the newspaper L'Avvenire published an article titled "In the Foggia ghetto, landfill of workers, decay and illegality win"

[61] On the 25th of August 2018, Palmisano published an article on the local newspaper Corriere del Mezzogiorno titled "Foggia, the ghetto of Borgo Mezzanone where mafia and foreigners are allied".

achieve a sum of 22 million euros, divided between black master (*capo nero*) and white master (*capo bianco*)[62], in the hands of organized crime. In the hands of farmworkers are left about 15 euros. I think this is a real enslavement".

However, while according to the above estimation, migrant workers of the entire province of Foggia would be hired by the same "black master" and "white master", this is not actually the case, so that the above profit is largely overestimated. At the same time, during the entire reportage, the word *caporale* is used to refer to the "white boss", who, most of the times is the farm owner himself, thus creating confusion in relation to what actually *caporalato* means. As a matter of fact, following the approval and implementation of law 199/2016, *caporalato* started being used in the public discourse as a term to broadly identify labor exploitation, also due to the titling of art. 603-bis of Criminal Code as "unlawful intermediation and labor exploitation". However, the equation between *caporalato* and labor exploitation is misleading. On the one hand, labor exploitation is widespread also in the absence of labor intermediation and, on the other hand, labor intermediation does not imply *per se* an exploitative condition.

Following the implementation of law 199/2016, Foggia has become one of the centers in the fight against labor exploitation and *caporalato* in Italy. According to *Ispettorato Nazionale del Lavoro* (INL - National Labor Inspectorate) in the province of Foggia from June 2019 to July 2023 there have been eleven operations coordinated by Foggia Public Prosecutor Office and the Nucleo Ispettivo Lavoro Carabinieri (NIL – Carabinieri Labor Inspective Unit) leading to the arrest of 65 people, 91 people under investigation, the seizure of more than 40 companies and fines for a total of 32 million euros. While on the one hand the implementation of *anti-caporalato* policies, through the strengthening of labor inspectorate and law enforcement agencies controls, has favored an improvement in terms of respect of labor rights and formal employment, on the other hand, it shed light on the contradiction existing between labor and citizenship rights inherent to the very structure of Italian nation-state. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, the focus will be placed on exploring the contradictions inherent to the *anti-caporalat*o rhetoric and measures.

According to some observers, the implementation of repressive measures and the general attention given to the province has favored an improvement both from a formal point of view, with the large shift from irregular work to formal employment relations, and from

[62] The black boss is the intermediary while the white boss is often the farm owner or another Italian intermediary.

a substantial one, with wages per hour raising from 2.5 to 6-7 euros. For instance, according to former secretary general of Flai-Cgil Foggia, Daniele Iacovelli:

> "until irregular employment was just an administrative infraction which implied the payment of a fine, farm owners made a cost-benefit analysis and continued to employ workers without a regular contract. However, when it became a criminal offence, and some of Foggia largest farm owners started being placed under house arrests, their company seized and placed under receivership, their fellow farmers started being scared." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with D. Iacovelli, Flai-Cgil Foggia, July 2023).

For this reason, Iacovelli maintains that law 199/2016 had a major impact in countering labor exploitation, by favoring both the regularization of employment relations and workers' ability to report their employers.

According to other observers, among which some workers themselves, the increase in per hour salaries should be reconducted more to the decrease in workforce supply experienced by the province following Covid-19 pandemic and the migration of thousands of Eastern European workers either to their country of origin or to countries with more favorable job opportunities, such as Germany and the UK, rather than to repressive measures.

> "Right now the *capos* don't have workers. They used to come until Borgo to look for workers, they beg you to go to work with them, they are ready to pay even 10 euros per hour. Especially with olives this year, the salary has been very good. Things have changed, before they used to treat us however they liked, but right now as far as they don't have workers, they are ready to treat you well, be nice with you and pay you good money." (Conv. with Musa, Borgo Mezzanone, Oct. 2023).

The same idea regarding the improvement of wages as a result of the unbalance between workforce supply and demand, rather than a consequence of the implementation of law 199/2016, is shared by former secretary of Flai-Cgil Foggia Raffaele Falcone.

> "I don't think that the improvements we are seeing are a result of the implementation of law 199/2016, I think is just more simply the law of demand and supply. It certainly had an impact in favoring a partial regularization of labor relations. But sometimes when they arrested someone rather than being an alarm for other farmers was a reason to celebrate, because they would acquire their share of the market. I myself I sued a company for labor exploitation, the workers working there were suffering extreme conditions, were living inside the company such as in a prison. However, even if we did all the procedure and the company was eventually seized, I didn't see as a victory. After few months during which they were left in a reception center without a work, the workers started complaining, and gradually went back to work in other places. The company owners, even if the company is placed under

> seizure, still retain the power of choosing the type of cultivation. So they chose wheat, that does not require much workforce, and they solved the problem. I think the implementation of this law will further the process of mechanization, as we have already seen with tomato." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with R. Falcone, Flai-Cgil Foggia, Nov. 2022)

As a matter of fact, the number of registered EU workers has dropped down from 15.000 in 2014 to 5.000 in 2022, and the number of foreign workers employed in agriculture dropped down from 20.000 in 2013 to 13.100 in 202l. In the same period, the medium yearly wage of West African workers has increased of 295%, going from 1500 euros to almost 6000 euros in nine years. While in 2016 the average salary for migrant workers was about 3.5 euro per hour, nowadays it is about 6.5 euro. Similarly, while a large box of tomatoes (so-called *cassone*) was paid about 3 euro, nowadays it can be paid up to 12 euro. As a matter of fact, the labor shortage dramatically increased workers' bargaining power, who are now able to effectively bargain with their bosses over their salary.

> "I never work for less than 8 euro per hour. If it is *uva* (grape), I work for six hours at 50 euro. Every additional our is 10 euro. If the *capo* does not agree I look for someone else. Right now, it is very easy to find a job because everyone is looking for workers and they cannot get as many as they need" (Conv. with Abdullahi, Torretta Antonaccci, Sept. 2022).

*Figure 25 West African farmworkers employed in the harvesting of artichokes. Source: photo by the author.*

The labor shortage has not only affected farm owners but also labor intermediaries, who are forced to offer better working conditions in order to avoid their team of workers to look for better opportunities.

> "You know, right now it is very hard to find workers. Some will come to work today, and if tomorrow they find a work where they pay them even 50 cents more, they will go for that. That's why right now we ask our bosses higher wages and better working conditions. If we don't do that, we won't have enough workers, and the harvest will spoil" (*authors' translation from Italian*, Conv. with Mamadi, Borgo Mezzanone, June 2023)

While the adoption of repressive measures against farm owners has to a certain extent been positive, it has given birth to various contradictions. In order to explore them, it can be useful to recall what is meant by labor exploitation according to art. 603-bis of Italian Criminal Code[63] as well as to briefly mention other offences concerning the employment of migrant workers not belonging to the European Union. Art. 603-bis punishes anyone who recruits or employs workers in "condition of exploitation and profiting from their state of need". Exploitation is considered taking place when: the salary differs from what it is established by national or local collective contracts; norms regarding working time, rest, weekly rest, unpaid leave, holidays as well as security and hygiene in working places are violated; workers are subjected to degrading working or housing conditions and surveillance methods. At the same time, according to Italian legislation, "employers who employ undocumented migrant workers […] are punished with imprisonment from six months to three years and with the payment of a fine of 5000 euro for each employed worker" (*author's translation from Italian,* art. 22 par. 12, d.lgs. 286/98). This means that to hire someone who is undocumented, independently from the salary and working conditions is considered *per se* as a crime. In this way, the responsibility of undocumentedness is shifted from institutions to employers, who are criminalized not only in case of exploitation and use of labor intermediation, but also for the mere employment of undocumented workers.

[63] "Unless the act constitutes more serious crime, it is punished with imprisonment from one to six years and with a fine from 500 to 1000 euro for each recruited worker, anyone who: 1) recruits workforce with to be destinated to work for third parties in conditions of exploitation, profiting of the state of need of workers; 2) uses, employs or hires workforce, also through the intermediation listed at number 1), subjecting workers to conditions of exploitation and profiting from their state of need. If facts are carried out through the use of violence or threat, it is applied the punishment of imprisonment from five to eight years and a fine from 1.000 to 2.000 euros for which recruited worker.
For the purpose of present article, it represents an index of exploitation the presence of one or more of the following conditions: 1) the repeated payment of a salary differing from what established by national and local collective contracts signed by most representatives unions, or anyway disproportioned from the quantity and quality of the work; 2) the repeated violation of legislation regarding working time, rest period, weekly rest, unpaid leave, holidays; 3) the violation of norms regarding security and hygiene in working places; 4) the worker's subjection to degrading working conditions, surveillance methods or housing conditions." (author's translation from Italian, art. 1, law 199/2016).

As a consequence of this, and following the implementation of law 199/2016 and the subsequent strengthening of labor inspectorate and law enforcement agencies' controls, employers have increasingly refused to irregularly hire undocumented workers, for the fear of being sanctioned and prosecuted. Undocumented workers have thus started to depend either on labor intermediaries or on friends to be able to obtain the copy of a valid residency permit necessary to sign a contract and be able to work. In this way, the same residency permit can be used to sign more than five contracts. However, in the case of inspections, if the discrepancy between workers' identity and the residency permits used to sign the contracts is noticed, the company can be prosecuted while workers can be taken to the Immigration office to verify both their identity and their legal status. That is why also employers' organizations are lamenting the contradictoriness of government's policies that sanctions the hiring of undocumented people while not granting documents to everyone.

> "We have another issue, because often workers exchange each other in order to allow those who don't have documents to work, so they will not tell us. So, you can find yourself working with someone you didn't hire, and unfortunately from photocopied documents is not easy to recognize them. And we run the risk of being sanctioned by Labor Inspectorate, but this is not due to the negligence of the company, because the company hired the worker, but after he exchange with someone else in order to allow him to earn something. It is a logic of solidarity, that is fine. But if this is the case, the government should give everyone documents! It should not allow for people to be undocumented and later sanction the company for that." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with A. Miano, CIA Capitanata, Aug. 2023)

If workers are found to be undocumented, an order to leave the country within seven days can be issued, so-called *foglio di via, espulsione* or, as some among West African migrant workers call it, *fuori Italia*. This is what happened to Yusupha, a Gambian citizen who arrived in Italy in 2016, following an inspection taking place at the end of August 2021 in one the farms where he was employed at the moment. The farm was owned by the company Agrigold S.r.l, owning both farms and a processing plant for tomatoes, was employing a large section of Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement inhabitants during the 2021 harvesting season. The company was eventually seized in February 2023 and the owners were arrested as part of the operation "Caronte" (Carabinieri 2023).

> "I was at my workplace in the farm, harvesting tomatoes. At a certain point, the Carabinieri arrived in the field and started asking us questions, how many hours we usually worked, how was the payment, if they gave us safety training, etc. After they started to check each worker contract and document. When my turn came, they asked my contract, I gave it to them, they asked me the document, and I told them that I didn't bring it with me, that I left it in the house. So, they took me and others who were in my

same situation to Foggia Questura to take our fingerprints. After they checked in the system, even if I had already been given an appointment to Foggia Questura through my lawyer to make a new asylum request, they say I didn't have document and they gave me *fuori Italia*." (Conv. with Yusupha, Borgo Mezzanone, Aug. 2021).

The story of Yusupha is emblematic of the contradictions inherent in the repressive approach of countering labor exploitation through law enforcement. Through the process previously defined as "juridification of exploitation" (Oliveri 2015), labor exploitation is considered merely as a crime. In this way, the aim of *anti-caporalato* operations, rather than the safeguard of workers' rights, becomes the punishment of those employers and labor intermediaries committing the prescribed offence. As a consequence of this approach, an inspection assessing labor exploitation can paradoxically take place at the expenses of workers themselves, who, rather than being supported, are further illegalized and, consequently, rendered more exploitable.

This happens even if according to Italian legislation undocumented migrant workers hired irregularly under conditions of exploitation who report their employer or collaborate with ongoing investigations have the right to obtain a residency permit for "special cases", following public prosecutor's green-light (art. 22 per. 12 quarter, d.l. 286/1998). As highlighted by Giovanni Abbate, Labor exploitation expert and project manager of the Italian section of International Organization for Migration (IOM)[64], however, this mechanism is not always smooth. For one thing, if workers intend to file a charge against their employer, they are required to present a valid residency permit. If undocumented, they are subjected to the same treatment above described, being identified and later issued an order to leave the national territory. For another thing, according to IOM data, on the entire national territory, between February 2020 and May 2022 in the context of the collaboration between IOM and INL, about 138 permits ex art. 22 have been issued or are waiting prosecutors' green light (OIM, INL 2022). Mr. Abbate maintained that, while the number can appear very small in absolute terms, in relative terms should be regarded as a relevant result, considering that in the previous five years only two permits ex art. 22 had been issued. According to Abbate, Foggia represents one of the worst in this regard. Indeed, public prosecutors tend not to quickly authorize the issuance of residency permits ex article 22, fearing that, if they do so, it would represent a pull factor for people to obtain a residency permit.

[64] IOM is closely involved in the contrast of labor exploitation and *caporalato* as a partner of various national project, such as Supreme, Alt Caporalato, Alt Caporalto 2, in the context of which IOM intercultural mediators collaborate with National Labor Inspectorate and law enforcement agencies in order to effectively investigate and prosecute violations of art. 603-bis.

> "During some meetings with Foggia public prosecutors' office we tried to discuss about the issue of timing and procedures regarding the authorization necessary for the issuance of permits ex article 22, following a report, because reports have been many, but approvals have been issued very slowly. We were very impressed by public prosecutor's office's fear of activating an instrumentalization of the mechanism, maybe due to the local context of the province. However, we explained them that it was unlikely that everyone would start reporting their employers only to obtain a residency permit […] The problem is that the law requires prosecutors' green light but does not establish a time limit. In this way, every public prosecutor's office decides on its own, based on the principle of autonomy. While in some offices the approval can be issued within few days from the filing of charges, following a quick read, in other offices, such as the Foggia one, they wait until the indictment, because they maintain that there could be instrumental charges and the subsistence of the crime must be proved. However, we highlighted that the two things should be disconnected, because the timing of protection cannot be that of criminal trials. Considering that is the National Labor Inspectorate to request the issuance of the permit, the public prosecutor's office should authorize it, because not doing so they also disqualify the evaluation of the inspective body" (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with Abbate, OIM Italia, Nov. 2022).

Another example of the contradictions inherent to the *anti-caporalato* rhetoric and practice concerns the 2020 regularization. In May 2020, in the middle of Covid-19 pandemic, the Italian government approved a norm to regularize undocumented workers employed in the agricultural sector and domestic work, with art.103 of d.l. 34/2020. The then Minister of Agriculture, Teresa Bellanova, delivered a highly emotional speech to announce the approval of the law.

> "For me, for my story, this is a fundamental point [moment of pause and emotion], and I refer to the emersion of employment relations, of which at art.110-bis [ndr 103]. From today, thanks to the choice of this government, the invisible will be less invisible. Those who have been brutally exploited in the countryside, or also in the so-called fake-cooperatives, where people were given on loan to work in families as domestic workers, will not be invisible again, because they will be able to access to a residency permit for work, and we will help them obtain once again their identity, their dignity, because we made a clear choice […] and from today we can say that the State wins, because it is more strong than criminality, it is more strong than *caporalato*". (*author's translation from Italian,* SkyTg24 2020).

In the days when the regularization was approved, this speech was played on repeat in the streets of Borgo Mezzanone informal settlements. People there hoped the words of Bellanova were to become true and that though that the regularization they would have removed the condition of undocumentedness and marginalization to which they had been

confined for too long. However, despite the rhetoric and expectations, the regularization was not only a failure, with only 65.166 residency permits issued on 207.542 requests (Ero straniero 2023), but the very process of regularization favored, rather than countering, *caporalato* and criminality. Furthermore, despite being designed for agricultural workers, only 30.694 requests have been in the agricultural sector, while the remaining one in domestic work. In the province of Foggia, only 1268 request were submitted, and in May 2023, only 524 workers had obtained a residency permit (ibid.). As a matter of fact, in the province, while most farmers refused to apply for their workers scared by the controls to which their company could have been subjected, those who applied or pretended to do so asked between 3000 and 5000 euros to each worker. While in some cases the requests were submitted but the strict requirements were not fulfilled, in other cases the requests were not even transmitted in the first place. This was the case of Modou, who was living in Borgo Mezzanone by that time, and of many others who I met during the summer of 2020.

> "I arrived here in Borgo from France, almost a year ago. I entered France through a visa because my sister is living there. But after one of my friends called me to come to Italy, to Foggia, saying that here it was good, you could work and get money. But when I arrived, I saw that things were quite different compared to what he had explained to me. The work was very hard, the living condition miserable, and I regretted why I came. When the news of this *sanatoria* came out, I thought I would try to apply so if I found a document I could move to a better place. So, I asked Khadim who used to take us to work. He said he could help me, he will talk to his capo, but I should pay him 4000 euro. I told him that I didn't have that money, and he said it was not a problem, he would remove them from my salary each month. So, I accepted, because I thought I didn't have any choice to obtain a document. After a few months, I started asking him how the application was going. He said that I should have waited, that they hadn't received an answer yet. After one year, during which I didn't see any result, nor even a receipt of the application, I understood that it was a scam, and I decided to go back to France. Now I am saving money and, after the harvesting season is over, I will leave." (*author's translation from French*, Conv. with Modou, Borgo Mezzanone, Aug. 2021).

Ultimately, while migrant farmworkers living in Foggia informal settlements were discursively used as the main beneficiaries of the measure, with videos and reports from informal settlements at the time when the regularization was approved, they were those who least benefitted from it.

The last example highlighting the contradictions inherent to *anti-caporalato* rhetoric and practice relate to the adoption of repressive measures in relation to the issue of transport to and from the workplace, and the focus on road patrolling. As remarked by multiple observers and widely known, one of the main issues at the core of *caporalato* involves the

transport of workers. The province of Foggia is particularly affected by the phenomenon, due to the large extension of its territory and the long distances covered by workers living in the province, whereby workers residing in Borgo Mezzanone or Torretta Antonacci can drive up two hours to reach their working place, arriving even in neighboring regions such as Molise and Basilicata. While the failure of projects intending to solve the issue of transport through the use of buses or minivans expensively subsidized by Regional or EU funds will be further explored in chapter eight, the attention will be here focused on analyzing the contradictions inherent to the purely repressive attitude adopted by law enforcement agencies through road patrolling. Indeed, as highlighted by the following examples, the trip from informal settlements to farms and back represents a lottery for workers, who don't' know whether they will be stopped by the police, and eventually arrested or seized the car, or they will be able to come back home safe.

The issue of transport in the province of Foggia obtained national resonance in August 2018, when sixteen workers living in the informal settlement of Grand Ghetto, died as a result of two car accidents while returning from work. In that occasion, the then Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini stated:

> "I wanted to be present here to make clear that the fight against mafia, slavery and the exploitation of illegal labor and illegal immigration is among my priorities and the priorities of this government, and we will use all the means possible not to allow these criminals to pursue in their objectives […] I don't want that Foggia and Italian agriculture are considered as outlaw because few people use mafia like means to enrich themselves. This is a problem of mafia. It is not a problem of irregular employment relations, it is not a problem of *caporalato*, it is not a problem of deceitfulness, this is a problem of mafia." (*author's translation from Italian*, Foggia Today 2018)

While the former Minister of Interior associated the accident with the existence of an organized criminal organization, things appear to be more complicated than this. Indeed, while the accident was likely caused by the driver dozing off due to the excessive tiredness related to overwork, a major issue is also represented by the access to driving licenses.
Indeed, for those who are undocumented, obtaining a driving license is impossible because residency permit, and often ID card, are required. At the same time, also for those who are documented, there are various obstacles, mostly related with language and alphabetization. Indeed, while until 2011 the theory part of the driving license exam was translated into seven languages, following the directive of the Ministry of Transport n. 54436/8.3 of 22 June 2010, driving license tests are not anymore translated to other languages, except from French and German, to respect linguistic minorities of South Tirol and Aosta Valley. As a consequence

of this, for West African migrant farmworkers, of whom a relevant section has not been alphabetized even in the language of origin, to obtain a driving license can prove extremely difficult. At the same time, given the productive structure of Foggia agricultural province and the lack of public or private transport to and for the working places, going to work every day becomes a lottery, both for labor intermediaries and for normal workers. Indeed, law enforcement agencies, whether they are police, Carabinieri or financial police, patrol the roads surrounding informal settlements and farms at key hours, such as early in the morning or in the afternoon, in order to stop and control those going or coming back from work.

*Figure 26 Police checkpoint near Borgo Mezzanone. Source: photo by the author.*

As highlighted by multiple testimonies, while law enforcement agencies are aware of the situation, they perseverate in patrolling the roads and ultimately punishing workers who don't have any other option but to drive without a driving license if they want to work. Contrarily to what it is assumed, not everyone driving a car is a "*capo nero*", but workers also organize themselves in teams of five or six people in order to go to work.

> "Some days they block all the roads leading out of Borgo, so you cannot go to work unless you wait until they have finished patrolling the road. They know that if they stand at the junction early in the morning, they will stop someone, and that person will not have driving license, or the car will not have documents, or they will find some other issue. They say they are looking for *capo nero*s, but not all of

> us driving is a *capo nero*. If we want to go to work, we must drive. Driving to work every day is a big risk, because anytime they can stop you, seize your car, and take you to prison. Every day we go for work we pray to come back without any issue." (Conv. with. Abdoulaye, Borgo Mezzanone, May 2023)

Another relevant issue lies in the purchase of stolen cars. Indeed, while some workers are aware of the risk of driving a stolen car, others prefer economizing and end up buying cars that have been stolen.

> "I don't have a driving license, because I don't have documents. But at least my car has documents. I always buy cars with documents so, if they stop me, I will not have too many problems, maybe they will seize the car, but I will not be accused of car theft or fencing. I know many people who were stopped by police and accused of stealing the car they were driving. Some of them spent up to six-months in jail! And the police know very well we are not the one stealing the cars. It is often Italians who steal cars in Foggia or Cerignola and after they come to sell them here in Borgo." (Conv. with Babacar, Borgo Mezzanone, July 2023)

We can also recall the experience of Mamadou, described in paragraph 6.1.2, who was arrested while coming back from work and thus decided to leave his house and work in the farms and go back to live in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone, opening an informal boutique.

In all these cases, the repressive action of police ends in itself, in that it does not bring any improvement on the side of public transport or labor intermediation, but simply further marginalizes and illegalizes those who are subjected to controls. As a matter of fact, if during a police check point the driver does not stop immediately, he can be accused of violation of art. 337 of Italian Criminal Code for resisting the police. Furthermore, if the car appears to be stolen, he can be accused of theft, in violation of art. 624, of fencing, in violation of art. 648. All these criminal proceedings can also negatively affect the difficult path to obtain a valid residency permit, thus resulting in further illegalization.

The experiences and stories explored in these paragraphs highlight the deep contradictions of the *anti-caporalato* rhetoric and practice, which often, rather than supporting workers to report their employers and achieve full labor, social and economic rights, further marginalize them, through the adoption of repressive measures simply aimed at enforcing the law. While it is certainly true that thanks to the enforcement of art. 603-bis as well as to the strengthening of controls implemented by National Labor Inspectorate the province of Foggia has experienced a partial regularization of employment relations. Nevertheless, the regularization of employment relation not followed by a regularization of migration status

has further exacerbated the condition of undocumented migrants, who are now forced to use someone's residency permit to work or instead be excluded from the very possibility of working.

### 6.2.2 Beyond *caporalato*. Exploitation, expropriation, and expulsion of West African migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia

In previous paragraphs, we explored the contradiction inherent to the *anti-caporalato* rhetoric and practice, an approach based on the adoption of repressive measures and discursive construction of *caporalato* as the main cause of labor exploitation.
However, as it will be highlighted in following paragraphs, to better grasp the economic and social oppression of West African migrant workers it is necessary to move beyond the framework of *caporalato* and labor exploitation, to broadly illustrate the system of oppression to which they are subjected. While the system of racial oppression will be analyzed more in depth in the next chapter, the following pages will focus on expanding the definition of exploitation in order to fully account for the economic oppression experienced before, during and after work. In order to do so, it can be useful to recall the definition of racial capitalism given by Bhattacharyya as a system based on processes of differential exploitation, expropriation and expulsion of racialized populations, which in turn become racializing processes. The relevance of Bhattacharyya's argument rest precisely on the importance given not only to exploitation but also to other two processes, expropriation and exclusion. This framework allows to contextualize the experience of West African migrant workers, similar to a certain extent to the experience of other racialized migrants coming from Global South formerly colonized countries, in its full complexity. In this way, the focus can be expanded from simply considering labor intermediation and labor exploitation in the workplace - characterized by low per hour salaries, long working times, lack of rest, holidays, security measures, etc. - to account for the entire process of economic oppression to which West African migrant farmworkers are subjected.

An analysis of the experience of West African migrant workers living and working in the province of Foggia highlights a continuous tension between exploitation and exclusion, with expropriation standing for what has historically affected countries of origin during the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism, leading to structural underdevelopment, poverty and mass migration. As explored in chapter four, following the independence of African countries in the 1960's, the domination of former and new colonial

powers did not cease, but rather became more interested in the control of natural resources, rather than human labor, while the movement of population started being increasingly hampered. This led to the dispossession of millions of people from their lands and properties which, however as maintained by Bhattacharyya in her analysis of racial capitalism, did not become an "enforced route to proletarianisation [...] but a route to dispossession and nothing else, in service to a capitalism that requires the access to resources but must limit expansion of productive forces in response to the limits of the world" (Bhattacharyya 2018:219). In this context, migration becomes an attempt to participate to the share of increasingly scarce resources, also including labor.

Once arrived in Italy, the racial segmentation of labor market forces racialized migrant workers to be employed in a limited set of working sectors, so-called three D jobs, Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning, among which agriculture can be found. The occupational segregation in the agricultural sector represents in itself a process of racialized exclusion, which in turn, becomes a racializing process. Indeed, being employed in agriculture is considered by many as a shameful occupation, associated with a lower social and economic status, irrespectively from the earned salary. For a segment of Italian society, the need of migrant workforce to satisfy the demand of labor in agricultural sector, as well as in construction and care, is often voiced as an argument in favor of migration. However, this perspective reproduces the idea according to which some working sectors are inherently designated for migrant workers, while their presence is merely functional to productive reasons, thus further reinforcing labor market racial segmentation.

While through the so-called Flux Decree migrant workers already arrive with the purpose of being employed in one of these sectors, in the case of asylum seekers internal migration represents the result of the failure to find an employment in other sectors, a process of expulsion starting from reception centers. As already highlighted in paragraph 6.1.2 and 6.2.1, most of those residing in the province of Foggia have arrived there from various parts of Italy, following the rejection of their asylum request and the expulsion from reception centers as well as due to the difficulty in finding an employment where they lived before. The province of Foggia, thus, despite its negative reputation in terms of working and living conditions, becomes an attractive pole for many West African migrants, both documented and undocumented.

> "I was living in Turin before. I did my camp there, I went to school, learned Italian language and achieved various professional training certificates. However, despite all these qualifications, I was not able to find a job there. I then decided to move to Foggia and work in agriculture. The difference

between agriculture and other jobs is that in agriculture, regardless of your color, they will hire you. Because the work itself is hard and Italians don't want to do it. You have to wake up every morning around 3 or 4 am, and be on the field before 5 or 6 am. During summertime, you have to work under the sun, which reaches very high temperatures in Foggia. During autumn and wintertime, you are working in the cold and in the rain, and sometimes in the morning the farm will all be frozen, until your fingers will pain because of the ice and the freezing temperatures. It is really a hard job, even if in the past few years salaries have grown a lot. That is why, even if you are a Black, they will never have problem to take you, because they know that no one else will do that kind of job. But there are some positions which are forbidden to immigrants. For example, in Italy you will hardly see a bus driver, a doctor or a police officer who is black" (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Ousmane, Borgo Mezzanone, May 2023).

As the testimony of Ousmane highlights, the exploitation in the agricultural sector is not merely related with an issue of salaries, but also with the harshness of working conditions. Indeed, working in agriculture is particularly hard, both from a point of view of physical effort and from a point of view of weather conditions. That is why, according to another worker living in Borgo Mezzanone, Musa from Gambia, "no matter how much they pay us, it will never be enough to repay our work".

"Right now, I am working olives. They pay us 10 euro per hour, which is good. I have seen a lot of improvements in the past few years, in relation to our salaries and working conditions. In the past, they use to treat us like animals, they didn't show us any respect. But right now things are changing, because they know that they don't have workers, so if they treat us however they like we will leave the work and go to another place. Still, you can find some capo who do not respect you, they put you pressure while working, telling you to be fast and not rest even for few minutes. For example, I worked for few days with a capo who was behaving like that, he never gave us peace while we were working, and he only paid us 7 euro per hour. But thankfully, I found this work where the capo is nice, and they pay us 10 euro per hour. Neve3rhtless, the work is very hard, because you have to keep the machine up to hit the olives and, in the night, all your body will pain you. That is why, no matter how much they pay us, it will never be enough to repay our work". (Conv. with Musa, Borgo Mezzanone, Oct. 2023).

*Figure 27 Senegalese farmworker returned home following a day at work in the farm. Source: photo by the author.*

Another element pertaining to the process of labor exploitation, even if not often included in accounts of exploitation of migrant farmworkers in the context of Italian agriculture, is represented by the precariousness of labor relations. While it is true that, following the implementation of law 199/2016, farms started to regularly hire workers, agricultural work remains structurally precarious. According to Italian legislation, in the agricultural sector worked days are declared at the end of each working month. This not only allows for the well-known phenomenon of under declaration of working days (so-called grey work) to take place, but also implies that working contracts are not binding and do not guarantee any right in terms of unfair layoff. Indeed, the termination of a contract can always be justified as descending from productive reasons. According to some unionist, as it will be further explored in chapter nine, this is among the reasons why workers' unionization in the context of farm labor appears to be so difficult to achieve. At the same time, despite the deseasonalization of agriculture undergone by the province of Foggia in the past years, there is always a degree of diminished production, especially during winter season, forcing workers to focus on spring, summer and early autumn in order to earn enough to sustain themselves also during the other months of the year. Agricultural unemployment benefit, so-called *disoccupazione agricola*, ruled by art. 32 of law 264/1949, is aimed to counterbalance the seasonality of agricultural labor and the resulting loss of income for farmworkers.

However, for one thing, due to the phenomenon of under declaration of worked days, particularly affecting West African migrant workers in the province, many are not able to reach the limit of 102 days worked in the two previous years needed to access the benefit, despite working for most of the year. Secondly, all those who are undocumented or with precarious legal status are cut off from the possibility of accessing the benefit. In the case of workers with precarious legal status, such as people holding only the receipt of renewal of their residency permit or whose permit had expired during the year, it is often possible to appeal the rejection in court, a procedure which however can require months if not years before being settled. And lastly, even when obtained, the benefit hardly suffices to cover living expenses for the period of unemployment. All these elements contribute to making agricultural work a structurally precarious job, regardless of the increase in per hour payments from 3 euro to 6/7 euros observed in the province of Foggia in the past few years.

Another element to keep in mind when trying to delineate a broader picture of the exploitation of West African migrant workers in the context of Italian agriculture is represented by their function in relation to the family and the country of origin. Unlike most Italian workers, who work in order to sustain themselves and their close family members, West African migrant workers are expected to financially support not only their close family members, but also their extended family and friends living in the countries of origin. As illustrated in chapter four, West African countries are strongly dependent on remittances, which make up between 5 and 25 percent of national GDPs. It follows that an increase in the earned salary does not often result in an improvement in terms of living standards, but simply in an increase of the amount of money sent at home each month. This is even more true in the case of single men, the majority among West African farmworkers, who can commit to work seven days a week in order to earn a higher salary and send remittances to their country of origin. As maintained by Lamin, migrants are like a “charity”, in that they are supposed to work in order to earn money and send them to their family members and friends living in their country of origin.

> “You know we (the migrants) are like a charity. We work tirelessly to send all our earnings at home. But, when people receive the money, they do not think how we get them. They just spend them and come to ask other money. To buy food, to buy clothes, to contribute to the organization of a ceremony, to contribute to the school fees of some family member, to support someone who is willing to come to Europe.” (Conv. with Lamin, Borgo Mezzanone, Sept. 2022)

From this point of view, it can be better understood why some workers continue to reside in informal settlements even when holding residency permits. While in some cases this is related to the difficulty in renting a house, due to racial discrimination and precariousness of employment relations, in other cases, continuing to live within informal settlements is a calculated choice, aimed at reducing at minimum expenses while at the same time maximizing the entrances through overwork. This also explains, as further explored in chapter eight, why programs aimed at "saving" workers from exploitation by placing them for long periods of time in reception centers without being employed tend to fail. Indeed, many people prefer working, even under exploitative working conditions, rather than being unemployed and live in a reception center. The need to work and earn money is among the reason why so many people from West Africa migrated to Europe, and can be summarized by the often-voiced remark "We came here to look for money".

> "From the place where I come from, we don't have anything, we are from the village. When I was growing up, in some days even to have food was a problem. We would go to work in the farm and sometimes we went to the city to sell some of our products, even if we earned very little money. I suffered a lot when I was young. Right now, that in our village more than twenty people are abroad, things have changed quite a lot. We used to buy rice every month, so those in village have always something to eat. But them they think here we find money on trees. So, they always ask us money. They don't understand that also for us is not easy, that we are working hard and living expenses are very hard in Europe. Every day they will call you to ask for money, and if you are not careful you will end up sending all your salary to Africa. Thank God, for myself, I came here without borrowing money to anyone. So, I don't have to give them by force. Only if I know it is really important, like health issues and food, I cannot deny. But other people borrowed money to come here, so now they need to repay. In other instances, their family sold everything so they could come to Europe." (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Hamady, Borgo Mezzanone, July 2023).

Finally, the implementation of law 199/2016 with the strengthening of labor inspectorate and police controls, has favored a progressive process of exclusion of undocumented workers who find it increasingly hard to be employed. If one the one hand workers have overcome this obstacle through the exchange of residency permits, as highlighted in previous paragraphs, the fines imposed on farmers employing undocumented workers have induced some of them to prefer mechanization over manual labor, as well as to shift to other cultures requiring less manual labor, such as cereals and legumes. This, taken together with the seasonality of agricultural labor and the racial segregation of Italian labor market, further reduce the possibilities of employment of racialized migrants, making labor an ever-increasing scarce resource and turning overwork and self-exploitation into

fundamental ways in which agricultural racial capitalism is reproduced, through the specter of becoming surplus population.

## Conclusion

In the present chapter we have started delving into the shape of racial capitalism in the province of Foggia by looking at the two dimensions which are most often represented in the public debate that are: informal settlements and labor exploitation. As it has been maintained, the mainstream representation of informal settlements and labor exploitation in the context of Foggia province has often been based on false representations aimed at reinforcing the conceptualization of migrant labor exploitation in the agricultural sector as being at the same time exceptional and descending from the responsibility of evil *caporali* and exploiters. In addition to that, rural informal settlements are often represented as the being primarily connected with the exploitation of migrant labor in the agricultural sector. However, by developing an in-depth analysis based on ethnographic observation, conversations with West African migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements and employed in the agricultural sector, as well as interviews with representatives of institutions, unions and employers' organizations, we have claimed that the existence of informal settlements goes well beyond the issue of labor exploitation in the agricultural sector, while at the same time maintaining that the condition of economic oppression experienced by West African migrant farmworkers cannot be fully explained through the concept of exploitation in the workplace. Thanks to the analysis carried out, it was possible to shed light on the contradictions inherent to the anti-*caporalato* rhetoric and practice implemented in the past few years following the approval of law 199/2016, that further reinforce the contradiction between labor and citizenship rights inherent to the paradigm of modern slavery. Indeed, while the prosecution of farm owners has to certain extent brought some improvements on the side of the regularization of employment relation, it has also increased the divide of rights safeguard between those who have regular residency permit and those who are left undocumented by national and European migration policies. As a consequence, while it is important to consider the exploitation of labor in the workplace, in order to better grasp the condition of economic oppression of West African migrant farmworkers employed in the context of Italian agriculture it can be useful to recall Battarcharrya definition of racial capitalism as based on the exploitation, expropriation and expulsion of differently racialized populations that in turn become racializing processes. This means that while West African

migrant workers have recorded an improvement on the side of salaries in the past few years, as shown in chapter 5.3.1, largely due to a workforce shortage, their condition of oppression has not vanished, in that it cannot be reduced to labor exploitation. Indeed, the contingent improvement on the side of labor exploitation has not resulted in a correspondent improvement of processes of ghettoization, illegalization and racialization, which have in some cases even worsened. It is for this reason that the following chapter will be dedicated to exploring the two other dimension of agricultural racial capitalism in the province of Foggia, which despite being so central in defining the experience of racialized migrant farmworkers in the province are often left unnamed: illegalization and racialization.

# CHAPTER 7

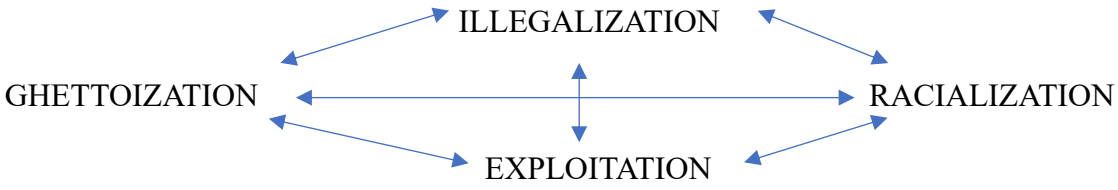
## FOGGIA AS A CENTER OF ITALIAN AGRICULTURAL RACIAL CAPITALISM: ILLEGALIZATION AND RACIALIZATION

As already mentioned in chapter six, as a result of the processes illustrated in chapter five, around 2017 Foggia started assuming a central position in the panorama of Italian agricultural racial capitalism. The relevance of the Province of Foggia can be seen as the consequence of a series of factors already mentioned in the previous chapter and which will be further examined in this chapter as well as in chapter eight.

This chapter and chapter six are dedicated to examining four processes defining the shape of racial capitalism in the province of Foggia which, while enlisted separately for the purpose of analysis, are all tightly connected and self-reinforcing. These are:

1. Ghettoization;
2. Exploitation;
3. Illegalization;
4. Racialization.

These processes define the experience of racialized migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia, and most specifically, of West African workers, influencing each other as exemplified by the following scheme.




If chapter six has been dedicated to exploring the two most visible and discussed dimensions, that are that of ghettoization and that of exploitation, the present chapter will focus on the other two components, illegalization and racialization which, while often hidden in debates on the subject, represent fundamental elements in order to understand the structure and functioning of racial capitalism in the context of Italian agriculture. Indeed, these two processes are often the root cause of the processes of ghettoization and exploitation already explored in chapter six.

After exploring the ways in which illegalization is enacted in the province of Foggia by looking at the case of Foggia Immigration Office and Foggia and San Severo Muncipalities, the analysis will move on exploring the shape of racism and white supremacy in the province of Foggia, and concluding looking at the definition of racism as vulnerability to premature death suggested by Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2008).

### 7.1 Illegalization

If "illegality" is conceived in institutional terms as a status, illegalization can be thought as a process, to which different actors contribute with various responsibilities (De Genova 2002). In the Italian context, Italian immigration legislation represents the first driver of illegalization, which, despite changing laws and regulations, sanctions the precariousness of legal status for non-European citizens belonging to the Global South, to be understood not in geographical but in social, economic and political terms. Illegalization can be thought as a central dimension in the reproduction of racial capitalism. As it has been already illustrated in former chapters, contemporary racial capitalism has been structured around borders and the categorization of human beings as "legal" or "illegal". The control of mobility, as either enforced im/mobility or filtered mobility, has been at the heart of the development of racial capitalism and has been partly substituted by the controlled and filtered mobility characterizing the global border regime, whereby migration status overlaps with racial categorization.

Any investigation on the role of racialized migrant labor in the context of agricultural racial capitalism can thus not prescind from an accurate analysis of illegalization, to be examined not by simply discussing the Italian and European normative framework, already analyzed in chapter five, but looking at it as a process, constantly reproduced in everyday interactions between racialized migrants, Immigration offices as well as other public offices such as Municipality for residence registration, Revenue Agency for release of Fiscal Code, and Italian Bank *Poste Italiane* for the opening of bank accounts. It is in this sense that we can talk about a "illegalization assembly line", to highlight the relevance of every contribution in terms of closure, denial of rights, institutional racism and "street level bureaucracy" (Lipsky 1980) [65] on the process of illegalization that transforms a human being into a deportable subject.

[65] The expression street-level bureaucracy was coined by Michael Lipsky in 1969 in order to highlight the way in which policies' and legislations' implementation ultimately relied on civil servants (Lipsky 1980). This concept has been widely used with regard to immigrants' access to rights, highlighting the impact of public officials' and civil servants' restrictive

The observations and reflections proposed hereafter on what I define as "the assembly line of illegalization" descend from a four-year experience in the field as an activist for legal support. Even though I have no legal background, I decided to embark in this work as a response to the needs I met during my staying in Borgo Mezzanone first, and Torretta Antonacci, later. Deciding to start to support migrant workers with their administrative practices was a response to the need of contributing to the struggle in a way that went beyond research, which was neither for me nor for the people inhabiting the settlements enough for earning the right to be there where I was not supposed to be. As Scheper-Hughes (1995) describes in her account of "militant anthropology", in order to develop a politically, socially and ethically committed anthropology is not enough to stop at the level of writing, but it is necessary to engage fully in supporting the struggle of those "whose lives and miseries provide us with a livelihood".

In order to be useful for the people who were giving me an opportunity to enter in their environments and learn about their lives, hardships and dreams, I trained myself in immigration law, through establishing collaborations with other organizations and lawyers outside of Foggia. Thanks to this activity of support and advocacy, I was able to indirectly experience what I here define as the 'assembly line of illegalization', in order to stress the processual nature of illegalization and the precarious nature of "legality". The assembly line of illegalization is made of all those public offices' employees, street level bureaucrats, non-governmental actors' operator, lawyers, employers, house owners, etc. who, by denying services, postponing appointments, requesting unnecessary documents or excessive payments, favor the slipping down of a person from a position of documented into a position of undocumented, or instead, prevent their regularization.

### 7.1.1 Exploring illegalization assembly line. Notes on the production of illegality from Foggia Immigration Office

After national legislators, the first manufacturers of illegalization are the Immigration Offices of Police (in Italian, *Questura - Ufficio Immigrazione*)[66]. Despite an already restrictive legislation, Immigration Offices apply a variety of illegitimate practices, further reducing the already limited possibilities of holding a valid residency permit. The lack of a common praxis shared by all Immigration Offices spread on the Italian territory -

interpretation of the legislation in preventing their access to fundamental rights, such as civil registration, healthcare, social benefits, and so on (Belabas, Gerrits 2015; Bhatia 2020; Gargiulo 2019; Williams 2015).

[66] In Italy, immigration is managed by police departments, and it is under the competence of the Ministry of Interior.

each province has its own Immigration Office - favors the creation of multiple systems of immigration management. Immigration offices' directors, similarly to what happens in the context of other public services, appear to define internal illegitimate regulations, justified by the constant threat of "invasion" from other provinces. The underlying assumption is that the more the interpretation of the norm is restrictive, the less people will be attracted to that particular office. The production of illegality on the side of immigration offices and, more broadly, immigration management infrastructure, can go from the refusal to receive an asylum application or renewing a residency permit in the absence of a proof of address (so-called *ospitalità*), to the constant postponement of appointments, justified by the lack of personnel, the existence of technical issues, and so on.

For the past four years, I have been observing practices, interactions and conflicts emerging in front of Foggia immigration office, going there about twice a week. Foggia Immigration Office is located on a street outside the city center. Every morning, at 7.30 am it is already full of people queuing and waiting for their turn to arrive. Some of them will be able to enter, while many will be postponed to another day, another week, or another month. The office is structured with two main internal units, section II and section IV, the former managing working permits and the latter managing permits belonging to the sphere of asylum, thus including first asylum requests, second requests (so-called, *reiterate*), renewal of permits for political asylum, subsidiary protection, humanitarian protection, special protection, etc.[67]

The analysis will here focus more on section IV, not only due to the process of "refugeezation" (Dines, Rigo 2015) of agricultural workforce and, more broadly, of migration already explored in chapter five, but also because it is in this field, where lines are more blurred, that the largest number of illegitimate practices is implemented. While the procedure followed in the realm of documents for working permits is to a certain extent more linear - with requirements for the renewal of residency permits for working reasons being a working contract, a minimum income and a housing solution[68], and the appointment being given by postal offices - the same cannot be said for the procedures relating to asylum, which not only are always subjected to changes, but do also involve more actors. Indeed, if the issuance and renewal of working permits is internal to the Immigration Offices, asylum requests often involve multiple actors, among which Territorial Commissions for the

[67] See Chapter 5.2 for an in-depth account of the different forms of protection existing in Italian regulation and their evolution in the past decades.

[68] On the subject of minimum income, courts have ruled that the immigration offices have to take into account various parameters, so that it is not possible to fix a standard yearly minimum.

Recognition of International Protection, other Immigration offices, and courts. The existence of multiple actors involved favors the multiplication of mistakes, the slowing of procedures due to the miscommunication and discharging of responsibilities between different actors. The work of section II and IV intersected dramatically in the years 2018-2020, with the abolition of the permit for humanitarian reasons and the need to convert all the permits for humanitarian reasons into working permits. It is expected to intersect again in 2024, following the approval of DL 20/2023, its conversion in law 50/2023, as well as the promulgation of various internal circular illustrated in chapter five which appear to further worsen the already dramatic impact of DL 20/2023, by strongly limiting the possibility of conversion of special protection permits into working permits.

*Figure 28 Foggia Immigration Office. Source: photo by the author.*

In order to examine some of the ways in which Foggia Immigration office produces and reproduces illegalization, I will here in the following mention some examples, building on fieldnotes, informal conversations and interviews.

"Last Friday I went to Questura to accompany Moussa, from Mali, who wants to present a new asylum request, Mahamadou from Senegal who wants to renew his permit for asylum request (so-called six-months permit, from its validity length), and Aboubakar, from Niger, who has received the recognition of subsidiary protection status from the Commission of Crotone and needs an appointment to obtain his permit. They have arrived there since 7 a.m. to get a good place in the line. I joined them around 8.30 am and the line was already very long, about 200 hundred people. After the employees of the II section opened and allowed the people to enter, the gate was closed. We remained waiting from five to ten minutes, when finally, two the employees of IV section came out. Marco, the one who usually processes appointment for new asylum requests, is not here today. One of the officers started off by saying:

<<We are only two today, all our colleagues are not here, due to other missions to which they have been sent yesterday. Another one is sick. Today only those who have appointments will enter, for all the other ones, come next week, or even the following one. It is not our fault. We are not the one deciding whether we will work here in the office or they will send us to service in other areas or surrounding cities.>>

People in the line started complaining:

<< I came here already four times, every time is like this >> said someone.

<<You don't like to work, it is not possible that every day is like this, come next week, come next week. We are working, we cannot lose 4 days a week of work to come here, our bosses can fire us for this reason. After, when we don't have a job, are you going to take care of us? We are trying to work, to make everything normal, but you really want to push us out of the right way.>> said another person.

I know most of those who are in the line, either by sight or in person. Many of them are living in Borgo or Torretta, they are trying to obtain a permit either through an asylum application or through the last special protection requests, which had already been given an appointment before the approval of DL 20/2023. The immigration officer replied, saying that they were right, but it was not their fault.

<<Indeed - he affirmed - we were not even supposed to open today, but I tried to come out to at least process those who had already been given an appointment.>>

Lawyers started talking with their clients, telling them to come next week. For most of those standing, especially those who are trying to apply for a new request, is not their first time lining on the que and being sent back home until following week. Frustration for constant delay is very high, and people on the line continue to complain until the immigration officer shouts:

<<If you don't stop pushing people before you and you don't move back and que on a single line I will enter again and will not take even those with an appointment.>>

Moussa and Mahamadou are told to come back next week, when maybe they will be able to process their requests. Aboubakar instead, who had already an appointment for today entered, but few hours later called me, telling me that he was given a new appointment for the end of the month.

Just another 'ordinary' at Foggia Immigration Office." (Fieldnotes, April 2023)

*Figure 29 People waiting in front of Foggia Immigration Office. Source: photo by the author.*

The above example highlights a series of key features regarding the ways in which illegalization is crafted by Immigration offices, through various strategies aimed to exclude, postpone and prevent access to the office and thus the formalization of one's requests.

One of the main tools through which illegalization is implemented is by postponing appointments and delaying residency permit issuance. Most of the times, people are requested to present four to five times to be able to obtain an appointment for a new asylum request, so-called *reiterata.* If given, that appointment, can take up to six-months. Since the beginning of 2023, Foggia Immigration Office started printing out proper appointments, with Immigration Office header, the personal data of the person and the date of the appointment. Until that time, appointments were written by hand on the back of the requests, usually prepared by lawyers or non-governmental organizations, and could go up to one year and a half. This would put at serious risk of expulsion people who had instead expressed their will to apply for asylum, contravening Italian and European law on the subject, envisaging that asylum applications should be received in a period of time ranging from three to ten days.

Postponement of appointments can be seen as a strategy used to reduce the influx of people, considering that a share of them after five or ten times without obtaining any result will give up, especially among those who, like the one of the above examples, risk being

fired as a consequence of multiple absences. Furthermore, while a denial to accept one's application could be easily appealed in court, postponements tend to be accepted by lawyers and non-governmental organization in the area. Indeed, while according to Italian legislation if an asylum application or a residency permit renewal is not received, it is possible to present an "urgent" appeal in the Court - called in legal slang as "*settecento*" (seven hundred) from the name of the article of Italian Civil Procedure Code regulating this kind of legal actions- this path is hardly pursued by lawyers in the area, who tend accepting long appointments or constant delays for their clients, preferring to maintain "good relations" with the Immigration Office. At the same time, while according to legislation those who intend applying for asylum can present the request by themselves to the nearest police station, Foggia Immigration Office does not accept requests if they are not presented through the help of a lawyer or a NGOs, thus favoring the dependence of asylum seekers on lawyers and thus the profit of lawyers. In the city of Foggia lawyers ask between 250 and 500 euros to present an asylum request. Considering a presence of no less than 10.000 people in need of legal assistance, the immigration legal assistance represents a business of more than 5 million euro, to which Foggia Immigration office contributes dramatically through the implementation of illegitimate practices.

If it is true that Foggia Immigration Office suffers a lack of investment on the side of central government, with a staff and structure largely under numbered compared to the number of non-EU citizens residing in the area, the lack of personnel is constantly used as an excuse to postpone appointments and prevent the formalization of asylum requests.

In some cases, technical problems emerge, postponing of various months the formalization of a request due to "technical issues".

One example is that of Ali, a Malian citizen who had already applied for asylum in 2006 and whose request was rejected, and was now trying to make a new request, considering the unstable social and political conditions of Mali. Despite his appointment date had arrived, he was forced to wait for four months due to the "impossibility" of writing his surname, as it had an apostrophe, and the "system" was not set to accept it.

In other instances, the formalization of a new asylum request, so-called *reiterata*, is postponed for various months due to the fact that the Territorial Commission had not previously updated the file, so that it appears in the system that the previous asylum request has not yet been concluded. In order to proceed with the update, it is often required to send to the Territorial Commission the final judgement of the court. However, if in meanwhile,

the asylum seeker has lost his lawyer number and does not hold the copy of the result, things become quite complicate and can take various months to solve the issue.
In other instances, when an asylum application is formalized, mistakes are made in writing the name or surname of the person, or instead inverting them. Once the mistake is made, the immigration officers decline any responsibility, saying that they are not allowed to change it and it will be possible to update it only once the person goes to Commission. However, being called for an interview with Territorial Commission can take up to two years, depending on the various territorial Commissions involved, some being extremely slow with appointments. A mistake in the name or surname has a ripple effect on the entire process of illegalization, in that it can prevent the person, even if formally "documented" to have a residence, a working contract, a bank account, etc., as it will be further explored in the following paragraphs. Furthermore, once the person has been interviewed by Commission it can take up to one year for the result to come out, always depending on the efficiency of various Territorial Commissions, reproducing a certain divide between Northern and Southern Italy, with Commission located in Southern Italy, such as Crotone, Bari, Foggia, Catania, Palermo, being overwhelmed by requests as first points of arrivals and thus constantly delayed. It is relevant to stress that the divide existing between various Territorial Commissions, both from a point of view of waiting times and from a point of view of outcomes, highlights the randomness of the process of asylum seeking in Italy, whereby some asylum seekers are penalized compared to others, simply on the basis of the place where they had first presented their request upon arrival. Considering that even if the person presents a second or third request of asylum in a different Immigration office the Territorial Commission will remain the same, it becomes clear how unfair it is for the asylum process to be so variable.

Another issue regards the non-conformity of temporary residency permits or receipts with the norm. For instance, Foggia Immigration Office does not give to people applying for a *reiterata* a six-months permit, as prescribed by law, but instead leaves them with the receipt of the presentation of the request, so-called C3, which represents a temporary residency permit, according to art. 4 co. 3 d.l. 142/2015. However, this receipt does not contain a date of expiry but only the date of issuance, producing countless differing interpretations regarding its actual validity, ranging from six-months to unlimited. As the experience of Malick highlights, while C3 should be considered as a valid permit to sign a job contract, this is not always accepted by companies.

> "I have presented my asylum more than one year and a half ago. I am working every day, I am doing my best, but Commission date is not arriving. My boss signed me a contract before, but right now he wants to renew it and he is saying that the document is expired, because it is more than one year and a half that it has been issued. I have tried to ask for Commission date, but they always tell me <<you have to wait, you have to wait. Commission date has not yet arrived. >> So, I am scared about losing my job now." (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Malick, Borgo Mezzanone, July 2023).

In some cases, companies contest the validity of the receipt in that it was issued too long before, while in others, these are not considered valid as a document *per se*, such as in the case of Ibrahima.

> "I have taken my document to many *fabbrica*[69], but they say it cannot make a contract. I don't understand why. If they give us a document and you cannot use it for work, what is the purpose of the document? After they will ask us to prove that we are working, but how can we have a contract if they don't accept our documents?" (Int. with Ibrahima, Torretta Antonacci, May 2023).

As the two above examples suggest, the grey zone created by the issuance of permits non-conforming to the law has a ripple effect on the very possibility of seeing one's right to stay recognized. As it will be further explored, this also affects the possibility of someone requesting for civil registration, fiscal code as well as opening a bank account.
All the above-mentioned issues concerning asylum seekers do not end when a form of protection is granted. Indeed, when the result is notified, the person can wait up to seven or eight months to be given an appointment for fingerprint, and from the date of fingerprints the issuance of the permit can take up to six months. In total, it can take more than three years between the asylum request and the document issuance, in the case in which the result is positive. If the result is negative, and thus an appeal has been proposed, waiting times can go up to seven years, thus leaving people in a limbo where they are neither documented nor undocumented.

If waiting represents a core element in the experience of asylum seekers, as it has already been shown by multiple scholarly analysis, as a result of the "refugeezation" of migration in Italy, it can be maintained that the issue of waiting became a central issue in defining experiences of migration in general.

[69] Term used my migrant farmworkers to define the processing plants for horticultural products.

The experience of Samba, a citizen of Guinea Bissau, who was granted special protection by Ancona Territorial Commission following a *reiterata* but is still waiting for his residency permit to be delivered, is emblematic of the exasperation caused by long waiting times.

> "I have been here for more than 8 years now. I have never had any problem in Italy, I don't steal, I don't sell drugs. I received a negative to my first request, but after I made a new request, I was called in Commission, and I was granted special protection. I waited for more than six months for my result to come out, when it was sent to my lawyer, I went to Questura to take an appointment. They gave me an appointment after five months. In April, I went for my fingerprint, and they told me that in 60 days it would have been be ready. Now it is four months and still it isn't ready. They say that there is a problem in the system, but they didn't explain me which kind of problem. I told them they should tell me, if they don't want to give me my document. I can go back to my country. Because I am tired to be here, to live this life, every day you wake up early in the morning to go work, and still, you are poor. I think if I came to Europe, I would have something. But now I know that it was better if I remained in my country. If you live in Europe, you come back and you are poor, and you wasted all your time here, far away from your family." (*author's translation from Italian,* Conv. with Samba, Torretta Antonacci, July 2023)

Residency permits should be delivered within sixty days from request. However, the issuance times can range from two months to more than a year according to the type of permit. In some cases, permits are delivered already expired.

The delay of appointments, formalization of asylum requests and issuance of permits represents a tool to favor the blurring of lines between who is "documented" and who is "undocumented" introducing a large category of people who, while being formally documented, meaning that they have the right according to Italian legislation to remain on Italian territory[70], are substantially undocumented, in that they lack a valid permit of stay.

Apart from postponements and delays, another tool used to increment this limbo is the request of a proof of address in order to present an asylum request, to renew residency permits for seeking asylum, so called six-months, and permits for international protection. Through the request of proof of address, so-called *ospitalità*, Immigration Offices fuel yet another black market, which adds to the one previously mentioned regarding legal assistance. Indeed, while according to Italian law, asylum requests and renewals of residency permit for international protection can be presented in the place of residence, to be intended as the place where someone lives, Foggia Immigration Office, as most Immigration Offices

[70] While with working permits the right to stay is tight to the validity of the residency permit, for asylum seekers and holders of international protection is not the same, in that the right to stay can prescind from the validity of the permit.

around Italy, request to prove the residence, either through a "*ospitalità"* or through a legal residence.

As the experience of Cheikh, a Senegalese citizen illustrates, the lack of proof of address prevented him from being able to renew his temporary permit and, as a consequence of that, he was not able to sign any contract or to attend an Italian school, both considered as necessary to be able to prove someone "integration" within Italian territory.

> "I have been living in Borgo for the past three years. My appeal in Padova was not yet over, but I couldn't renew my six-month due to the lack of *ospitalità*. I looked for it everywhere. First, I tried in Padova. I paid someone 250 euro, a Senegalese, but when I went with that one in Questura they rejected me, saying that it was fake. After I tried to look for it in Foggia, I asked many people. They used to tell me yes, after they changed their mind. I stayed like this for three years, without a valid permit, without a contract, without an id card, all because of the *ospitalità.* Now my lawyer called me saying that the appeal was rejected, because I didn't provide any working documentation. I am working every day, but I don't have a contract because my document is not valid. I tried my best to renew it, without success, all because of this *ospitalità*." (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Cheikh, Borgo Mezzanone, November 2020)

In other instances, people who are granted international protection, either refugee status or subsidiary protection, are unable to renew their permit once expired and, in some cases, even to obtain it, after winning a court ruling on the case.

The story of Issouf, from Ivory Coast, is explicative of this issue.

> "I arrived in Italy in 2011. Roma Commission first gave me a negative, after they re-examined the case again because we were among those who came from Libya, and they gave us a one-year residency permit for humanitarian reasons. At that time, I gave the case to a lawyer, who appealed it in court. I finally obtained subsidiary protection, thanks to the unstable social and political situation of Ivory Coast, which was just coming out from its second Civil War. However, I was never able to really obtain that permit. I didn't have residence, and when my humanitarian permit expired, I couldn't do anything. It has been 10 years since I don't have a document and I am living in Ghetto." (*author's translation from Frenc*h, Conv. with Issouf, Torretta Antonacci, June 2023).

As all the above examples illustrate, in light of an already excluding legislation, Immigration Offices apply a series of illegitimate practices, enacted differently according to the various officer present at the gate, based on the request of unnecessary documents or on preventing access through the delay and postponements of appointments, in order to further exacerbated the grey area of those who, while formally documented, end up being undocumented lacking a valid permit of stay. In this sense, Immigration officers configure

themselves as street-level bureaucrats, whose attitude towards immigration, knowledge of the legislation and procedure can dramatically affect the status and lives of thousands of people, who can be denied their rights, while formally being entitled to a residency permit, even if temporary.

### 7.1.2 Residence as a tool to control and exclude. Notes from San Severo and Foggia municipalities[71]

As highlighted in previous paragraphs, proof of address represents a central tool to prevent people who have the right to apply for asylum or to renew their document from enacting that right. Nevertheless, even when the hurdle of Immigration Office is overcome and a document is obtained or renewed, new obstacles emerge. Despite holding a residency permit, most services are inaccessible in Italy without a valid residence and Identity Card. As highlighted by Enrico Gargiulo (2020, 2023), one of the most prominent Italian scholars on the subject, residence evolved from being a tool to record the presence of people within a specific territory, to become a way to select and exclude the undesirable, both during fascism and following the construction of the welfare state, linking the access to welfare to civil registration. Residence is defined by Italian Civil Code (art. 43) as "the place where someone holds its habitual abode" and it is characterized at the same time as a right and as a duty. It is a subjective right to be registered in the place where someone lives, and it is a duty to declare it. In relation to immigration, decree-law 286/1998 states that non-EU immigrants hold the same rights and duties of Italian citizens in relation to residence, with the addition of having to prove the regularity of their stay in Italy. Nevertheless, in the past decades, residence evolved from being a right/duty to often become a denied right. According to Gargiulo (2023:14), the selection performed through residence gives birth to a "civic stratification" whereby people of the same origin, who are living in the same areas and hold the same type of residency permits can result having completely different life experiences, in terms of access to services, rights and opportunities. Residence has been defined, borrowing the famous sentence of Hannah Arendt, as "a right to have other rights", in that most of the rights are accessible only to those holding a valid civil registration (Campagna LasciateCIEntrare 2018). A relevant shift into the possibility of accessing residence was marked by the approval of decree-law 2014, so-called Decree Renzi-Lupi,

[71] The present paragraph has been written building on the author's experience as a legal volunteer, interacting weekly since 2021 with Foggia and San Severo civil registration offices in relation to the civil registration of West African farmworkers living in Borgo Mezzanone and Torretta Antonacci informal settlements.

from the name of the two proponents. According to art. 5 of the decree, residence cannot anymore be given simply to those who declare their habitual residence in a place but, in order to obtain it, it is necessary to prove the house tenure status. The decree was approved to exclude from the access to residence those living in occupied buildings, but had ripple effects on a variety of situations, including those renting a house without a formal house contract.

For people living within informal settlements, it is not possible to register to a "real address", in that their informal housing is not considered as a proper habitation and it is not possible to prove their tenure status. Hence, they are commonly registered as people of no fixed abode. In this regard, Italian legislation rules at art. 2 clause 3 of law n. 1228/1952, as modified by the law n. 94/2009 that "persons of no fixed abode should be considered resident in the place where they have established their domicile." The domicile is defined as "the place where someone has established the center of business and interests" (art. 43, Italian Civil Code). In the province of Foggia, the main municipalities registering migrant farmworkers living in the two largest informal settlements, Borgo Mezzanone and Torretta Antonacci, as well as in smaller ones, such as Stornara, Stornarella, Pozzo Terraneo and Borgo Tre Titoli, are that of Foggia and that of San Severo. In Foggia, the registration of people of no-fix abode begun in 2010, following the interlocution between various NGOs operating on the ground and Foggia Municipality. Nowadays, in order to be registered to the address, it is necessary to apply to one of the eight organizations registered with the Municipality to provide the domicile. In chapter sever, the obstacles, requirements and tariffs requested by these organizations in order to access residence will be further explored, examining the ways in which the externalization of Municipal services to private actors can foster further exclusion and violation of rights. In San Severo, on the other hand, the path towards the recognition of the right of people of no-fixed abode to see their residence registered has been quite tortuous, with the municipality and, more specifically, the registration office, resisting the application of national regulation on the subject. It required for Pope Francesco's Almoner, Konrad Krajewski meeting the municipality of San Severo and signing a Protocol between Caritas and the local municipality for the inhabitants of Torretta Antonacci and neighboring settlements to see their right to residence recognized.
Nevertheless, while at present the two municipalities formally recognize the right of registration of persons of no-fixed abode within their territory, various issues emerge in the registration of people with documents not fitting in the narrow schemes of registration officers.

There are three main sets of issues to be analyzed. The first emerges a consequence of a discrepancy in the interpretation of norms regarding validity of specific permits, such as the so-called C3 or the receipt issued following the renewal of a permit or the request of a permit for special protection according to art. 19 par. 1.2 of d.l 286/1998. The second descends from the request of unnecessary documents, such as fiscal code or passport. The last concerns the issuance of ID cards, once the residence has been registered.

Emblematic of the overlapping of these three sets of issues is the experience of Moussa, an Ivorian citizen residing in the informal settlement of Torretta Antonacci. After having tried for more than four months to register his residence in San Severo, he was finally forced to apply to Foggia municipality, which eventually issued him residence and ID card. Even if the story of Moussa appears to be absurd, it is far from being an uncommon experience.

> "I went to San Severo more than ten times to try to have my ID card, but I couldn't make it. The first time I went there, they said I was missing my fiscal code, so I should go to apply and then come back. I went to apply for fiscal code, but they told me that as far as I wasn't resident in San Severo, they couldn't give it to me. I explained the issue to the association helping me to apply for residence and they helped me to get the fiscal code. I then went with it to the municipality, and the officer asked me to sign, and I did it. After few days, the association that accompanied me there said that there were some issues regarding my registration, because more than one person held the same name, surname and date of birth, and as a consequence, I should be patient. I waited for few weeks, but I didn't have any feedback. So, I asked them, and they said I should wait. Finally, after about two months, the association said I obtained my residence. Therefore, I went to apply for an appointment for ID card, and they told me that as far as I previously had an ID card, I should report its lost to the police before applying for a new ID card and that the number of the ID should have been written on the police report. But I didn't have a copy of it, so I couldn't know the number. After some discussions, the municipality gave me a paper on which the number of the lost ID card was written. I went to the police to report the lost, but they told me that my document (C3) was not considered a valid document to identify me. And this was said by the same Questura that issued that document! I then tried in different places, like Carabinieri and San Severo police, and I was finally able to get it. It was now more than four months that I was trying to obtain the ID. When I went back there, the officer said that my document was expired, because it was more than six-months since it had been issued, so they couldn't issue an ID card, until I had a valid permit!" (*author's translation from French*, Conv. with Moussa, Torretta Antonacci, June 2023).

Among the first set of issues, we can thus find the one concerning the registration of people holding a receipt of asylum request, so-called C3, issued according to art. 4 par. 3 of decree-law 142/2015. As previously illustrated, these permits do not contain a date of expiry but only the date of issuance. As a consequence of that, different municipalities establish

different expiry dates, ranging from six-months to unlimited. In this regard, Foggia and San Severo municipalities differ, with Foggia adopting a broader interpretation compared to San Severo. As a matter of fact, while before 2023 Foggia Municipality considered C3 valid for one year for the purpose of civil registration, in 2023, following a query directed to the National Association of Civil Registration Officers (*ANUSCA- Associazione Nazionale Ufficiali di Stato Civile e d'Anagrafe*), this interpretation was modified, and now C3 permits are considered valid until the conclusion of the asylum procedure. On the other hand, San Severo municipality still considers the validity of C3 as limited to six-months, thus preventing the majority of those holding a valid permit to enact their right/duty to civil registration.

Among the issues related to the dispute regarding the validity of permits it is also possible to locate the registration of holders of the so-called *cedolino* (slip). This can be issued following the renewal of a permit for international protection (refugee and subsidiary protection status), special protection or permit for asylum request and, since 2021, also following applications of special protection directed to police commissioner, according to art. 19 par. 1.2 of decree-law 286/1998. Until recently, *cedolino* appeared as white strip of paper, with a photo, a case number, a date of issuance, name surname and the date of birth of the person. Starting from late 2022, fiscal code and country of origin were added to it.
In relation to the renewal receipt, both Foggia and San Severo municipalities maintained that the period between the expiry date of the document and the issuance of the receipt should not overcome sixty-days, the maximum term allowed by law to renew residency permits. However, as previously highlighted, international protection permits differ from working permits in that the right of stay of the holder does not depend on their validity. Considering that civil registration depends on the regularity of the stay of the applicant, it follows, as variously maintained by court rulings, that receipts of renewal are to be considered as valid documents for the civil registration independently from the date of expiry of previous permits. Following the previously mentioned query sent by Foggia municipality to ANUSCA, Foggia municipality started accepting *cedolino* as a valid document for civil registration, regardless of whether it was issued in the process of renewal or in the process of application for special protection. Even if in the past the municipality of San Severo had supported its claim regarding the impossibility to proceed with civil registration of holders of *cedolino* due to the lack of all the necessary personal details, despite ANUSCA opinion and the addition of country of citizenship and fiscal code to the new receipts, they maintained their restrictive interpretation and continued denying civil

registration to those holding a *cedolino*, until a court ruling promoted by the association *Terra e Libertà* forced them to operate according to the law, as it will be further explained in chapter nine.

A second set of issues arises in relation to the request of unnecessary documents, such as fiscal code or passport. Also in this case, as highlighted by Moussa experience, the municipality of San Severo appears as the one putting in place more illegitimate practices, hampering the process of civil registration of both EU and non-EU foreign citizens[72]. In this regard, it should also be stressed an excessive turn-over of civil registry officers in San Severo municipality, which often lack adequate training regarding legislation and procedure. As a consequence of this, various praxis evolved during the past years, with some requirements being removed, also thanks to the work of advocacy implemented by settlement inhabitants, further analyzed in chapter nine. For instance, while in 2021 and 2022 the civil registration officer in charge would demand an original copy of the fiscal code issued and stamped by the Revenue Agency, in 2023 an agreement was achieved according to which for those whose fiscal code was written on the residency permit additional documentation should have not be requested. As the experience of Moussa, shared by dozens of people, highlights, the request of fiscal code as a requirement for civil registration triggers a vicious circle, for which if you don't have a fiscal code certificate you cannot have a residence, and *vice-versa*.

Finally, the last set of issues concerns the issuance of ID cards, once the civil registration has been completed. Indeed, while by law the issuance of ID cards descends automatically from the civil registration, in practice it is not always the case. Again, the municipality of San Severo distinguishes itself for illegitimate practices, denying in more than one instance the issuance of ID card to those holding a C3 considered not valid, such as in the case of Moussa, or being in-between two status, such as in the case of Omar, a Gambian citizen who was recognized special protection by the Territorial Commission but was waiting for his appointment to apply for the issuance of the permit.

> "I went to San Severo Municipality, the civil registration office told me that everything was ok, so I went down to the ID card office to obtain an appointment for ID card. They gave it to me but after that, the day I went for the appointment they said that I could not get the ID card until my document was issued. And I was supposed to wait more than six-months for the appointment to fingerprint, so before my document would be issued it could take more than a year. I needed my ID card to open a bank

[72] While it is not part of the present work to explore the issue of EU citizen, it is here relevant to note that in some instances they can experience various issues in obtaining a valid residence, due to the lack of a common interpretation regarding the right to civil registration of EU citizens without a valid working contract.

> account and start working, so I couldn't wait all that time. I came back various times and I never succeeded, until a lawyer intervened sending a letter to the Municipality. After that, they called me and finally issued my ID card, but it took more than two months." (Conv. with Omar, Torretta Antonacci, Nov. 2022).

In this case, the pretext for not issuing the ID card was given by the introduction with art. 3 par. 2 of d.l. 130/2020 of a three-years ID card for asylum seekers, in opposition to the ten-years ID card envisaged in Italy. As a consequence of that, ID card office employees maintained that as Omar situation was not clear, holding a permit for asylum request but presenting the Commission result where it was stated that he received a two-years special protection permit, it was better to wait until the document was issued to dispel any doubt. Nevertheless, as maintained by Omar, this would have prevented him from working with a regular contract for more than a year.

The consequence of the restrictive interpretation on the side of San Severo municipality is a "migration" of those who were supposed to be registered in San Severo to Foggia municipality, and a consequent over estimation of presences in Foggia compared to neighboring municipalities. In chapter nine, the struggle of settlement' inhabitants, and in particular, of Torretta Antonacci settlement, for the right to residence will be explored in more details. It is here enough to note that these various interpretations are possible due to a legislation which is not clear on a certain set of issues, to the issuance of permits not conforming to the norm, and, finally, due to registration officers' lack of training and discriminatory attitude.

What emerges from the analysis of Foggia Immigration Office, San Severo and Foggia municipalities illegitimate practices strengthens the definition of illegalization as a process, conveyed through the parallel with an assembly line. As each worker on the assembly line can affect the final shape and quality of the product, each street-level bureaucrat can affect with their arbitrary denial, delay and mistakes the final outcome of the process of regularization hardly pursued by any non-EU citizen in Italy. As brilliantly highlighted by Hannah Arendt (1963) in her famous essay on the "banality of evil", exploring the Holocaust through the trial of Adolf Eichman in Jerusalem, in the context of a bureaucratic state, evilness does not necessarily take the appearance of a devil but rather, of a bureaucrat diligently following the rules without asking himself the impact of the implementation of those norms on specific individuals. According to Arendt, Eichman might had not been able to personally kill the Holocaust victims, but through his actions he allowed for their extermination to take place.

Similarly, with all the due differences, in the context of a meeting held in San Severo on the 14th of July 2023, the Assessor to Welfare Policies of San Severo suggested that Civil registration officers have never been within an informal settlement, and so have never experienced what are the consequences of their refusal to register the residence of someone and the ripple effects that it can have on their lives. In addition to that, I would suggest that, building on Bhattacharyya (2018) observations, the supposedly race-blindness of legal mechanisms allows for racism and discrimination to take place unnoticed, justified by the application of State approved laws. Nevertheless, racial discrimination also impacts dramatically in preventing the access to of racialized migrants, as it will be further explored in following paragraphs.

To conclude, we can maintain that if Italian and European legislation clearly play a central role in the production of migrant illegality, a great role in the process of illegalization is performed by all those street-level bureaucrats (Immigration officers, civil registration officers, revenue agency officers, bank employees, etc.) on the ground which not only apply an already discriminatory legislation but interpret it in illegitimate ways, denying the access to rights of thousands of non-EU migrant workers.

### 7.2 Racialization

Racialization, race and racism[73] represent fundamental categories, but often unexplored, to understand racialized workers' specific experience of oppression in the context of agricultural racial capitalism. While it is true that exploitation does not only concern racialized subjects, racism allows for exploitation to take place and be more brutal, while at the same time favoring processes of ghettoization and illegalization above illustrated, as well as affecting other spheres of life not included in the production process. As Stuart Hall (1980:341) famously put it, "race is the modality through which class is lived" meaning that, for racialized subjects, class oppression is experienced and understood as part of racial oppression.

As previously highlighted in Chapter 2, the definition of White supremacy can prove more helpful than that of racism in that it highlights the system of power underlying discrimination, while at the same time making visible that those who benefit from the system of oppression are whites, and anyone closer to whiteness. If it is true that the concept of

[73] As already explored in first and second chapter, race, racialization and racism stand for three different, yet interrelated, categories. Racism represents the structural discrimination of negatively racialized, according to a hierarchy of races, which while differing according to time/space, commonly places the white at the top and the Black at the bottom. Racialization, as the process of enacting racial thinking, involves also whites, while racism doesn't.

white supremacy is mostly used in the context of United States, having a different history of racism compared to Italy, some similarities can be drawn, while at the same time taking into account Italian specific history of racism, as explored in chapter 5. While racism in the context of migration to Italy has been historically directed to different national groups, such as "Albanians", "Romanians", "Moroccans", following the rise in sea arrivals from the African continent starting from 2011, "Black Africans" have come to embody, in the public and political debate, the quintessential representation of "migrants". Contemporary forms of racial discrimination have mixed with historical ones, dating back to the times of Italian colonization in East Africa, giving birth, on the one hand, to discriminatory practices and even murders and, on the other hand, to practices of victimization and infantilization on the side of both institutional and non-governmental actors. Being racialized as "Black Africans" entails thus a countless number of meanings, both in terms of discrimination and in terms of self-identification.

People racialized as "Blacks" experience in the province of Foggia a wide range of discrimination, going from implicit discrimination, hidden behind an "I am not racist, but…" or behind the denial to perform basic tasks on the side of public officials, to overt racial discrimination and racially motivated violent attacks.

In what follows the various degrees of racism experienced by West African migrants in the province of Foggia will be explored. While in the first part of the subchapter everyday forms of both explicit and implicit racial discriminatory practices will be explored, the second part will account for the most profound manifestations and consequence of racism, which, building on Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition, is concerned with the exposure of certain racialized groups to premature death. Finally, the attempt will be that of re-adapting the pyramid of White supremacy, as elaborated by Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Non-Violence in 2005, to the context of West African farmworkers the province of Foggia.

### 7.2.1 Delineating the shape of White supremacy in the province of Foggia: between tacit and overt racial discrimination

Drawing upon experiences gathered from informal conversation, interviews and engaged participant observation, it is possible to delineate a multiplicity of forms of racial discrimination to which people racialized as "Black" are subjected in the province of Foggia. It is necessary to remind once again the positionality from which this research has been carried out. As a white Italian woman practicing research and activism, I have been

witnessing not only the discrimination experienced by West African migrants but also the privilege of being considered as a white and a citizen, and, sometimes, the "bad reputation", from the point of view of public employees, of being the one supporting racialized migrants to access their basic rights. Before exploring concrete experiences of discrimination in the following paragraphs, building on the testimonies of those who have experienced it first-hand, it is relevant to briefly reflect on my positionality in relation to the broader context of analysis. Indeed, the act of supporting racialized migrants in accessing their rights by accompanying them to public offices and using my racial, citizenship, and language privilege, can be double sided. On the one hand, it can be functional for the result to be achieved easily, whether it is an appointment at the Immigration office, a civil registration in the municipality, the opening of a bank account, etc. On the other hand, being the process mediated by my privileged position as a white Italian, it leaves untouched the structural discrimination affecting racialized migrants, making my presence, or the presence of someone holding the same privileges, necessary, thus reproducing the structure of power centered on citizenship and whiteness. This ambivalence requires an in-depth reflection on the part of activist holding racial and citizenship privileges, and it will be discussed more in depth in chapter seven and eight. It is fundamental to remind that anti-black racism and white privilege represents two sides of the same coin. It is thus necessary to reflect on racialization not only in relation to blackness but also in relation to whiteness, and the meaning it attains in the context of the West African diaspora, which, as explored in chapter four, holds a specific place in the historical construction of racial capitalism. Indeed, the awareness of West African migrants of being part of a system of oppression dating back centuries and spread at the global level is extremely vivid and represents a central framework of understanding and meaning making.

As it can be highlighted from the following excerpt, anti-black racism is understood as a global phenomenon, which connects the discriminations experienced in Italy to the one experienced along the journey, such as in Libya, in Tunisia or in Morocco, as well as to the privileges enjoyed by whites in the countries of origins.

> "I don't know where Black people can go until they will have peace in this world. In Africa, we don't have peace, when they see whites, even if we are citizens, they will give them more rights than us. We went to these Arab countries, and it is even worse than here. You know, the time we were in Libya, small kids would attack us with guns, asking money and ready to kill us like animals if we didn't give them. Last year, you see what they did to Blacks in Morocco, how they killed people like animals at the border. Right now, you see, what is happening in Tunisia also. They are killing people, raping women,

> leaving them in the desert, only because they are Blacks. After, if they are here, they will say we are all brothers, we are all Africans, but when you are in their countries, they will show you they are not Africans. They used to call us "Africans" as if they were from Europe. After you come to Europe and is the same. Especially here in Foggia. When I was living in Genova it was not like that. But here, there is too much racism. Anyplace you go, whether is the Post Office, the Municipality, or even in the street, they will show you that you are not welcome here. To see someone working in a sector other than agriculture is almost impossible. In the North of Italy is better, but in general in Italy you will not see Blacks doing many jobs, like for example bus driver, policeman, as you can see it in Germany. And even in the workplace, they will differentiate between us and the whites. I have worked once in a *fabbrica* in Zapponeta, we, the Blacks, were the only one remaining to work after the eight hours were over. One day we worked for 17 hours! They used to pay us less than Italian and Romanians. And how they used to talk to us, shouting as if we were not human beings." (Conv. with Jewru, Borgo Mezzanone, July 2023).

Being identified as Black and African is considered as a major vector of discrimination and oppression, through which it is possible to frame not only the subalternity experienced within European countries, but also the very need to migrate, as rooted in the neo-colonial politics affecting the African continent. Racism is perceived in every sphere of life from wok to leisure time, through an hierarchization structured along the color line. At the same time, Foggia is perceived as particularly racist if compared to rest of Italy, especially Northern Italy, which is considered more open both from the point of view of employment and from that of sociability.

Foggia and its surrounding villages are indeed segregated spaces. There are only some areas where racialized subjects are not considered as out of place. Walking around the city, it is possible to trace invisible lines marking the areas where it is tacitly allowed to go for racialized subjects and where it is not allowed to walk, sit, have a coffee. These are not openly declared bans, but they can be easily perceived. Not only the informal settlements situated in the countryside surrounding the city are isolated spaces, separated from the society as a whole and considered as "uncivilized places", but also the so-called *Ferrovia* neighborhood, near the train station, has been repeatedly described by institutions, newspapers and non-governmental organizations as a "ghetto" characterized by "decay" and "illegality" due to the presence of "immigrants", where local citizens are now "foreigners in their own city" (L'Immediato 2023) In an interview released by the spoke-person of a neighborhood inhabitants' association to a local newspaper, it was stated:

> "In these years necessary measures and specifically designed ordinances have never been adopted in order to avoid that Ferrovia neighborhood became a ghetto out of control. Still now, the will, capacity

and concreteness to solve a problem become entrenched in few meters of streets that have become conquest territory of drug dealers, prostitutes, and idlers who from 8 am occupy the streets and sidewalks for their own interests" (*authors' translation from Italian*, L'Immediato 2023)

*Figure 30 Demonstration signboards pointing anti-black racism. Source: above (Aboubakar Soumahoro Facebook page), below ( Comitato Lavoratori delle Campagne Facebook page).*

As it is possible to highlight from the extract, activities considered either as "illegal" or "immoral", such as drug dealing and prostitution, are taken as representation of the "decay" and "illegality". Nevertheless, the illegality of activities is used as a justification to mask the real issue, which is related to the high numbers of people considered as different and undesirable, as in the case of Grand Ghetto and Borgo Mezzanone informal settlements' eviction in 2017 and 2019. In this regard, it can be useful to recall the speech of a representative of the local section of *Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana* (ARCI) during an institutional meeting, who was outspoken in identifying the problem as the presence per se of high numbers of racialized migrants. Following a discussion regarding the National Resilience and Recovery Plan (PNRR) project for the "overcoming" of informal settlements, and the opportunity to renovate some buildings in the city center to avoid further ghettoization he affirmed:

"The decay that we are experiencing today in the neighborhood nearby the station is due to the lack of urbanistic planning, which saw the release of permits for the opening of countless "ethnic" shops selling

> food and other things. This should have not been allowed in the first place, to have a so high concentration of "ethnic" shops." (Fieldnotes, June 2023).

This excerpt is emblematic of a series of aspects, characterizing the shape of White supremacy in the province of Foggia. First, as it will be further explored in chapter seven, non-governmental organization which were, in theory, supposed to counter racism and discrimination represent in some cases the first perpetrators of racial discrimination, enacted both through victimizing and patronizing practices and through overtly racist claims, such as the one above reported. Secondly, the idea of "integration" which is advanced as a solution to segregation is one of forced assimilation, according to which the high concentration of non-Italian non-white to be either living or simply staying in the same area should be forbidden. If this happens, the area is automatically defined as characterized by "decay" and "illegality", even though the so-called illegal activities consist in an improvised street-market or in the large presence of people in the streets, defined as "illegal" not for their actions but for their intrinsic nature. Third, the call for more "integration" masks the unwillingness to discuss about racial discrimination, that is, to identify the source of segregation in the systemic discrimination of society and/or institutions in relation to racialized subjects.

In the city of Foggia, being racialized as Black represents a major factor of discrimination in accessing public services, such as post office, hospital, municipality, etc. What marks the difference is not necessarily the denial of access, but rather the attitude which characterizes the interaction with people racialized as Blacks. It is common to hear a public official or employee referring to an adult calling him "*amico*" (my friend) which, despite the apparent friendly manner, underlies a profound lack of respect implicit in taking for granted the right to overstep the boundaries. At the same time, during official meetings or when hearing non-governmental organization talking about their work, it is common for West African migrants to be defined as "*ragazzi*" (boys), irrespectively of their age and status. While the attitude of infantilization and victimization adopted by NGOs and unions working in the area will be further explored in chapter seven, it is fundamental to recall that White supremacy can be though as a pyramid, where every act holds a different position according to the degree of explicitness/violence of racial discrimination, but they all ultimately fall within the same structure of power.

Tacit racial discrimination characterizes everyday interaction of West African migrants living and working in the province of Foggia. Racial discrimination also underlies the implementation of illegitimate practices and denials by street-level bureaucrats explored

in previous paragraphs, which are nonetheless justified as descending from the application of regulations and norms.

In addition to what already explored in previous paragraphs a major issue, encountered by high numbers of people, is related with the opening of bank accounts.

Very often, especially in the Post Office located in the street close to the *Ferrovia* neighborhood, people are denied basic services with excuses such as that "network is not working", that some documents are missing or that some system error appears which cannot be solved. The evidence of the underlying racial and/or language discrimination and/or xenophobia is given by the fact that if accompanied by a white and/or citizen and/or native/fluent speaker the unsurmountable obstacles are overcome, and the account is opened.

> "I went to the Central Post office to open a Poste Pay but they refused. So, I went to many other post offices, but they didn't agree. Until the time you accompanied me, that is the time they accepted. But when it was only me, they will never agree. You know, here, they don't like us Blacks." (Conv. with Muhammad, Foggia, July 2023).

Case a part is that of Nigerian citizens, who are discriminated not merely by office employees but at the institutional level, considering that *Poste Italiane* systematically denies them the opening of accounts, considering Nigerians as part of a blacklist regarding financial services due to frequent fraudulent activities carried out by Nigerian nationals. Even though this represents a clear discrimination based on nationality, in clear violation of art. 3 of Italian constitution and despite various reports and letters published by prominent Italian juridical organizations such as *"Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione",* changes have not yet taken place (ASGI 2022).

> "I don't know why Italy has so many problems with Nigerians, every time Nigerian, Nigerian. They say we cannot open Poste Pay account and, if you go to one of these other banks, they will ask you many things which they know we cannot provide. Without bank account we cannot work, we cannot receive welfare benefits for our children, etc. I don't know why Italians hate Nigerians so much." (Conv. with Favour, Foggia, June 2023).

Racial discrimination also manifest itself in the attempt to access housing market, and it can be considered as one of the major factors underlying the presence and growth of informal settlements, together with the process of illegalization explored in previous paragraphs. Indeed, while buying a fake residence for the purpose of documents renewal can be quite easy, finding a house to rent can be extremely difficult.

> "You know for us it is so hard to find a house to rent. Not that is impossible, but it is very hard. Most of the times if they see you are a Black they will find an excuse, they will say your salary is not high enough, they will ask you many documents you cannot provide. They will not tell you directly <<we will not rent you the house because you are a Black>>, but you will understand it anyway. In Borgo they have many houses which are empty, they are not rented to anyone, but they will never rent us. *Marocchino* they are living there, but to us, no, they will not give us." (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Mamadou, Borgo Mezzanone, July 2022).

The issue of racial discrimination and segregation in relation to housing is particularly relevant in shaping regional and national plans aimed at "overcoming" informal settlements, as proved by the installation of temporary housing units in the same area of informal settlements under the name of "*Foresterie Regionali*" (Regional Guesthouses), or by the project plan regarding the expenditure of National Resilience and Recovery Fund (PNRR) proposed by Manfredonia municipality. Indeed, these projects reproduce the spatial and social segregation of West African migrant workers by creating governmental structure that are isolated from the broader community, thus reinforcing the idea according to which racialized migrant farmworkers' presence in the area is merely functional to productive reasons.

The informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone, due to its proximity with the village Borgo Mezzanone, has been the theatre of multiple episodes of racial discrimination by village inhabitants, who have repeatedly complained with authorities for feeling of insecurity deriving by the large presence of "immigrants" invading the bus or simply existing.

During a meeting taking place in May 2023 in the village of Borgo Mezzanone, regarding the inauguration of new service center dedicated to the community (such as Post Office, pharmacy, civil registration office, doctor, etc.) financed as part of the PNRR program, the inhabitants of Borgo Mezzanone arose against the representatives of Manfredonia municipality, accusing them of coming there only when there were some funding opportunities related to migration.

> "Today we went to Borgo Mezzanone village, where the meeting organized by Manfredonia municipality was taking place. I had contacted two members of our association who came from Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement. All the other participants were representatives of associations and unions, white, Italians, not living in Borgo Mezzanone village nor in the informal settlement, apart from Dina from the Caritas of Borgo Mezzanone.

The Councilor for Social Policies introduced the project, explaining the source of funding and the type of intervention they were planning to implement. The intervention would include the opening of a civil registration office, a post as well as a refectory and shower for homeless people. The councilor maintained that the funding was tied to the improvement of the condition of the most socially and economically marginalized segments of the society, so the intervention was supposed to include those kinds of measures.

While the councilor was still illustrating the type of planned intervention, a member of the Borgo Mezzanone committee, a committee of the inhabitants of Borgo Mezzanone village intervened.

<<Every time you organize this kind of meetings, you only invite association but not us, who live here. We came just because we were informed about the meeting, but we were not on the guest list. Every time these is a project is only about migration, it is a business nowadays. We are always forgotten apart from the times in which some money for immigrants come, that is the time we will see you here. If you want to inaugurate new services which will be both for us and for those staying in the camp, we rather prefer not to have any. Indeed, if you inaugurate them here, our village will be invaded by hundreds of people, more than the one who are already here. We have enough! We are not racist, but we don't want to share with them our space.>>

Following this speech, the inhabitants of Borgo Mezzanone village left the room and went out in sign of protest. I was then able to discuss with some of them, trying to better understand their point of view. When I asked them for which reason they would prefer not having any service rather than sharing them with those living in the informal settlement, they repeatedly said that it was not because of racism but due to the conditions of abandonment in which the institutions left them for years. However, it was clear that racism was part of the reason, even though they did not consider it appropriate to explicitly define themselves as racist. After more than half an hour of discussion, during which I tried to claim that having services for the community as a whole was better than not having anything without any result. The feeling that they voiced was one of fear, for being outnumbered by "them", "Black people", who were many more than them and they felt threatened by this. However, if I asked why they would feel threatened, they were not able to offer another explanation rather than the fact that they were different and "unwilling to integrate".

Following the end of our discussion, a member of Centro Intercultural Baobab maintained that it was normal for them to feel threatened, because racism is a sentiment innate to human beings and it was the institutions responsible of having fostered it by creating those conditions." (fieldnotes, May 2023)

The illustrated episode highlights multiple facets of racial capitalism in the province of Foggia. The issue of racial discrimination and institutional racism intersects with the speculation that has been going on in the past decades with regards to projects for migrants and asylum seekers that has fostered negative sentiments on the part of local communities. While the accusation regarding the "business of migration" will be further explored in chapter eight, it is fundamental to stress that if it is true that the marginalization and segregation of West African migrant workers is first and foremost caused by institutional

policies, it is also favored by s general attitude of discrimination against migrants racialized as "Blacks". As we have explored in previous chapters, racial discrimination is not innate to human beings but rather the consequence of the hierarchization of human species in races in the context of European colonialism. The structure of white supremacy in Foggia province appears to reproduce racial hierarchies, according to which those who are less close to whiteness are most discriminated, not only in the working place but more broadly in multiple areas of their lives. Indeed, while migrant workers from Morocco or Romania often experience similar degrees of exploitation in the workplace, they can more easily find housing within urban areas and villages, so that it is extremely rare to see them living within informal settlements. Informal settlements in the province of Foggia are thus mostly inhabited by West African migrant workers racialized as Blacks, with the exception of Roma and Sinti, which indeed represent one of the mostly discriminated and segregated communities in the Italian context.[74] Nevertheless, the racism is never openly declared, and being described as holding racist beliefs and practices is considered as an insult.

Lastly, one of the contexts in which implicit racial discrimination is more present, is the Immigration Office. If the very structure of border regime and existence of immigration offices represents itself a manifestation of institutional racism, it is also true that people within that system are differently racialized and experience different degrees of discrimination, within an already discriminatory system. In this regard, according to various testimonies, Blacks are said to experience higher forms of discrimination, both in relation to the access to the immigration office as well as in relation to the attitude held in their regards.

> "When you go to Questura, you can see how the use to talk to us, how they use to shout with us. They don't have any respect. You will see that with these white people, like Marocchino or Ukrainians, they don't use to behave like that. In fact, with Ukrainians they allowed them to pass before everyone". (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Malick, Foggia, June 2022).

In relation to this, it is relevant to recall an episode taking place at Foggia Immigration office dating back to July 2022. In the months following the breakout of the war in Ukraine, Foggia Immigration Office stopped accepting asylum requests from other countries, maintaining that "right now there is a war in Ukraine so we will take only Ukrainians". They started organizing different ques, of which one was specifically dedicated to Ukrainians. After some months of reduced service, one day in July 2022, Foggia Immigration Office claimed that

[74] Roma and Sinti communities hold a specific place in the context of Italian racism, being one of the most discriminated groups, living within informal settlements not only in rural areas, but also in cities.

the contract for intercultural mediator had not been renewed by the Ministry of Interior and, in addition to that, some technical problems were impeding the work to be done on that day. In that occasion, one attendant on the que claimed:

> "We, the Blacks, we are all out, but the whites entered. How is that possible? If machines are not functioning, they aren't functioning for everyone. If we make noise after they will say that we, the Blacks, we are crazy, but we are not crazy. This is psychological violence!" (fieldnotes, July 2022).

Following this episode, reaching the apex of a series of everyday discrimination and harassments experienced by people racialized as "Black Africans" in the area, and the exasperation caused by continuous postponement of appointments by the Immigration Office, a letter and press release was sent to Foggia Immigration Office by the union Unione Sindacale di Base (USB), reporting the facts, denouncing racism and asking for an observatory on racial discrimination to be put in place. The title read: "We are tired of being treated as second-class people. Stop racism! We demand respect and equal rights." Once the letter was received, a delegation was urgently invited, due to the "seriousness of the accusations". During the meeting, representatives of Police and Immigration Office voiced their indignation for having been called "racists". More specifically, the head of Police said:

> "Really you can say everything about us, but not that we are racist. How can I be racist? I am coming from Nocera Inferiore [Provice of Salerno, Campania Region]! We have been very offended by you claims" (fieldnotes, July 2022).

As highlighted by various analysis (Di Angelo 2018; Eddo-Lodge 2017), in the past few decades, especially following some outstandingly violent manifestations of racism, such as the Ku Klux Klan or the apartheid in South Africa, racism started being characterized as a moral issue, rather than a system of power, and being defined as "racist" started being seen as a moral insult, rather than as an acknowledgement of the ways in which our societies' structure unconsciously affect our way of thinking. In the Italian context, as discussed in chapter five, racism has historically been directed to Southern Italians, who have been variously discriminated, being defined as an inferior race, starting from the building of Italian nation-state until nowadays. As the above example illustrates, in some cases the discrimination historically suffered by Southern Italians is taken as a proof by Southern Italian for a presumed immunity from racism. However, as it has been highlighted by multiple analysis, having been subjected or being subjected to racial oppression does not represent an immunizing factor to perpetrate racial oppression, precisely because White

supremacy can be thought as a system of power within which people are socialized and thus not depend on innate qualities. On the contrary, as maintained by the majority of West African workers living and working in the area, the province of Foggia appears extremely more racist if compared to other areas in Italy, especially in the North, thus disqualifying the argument according to which Southern Italians cannot be racist. While the above analysis has certainly been partial and limited, we have tried to draw the base of White supremacy pyramid, as characterized by everyday episodes of racial discrimination, discrimination in the access of basic service, etc. In what follows, we will explore its apex, as represented by violent attacks against racialized migrants and as the vulnerability to premature death of racialized subject, as suggested by Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition.

### 7.2.2 Racial capitalism as "vulnerability to premature death": dying without a name.

According to Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2008:28; 2022), racism can be defined as "the state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death". Racism therefore creates and reproduces differences among variously racialized groups, both through its state apparatus and through the society as a whole. These differences do not only affect various degrees of exploitation, expropriation and expulsion from societies, but are ultimately implicated with life and death, with who should live and who may die. Necropolitics (Mbembe 2019) is central for the racial-colonial order to be maintained, and violence is constantly exercised in the context of the border regime to secure the border. At the same time, while racism often manifest itself through the direct exercise of violence by state or non-state actors, it can also reveal itself as a consequence of neglect, drawing lines between which lives are worth to live and which one are not. In what follows the apex of the White supremacy pyramid, that is the most serious expressions of racism, involving violent racists attacks as well as the structural discrimination and neglect causing the death of racialized subjects will be explored.

In the past few years, various violent racist attacks against migrant farmworkers racialized as Black have taken place in Foggia. The one explored are those reported, while being aware that many others have likely taken place unnoticed.

In three different instances in July 2019, along the route of Via Manfredonia, the inhabitants of *Casa Bianca*, an abandoned milk processing plant inhabited by mostly Senegalese and Gambian farmworkers, were attacked with stones early in the morning while going to work. The incident repeated more than one time following the same dynamic and affecting about six people who, while going to work with bicycle early in the morning, were approached by

a black car throwing stones at them. One of those attacked of Gambian origin, lost his sight from one eye due to the attack. In the subsequent years, similar episodes repeated with cars approaching workers early in the morning while they were going to work either throwing stones at them or hitting them until they would fall down, both in Foggia city and in San Severo.

In May 2021, Sinayogo Boubakar a Malian worker going back to the informal settlement of Torretta Antonacci was shot in his face by Italians. The attack was likely to be a retaliation following the arrest of a member of a local criminal organization few days before who was caught while stealing fuel from Torretta Antonacci Regional Guest House generator and was handed over to the police by the inhabitants of the informal settlement. However, while Sinayogo Boubakar was not involved in the episode, he was shot in the face by an armed gunman who approached him with a car while he was returning home.

While the actions taken by unions and political collectives in relation to the violent attacks suffered by racialized migrants in the province will be further explored in chapter nine, it is relevant to stress that these episodes were mostly against people racialized as Blacks, while other national groups such as Moroccans or Romanians weren't affected. These acts of violence recall the gratuitous and non-contingent nature of anti-Black violence described by Frank B. Wilderson III (2020) as one of the three components of the legacy slavery.

The province of Foggia has not only been the theatre of racially motivated attacks, that have in some cases resulted in death, but also of many other episodes that have transformed the death of racialized migrant workers in an ineluctable variable. Death can happen as the result of a fire incident, of violent racist attacks, of fights, of excessive work, as a consequence of the lack of appropriate healthcare, or caused by car incidents while returning from work. The list of deaths is long and shows no signs of interrupting. In what follows, some of the names, dates and circumstances of these deaths are reported. Even though the following list is by any means exhaustive, it is fundamental to mention at least some of these deaths, not only to remember the victims, but to highlight their frequency, the age of those involved and the circumstances of their death.

22 September 2015: Mamodou Sare (Burkina Faso, 37 years-old) was shot and killed for stealing some cantaloupes. His friend was also shot, but he was hospitalized and survived.

2nd of March 2017: Mamadou Konate (Mali, 33 years-old) and Nouhou Doumbouya (Mali, 36 years-old) burned to death in the fire incident following Grand Ghetto informal settlement eviction.

4th August 2018: Aladjie Ceesay, Ali Dembele, Moussa Kande e Amadou Balde, died in a car accident while returning from work.

6th August 2018: Lhassan Goultaine (Morocco 39 years-old), Anane Kwase (Ghana, 34 years-old), Moussa Toure (Mali, 21 year-old), Lahcen Haddouch (Morocco, 21 years-old), Joseph Avuku (Ghana 24 years-old), Ebere Ujunwa ( Nigeria, 21 years-old), Baofudi Cammara (Guinea, 22 years-old), Alagie Ceesay (Gambia, 24 years-old), Alasanna Darboe ( Gambia, 28 years-old), Eric Kwarteng ( Ghana, 32 year-old), Romanus Mbeke ( Nigeria 28 years-old), Djoumana Djire (Mali, 36 years-old), died in a car accident while returning from work.

6th of November 2018: Bakary Secka (Gambia) burned to death while sleeping in his shack house in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone.

26th April 2019: Samara Saho (Gambia, 26 years old) burned to death while sleeping in his shack house in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone.

4th February 2020: an unidentified Nigerian woman died after days of agony following a fire that left her with third-degree burns on the 90% of her body.

12th June 2020: Mohamed Ben Ali (Senegal, 37 years-old) burned to death in his shack house in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone.

3rd of April 2021: Anssou Kondjira (Senegal, 24 years-old) died due to a car accident while returning home in Casa Sankara, along the route SS16, one of the deadliest in Italy.

31st July 2021: Oyedele Tobi (Nigeria, 31 years-old) bled to death, in front of militaries, after having been stabbed at his arm by another person living in the settlement of Borgo Mezzanone.

August 2021: Baye Diouf (Senegal, 50 years-old) died following a heart attack due to delay in rescue services, in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone.

6 August 2022: Fatoma (Ghana) died due to a car accident while returning from work on his bicycle.

28 June 2022: Yusupha Joof (Gambia, 28 years-old), burned to death while sleeping in his shack house in the informal settlement of Torretta Antonacci.

January 2023: Queen (Nigeria, 32 years-old) and Ibrahim Sowe (Gambia, 32 years-old) died inside their house, while sleeping, due to carbon dioxide inhalations.

10th May 2023: Cheikh (Senegal) died due to a non-treated asthma attack, after being hospitalized, but not assisted, at Foggia hospital.

21 July 2023: Sane (Gambia) died due to a car accident while returning home in Casa Sankara, along the route SS16, one of the deadliest of Italy.

8 August 2023: Famakan Dembele (Mali, 28 years) died in Torretta Antonacci following a heart attack likely related to overwork in the tomato harvesting.

*Figure 31 Car accident of the 6th of August 2018 where twelve farmworkers lost their lives. Source: Repubblica.it*

To understand these deaths, however, we should not merely focus on the apparent cause, the car incident, the fire, the stabbing. We should rather trace the journey that allowed these deaths to take place. Informal settlements' isolation represents one of the root causes in that, in case of emergency, ambulances can take more than one hour to reach the area. In Borgo Mezzanone, as previously described, the reception camp at the entrance of the informal settlement is guarded by militaries 24/7. When an ambulance is called by someone within the informal settlement, they arrive at the entrance of the camp and ask the military to allow them entering, so to be able to reach more easily the place where the sick or injured person is. However, this possibility is often denied by the militaries, who force the injured or sick person to round the fenced camp in order to reach the gate where the ambulance is waiting.

This is what happened on 31st of July 2021, when Oyedele Tobi, who I had met just few days before and with whom I had agreed to meet the following Tuesday in Foggia Immigration Office in order to present a new asylum request. Tobi had arrived in Italy in 2017 and had been living in the reception facility for asylum seekers near Venezia, until he was thrown out following a fire incident that destroyed the entire structure. On the morning of the 31st of July 2021, he had a fight with another person of Gambian nationality, also living in the informal settlement, who stabbed him at his arm. Yet, the wound alone would have not caused his death. While waiting for the ambulance to arrive, he was left for more than 30 minutes, lying under the sun, still alive, bleeding to death while militaries around him discussed about the naturalness of the incident, "because between Nigerian and

Gambians it is always like that." Despite being militaries with a training in first aid, they preferred quibbling about the inherent rivalries existing between Gambians and Nigerians rather than avoiding the death of a human being in front of their eyes, by simply tighting properly his bleeding arm. When the ambulance eventually arrived, Tobi had already died. While I was there in Borgo Mezzanone, I was not actually present on the scene, which I saw through a video that was sent to me by a friend.

*Figure 32 Fire incident in Borgo Mezzanone, March 2020. Source: photo by the author.*

Another fundamental issue affecting the possibility of life and death is related to racial discrimination in accessing the health care. As it has been reported me by many inhabitants of both Borgo Mezzanone and Torretta Antonacci informal settlements, in some instances they have been asked fiscal code in order to access Emergency Room or instead they have not been assisted promptly. An example of the deadliness of this negligence was the death of Cheikh, a Senegalese citizen who died due to a non-treated asthma attack, after waiting various hours in Foggia Emergency Room in May 2023. The lack of proper treatment of hospitalized persons in Foggia main hospital have brought many to prefer not going to the hospital, or rather going to other cities in order to be properly treated. The high rate of death of those hospitalized has brought many to believe that "if you are Black and you go to Foggia hospital you may well not come out alive". Racism does not only affect patients but also

visitors, who may not be allowed to enter to check their family members or friends, nor being informed of their health condition. This is what happened to Samba, from Guinea Bissau who went to visit his friend Bocar, who was hospitalized for a hepatitis and liver cancer. He asked me to accompany him to the hospital because he felt that he was not allowed to enter to visit his friend due to racism.

> "I asked you to come with me because I know how they used to treat us. I came here many times, but they never allowed me to visit him. You see right now, if you were not here, they wouldn't have let me enter. When the nurse opened the door and saw me, she was not even listening to what I was telling her. It is only because you were here that she finally allowed us to enter." (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Samba, Torretta Antonacci, Sept. 2022).

A third issue is related to specific institutional and political choices, such as that of creating a reception center for farmworkers on one of the deadliest routes in Italy, S.S 16. While the contradictions inherent to Casa Sankara project will be further explored in chapter seven, it is here fundamental to stress that the death of Anssou Kondjira and Sane took place while they were returning from work. In the case of Anssou, he was walking home on the route S.S. 16 due to the complete lack of public transport serving Casa Sankara.

Finally, the deaths of Mamadou Konate, Nouhou Doumbouya, Mohamed Ben Ali, Yusupha Joof, Queen and Ibrahim Sowe, together with many others that I was not able to report, are all the result of the processes of illegalization and ghettoization, explored in previous chapters, that ultimately costed their lives.

The continuous death of West African farmworkers and inhabitants of informal settlements is perceived by many as an existential threat voiced by the remark "they will finish us".

I knew some of these people. Others died before I even knew what was going on in Foggia. Some of these deaths remain impressed in my memory, because I was there when they took place. Looking at these names, at their age and the circumstances of their death, and comparing them with my white, Italian, middle-class agemates, I would say that we can get a vivid picture of the meaning of racial capitalism as vulnerability to premature death. Since I am living in the province of Foggia, more than 20 working class migrant racialized as Black people aged between 20 and 40 have died due to car accidents, fires, stabbing, inhalation of carbon dioxide, etc. while none of my Italian, white, middle-class agemates has died in the meanwhile. This is neither a coincidence nor a contingency. It is the most profound representation of a system classifying some lives as worth and some as disposable.

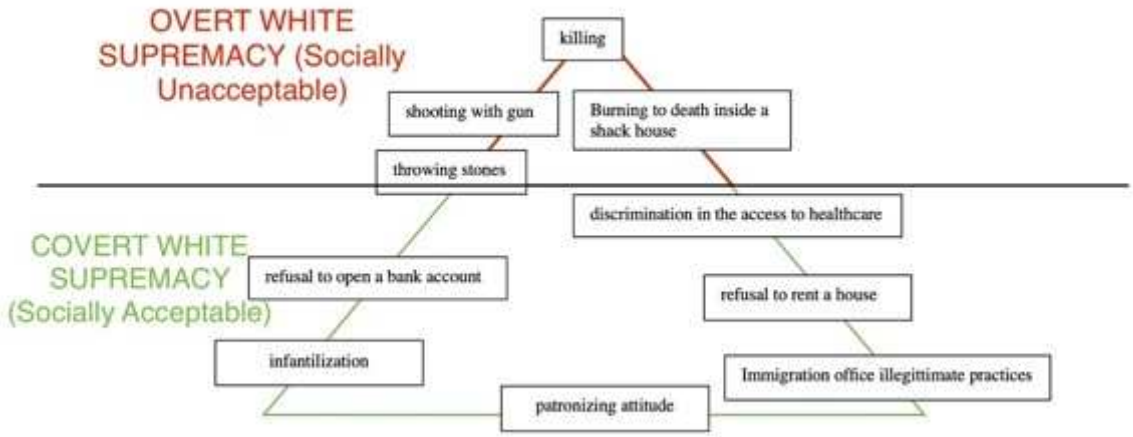



*Figure 33 Re-elaboration of the pyramid of White Supremacy elaborated by Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Non-Violence with reference to the province of Foggia. Source: elaboration by the author.*

## Conclusion

If the previous chapter was dedicated to exploring the most visible and discussed aspects of racial capitalism in the province of Foggia, namely ghettoization and labor exploitation, the present chapter has been dedicated to investigating the roots of the exploitation and ghettoization of migrant farmworkers by delving into the role played by illegalization and racialization in defining the experience and condition of oppression of West African migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia.

As it was possible to highlight through the above analysis, the process of illegalization does not end with the discriminatory immigration legislation existing at the national level, but is further reinforced every day through the enactment of illegitimate and discriminatory practices by street level bureaucrats. Each violation constitutes a step forward in the process of illegalization, allowing to define it as a "illegalization assembly line". In the past decades, following the refugeezation of migration, the lines between documentedness and undocumentedness have increasingly become more blurred, with people being formally documented being unable to access their basic rights due to different interpretation regarding documents' validity as well as due to the illegitimate practices implemented by both immigration offices and other public offices, such as municipalities, banks, revenues agencies, etc. Furthermore, due to the management of migration through asylum procedure the precariousness of migration status has become a structural feature and waiting has become a shared experience. The asylum management has further brought with it an

individualization of the issue of regularization that, rather than being considered as a collective issue has become an individual matter to be managed through lawyers and individualized assistance. This had repercussions on the possibility of organization by migrant farmworkers as it will be further explored in chapter nine. While the process of illegalization is shared by all the non-EU migrants, it differently impacts on differently racialized subjects who experience a different treatment not only in accessing Immigration Offices, but are also further discriminated in the access to other public offices. In this way, the process of illegalization intertwines with that of racialization, exploitation and ghettoization determining a multiplicity of intersecting forms of oppression. Indeed, the process of illegalization dramatically affects the process of ghettoization, in that someone who is undocumented or with a precarious legal status cannot easily abandon informal settlements, as well as the process of exploitation, in that by being undocumented the person is forced to work with other people's documents or work without a regular employment contract. The combination of these processes further affects the process of racialization, with illegalization, ghettoization and exploitation becoming racializing further reinforcing the segregation between West African workers and the Italian society.

In the Italian context, being racialized as Black often implies an extreme level of discrimination which can be traced back to the history of colonialism and Fascism, as explored in chapter five, while it is often dismissed in the public discourse as merely descending from the recent nature of the phenomenon of migration in Italy. However, in the province of Foggia racism appears to be particularly strong, influencing processes of ghettoization, exploitation and illegalization. Indeed, the social, spatial and labor segregation experienced by West African migrant farmworkers can be partly explained in light of the pervasiveness of racism in the province of Foggia, which often prevents West African migrant farmworkers living in the informal settlements of the province to find a house to rent as well as to find an occupation different from agriculture. At the same time, racism manifests itself also in the form of patronizing and infantilizing attitudes held by NGOs and unions towards West African migrants who are defined as mere victims to be assisted, as it will be further explored in chapter eight and nine. Finally, racism against Black people in the province of Foggia does not merely manifests in terms of exclusion but also in terms of violent attacks, killings and, ultimately, "vulnerability to premature death". Hence, the experience of oppression of West African migrants in the province of Foggia cannot be reduced to labor exploitation which represent just a part of the complex structure of oppression to which they are subjected in the context of racial capitalism.

# CHAPTER 8

# THE NGO-IZATION OF RESISTANCE AND THE NON-PROFIT INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX IN THE CONTEXT OF ITALIAN AGRICULTURAL RACIAL CAPITALISM: NOTES FROM THE FOGGIA PROVINCE

As highlighted in chapter five, Foggia can be defined as a center of Italian Agricultural Racial Capitalism not only in light of the forms of exploitation, segregation and exclusion of racially differentiated populations, but also considering the economy surrounding the management of the endless "emergency" of racialized migrant farmworkers' exploitation and ghettoization. Indeed, as previously maintained, among the reasons at the heart of Foggia national relevance in relation to the fight against migrant farmworkers exploitation lies in the presence of Italy's largest rural informal settlements, often identified as the emblem of *caporalato* and exploitation. If in the previous chapters we have attempted to deconstruct the oversimplified representation of Foggia informal settlements offered by media, institutions as well as by some scholars, the present chapter will be focused on shedding light on the ways in which non-governmental actors implement a series of policies and actions aimed at the reproduction of the "emergency". The province of Foggia is characterized by the presence of a large number of non-governmental organizations operating in the area for the purpose of "assisting" migrant farmworkers. While offering essential services, such as healthcare support, legal paperwork, etc., these organizations often tend reproducing a colonial logic, according to which the aid relationship is essential to reproduce asymmetric relations of powers, further strengthened by the systemic exclusion of migrant farmworkers from self-representation in the context of institutional as well as public meetings. In what follows, building on four years of ethnographic observation, I will offer a reading of the politics of assistance and representation carried out by NGOs and unions in the area through the lens of coloniality. This perspective appears particularly apt to shed light on the colonial and Eurocentric biases inherent to the representation of racialized migrant farmworkers as "victims in need of assistance" as well as of informal settlements as places that can become theatre of display of white saviorism. The narrative underlying NGOs and unions work in the area as "helpers" is functional to the reproduction of a colonial politics of representation, whereby racialized subjects are denied the right to speak for themselves, recalling the famous question of post-colonial author Gayatri Spivak "Can the subaltern speak?". As it will be claimed in the last chapter, the subaltern can speak, organize, and fight for their own rights and, in doing so, they also counter the colonial logic

of non-governmental actors working in the area, which often deny them political subjectivity defining them as mere victims to be assisted. Their autonomy is often prevented, through the development of a series of projects aimed at fostering the dependence on external subjects, such as unions, NGOs, lawyers, etc. Furthermore, NGOs are taken as legitimate representatives of migrant farmworkers' requests, while these are systematically excluded from any institutional meeting aimed at discussing issues and projects related to informal settlements and labor exploitation, as well as plans aimed to overcome them.

The first part of the chapter will be dedicated to offering an overview of the major non-governmental actors operating in the province of Foggia, as well as the major sources of EU funding allocated in the past few years in relation to the fight against migrant labor exploitation in the agricultural sector and the overcoming of informal settlements. The second part will be dedicated to examining the three components of the NGO-ization of resistance in the province of Foggia, that we can define as the issue of accountability, the issue of interdependence between NGOs and institutions and the issue of coloniality and white saviorism informing NGOs and unions practices. Finally, the last part of the chapter will be dedicated to assessing and critically analyzing two specific projects funded through EU funds, looking at the ways in which they tend reproducing the narrative of the exceptionality of labor exploitation and criminalization of informal settlements and *caporalato*.

## 8.1 The Non-Profit Industrial Complex and the NGO-ization of resistance in the province of Foggia: an overview of major actors and sources of funding

The province of Foggia is characterized by a large presence of non-governmental actors, among which NGOs, unions and political collectives, operating in the area with the declared purpose of offering a support to migrant farmworkers and advocating for an improvement of their living and working conditions. Even though most of these actors offer essential services -such as healthcare, legal support, access to social benefits, language school, etc. - their intervention is ambivalent. Indeed, they appear to be perfectly fit within the mechanism allowing for the continuous reproduction of the "emergency" approach adopted to deal with the living and working conditions of migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia.

In what follows, after briefly presenting the various non-governmental actors operating in the province of Foggia, as well as the main EU fundings regarding the countering of migrant

labor exploitation in Southern Italy, the analysis will focus on discussing the ways in which the above-mentioned parameters manifest themselves in the context of Foggia province.

### 8.1.1 An overview of non-governmental actors operating in the province of Foggia

In the province of Foggia, there are a multiplicity of non-governmental actors operating for the declared scope of supporting and advocating for the rights of migrant farmworkers, refugees and asylum seekers living in informal settlements.
Before offering an overview of the various actors involved, it appears necessary to make a few remarks. First of all, while EU farmworkers represent a consistent share of the total workforce employed in the province of Foggia, most non-governmental actors are not concerned with this segment of farmworkers. As it will be further explored in the following pages, the focus on African workers can be explained in light of different factors, such as their higher "visibility", the precariousness of their status, the requirements of the fundings on which projects are developed, etc. Secondly, while for the purpose of the following analysis various actors will be categorized in different ways according to their main purpose, it is essential to take into account that in the past decade there has been a growing overlapping between different roles, so that it is not easy to clearly identify which organization is performing which role. This overlapping took place also as a consequence of what can be defined as "the individualization of labor exploitation", that is the adoption of a human-rights-based approach in relation to labor exploitation, categorized as a human rights violation and as a crime, following the approval of art. 603-bis, and thus requiring and individualized approach rather than a collective one. While this will be further explored in the last section of the chapter, it is fundamental to bear in mind that it is among the main reasons why it is now extremely difficult to differentiate between the roles of unions, NGOs and other actors. Nevertheless, in light of unions' traditional role as workers' representatives and organizers, their role will be separately assessed in chapter nine. The lack of a clear division of roles, taken together with the extreme fragmentation characterizing the actors operating in the area, often leads to a repetition of similar interventions. The following list includes all the actors that have been operating in the province of Foggia in the past few years, even though some of them are not active at the moment.

- AIIMS (*Associazione Immigrati per l'Integrazione e la Motivazione Sociale* - Immigrants Association for Integration and Social Motivation, is a migrant and

refugees association created in 2019 thanks to the support of the project PartecipAzione, promoted by INTERSOS and UNHCR. AIIMS was based on the use of social media and online radio for the purpose of keeping both Italian and immigrants informed, in order to fight disinformation, discrimination and promote social integration. Since its inception, in 2019, the association promoted various activities within informal settlements as well as online.

- ANOLF (*Associazione Nazionale Oltre Le Frontiere* – National Association Beyond Borders) is a non-profit organization associated with FAI-CISL union, offering support to renew residency permits, applying for civil registration for people of no fixed abode, writing CV, etc. services provided following the payment of a membership fee, ranging between 15 and 30 euro.
- ARCI (*Associazione ricreativa e culturale italiana* - Italian Recreational and Cultural Association) manages the second reception system in collaboration with Foggia Municipality (SAI, ex-SPRAR), offers legal support and residence for people with no fixed abode (for a membership fee of 15 euro) as well as being promoters of various project (such as Rete SIPLA Sud) in collaboration with other actors.
- ASGI (*Associazione Studi Giuridici Immigrazione* - Juridical Studies on Immigration Association) members of this national organization of lawyers and jurists specialized in immigration law operate in collaboration with INTERSOS mobile clinic.
- ASL (*Azienda Sanitaria Locale* - Local Health Department) offers a service of healthcare assistance and socio-legal support following the principle of proximity assistance, through a multidisciplinary team (lawyer, intercultural mediator, psychologist, doctor) covering with a mobile unit the informal settlements of Torretta Antonacci and Borgo Tre Titoli, funded by various EU and Regional funds.
- *Associazione Terra e Libertà* (Land and Freedom Association): association created in 2021 Torretta Antonacci informal settlement's inhabitants in order to obtain formalize their self-organization. Since September 2023, it manages the Regional Temporary Housing units of Torretta Antonacci. Its role will be further explored in chapter nine, as part of the analysis of the forms of self-organization of West African migrant farmworkers.

- *Associazione Italo-Africana dei Lavoratori Agricoli* (Italian African Farmworkers Association): association formed in 2022 by the author together with some inhabitants of Borgo Mezzanone settlement, mostly of Senegalese and Gambian nationality, with the aim to promote an exchange of knowledge and agricultural techniques between Italy and countries of origin. The association also carries out socio-legal support and advocacy activities.
- *Avvocati di Strada* (Street Lawyers): local branch of the national association made of lawyers offering free legal help to people with no fixed abode.
- Caritas (Foggia-Bovino, San Severo, Cerignola-Ascoli Satriano, Borgo Mezzanone), is the pastoral organization of Italian Episcopal Conference, which is active on the national territory for the promotion of charity as "love of neighbour" (Caritas 2022). With regard to migrant farmworkers assistance, until 2019, Caritas promoted a mobile unit as part of the project "Presidio". It has later been promoter of other projects, such as SIPLA, further explored in the following paragraphs.
- *Casa Sankara – Ghetto Out*, is a non-profit organization formed in 2016 with purpose of giving continuity to informal work started since 2012 by a group of "African migrants committed to create an alternative to ghettoes where to be able to live and plan a legal and fair path towards economic and social integration". Since 2019, manages the Regional Farmworkers Temporary Housing Structure funded by Puglia Region (Int. with H. Faye, Casa Sankara – Ghetto Out, Nov. 2022).
- *Centro Interculturale Baobab* (Baobab Intercultural Center) managed by Cooperativa Sociale Arcobaleno, offers support for the renew and conversion of residency permits, civil registration for people with no fixed abode, asylum requests, etc. free of charge. It was created in 2006, following Regional resolution n. 20949 L.R. 26/2000, art. 4 clause.1, establishing the creation of four intercultural centers in the cities of Bari, Foggia, Lecce and Brindisi. The center was initially funded by Puglia Region, Foggia Province and Foggia Municipality, with the aim of providing services as well as promoting intercultural exchange, through the implementation of recreational activities, language courses, etc. However, following a cut of funds, starting from 2013 the socialization activities have been dramatically reduced, and the drop-in center have continued to function first thanks to Municipal funds from 2017 to 2019 as part of the network

of “108 drop-in centers” (according to art. 108 of Puglia Region Regulation n. 4/2007), and later thanks to the funding of Fondazione Siniscalco Ceci – Emmaus.

- *Fondazione Siniscalco Ceci - Emmaus,* is a non-governmental organization founded in Foggia at the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays, it is a non-profit organization managing one of the largest organic agricultural farms of the province of Foggia, as well as being active in many projects of reception for minors, as well as for asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers.
- *Il faro del Borgo* (The Borgo Lighthouse) is a non-profit association composed of inhabitants of Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement. It was created in March 2021, thanks to PartecipAzione funds and following an advocacy project promoted by INTERSOS and ASGI, with the aim of promoting a solution to the issues faced by Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement inhabitants starting from the knowledge of those who inhabit it every day (Carletti et al. 2021). Despite some initial activities, at the moment the association does not appear to be active.
- INTERSOS is a humanitarian organization active in the field of healthcare assistance. It is present in the province of Foggia since 2018, where it manages a mobile clinic in the informal settlements of Borgo Mezzanone, Poggio Imperiale, Lesina, ex-Daunia Lat, and formerly, Grand Ghetto. Since 2020 its activities are partly funded through the Su.Pr.Eme and P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme projects of health outreaching co-ordinated by AreSs.
- *Medici con l’Africa CUAMM* (*Collegio universitario aspiranti e medici missionari*), is a humanitarian organization active in the field of healthcare assistance, serving Borgo Mezzanone and Casa Sankara. Since 2020 its activities are partly funded through the Su.Pr.Eme and P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme projects of health outreaching co-ordinated by AreSs.
- *No Cap*: is a non-profit organization, founded by Yvan Sagnet in 2016 with the purpose of promoting an alternative model to the system of labor intermediation and exploitation characterizing Italian agriculture. It operates as both a labor intermediary and a brand, recruiting workforce, providing housing and developing partnership with supermarkets and retail chains for the selling of No Cap branded products. It is self-financed through the retaining of a share on each sold product.

- SALA (*Sindacato Autonomo Lavoratori Africani* – Autonomous Union of African workers), is a service center founded in 2013 in Milan by Baye Diouf, a Sengalese migrant living in Italy since 2002. It offers bureaucratic assistance both in the field of immigration and social benefits. Since 2021, it collaborates with Casa Sankara – Ghetto Out, playing a role as a "labor mediator" (Int. with Baye Diouf, SALA, Aug. 2022).
- *Società Cooperativa Sociale Oasi2 San Francesco Onlus*, is an anti-trafficking organization, member of the regional network *"La Puglia non tratta – insieme per le vittime"* works mostly in the Barletta-Andria-Trani province, as well as in the area of Cerignola (Borgo Tre Titoli informal settlement, so-called Ghana House). It offers support to victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual and working exploitation, operates with a mobile unit with an approach based on harm reduction, and manages both second reception centers for both asylum seekers and refugees, as well as and victims of trafficking. It is a partner of the national project, Di.Agr.A.M.M.I. Sud, with Flai Cgil.
- *Società Cooperativa Sociale Medtraining*, is an anti-trafficking organization, member of the regional network "La Puglia non tratta – insieme per le vittime", operating in the area of Borgo Mezzanone with a focus on women victim of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.
- *Solidaunia,* it is an Italian NGO operating in the field of healthcare assistance. Since 2020 its activities are partly funded through the Su.Pr.Eme and P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme projects of health outreaching co-ordinated by AreSs.

The above list clearly exemplifies the multiplicity of actors involved in the province of Foggia for the support of migrant farmworkers. Despite being so numerous, however, these actors do not often work in close collaboration with one another. Indeed, it is possible to highlight a tendency to fragmentation and competitiveness between various actors, not only among trade unions, but also among NGOs. According to some observers, this fragmentation can be explained in light of a "individualistic politics" characterizing the social fabric of the province of Foggia, and partly descending from the neo-liberal transformation of non-profit sector (Int. with M. El Majdi, FAI-Cisl, May 2021). An attempt to create a common platform among the organization operating in the province was done in 2018 by the humanitarian organization INTERSOS, which was just launching its first project in the area. INTERSOS promoted the creation of a network named "*Rete di Prossimità della*

*Capitanata*" (Capitanata Proximity Network), counting twelve[75] partner organizations, technically open to any organization operating in the province of Foggia during the entire year and offering at least a weekly service (Int. with A. Verona, INTERSOS, Apr. 2021). In 2019, following the partial eviction of Borgo Mezzanone settlement, the network submitted a series of proposals to the then Head of Civil Liberties and Immigration Department Michele Di Bari, regarding the necessary steps to be taken in order to implement an effective strategy aimed at overcoming informal settlements and improving migrant farmworkers living and working conditions. However, following the eruption of Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the turnover in INTERSOS personnel, the Proximity Network lost its political role, becoming nothing more than a platform to informally discuss individual cases in an attempt to coordinate various actors' actions.

In what follows, after offering an overview of the main EU funded projects developed with the declared aim of improving the living and working condition of migrant farmworkers in Southern Italy, with a focus on the province of Foggia, we will discuss the ways in which the shape of the NGO-ization of resistance in the Province of Foggia.

### 8.1.2 The rise in EU-funded projects aimed at countering migrant labor exploitation in Southern Italian agricultural sector

In the past decade there has been a surge in EU funded projects aimed at fighting against the exploitation of migrant farmworkers in the context of Southern Italian agriculture, as well as improving the living and working conditions of migrant workers living in informal settlements. This increase can be explained both as a result of the raising awareness at the European level regarding the living and working conditions of migrant farmworkers in Italy, as well as part of a series of action implemented by Italian national and local government following the approval of law 199/2016. While these projects have sometimes implemented much needed services, the intervention promoted have often been inscribed in what we could define as "the logic of projects" that is, an emergency driven approach, resting on the temporariness of funding, preventing to develop long-term self-sustaining projects and enacting a vicious circle according to which reporting to funders becomes the ultimate goal of projects themselves, rather than implementing effective changes. In what follows, some of the main EU-funded projects aimed at assisting migrant

[75] Africa United, AIIMS, Anolf Puglia, ASGI, Caritas Borgo Mezzanone, Caritas San Severo, coop. soc. Arcobaleno, FLAI-CGIL Foggia, INTERSOS, coop. Soc. Medtraining, coop. Soc. Oasi 2 San francesco, ass. Solidaunia.

farmworkers and countering labor exploitation developed within Puglia region will be explored, building on analysis of official documents, interviews and ethnographic observation.

The two main sources of funds for projects aimed at fighting migrant labor exploitation and improving the living and working conditions of non-EU migrant workers employed in the agricultural sector and living in informal settlements in Southern Italy are the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the European Social Fund (EFS). As already explored in chapter four, the AMIF Fund is managed by European Commission - DG Migration and Home Affairs and has four main declared objectives:

1. " to strengthen and develop all aspects of the common European asylum system, including its external dimension;
2. to support legal migration to the Member States, including by contributing to the integration of third-country nationals;
3. to contribute to countering irregular migration and ensuring effectiveness of return and readmission in third countries;
4. to enhance solidarity and responsibility sharing between the Member States, in particular towards those most affected by migration and asylum challenges" (European Commission, 2023).

AMIF follows a six-year planning and, for the period 2014-2020, the European Commission set up a total fund of 3.137 billion euros, while for the period 2021-2027 the amount was increased to 9.88 billion. According to the European Commission, 88% of the funds is spent through shared management, meaning that the funding is allocated to responsible authorities in EU member states, who then implement the action in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, among which NGOs and civil society organizations. The remaining 12% of the funds are spent through direct management and shared between Union actions and Emergency Assistance.

The European Social Fund (ESF) represents European Union's main instrument to promote employment and growth in EU member states. In Italy, this fund finances the National Operation Plan (PON) Inclusion, which among its main objectives has the fight against poverty and the definition of individualized plans of social and working inclusion for vulnerable families and individuals, with the aim to promote their autonomy. According to priority axis 3, PON Inclusion also finances actions aimed at the prevention, support, integration and job coaching of third-countries nationals, victims or potential victims of labor exploitation (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2019).

Since 2019, there have been multiple projects funded through AMIF and FSE concerning the assistance of migrant farmworkers suffering labor exploitation in Southern Italy. The two major projects, promoted at the national level by Ministry of Labor and Social Policies and the five "less-developed" Southern Regions of Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania and Sicily have been Su.Pr.Eme and P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme.

Su.Pr.Eme. (*Sud Protagonista nel superamento delle Emergenze in ambito di grave sfruttamento e di gravi marginalità degli stranieri regolarmente presenti nelle 5 regioni meno sviluppate* - the South as a major Player in overcoming Crises within the context of severe labor exploitation and the marginality of migrant citizens legally residing in the 5 least developed regions of Italy), was funded through AMIF - Emergency Funds (AP2019) of the European Commission – DG Immigration and Home Affairs. It was led by Ministry of Labor and Social Policies – DG Immigration, coordinated by Puglia region, technically supervised by *Consorzio Nova* and in partnership with National Labor Inspectorate (INL), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Basilicata, Calabria, Campania and Sicilia regions. The project lasted for three years, from 2019 to 2022. On the 25th of July 2019, the European Commission communicated to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies – DG Immigration, the approval of the project Su.Pr.Eme funding 30.237.546,36 euros, representing 90% of the total funds allocated to the project (33.557.713,33 euros). On the 4th of September 2019, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies – DG Immigration and Integration Policies signed with European Commission the "Grant Agreement 2019/HOME/AMIF/AG/EMAS/0086" for the implementation of the actions planned as part of the Su.Pr.Eme. project. On the same day, Puglia region was appointed as "co-applicant and coordinating partner" by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies and, on the 3rd of October 2019, a convention for the implementation of Su.Pr.Eme. actions in Puglia region was signed by the parties. The AMIF funds allocated to Puglia Region amounted to 5.740.576,28 euros, to which 727.272,72 euros were added by Puglia Region, for a total of 6.467.849,00 euros allocated for the Su.Pr.Eme. project in Puglia Region. Su.Pr.Eme. funds characterize themselves as emergency funds and therefore were mainly spent for the provision of essential services to informal settlements, such as water and food supply, waste disposal, custody and security for Regional Temporary Housing Units.

In Puglia Region, Su.Pr.Eme. funds were mostly invested in the province of Foggia, which is the one hosting the largest shares of migrant farmworkers living within informal settlements.

About 3 million euros were invested in the provision of drinkable water supplies to informal

settlements through the filling of cisterns through a tanker truck. This was provided by the private-public company *Aquedotto Pugliese SPA (AQP)*, following a Memorandum of Understanding signed with Puglia Region in 2020. According to art. 4 clause 6 of AQP statute, the company is committed to invest a share of their holdings, not exceeding a twentieth of their previous year earnings, to the provision of water supply to economically disadvantaged sections of the society. In addition to these resources, Puglia Regional Council, with resolution n. 104/2020, deliberated to allocate additional Su.Pr.Eme. fundings to the water supply service to informal settlements. The allocated sum for 18 months starting from 2020 was of 1 million euro, and additional fundings were allocated in 2021 and 2022, reaching about the total sum of 3 million euros (Int. with I. Chiapperino, Oasi2/Consorzio Nova, Aug. 2023). In addition to that, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the regional agency for waste disposal (*Agenzia territorial della regione puglia per il servizio di gestione dei rifiuti* – AGER), with an initial allocation of 300.000 euros for the removal and disposal of waste from informal settlements, following resolution n.105/2020 of Regional Council. 395.000 euros were subsequently allocated to the waste removal and disposal in Torretta Antonacci informal settlement, drawing on fundings of the regional autonomous budget. Su.pr.Eme. funds in the province of Foggia were also used to finance the service of renting of means of transportation to accompany workers to the farms implemented by NGOs, for a total sum of 45.000 euros between 2019 and 2022, as well as for the purchase of bicycles for a total sum of about 16.500 euros. Additional Su.Pr.Eme. resources were allocated for the management of Regional Temporary Housing Unit structures of Borgo Mezzanone and Torretta Antonacci, respectively for a sum of 50.000 euros and 190.000 euros.

Finally, about 517.000 euro were allocated for the implementation of activities in the Azienda Agricola Regionale Fortore, managed by the association Casa Sankara – Ghetto Out, which will be further examined in the last part of the chapter.

On the other hand, P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme (*Percorsi Individualizzati di Uscita dallo Sfruttamento* - Individualized Exit Paths from Exploitation) was funded by PON Inclusion 2014-2020 of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies – DG Immigration through EFS funds. The project saw Puglia Region as the leading partner, following the signature of the convention with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies in March 2019, Region Sicilia, Campania, Basilicata and Calabria as partners and *Consorzio Nova* as technical partner. It was initially funded for a total amount of 12.799.680,00 euros. Following note n. 2306 of 27th of May 2020 of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies – DG Immigration, 7 million

euros were added to the fund, for a total of 19.799.680,00 euros. These additional resources were allocated in order to "satisfy the needs emerged following the implementation of previous project, improve the quality and accessibility of territorial services, promote the development in urban areas, favor the employability of immigrant population and create measures for the prevention and respect of health in places of life and work".

According to the project webpage, P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme aims "to implement an interregional systemic action to complete and strengthen existing initiatives in the field of prevention, identification and contrast to labour exploitation and irregular work" by working on four axis "governance, services, ermerging from illicit work placemenent, and enterpreneurship".

In the province of Foggia the main actions funded through P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme funds were related to the implementation of activities of socio-legal support, reception, training of migrant farmworkers living within informal settlements, as well as activities of health outreaching carried out by A.r.e.S.S (*Agenzia Regionale per la Salute e il Sociale* - Regional Agency for Health and Social). The project is directed only to third country nationals with a regular residency permit, thus formally excluding all those who are undocumented.

More in detail, about 686.000 have been spent for the implementation of the project P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme Capitanata, realized by Consorzio Aranea, Cooperativa Arcobaleno, Caritas San Severo and Fondazione Siniscalco-Ceci, further examined in the second part of the chapter (DET. 68/2021, DET 188/2022). 490.000 for the project of health outreaching implemented by A.r.e.S.S in partnership with Intersos, Solidaunia, CUAMM, and ASL Foggia (D.G.R. 2130/2021). Finally, additional resources were allocated to the development of the Social Hub of Casa Sankara, including the implementation of training course, traineeship, socio-legal support, home search, etc. for a total of 1.017.700 euros (res. 185/2020).

In addition to Su.Pr.Eme and P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme, other two major projects funded through FSE European funds aiming at countering migrant labor exploitation in the agricultural sector in Southern Italy were implemented in the past few years: SIPLA Sud and Diagrammi Sud. These projects were selected following the public call *Avviso n.1/2019 FAMI-FSE Caporalato* organized by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies and the Ministry of Interior.

The call initially allocated 23 million euros for the development of projects aimed at countering migrant labor exploitation in the agricultural sector on the entire national territory. 15 million euros, financed through AMIF funds, were dedicated to the Northern and Central Italy, while 8 million, financed through EFS funds, were allocated to the Southern Regions. With regard to the EFS funds, the project proposed by ARCI under the

name of *"S.I.P.L.A. Sud, Sistema Integrato di Protezione per i Lavoratori Agricoli*" (Integrated Protection System for Farmworkers) was first in the listed ranking and selected, for a total funding of 3.883.047,00 euros. Subsequently, additional resources were added to the fund in order to be able to fully finance the project listed as second in the ranking, promoted by the union Flai-Cgil under the name of "*Di.Agr.A.M.M.I. di Legalità al centro-sud - Diritti in Agricoltura attraverso Approcci Multistakeholders e Multidisciplinari per l'Integrazione e il Lavoro giusto"* (Rights in Agricutlure through Multistakeholders and Multidisciplinary Approaches for Integration and Fair Work), for a funding of 7.294.963,88 euros. The total funding of EFS project amounted to 11.343.477,65 euros.

The two projects were also funded through AMIF funds in Northern and Central Italy, giving birth to SIPLA Nord and Di.Agr.A.M.M.I. Nord, funded respectively for 2.236.394,16 million euros and 6.498.627,50 euro, following an additional increase of resources also on the AMIF fund, reaching a total of 30.934.024,55 euros.

SIPLA Sud project, which saw the partnership between ARCI and Caritas, was aimed to promote the exit from conditions of labor exploitation and housing precariousness through the implementation of activities of sociolegal support, job placement and reception within hosting facilities, as well as through the creation of SIPLA centers, disseminated all around Italy. In Puglia, seven territorial centers were created, of which four in the province of Foggia (two in the city of Foggia, one in San Severo, one in Cerignola). It lasted for two years, from the end of 2019 to the end of 2021.

According to Stefano Campese, formerly coordinator of SIPLA SUD in Cerignola, the final goal of project was not easy to achieve, due to both organizational and bureaucratic reasons, such as the delay in funds allocation, the difficulty in interacting with employers' organizations for the activation of traineeship, as well as the difficulty in finding a structure suitable to host migrant workers. In April 2021, after one year of activity, the project in Cerignola counted 130 people taken in charge. In addition to that, activities aimed at countering labor exploitation included an Italian course, a course on safety at work and a course on self-entrepreneurship, all delivered online, as well as the activation of six traineeship, for six months, for a total of 35.000 euros (Int. with. S. Campese, Caritas Cerignola - Sipla Sud, Apr. 2021).

On the other hand, *Di.Agr.A.M.M.I. Sud* leading partner was Flai-Cgil with multiple implementing partners such as Consorzio Nova, Terra!, IOM, Oasi2, etc. The main goal of the project was the fight against migrant labor exploitation and *caporalato*, through the establishment of multidisciplinary and multistakeholder networks, favoring the exit from

conditions of severe labor exploitation and trafficking through the implementation of street units, as well as supporting job placement and house search through traineeship and housing vouchers. The project also promoted professional training and language courses. In the province of Foggia, according to the former coordinator of the project and member of the secretaryship of Flai-Cgil, Emanuela Mitola, the major outcomes were related to the activation of free Italian language tests, in collaboration with University of Rome III, and professional training courses. However, on the side of job placement and house search the results were quite poor, as it will be further explored in the next paragraphs. *Di.Agr.A.M.M.I. Sud* lasted for about two years, from the end of 2021 to the end of 2023.

Overall, between 2019 and 2023, 60.652.357 euros were spent in Southern Italy in projects aimed at countering migrant labor exploitation within the agricultural sector. However, as it will be further explored in the following paragraphs, the overall results in the province of Foggia appear to be limited compared to the total expenditure. Indeed, while these projects have in certain instances brought much needed services, such as water supply, health support, waste disposal, they have done so by reproducing an emergency driven logic aimed at reaffirming the precariousness of informal settlements. For instance, if these resources were invested to implement structural interventions, such as the restructuring of water pipes in order to assure water supply independently from the delivery of water tanks, costs would have been dramatically reduced, while making the intervention more sustainable from an environmental and social point of view. From the point of view of services, the continuous reproduction of temporary projects managed by NGOs, appear to be furthering the waste of public resources, whereby the reporting to governmental and EU institution becomes itself the main aim of the project, while no actual monitoring on the project outcomes is carried out. In addition to that, these interventions have as a primary target third-country citizens with a regular permit of stay, thus missing dramatically to accounting for the inextricable link existing between informal settlements and undocumentedness. Finally, these projects are characterized by a complete lack of accountability both to citizens, who can hardly obtain all the information related to the fundings, as well as to migrant workers themselves, who are often not aware of the huge investment made to guarantee and safeguard their rights. In the following paragraphs, an in-depth analysis of the impact of EU funded project on the process of NGO-ization of resistance above illustrated will be proposed.

## 8.2 The NGO-ization of resistance: accountability, governmentalization and white saviorism

In order to assess the role of NGOs and the relationship with funding insitutions, it appears fundamental to recall the definition of "NGO-ization of resistance" (Roy 2014) offered in chapter 2.3. As previously maintained, the NGO-ization of resistance, with regard to migrants' rights activism in the Global North, can be defined in light of three parameters, mutually influencing each other, that are:

1. Accountability to funders rather than to those directly affected or to the public, and reproduction of emergency driven projects;
2. The professionalization and bureaucratization of activism, which becomes a nine-to-five job and the dramatic reduction of conflict, with NGOs becoming supplementary to public offices;
3. The adoption of a patronizing-colonial attitude, defined as "white saviorism", which includes the lack of involvement of affected communities.

In what follows the three dimensions of the NGO-ization of resistance will be explored, with reference to the province of Foggia.

### 8.2.1 Accountable to whom? Ngo-ization of resistance, accountability to funders and the logic of EU projects

The above-mentioned analysis relating to the various expenditures of EU funds for the implementation of projects aimed at countering migrant labor exploitation and housing precariousness in the province of Foggia was not easily developed. Indeed there is no common database where these data can be obtained, as already maintained in chapter four in relation to the tracing of EU funds allocated to NGOs and governments in the African continent with the purpose of "countering irregular migration". Furthermore, while in that instance it was possible to consult both the AICS Aid and the EU Commission online portal where major funded projects were listed, in the case of funds concerning projects developed in Italy for the countering of migrant farmworkers exploitation and housing precariousness, there is no such online portal gathering all the relevant data. As a consequence of that, in order to extract the above listed information, I had to develop an in-depth analysis of regional

resolutions and Ministerial decrees concerning the allocation of funds to specific organizations and projects. While regional and governmental bodies officially publish the allocation of expenditure in order to respect transparency rules, these data are not publicized and disseminated. As a result of that, even if he above-mentioned projects accounted for an expenditure of public funds superior to 60 million euros, there is hardly any trace of them online, apart from few brochures and websites reporting basic information about the implemented projects. Furthermore, in the context of projects' closing conferences there has been no mention about the expenditure of funds and the efficiency with which these were used. On the contrary, the results of the various project were promoted by focusing on individual success stories.

When asked about the accountability and traceability of public funds expenditure in the context of Su.Pr.Eme. and P.I.U Supreme, the Director General of Immigration for Puglia Region, Dr. Antonio Tommasi, maintained that it was the responsibility of *Consorzio Nova,* the technical partner responsible for accounting, to provide that information.
Ilaria Chiapperino, *Consorzio Nova* officer in charge of Su.Pr.Eme. and P.I.U Supreme accountability for Puglia region, explained that all the projects had been rigorously accounted and the reporting had been uploaded on a dedicated European Commission platform.

> "Our reporting undergoes rigorous checks. We have a first level check by *Consorzio Nova*, which is then followed by a second check implemented by an independent auding company, selected through a public notice. After, the reporting is uploaded on a platform of the European Commission from which it can be selected for spot checks." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with I. Chiapperino, Consorzio Nova, Aug. 2023)

However, the correctness of accounting to funders does not imply that the declared project outcomes have been achieved, nor that effective changes have been brought about. These two could be only assessed by an independent investigation analyzing the actions effectively implemented by taking into account the rate of success of each action as well as the cost-benefit ratio, and including the real opinion of beneficiaries. While it has not been possible, due to time and resource limits, to develop an in-depth analysis of this kind accounting for all the above-mentioned projects, in what follows I will highlight some consideration building upon field observation that have been crucial in highlighting how the limits of these projects often rests precisely in the priority given to funders' accountability rather than to beneficiaries and the larger public. In the last part of chapter, two projects funded with the

projects developed as part of Su.Pr.Eme and P.I.U. Supreme will be investigated more in depth.

One of the major tools used to report to EU-funders about the activities of support carried out in favor of migrant farmworkers and those living within informal settlements are data sheets. These include a series of information, changing according to the different projects, where personal data, needs and requests of the beneficiaries are registered. However, it appears that, in certain instances, the filling of data sheets becomes itself the goal of the activity, rather than a mere accounting of implemented activities. This degeneration is not necessarily a responsibility of involved social workers, but it is rather favored by the very structure and dynamics of EU funding and the requirements demanded for reporting.

As maintained by Domenico La Marca, President of Cooperativa Arcobaleno and Coordinator of the project P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme. Capitanata.

> "EU projects are lethal from a point of view of bureaucracy, this is one of the limits that I will write down. They are full of grids and sheets. Sometimes someone was right to tell us to go to hell. Because anything you had to do, you had to sign it. And in some context, such as in informal settlements, this thing is not very well seen. But I understand. Even Italians, if you stopped them in the street and after talking to them you would ask them to sign, they will tell you to go to hell. Furthermore, for anything you do you have to write a report about it, so this takes a lot of time. To meet the people and assess their needs is not what takes most of the time. Most of the time is taken by reporting what you have discussed with that person, the individualized path you have agreed, etc." (*author's translation from Italian,* Int. with D. La Marca, Coop. Arcobaleno, Nov. 2023).

Thanks to my activity of socio-legal support in the informal settlements of Foggia province and, more specifically in Torretta Antonacci, I was able to experience first-hand the extent to which the necessity of reporting to funders can take over the urgency to solve concrete, often bureaucratic, issues on which the life of migrant workers depends.

Until early 2022, Caritas was the only organization recognized by San Severo municipality for the domicile of people with no fixed abode for the purpose of civil registration. As a consequence, we had to refer to them those who needed civil registration. At that time, Caritas San Severo was also an implementing partner of SIPLA Sud project.

> "Today Ibrahim came to us asking for residence. However, we could not proceed to his registration through the newly formed association *Terra e Libertà* in that it is not yet recognized by San Severo municipality as a valid organization for the domicile of people with no fixed abode. As a consequence, I directed him to Chiara (pseudonym), intercultural mediator for Caritas San Severo. However, few

hours later he came back to me, saying that they could not attend to him in that there was not enough time. The following day, I contacted Chiara in order to ask her why they could not attend to Ibrahim the previous day. She explained to me that they could only meet four people in two hours, despite being more than five between intercultural mediators and social workers, in that the filling of data sheets for the SIPLA Sud project would take not less than half an hour per person, because the project required many details to be registered in order to count the encountered person as taken in charge by the team. When Ibrahim was finally attended to the following week, he explained me that he was asked a series of question unrelated to his request, such as the name of his mother, the year in which he left his home country, his employment in his country of origin, and so on. I was shocked by the fact that five between intercultural mediators and social workers in two hours could only attend to four people and, most importantly, that in order for someone to apply for civil registration he was asked a series of unrelated question useful only for the purpose of project reporting". (fieldnotes, March 2022)

As the above illustrated examples shows, reporting can be detrimental to the declared aim of the implemented project itself, by subtracting essential time from the support of people in order to fill data sheets and fulfill reporting requirements. Furthermore, it is necessary to note that most of the final reporting does not include an analysis of the rate of problem solved, but merely accounts for the number of people taken in charge and their details.
This dynamic was further confirmed by former CGIL Secretary, Emanuela Mitola, appointed to the management of *Di.Agr.A.M.M.I. Sud* for Foggia Flai-Cgil. With regard to the project *Di.Agr.A.M.M.I. Sud*, Mitola maintained that the overall goal of the project appeared to be the filling of data sheets, listing a series of needs and necessities of migrant workers which, however, were not going to be satisfied.

"I was responsible of Diagrammi Sud for the province of Foggia. While the project might have been thought with a rational, in the end it became more about the filling data sheets, rather than actually responding to migrant farmworkers' needs. In theory, the data sheets - where we would list personal details, previous working experience, title of study and training, and the declared needs of the person - were meant to represent a starting point for the partner organization, Oasi2, to choose some beneficiaries to be included in their programs. However, at the end, it became like they didn't know who to choose so they asked us to suggest them some potential beneficiaries. But major issue was that the filling of data sheets was the end and not the mean.
I remember the Regional responsible for the project continuously asking me how it was going with the filling of data sheets, whether I could do more. It became like the ultimate goal, regardless of the fact that any time we asked someone what their needs were, we created an expectation that we could not satisfy. There were also some positive aspects of the project, such as the possibility for about 150 people to attend free of charge Italian language certification exams, as well as the activation of two training courses for tractor driving and pruning. But however, for the amount of funding, I think these results

were quite modest." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with E. Mitola, former Flai-Cgil secretary, Dec. 2023).

Another example regarding the primacy of reporting to funders rather than implementing activities characterizing EU-funded projects can be drawn from my experience as a collaborator with the Association of *Terra e Libertà*. While an in-depth analysis of this experience of self-organization will be developed in chapter nine, for the present analysis it is enough to note that in September 2023, following years of struggle, the organization was appointed to manage the Regional Temporary Housing Unit structure of Torretta Antonacci. As previously highlighted, the custody and security service was first financed with Su.Pr.Eme funds and later with P.I.U. Supreme. Being the two projects characterized by different requirements, also the reporting needed to change in order for the funding to be considered admissible by the European Commission. As a consequence, the activity of custody and security was transformed into an activity of custody, security and socio-legal support. In order to report on the activity of socio-legal support, *Consorzio Nova* and Regione Puglia required the organization Terra e Libertà to be filling about six to seven data sheets regarding the beneficiaries, their needs, the action planned and implemented by team, and so on. When asked if it was possible to replace the countless sheets with a single one merging all the needed information, in order not take time away from the actual support of Torretta Antonacci settlements' inhabitants, the refuse was categorical. These were the sheets to be filled every month, as well as the end of the first three months, in order to receive the second tranche of funding.

In addition to that, the communication team required the organization to "submit success stories from which it is possible to highlight the positive impact of the project on the beneficiaries". The success story should be developed according to the following scheme:

"1. Background story of the main character;
2. How the main character first enters in contact/comes to know about PIU Supreme;
3. In which ways the organization (through PIU Supreme project) supports the main character;
4. Which is the positive impact of implemented activities on the main character life".

Individual "success stories" are often used to symbolize the impact of the project on the lives of affected communities. However, their narrative appears to be functional merely to self-celebration of the project, without never mentioning the underlying structural factors allowing for the marginalization and segregation of racialized farmworkers within rural

informal settlements to take place. Furthermore, success stories are used as a tool of accountability towards the public, impressing them with individual stories rather informing them about the actual expenditure of the project and the overall results.

Finally, the lack of public denounces by NGOs regarding the institutional racism allowing for the marginalization and segregation of migrant farmworkers to take place represent another fundamental element in the process we defined as the "NGO-ization of resistance" and it is partly related to their source of funding. Indeed, being the main funders of these projects those same institutions that implement policies and narratives promoting the racialization and illegalization of migrant farmworkers in the first place, such as the European Commission, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, it is not hard to understand why NGOs are reluctant to openly criticize and denounce their policies. However, the avoidance of conflict also with local institutions represent a shared feature of NGOs and unions operating in the area of Foggia, regardless of their source of funding. It is for this reason, that the next paragraphs will explore more in-depth this dynamic, characterizing most of the organizations operating in the province of Foggia.

### 8.2.2 The professionalization and bureaucratization of activism: becoming interdependent with institutions, reducing the conflict

The second element of the NGO-ization of resistance, which we find starkly in the context of the province of Foggia, is represented by the professionalization and bureaucratization of activism, which becomes a 9-5 job, as well as the increasing interdependence between NGOs and those institutions responsible for the marginalization, illegalization and racialization of migrant farmworkers, resulting in a dramatic reduction or even elimination of any conflictual and confrontational attitude. As it is possible to highlight from the list of actors operating in the province of Foggia in relation to the support of migrant farmworkers and informal settlements' inhabitants, these are mostly NGOs or unions, rather than political collectives or volunteers' organizations. As a consequence of that, the majority of those involved in activities of support and assistance of migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia are doing so a job.

It is extremely difficult to find someone engaged in these activities on a voluntary basis, as part of a broader political activity. Some of these organizations, such as *Centro Interculturale Baobab* as well as *Fondazione Siniscalco Ceci – Emmaus,* rely on the work of civil service volunteers, who are formally defined as volunteers while actually being employed for five hours a day for five days a week, for a total of about 500 euros a month,

paid by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies. This implies an hourly payment of about 4,6 euro, that would be defined as exploitation if it was not legitimized by the fact of being formally volunteers. In other instances, NGOs working in the field offer extremely precarious working contracts, partly justified by the temporariness of their fundings, which are starkly in contrast with their declared aim of fighting labor exploitation.

These exploitative working conditions, which NGOs workers are often forced to accept due to the lack of working opportunities, have multiple consequences in relation to their ability to speak up the truth and openly criticize not only the policies implemented at the national level, but also the ways in which local institutions continuously favor the process of illegalization and discrimination of racialized migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia, as already explored in chapter seven.

My activity on the ground in Foggia during the past four years allowed me to experience first-hand the degree of subordination to institutions of most NGOs as well as unions operating in the province, which sometimes leads some of those organization that were supposed to support migrant workers against the discriminatory practices implemented by institutions to become themselves implementors of those practices. This attitude is firstly manifested in relation to Foggia Immigration Office that represents one the major actors in the assembly line of illegalization and marginalization of migrant farmworkers and informal settlements' inhabitants, as it has been already explored in chapter seven.

First of all, the NGOs and unions operating in the province rarely condemn the discriminatory and illegitimate practices adopted by Foggia Immigration Office with regard to asylum seekers, holders of international protection and so on. For instance, while it is not rare for the Immigration Office officials to send back and forth people applying for international protection or trying to renew their residency permit, often shouting at them and having a disrespectful attitude in their regard, these behaviors have never been called out by local NGOs and unions, except for USB that, in July 2022, published a press release denouncing discriminatory behavior against African migrants and calling for an independent investigation. However, most of NGOs and unions do not even accompany their beneficiaries to the Immigration Office, so it is likely that they don't even know what is going on there on a daily basis. However, not only Foggia Immigration Office has not been called out for its discriminatory and illegitimate practice, but it has even been praised for its work. Indeed, during the closing conference of the project Sipla Sud, taking place at the end of November 2021, the representative of Caritas Foggia praised the "extraordinary personnel

of Foggia Immigration Office that everyday supports migrants and tries its best to satisfy their needs".

Yet, local NGOs not only avoid to publicly denounce the Immigration Office for its illegitimate practices, but also refuse taking legal action against the Office even when the right to asylum is being denied according to Italian legislation. This attitude is not shared only by NGOs, which however follow only a minimal part of the total asylum applications in the province of Foggia, but also by private lawyers. Indeed, while according to Italian immigration legislation asylum seeking claims should be formalized within ten days, without any additional requirements, between 2020 and 2022 Foggia Immigration office used to give appointments for the formalization of asylum claims after about one year and a half from the date of application. In addition to that, in different periods between 2020 and 2023 the Office asked for a proof of address in order to submit an asylum application. In all these cases, NGOs as well as most of the lawyers, refuse to appeal, suing the Immigration Office for illegitimate denial of the right to asylum, instituting a legal proceeding according to art. 700 of Italian Civil Procedural Code. In more than one informal conversation held with immigration lawyers operating in Foggia, when asked why they wouldn't recur to Courts when the Immigration Office was clearly violating the law, they answered "If we appealed in Courts because they do not formalize our requests, they will not accept our requests in the following days. They will be angry at us." This mindset, that is widely shared among immigration lawyers in Foggia, highlights an understanding of asylum claims and other immigration practices not as rights of migrant persons, but as favors that the Immigration Office officials do to specific lawyers.

Another example of this attitude can be drawn from an experience I had with the organization *Centro Interculturale Baobab* few years ago. At that time, I was not yet following asylum applications, so I used to refer people to other NGOs, such as Baobab. I directed to them an Ivorian citizen willing to apply for asylum, and he was given an appointment after more than eight months, handwritten on the same paper that he brought to request for asylum. Considering it a stark violation of his right to asylum, I contacted via email the organization, asking them whether they were planning to appeal against this appointment, in order to safeguard the person's right to asylum in line with Italian law. Few minutes later, I received a call from one of Baobab Coordinator, telling me that she did not understand why I wrote what I wrote, that he should have been thankful to even be able to receive an appointment, rather than complaining about waiting times and that my attitude was absolutely inappropriate. The tone of the conversation was quite aggressive, and I was

shocked about their attitude of defense towards Foggia Immigration Office illegitimate practices. Unfortunately, that was not the only negative experience I had with this specific organization, which appears so institutionalized that it reproduces patterns of discriminatory and illegitimate practices, sometimes even surpassing the institutions themselves.

Another element configuring the relationship between NGOs and institutions is represented by the progressive substitution of NGOs to institutions themselves in delivering essential services. For instance, in Foggia, in order to obtain a residence for people with no fixed abode, it is necessary to apply through an NGO or a union, offering their headquarters to domicile people of no fixed abode. The delegation of this fundamental service to NGOs and unions have favored the rise in corruption and the selling of residences, reaching nowadays a price between 15 to 250 euros according to different organizations. Seven of the above-listed organization provide for this service, according to the following pricelist: ANOLF 30 euros; ARCI 15 euro; Caritas Foggia free of charge; *Centro Interculturale Baobab* free of charge *Centro Mediazione Culturale Yosof* 250 euros, CGIL 100 euros, *Associazione Italo-Africana* free of charge; USB free of charge. Despite the fact being widely known, the municipality has not taken any step to cease the selling of residence for people with no fixed abode, that from being a fundamental right to access essential services as healthcare, opening of bank accounts, and so on, often becomes a privilege. Nevertheless, it must be accounted that the municipality's externalization of the service to NGOs and unions without any compensation implies that these organization in one way or another must balance their expenses, so while it is crucial to criticize the organization profiting from the state of need of people with no fixed abode, it must also be clarified that the main responsibility lies in the hand of the municipality.

In addition to that, it seems important to highlight that some of the organizations not asking for a payment are requesting unnecessary requirements in order to access the residence for people with no fixed abode, ultimately favoring those organizations asking 'only' for money. Among them, *Centro Intercultural Baobab* stands out for implementing the most discriminatory and illegitimate practices. Indeed, in order to obtain their domicile, whether to apply for residence for people with no fixed abode as well as to present it in the Immigration Office in order to renew one's own residency permit, Baobab personnel used to ask people whose residency permit was not issued by Foggia Questura to prove their "ties with the territory" (*legame con il territorio*), mostly meaning to present working contracts from the province of Foggia. This illegitimate request further promotes circles of exclusion and marginalization, in that people who are undocumented or whose document is about to

expire or, again, who need to open a bank account in order to work and renew their permit, are required to provide working contracts to obtain residence, thus giving birth to a vicious circle according to which those who are already marginalized will be further marginalized. In this regard, it is peculiar that an organization supposedly created to support migrants and refugees places stricter requirements to access their services than institutions themselves.

Another example concerning the progressive interdependence between NGOS and institutional actors is represented by the partnership established in the context of the Su.Pr.Eme and PIU Supreme project between the three humanitarian organizations INTERSOS, CUAMM and Solidaunia, the ASL of Foggia, coordinated by the Regional Agency for Health and Social (AreSS). The impact of this partnership was particularly clear with the transformation of the work of the humanitarian organization INTERSOS. While the mission of INTERSOS projects in Italy would be that of "creating the needed structure and progressively allow for their self-sustenance and inclusion within government healthcare facilities" (author's translation from Italian, Int. with A. Verona, INTERSOS, Apr. 2021) in the case of Foggia this goal has progressively waned following the 2020 partnership with AreSS. Indeed, while in 2018, at the beginning of their presence in Foggia, INTERSOS perceived their work not as mere healthcare humanitarian assistance, but also as advocacy, as demonstrated by their attempt to establish the Proximity Network as a platform to raise concerns and demands to local and national institutional representatives, since 2020 this attempt has vanished, also due to a personnel turnover. Nowadays, INTERSOS mobile units offer healthcare assistance to the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone, and to other smaller settlements in the province, following the partition agreed as part of Su.Pr.Eme and PIU Supreme projects. While bringing essential healthcare services to the inhabitants of informal settlements, INTERSOS has dramatically reduced its advocacy in the past few years and has become quite subsidiary to institutional healthcare. For instance, in November 2022 the office of ASL dedicated to the issuance of so-called STP code, necessary for undocumented people to healthcare, was closed for lack of personnel. However, no public denounce was made, regarding the shutting down of an essential service. Indeed, as maintained by one intercultural mediator working with INTERSOS from the beginning of the project in Foggia until 2021:

> "when the institution that you were supposed to criticize is the same that is funding your project, it is not likely that you are going to make your voice heard the same way".

What emerges from the above analysis is an increasing interdependence between NGOs and institutions, both at the national and European level, through the implementation of EU and Ministerial funded projects, as well as at the Regional and local level, through the progressive replacement of institutions in delivering essential services. This interdependence, added to the professionalization of activism that becomes a 9-5 job, promotes the complete subordination of NGOs to the will of institutions, transforming them from non-governmental non-profit actors to private actors funded with public money to implement institutional policies.

In addition to that, it if fundamental to highlight that even those actors not directly funded by EU or governmental funds tend to adopt an attitude of conflict avoidance, ultimately allowing local institutions and public offices to perpetuate undisturbed their violation and denial of racialized migrants' fundamental rights.

### 8.2.3 White saviorism in the context of Foggia informal settlements: between voluntourism and the coloniality of assistance

As suggested in chapter 2.3, NGOs in Western Europe operating in the field of migration often tend reproducing the colonial approach defined as "white saviorism", proper to Western NGOs operating in the Global South. Foggia informal settlements, due to their specific nature as settlements inhabited by West African migrants racialized as Black and constructed in the public discourse as inherently "poor" and "in need of assistance", have been the theatre of multiple forms of white saviorism in the past decades. These went from forms of "voluntourism" and "poverty safari" to the adoption of colonial and patronizing attitudes on the part of NGOs and unions with regard to West African workers and settlements' inhabitants. What is interesting to note is that while conditions of precariousness and exploitation are shared also by other social groups, such as Northern Africans and Eastern Europeans, it is much rarer to see this kind of attitude displayed in their regards. I was able to highlight these attitudes both through direct observation and by following specific cases through my activity of socio-legal support, as well as thanks to the testimonies of migrant workers and settlements' inhabitants, denouncing form of racism and exploitation of their precarious condition for personal gains by individuals and organizations. While the individual stories of the people involved will not be disclosed and their names will be replaced with pseudonyms, these stories will be used to get an insight into the attitude displayed by specific actors operating in the province of Foggia.

One of the first elements characterizing the shape white saviorism in Foggia informal settlements, which we can define as a constitutive element of the "coloniality of assistance", is connected to the attitude of unions and NGOs'. Indeed, the predominant approach of both unions and NGOs operating within informal settlements is one oriented towards a "display of help", which however does not often result in the actual resolution of the issues they pretend to address. It is not uncommon to see white Italian volunteers or unionists walking around the settlements, stopping here and there, chatting with people who explain to them their problems, taking pictures of residency permits, photocopying papers, promising to offer an effective support, and then going back home without never giving a response. Nevertheless, this "work" is mostly reported through pictures published on social media to show that the organization is actively helping people living within informal settlements. As far as those involved rarely have access to comment, by voicing their concerns and telling their side of the story, those organizations can continue to promote false narratives regarding their work. A blatant example of this attitude was highlighted by former Flai-Cgil Secretary Mitola who maintained that, in the context of *Di.Agr.A.M.M.I. Sud* project, she was asked to go within informal settlements just to take pictures of her donating *Di.Agr.A.M.M.I. Sud* gadgets to people.

> "They asked me multiple times to go to Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement in order to take pictures with Diagrammi Sud gadgets. I tried to ignore their requests and refuse, because I disliked this approach, but they continued to demand me, and, as far as they were still my superiors, I had to satisfy their requests. However, I went to Casa Sankara rather than Borgo Mezzanone, and my colleague took me pictures while I was distributing items to the workers living there. Nevertheless, as far as they wanted the picture from Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement, they still captioned it saying that it was Borgo Mezzanone. It is clear that it is directed to people who don't even know where

*Figure 34 Diagrammi Sud picture taken in Casa Sankara while distributing gadgets. Source: Diagrammi Sud website.*

these places are, because if you know there you can immediately understand that the place is not Borgo". (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with E. Mitola, former Flai-Cgil Secretary, Dec. 2023).

This is just one of the countless examples in which organizations have given priority to publicize their 'presence' within informal settlements, rather than actually doing something. Another example can be drawn from the "Legal Clinic for people of no fixed abode and migrants' rights" of the University of Foggia, in collaboration with Street Lawyers Association, that, approximately once a year, posts a picture of the clinic students inside Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement. However, the day in which the picture is taken is likely to be among the few days, if not the only one, in which they go there. Indeed, informal settlements' inhabitants don't even know about their existence and do not rely on them for residency permit assistance. This approach was also largely used by Aboubakar Soumahoro, former USB unionist and founder of the association *Lega Braccianti*, whose communication strategy was largely based on promoting his presence and action within informal settlements on social media without actually doing the things he claimed to do. While his role in Foggia informal settlements cannot be reduced to this and it will be further explored in chapter nine, for the present analysis it is crucial to bear in mind that while most of Foggia NGOs and unions fiercely attacked him for this attitude in 2021, what they had been doing until that moment was quite similar.

A second element defining the shape of white saviorism and coloniality of assistance in the context of Foggia informal settlements is represented by possessiveness. Possessiveness configures itself as a practice aimed at reinforcing the helper ego through the display of help as an act of power, sending the message that no one else apart from that specific organization should follow the case of that person, even if they had not been able to solve their problem. In addition to that, most NGOs operating in Foggia also display a sense of territorial control, according to which them and only them should be considered as referents in that area. Personally, in more than one instance I was faced with the extreme possessiveness displayed by NGOs professionals with regard to specific cases as well as to their general attitude of territorial control. I must here specify that during my first years in the province I was not related to any specific organization in Foggia, but I was collaborating with an organization based in Rome. In various instances, I was confronted with ostracism by local NGOs, treating me as if I was invading their territory.

In one case, in Borgo Mezzanone, I met a man from Pakistan, Ali, with a disability and holding a residency permit for refugee, who was therefore entitled to be hosted within

second reception system (so-called SAI), in that he had never been hosted in such a facility before. Ali told me that *Centro Interculturale Baobab* helped him in the past to obtain the document, but right now, despite asking them multiple times, they said they could not help him to find any accommodation. As a consequence, and already knowing the widespread attitude of control with regard to 'other organizations' cases', I immediately contacted *Baobab* in order to know if they had already applied for him. They answered me by saying that they didn't do that service anymore, and therefore they could have not helped him. As a consequence, I decided to send a request by myself, through the organization with which I was collaborating in Rome. While in the end he was eventually accepted and hosted within a second reception facility, just following my enquiry to *Baobab*, he received a call by *Baobab* coordinator insulting him for having asked my support and threatening him with never going there again. Ali reported to me the event, which I could not explain to myself in any way apart from the idea that he was "theirs", so I should have not involved myself in something that was not my business. Unfortunately, that was not the only instance in which I was able to assess this attitude on the part of NGOs working in Foggia. A similar episode took place with the same organization, with regard to an elderly woman, for whom I simply asked whether they had any correspondence for her, in that I was following a request for social benefits and some mails was sent to her residence address. In that case, she was called to their office, regardless of her age and difficulty in moving, only to tell her that she should never again ask me for that information, but she should ask directly to them, even if they could not easily understand each other, as they didn't speak French and she didn't speak Italian.

Another episode through which I could experience the possessiveness and territorial control of organizations operating in Foggia took place in the summer of 2020.

While I was in Borgo Mezzanone, I was approached by a young woman from Nigeria, Queen, a friend of a friend of mine, asking me for help to get her a place to go, in that she was pregnant and due to give birth very soon. Also in that case, without any intention of bypassing other organizations that had been taking care of the case before, I contacted various NGOs operating in the area, asking if they had already found a solution for her. The representative of Caritas Borgo Mezzanone referred me to two partner organizations, INTERSOS and ASGI, that had been following the case. Hence, I wrote them just to know how the things were going, so that I could report it back to Queen. One of them told me that she had never been in charge of her case, while the other sent me a voice message saying, with a very aggressive tone, that they had tried their best, but Queen didn't accept the place

they offered to her and, if I was better than them and I could find a place and convince her to go there, I could do it. I was puzzled by this kind of response, given to me by someone who I didn't even know and who was being upset simply because I posed her a question. The issue went on for about a month, during which Queen gave birth in another city and after came back to Borgo. When she arrived, my team in Rome circulated a picture of her residency permit in a group chat of social and legal operators, asking for a place within a reception center, as well as an informal structure that could host her in the meanwhile. The thing was made harder by the fact that, even though the case of Queen had been followed for more than six-months by the two organizations, she was still undocumented and therefore could not access all those governmental structures limited to the reception of asylum seekers. Following the circulation of Queen's residency permit in the legal group chat, the ASGI operator who had first answered me by saying that she didn't know who Queen was, wrote me telling me that she had recognized the woman because she had been in charge of her case for a long time. She said that the circulation of personal data represented a breach of privacy rules and that I was liable of prosecution due to my role in favoring her return to Borgo Mezzanone. While the message contained many false information, its main aim was that of threatening me for having dared to be involved in a case that was not my own.

These few examples are just emblematic of a widespread attituded among NGOs as well as unions, as it will be further explored in chapter nine, of conceiving racialized migrant workers and settlements' inhabitants as their property and, therefore, not as independent subjects able to choose by themselves.

A third feature of white saviorism in the province of Foggia regards the constant flux of researchers, journalists, documentary makers, self-proclaimed activists, and so on, especially during summertime. Similarly to what happens in the African continent, as explored in chapter 2.3, where white privileged people arrive in Africa considering themselves as saviors, able to solve just in few weeks the socio-economic and political problems that have been affecting communities for decades or even centuries, these "volountourists" consider informal settlements of migrant farmworkers as a theatre where they can display their goodness and their political engagement in promoting the rights of migrant workers exploited in the Italian agricultural sector. This mostly happens in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone, which is the one closer to Foggia city as well as better connected to it with public transport. In the past years, I have witnessed dozens of people passing by, declaring that they were committed to do their best to change the conditions of migrants farmworkers living within informal settlements, and then

disappearing after few weeks, and most importantly, after they had got what they actually needed, whether it was the research material for their dissertations, the footage for a new documentary on the subject, or some pictures to post on Instagram in order to boost their newly created identity as activists against migrant labor exploitation and *caporalato*.
In addition to these individuals, it is quite common for organizations operating in the province, whenever they have a delegation from the national organization or other partners, to carry them on tour in the informal settlements, describing them how is it like to live there, without actually having never spent more than half a day inside an informal settlement.

The fact of speaking for migrant farmworkers and informal settlements' inhabitants, during official meetings and in public events, without never inviting them if not to represent the "success story" through which they can praise the project, is yet another crucial characteristic of white saviorism in the province. In this case, NGOs' and unions' members, majority of whom are white Italians, living comfortably in their houses and working full time as unionists or as NGO professionals, self-proclaim themselves as representatives of migrant farmworkers and informal settlements' inhabitants, without having been entitled to do so by any democratic mechanism of representation.
For instance, in the context of meetings organized by Foggia Prefecture with regard to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) aimed at the overcoming of informal settlements, only NGOs and unions representatives were invited, with no delegate from informal settlements. When the participation of informal settlements' inhabitants themselves was solicitated, the answer given by the Prefecture was that they were too "emotionally involved", and therefore it was better to postpone their participation to a later moment. This answer recalls the 'theory' according to which racialized people would be too emotionally engaged to speak about racism, or women too engaged to speak about gender violence, denying the oppressed people the platform to speak for themselves. As it will be further explored in chapter nine, while with regard to Borgo Mezzanone there is still a long way to go in order to gain the full recognition of migrant farmworkers and informal settlement inhabitants' self-organization, Torretta Antonacci informal settlement has gained more institutional recognition thanks to the internal organization of its inhabitants.

The fact of not taking into consideration the voices and experiences of those directly involved and affected by decisions taken in institutional tables has various implications.
First of all, discussing plans and projects without taking into account the opinion of those directly affected can imply the failure of the project, as it was designed on the wrong assumptions. For instance, in the case of PNRR funds, if a plan to move the population of

informal settlements to another area is not first discussed with the inhabitants it can dramatically fail, as it already happened in 2017 following Grand Ghetto eviction.
In addition to that, the fact of speaking without having been entitled to do so, while advocating for "what is better for them" represents a vivid example of a patronizing and colonial attitude, of self-proclaiming oneself from a position of privilege as the bearer of demands for others, who are at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression. Furthermore, being the majority of those speaking imbued with the same racial-colonial prejudices sedimented in the dominant society, they tend reproducing stereotypical representation and sometimes even voicing clearly racist remarks. An example of this was the claim voiced by the president of ARCI Foggia, already cited in chapter seven, when he maintained that "the decay of Foggia railway neighbourhood was a direct consequence of the authorization given by Foggia municipality to the construction of too many ethnic shops in the area." However, even when racist remarks such as this are not explicitly made, the continuous calls for the "need of integration" of migrant farmworkers, implicitly refers only to Black African workers and underlies the urgency that they become "just like us".

These attitudes have added to a historical awareness embedded with many coming from the Western African region regarding the nature of white people, that have been transmitted from generation to generation following slavery and colonialism, as well as being constantly reproduced through neo-colonial practices and policies in the countries of origin. The idea that white people kindness always hides something else, the widespread distrust for the actions and promises of white people have been further consolidated by the unkept promises delivered by countless organization working within informal settlements. In the past few years, I have been able to record the decline of trust for external organization among both Borgo Mezzanone and Torretta Antonacci informal settlements' inhabitants, further explored in chapter nine. While for the purpose of brevity, I will report in the following only few examples, I have been hearing these kind of statements multiple times in the past five years.

> "Many people come here saying that they are here to help us. But we know white people they always look for their interest. They come here for specific reasons, during specific time of the years or if they are looking to get something from us and, mostly, they do so for their personal interest. I have been participating to various demonstrations and activities in the past, but right now I don't trust any of them anymore, because we did not see any result coming out from there." (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Cheikh, Borgo Mezzanone, May 2023)

Another example of distrust and disillusion was voiced by an inhabitant of Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement the day in which the mayor of the city of Manfredonia was invited there to discuss about the PNRR project for Borgo Mezzanone. While we were inviting him to attend the meeting, so he would have been able to voice his concerns and make his voice heard by the institutions, he said:

> "You know these people only come here for their personal interest, they don't care about us and, even if I speak, nothing will change for us here." (Informal conversation, Borgo Mezzanone, April 2022)

## 8.3 The individualization of exploitation and the fictious narrative of integration and anti-caporalato

The previous paragraphs have been dedicated to analyzing the overall structure and dynamics of EU funded projects in the province of Foggia and the ways in which the NGO-ization of resistance affects the possibility of effectively organizing against exploitation, racialization and marginalization of migrant farmworkers. In what follows, a more detailed analysis of the consequences of the NGO-ization of resistance in the province of Foggia will be explored, by looking at the ways in which it favored the adoption of an individualized approach to the countering of labor exploitation and marginalization.

### 8.3.1 The individualization of labor exploitation: exploring P.I.U Su.Pr.Eme. Capitanata

The acronym "P.I.U Su.Pr.Eme." stands for Individualized Exit Paths from Exploitation, highlighting the underlying approach of the project: the exploitation of racialized migrant workers can be overcome through individualized paths, rather than through collective actions. This idea, that we could define as "the individualization of labor exploitation", has become increasingly popular in the past decades, with the surge of individualism in Western societies following the advent of neoliberalism. It implies that labor exploitation in general, and the exploitation of racialized workers, in particular, does not represent a structural feature of global racial capitalist economy, based on the differentiation of global population according to racial, gender, status lines exploited for the purpose of surplus extraction, but it is rather an individual issue that can be solved accordingly. The individualization of labor exploitation goes hand in hand with the anti-trafficking and anti-*caporalato* rhetoric, according to which the real responsible of the

exploitation of trafficking victims and migrant workers are the evil human traffickers and the *caporali*, thus hiding the structural factors allowing for the super exploitation of migrant workers to take place. The individualization of labor exploitation is connected with the decline of the role of unions as advocates for workers' rights, and most specifically, racialized migrant workers, as it will be further explored in chapter nine. Rather than promoting the fight against labor exploitation as a collective fight uniting all workers, the individualization of labor exploitation allows for those "fighting" against labor exploitation to frame their action as an act of salvation of victimized migrant workers, reproducing the white savior mechanism previously illustrated. Furthermore, individualization of labor exploitation in the context of agriculture and informal settlements tends reproducing and idea according to which labor exploitation only takes place within informal settlements and in the agricultural sector, thus promoting any exit from informal settlements and/or from agricultural sector as a liberation from exploitation.

In the province of Foggia, the project P.I.U. Supreme Capitanata has been implemented by the organization *Consorzio Aranea*, in partnership with *Cooperativa Arcobaleno*, *Fondazione Siniscalco-Ceci Emmaus* and *Caritas San Severo*. The project was co-designed with Puglia Region following the public call of co-designing advertised with resolution n. 68/2021 and resolution n. 27/2022. According to the available data published by Puglia Region on their official bulletin page[76], the project received a total funding of 686.000 euros for two years between 2021 and 2023, divided into a first project of 290.000 euros and a second one of 396.000 euros, following the increase in the total budget of P.I.U. Supreme project and the extension of the project deadline from the 31st of October 2021 to the 30th of November 2023. Unfortunately, as already maintained in previous paragraphs, the data regarding the actual expenditure of these funds by each organization are neither available nor publicized online. Even though according to Italian legislation, art. 1 clause 125 of law 124/2017, any company or private non-profit organization receiving public funds is obliged to publish the received amounts on their website if these exceed 10.000 euros, *Consorzio Aranea* doesn't appear to have complied, being their last update dating back to 2018.[77] In addition to that, despite some of the project results having being publicized during the conference *"A Misura d'Uomo – Un'esperienza di innovazione sociale in Puglia – P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme. Capitanata"* taking place in Foggia in November 2023, there was no mention regarding the relationship between total expenditure and achieved results.

[76] The official bulletin page can be consulted at the address: https://burp.regione.puglia.it/en/bollettini
[77] The transparency documents published by Consorzio Aranea on their website can be consulted at the address: http://www.consorzioaranea.it/download/dettaglio.asp?id=90

According to the project coordinator, Domenico La Marca, during the two years in which the project had been running, there have been a total of 883 people taken in charge. Of these, 252 people formerly living within informal settlement have been hosted within the two reception facilities available for the project, *Casa di Abraham e Sarah* and *Villaggio Don Bosco*, both owned by *Fondazione Siniscalco Ceci-Emmaus*. In 2022, according to Fondazione Siniscalco Ceci - Emmaus annual social report, 44 people have been hosted in *Casa di Abraham e Sara* and 78 in *Villaggio Don Bosco*, the majority of whom from Senegal (47), Gambia (16), Nigeria (10) and Mali (8) (Fondazione Siniscalco-Ceci Emmaus 2022).
It is fundamental to highlight that these reception facilities are not situated within the city center and, while *Villaggio Don Bosco* is served by public transport, the same cannot be said for *Casa di Abraham e Sara* which appears to be quite isolated. As a matter of fact, La Marca highlighted the isolation of reception structures as a weakness of the project, saying that, if a new project is funded, they it will be remodulated by taking it into account.

> "We have understood that the kind of reception given in *Casa di Abraham e Sara* is not suitable for this target, because it like an asylum seekers emergency center, where you are only provided food and a place to sleep. But many of those who live within informal settlements have already gone through this kind of reception and they had enough. That's why if the project will be funded again in 2024, we will focus only on Villaggio Don Bosco, as well as on creating other opportunities of social housing within the city center. Indeed, our goal is to avoid any kind of small-scale reproduction of ghettoes, through the isolation of people from local communities" (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. con D. La Marca, Coop. Arcobaleno, Nov. 2023)

The project had as a target only people with a regular permit of stay, so that all those undocumented could not be hosted within reception facilities. Nevertheless, according to La Marca, undocumented people were still assisted and recorded in a separated registry, accounting for about 400 undocumented people supported in two years.
In addition to socio-legal support and reception, the project P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme. Capitanata has also funded some Italian language and professional training courses, open to everyone but mainly directed to those hosted within *Villaggio Don Bosco* reception facility.
During the interview, La Marca stressed multiple weaknesses of the project, maintaining that he is aware that informal settlements are also places of sociability and community.

> "I know that we are not a travel agency, that you show a house and people come. I am aware that these places have a dignity, there are relations, there they feel welcomed, when they come here, they feel different. You invite them to leave a place that, despite the precariousness, also represent a certainty,

> where they have their points of reference, they are able to find a job, whether regular or irregular, they are able to have a place where to sleep […] we know that we don't arrive there, they see a white man and they say "oh wow they come to save us!". We are not saviors". (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. con D. La Marca, Coop. Arcobaleno, Nov. 2023)

However, in spite of this awareness displayed during our interview, the external representation is mostly based on the reproduction of Manichean dichotomies, according to which informal settlements are described as hell, *capo nero* as the real evil, and the project as the savior. An example of this narrative can be highlighted from a Facebook post, published by *Centro Interculturale Baobab* in august 2022 describing one of the success stories of P.I.U. Supreme project.

> "I don't want to go back to that hell.
> Kawdo is a ghanian citizen arrived in Italy in 2009. After applying for asylum and being hosted in a first reception center, his request has been rejected and, as a consequence, he has remained for a long time in a condition of irregularity. He left in Ghana his wife and two children (one of whom is attending the university of architecture), while he has always lived in the street, in abandoned farmhouses or in ghettoes. At the end of 2021, he met the Social Service of Foggia Municipality, who helped him by offering him a place in the men dormitory. In the same period, K. was trying to obtain a residency permit, following an asylum request presented through his lawyer. Only few months ago he was granted special protection by the competent Territorial Commission. He looked for a job in agriculture, and for a few months he found himself in Palmori, a small ghetto where about 70 people live, surrounded by ruins, remains of building materials, iron and waste. <<We were all farmworkers – Kwadwo told us- and we paid 50 euro to enter and 5 euro a day to a Ghanaian "black boss". He found a work for all of us. If you didn't pay five euro, you could lose all.>>
> Kwadwo Ampadu is not living there anymore. Thanks to the project PIU SUPREME CAPITANATA, he now has a regular employment contract and lives in a house in Villaggio Don Bosco, where he is being hosted since few days.
> "I don't want to go back there again, if not to take some of my clothes".
> Kwadwo is one of the about 80 people who, in one year, left those infernal places, to start a new life." (*author's translation from Italian*, Centro Interculturale Baobab 2022).

According to La Marca, among all those assisted, about 100 people have permanently left informal settlements, and in 2022, more than 54 have found a regular employment thanks to the project. However, for one thing, the dynamic of migration does not allow to say whether someone has left permanently informal settlements, in that after one or two years they could come back, as it happened for many people due to the precariousness of their labor relations as well as legal status. In addition to that, thanks to our activity of socio-legal

support in Torretta Antonacci and Borgo Mezzanone, we have been able to assess that the majority of those who solve their document issue leave independently to go to other cities where they have better working opportunities, even without the help of any organization. Ultimately, this narrative appears to reinforce the idea according to which labor exploitation takes place only within the agricultural sector, and only among those who are not regularly employed and living within informal settlements. However, as it has been showed both through the analysis of INPS data in chapter 5.3 and through ethnographic observation in chapter 6.2, in the past few years the number of migrant workers, especially of West African origin, regularly hired and receiving the contractual salary in the agricultural sector in the province of Foggia has raised dramatically. As a matter of fact, reports regarding success stories of individual exit paths from labor exploitation never mention the hourly payment, the workload, but simply maintain that the person has found a regular employment. As already highlighted, the increasing formalization of labor relations can be explained as a result of the implementation of law 199/2016, while the surge in salaries can be explained as a consequence of the workforce shortage recorded following Covid-19 pandemic. These processes have been strengthened by the increasing awareness of migrant workers regarding their working rights. On the other hand, labor exploitation continues to be pervasive in other sectors, such as hospitality, where police controls are not as much widespread. For this reason, considering having a regular contract or finding an employment in a working sector different from agriculture as an exit from conditions of exploitation means to hold a very partial and biased perception of reality.

The implementation of individualized paths of exit from exploitation rests on the assumption that exploitation is an individual issue, caused by a lack of training, and it can be solved individually. However, looking at the Italian labor market we can highlight that exploitation and precariousness are endemic and cannot be solved merely with an individualized approach aimed at transferring people from informal settlements to governmental reception facilities and from agricultural sector to other working sectors. In addition to that, the issue of migrant workers exploitation and precariousness is tightly connected the precariousness of migrant legal status, so that implementing EU projects only directed towards those who are documented immediately highlights the underlying contradiction.

### 8.3.2 The fictious narrative of "integration" and "anti-*caporalato*": notes on *Casa Sankara* model of labor camp

*Casa Sankara – Ghetto Out* is a reception facility for migrant workers situated along the route SS 16, connecting Foggia to San Severo. Its origins are deeply intertwined with the story of Grand Ghetto, now renamed Torretta Antonacci, already illustrated in chapter 6.1. Casa Sankara was inaugurated in 2013, and in the past 10 years has been promoted by Puglia Region as an alternative model to counter informal settlements, migrant labor exploitation and *caporalato.* It has been founded and it is managed by two citizens of Senegalese origin, Papa Latyr (Hervè) Faye and Mbaye Ndiaye, who chose the name in a tribute to Thomas Sankara, the Burkinabè revolutionary leader admired all around West Africa.
As narrated by one of the co-founders, Papa Latyr (Hervè) Faye, Casa Sankara was born from the beginning in order to be an alternative to Grand Ghetto and in contraposition to it.

> Casa Sankara was born in 2012, when we embraced our public condemnation against exploitation and *caporalato.* At the beginning many told us that we were wasting our time, that we were crazy, but we continued. We always saw a motivation to keep going forward. At the beginning, we thought we were the only to be exploited. In 2009, we were scammed in the context of the regularization. And then we opened our eyes and became aware that we weren't the only one. We went to the Ghetto, and there we understood that what we had experienced was nothing compared to what people were going through there. It was a shock. We were living in San Severo and we would have never imagined to see something like that in Italy. You know, when you leave from Africa you think that Europe is paradise.
> There were many organizations working in the ghetto, such as Caritas San Severo, Baobab, a group of people that had chosen to do something about it. We didn't stop at reporting and publicly denouncing, we wanted to offer alternatives. We thought that if they had a better place to go, they could had left the ghetto. We saw many abandoned houses, in Foggia and San Severo, and we couldn't understand why so many people were living inside shacks while hundreds of houses were empty. One of us knew this place [*Azienda Fortore*] because it was part of the *Albergo Diffuso* project, developed during Minervino assessorship. Even though it was ready to use, with all the beds and furniture, it had never been inaugurated and it had been abandoned. So, we decided that this was meant to be the place. We managed to be invited to a meeting with the then President of Puglia Region, Nichi Vendola, and the assessor Minervino. We told them that if they wanted to evict the ghetto first of all they should have found a place where to put those people. We proposed them to use this abandoned structure that was already owned by Puglia Region. There were 32 places, and they could have been increased by adding some tents. After various meetings, we signed a convention to manage the structure. In 2013, following a fire incident in the Ghetto we hosted about 17 people, mostly from Mali who, after a while, left by themselves. It is there that our collaboration with institutions started, because they understood that we could actually do something with this structure. At the beginning we managed the reception of asylum seekers, who were arriving at thousands by boats in those years, and the Prefecture didn't have any

other place to locate them, because the CARA of Borgo Mezzanone was full. At that time, our association could not sign a convention of this type, so we relied on another organization with which we should have collaborated. It was a good and bad experience, because at the end this association played with the money, it was the period of *Mafia Capitale*. At that time, we were not aware of it, we believed in struggle, but after we discovered that there were so many of this interest behind the management of immigration. At that time, I had to renew my residency permit, and the association had promised us to sign a working contract. However, we worked for eight months, and we didn't see even one euro. When we went to claim our rights, asking for our salary to be paid, they told us that we were volunteers. And from being fighting against exploitation and *caporalato*, we suddenly found ourselves being exploited. We reported them to the police, and we sent a note to the Prefecture, which immediately terminated the convention. After, they started threatening us, they wanted to send us away. They reported us to the police for illegal occupation, and we reported them for labor exploitation. Nevertheless, we won the case. After some time, we met Stefano Fumarulo, who was working for Puglia Region and was committed to fight against mafia and *caporalato*. He introduced us to Michele Emiliano, the President Puglia Region, just a few months after he was elected. We explained to him our project and he fully embraced it, considering it as a model to overcome ghettoes and fight against *caporalato*." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with H. Faye, Casa Sankara – Ghetto Out, Nov. 2022).

The president of Regione Puglia, Michele Emiliano, has been indeed one of the main proponents of Casa Sankara project, which became his flagship in the fight against migrant labor exploitation, *caporalato* and informal settlements. Starting from 2016, Puglia Region signed various conventions with the association Casa Sankara – Ghetto Out, meant to institutionalize and stabilize their presence in the regional property *Azienda Agricola Fortore,* while at the same time criminalizing informal settlements. Indeed, in February and March 2016, the President of Puglia Regional Council and the Director of the Section Citizen Security filed two complaints against unknown suspects for alleged crimes committed in Grand Ghetto. The main reference of these charges, according to Puglia Regional official documents (D.G.R. 212/2017), was the report of the NGO Medici per I Diritti Umani (MEDU) published in April 2015 under the name Terraingiusta, according to which:

"the presence of migrant workers in Ghetto di Rignano was characterized, among others, by the following aspects: workforce organized in teams with team leaders, use of *caporalato*, extreme working conditions (in places such as stables, greenhouses, isolated countryside in conditions of factual segregation), endemic violence, lack of payment and threats, physical aggression, violent criminal racism, enslavement, sexual exploitation." (*author's translation from Italian,* D.G.R. 212/2017)

Following the filing of these charges, in March 2016 the area where Gran Ghetto was situated was placed under seizure by Foggia Police Department and, in March 2017, it was eventually evicted. The eviction of Grand Ghetto, as already illustrated in chapter 6.1, went hand in hand with the establishment of *Casa Sankara* as the model example for integration and anti-*caporalato.*

In May 2016, Puglia Region signed a Convention with the association *Casa Sankara – Ghetto Out* for the management of the reception facility and the surrounding agricultural land, assigned free of charge for a total of five years. The area was designated to receive migrant workers formerly living in Gran Ghetto with the installation of temporary housing units. Following the eviction of Gran Ghetto and the forceful removal of people, those who agreed were transferred to *Casa Sankara*. The creation of *Casa Sankara* as an alternative to "ghettoes" was framed by Puglia Region in the context of the protocol *"cura-legalità-uscita dal ghetto*" (care-legality-exit from ghetto) promoted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies.

Until 2019, the reception of migrant workers was partly realized by hosting them in tents, when 100 temporary housing units were placed in *Casa Sankara* by Puglia Region, and those living within tents were transferred there. Since then, Casa Sankara received significant amounts of funds from Puglia Region, through allocation procedures that, despite being formally open, have systematically been awarded to them. After receiving about 200.000 in the form of "extraordinary contribution" in 2021, (DEL. 1875/2021 – DEL. 1190/2021), Casa Sankara was involved as part of a major funding opportunity in the context of Su.Pr.Eme and P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme project, corresponding to an allocation of resource of € 617.140,00 from Su.Pr.Eme and € 1.201.200,00 through P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme. As reported by official documents:

> "in order to promote a systemic and multidisciplinary action, aimed at systematizing and finalizing the multiplicity of interventions and initiatives planned in the context of Su.Pr.Eme and P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme project to adopt a specific call for expression of interest for the selection of a private partner for the co-design and presentation of a structured project regarding the use of the entire building complex owned by Puglia Region, named *Azienda Agricola Fortore*, for a period of six years, with restriction of use for the reception of Third Country citizens victims of potential victims of labor exploitation in agriculture and the implementation of innovative practices of social agriculture;
>
> To estimate the total value of the procedure at 1.818.340,00, of which 1.518.340,00 dedicated to the implementation of the intervention proposed by the actor selected as part of this procedure, and 300.000 directly managed by Puglia Region." (author's translation from Italian, DET. 185/2020)

The activities to be realized with these fundings included: the implementation of a social hub (100.000 euros); the activation of transport services (167.140 euros); experimental activities of social agriculture (200.000 euros) and the purchase of agricultural equipment (150.000 euros); house search and contribution to facilitate house renting (134.000 euros); socio-legal support activities (185.000 euros); 300 individualized paths for social and working integration (163.200 euros); five professional training course of 40 hours for 12 people each (26.500 euros); six workshops destinated to key actors of labor market (15.000 euros); 100 individualized paths for job placement (500.000 euros); 3 laboratories of entrepreneurship of 30 hours for 12 people each (9.000 euros); implementation of an interprofessional team aimed at accompanying the creation of self-enterprises (18.500 euros); contributes for the creation of ten new enterprises, including self-enterprises (150.000 euros).

However, only a minor part of these funds is listed on *Casa Sankara* website as part of the declaration of public funds received, mandatory according to law 12472017.

*Casa Sankara* has been promoted by regional, national and even European institutions as a model of integration and fight against migrant labor exploitation and *caporalato*. It has received delegations from the European Commission, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, Puglia Region and so on. It has hosted various public events, such as the presentation of the IDOS Statistical Report in 2022 as well as the meeting organized by Cgil Puglia in the context of Recovery and Resilience National Program (PNRR). In all of these occasions, institutions have praised *Casa Sankara* for its ability to achieve "integration", fight *caporalato* and demonstrate that an alternative to informal settlements and labor exploitation is possible.

*Figure 35 Presentation of 2021 IDOS Statistical Report at Casa Sankara. Source: photo by the author.*

This narrative has been further supported following the creation of the tomato brand "*R(I)ACCOLTO*" (a pun in Italian language meaning at the same time welcomed again and harvested), produced in *Casa Sankara* agricultural land and sold thanks to an agreement with the processing industry Conserva Italia and the large-scale retailer Coop. Hervè Faye suggested that the idea of producing tomatoes "free from exploitation" represented another step in their fight against *caporalato*.

> "At the beginning we only wanted to offer an alternative solution to the shacks of the Ghetto, but after we understood that it wasn't enough. So, we asked Puglia Region to give us these lands, and allowed us to use 13 hectares on which we could cultivate. We decided to cultivate tomato, because it is an extremely symbolic product, which before was a *caporale*, a suffering for us, and after it became a tool of liberation. We transformed something negative in something positive. So, we created *Riaccolto*, our brand, with the support of Coop. To say that the product is not only the tomato, but there is a whole story behind it. They put us in contact with processing facilities, so we could have a 100% ethical product. Thanks to *Riaccolto* we were able to sign about 50 working contracts, for those who needed most. In this way, this becomes not only a working place, but rather an opportunity of integration" (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with H. Faye, Casa Sankara – Ghetto Out, Nov. 2022).

> "Behind this tomato there is a story, ethical means a behavior allowing you to say no to injustice, no to illegality, no to exploitation, ultimately no to mafia. The user needs to understand that when he enters in *Casa Sankara* he has to abandon the mentality of ghetto, because the two cannot go together. The mentality of ghetto only brings you closer to organized crime. But by entering in *Casa Sankara* you are entering a new world, a world completely different, a world that moves towards real social and working integration."
> (H. Faye in Su.Pr.Eme Italia 2022).

*Figure 36 Riaccolto promotional leaflet. Source Coop Italia.*

However, while the narrative surrounding *Casa Sankara* is grandiose, the reality on the ground appears to be more complex and contradictory. For one thing, from a spatial point of

view, *Casa Sankara* appears to be as segregated as informal settlements, if not even more, due to the lack of informal transport services. Indeed, as it is possible to highlight from the figure below, *Casa Sankara* is situated in the middle of the countryside, surrounded by agricultural fields and without any public transport line connecting it neither to San Severo nor to Foggia city center. Those living in *Casa Sankara* are often forced to move with bicycle of by foot along route SS16 in order to reach the bus stop, which is many km away. However, route SS 16 is one of the most dangerous in Italy, recording an extremely high rate of car

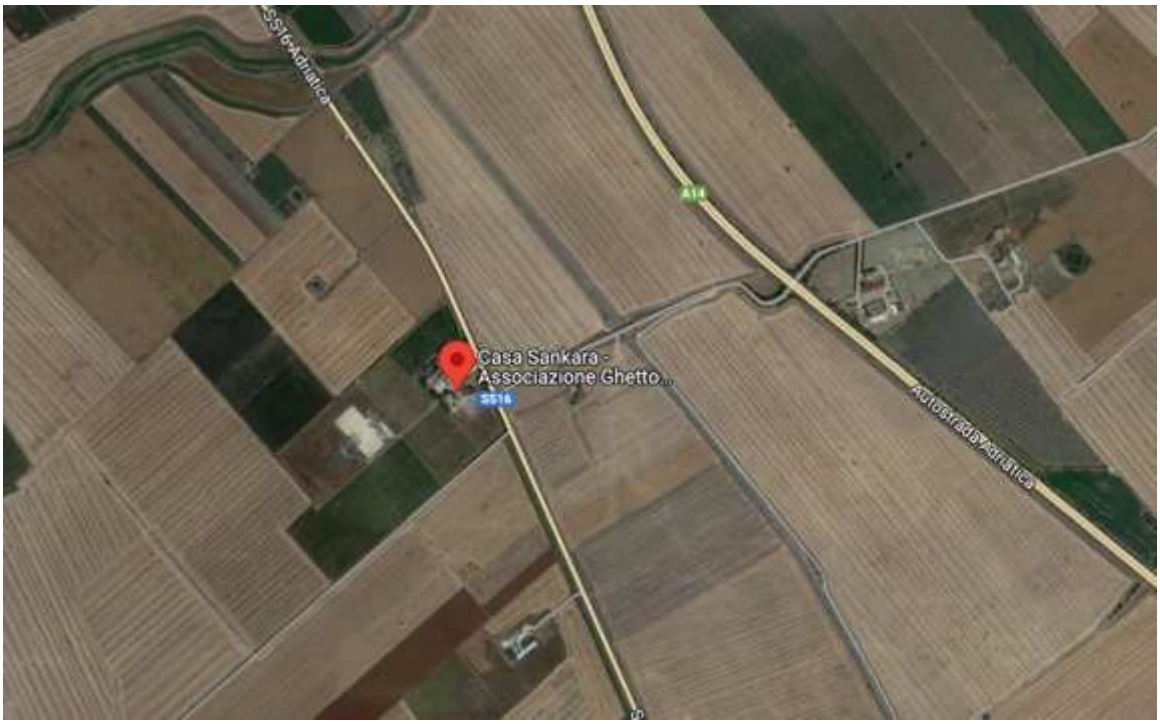


*Figure 37 Aerial view of Casa Sankara. Source Google Maps.*

accidents. As a matter of fact, in 2021 Anssou Kondjira, a Senegalese resident of *Casa Sankara* was killed by a car while walking back home at night. Furthermore, the living conditions of migrant workers in the temporary housing units of *Casa Sankara* resemble quite starkly the condition of those living in informal settlements, as well as in the newly created temporary housing units of Torretta Antonacci and Borgo Mezzanone. They share the same degree of segregation from the larger community, as well as the precariousness of water supply and electricity. For instance, in 2023, light supply was cut off from *Casa Sankara* for about two months, from March 2023 to May 2023. In that occasion, the inhabitants of *Casa Sankara* organized a protest to raise attention of their precarious living conditions, while at the same time denouncing the managers of the structure of profiting from their suffering. In two different moments, they blocked the route SS 16 for the

authorities to listen to their concerns. However, despite blocking a major route, there was no mention of the event in any local newspaper or social media page.

The silencing of these protests highlights the extremely powerful position achieved by the *Casa Sankara* in the local and regional politics, due to its status as an alternative model of integration in contraposition to informal settlements and exploitation. Indeed, their power extend well beyond those institutions which directly fund them, to unions and NGOs operating in the province that promote *Casa Sankara* as a model and avoid publicly criticizing them. However, during interviews, more than one organization raised their concerns regarding *Casa Sankara* as a model of integration and an alternative to informal settlements.

As maintained by Raffaele Falcone, former Foggia Flai-Cgil secretary, *Casa Sankara* image as free from exploitation is far from being the reality.

> "*Casa Sankara* was empty for years because people didn't want to go there only to have a bed and hot water but no work. Now *Casa Sankara* is full because there are *caporali*, so people can actually go there and work. If you want the institutional story, I can tell you that *Casa Sankara* is a nice project, also Coldiretti is investing there. In *Casa Sankara* they implemented various activities, among which this agreement with an important agricultural firm for RIACCOLTO, but these initiatives are only useful to advertise the companies promoting them, but they don't change the situation, everything remains the same. In *Casa Sankara* you have ten people going to work with minivans and 300 going with *caporali*, so it is not really effective." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with R. Falcone, Flai-Cgil Foggia, June 2021)

Nevertheless, despite the criticism and the awareness regarding *Casa Sankara* actual functioning, CGIL has never stopped to publicly promote it as a model of integration and as an alternative to informal settlements and *caporalato*. As highlighted by Flai-Cgil former secretary Emanuela Mitola, Cgil never publicly denounced *Casa Sankara* for their policies, even when these were starkly in contrast with their mission as a union. In particular, she mentioned an example of a resident of *Casa Sankara*, who worked there as part of RIACCOLTO project, but was never paid.

Mohamed (pseudonym), whom I was also able to interview by phone as he had left the province of Foggia, maintained that he had a leading role in the implementation of Casa Sankara tomato production, thanks to its agricultural expertise achieved following years of work in the agricultural field.

"At the beginning I really trusted Mbaye. I told him that I came there to look for a document, with the sanatoria in 2020. He said he would help me with that, that they had a farm, and he could do me a contract and help me. The first year didn't go very well, he said he will pay about 47 euro per day, but he couldn't make it, so he paid us about 40 euro a day. The second year he asked me to work for him, I told him I cannot work for free. I came here to look for money, not to work for free. After his wife also asked me to help them, because I was the one in charge of everything. I told her <<I cannot work with Mbaye because he is not paying me>>. She told me <<this year money is not a problem, we have money this year, I guarantee you.>> So, I accepted. The second year I was the leader of the team, I was the one who put fertilizer, who set up the irrigation and so on. I did everything there from the planting to the harvesting. We got about 15 trucks of tomatoes from there. But still the last 45 days I worked there he didn't pay me, so we fought, not physically, but verbally.

One day, it was on Friday he called the police and after he left. The police arrived there, I was just going out from the mosque, I saw them and told them that if they came there because Mbaye called them, at least Mbaye should be there. They told me that Mbaye was not there, so I could tell them my side of the story. I told them that all our problem was because of Mbaye didn't pay me for my work and, also, I paid him 1400 euros for the *sanatoria* but I didn't see anything. I reported to them that Mbaye told me that he knew many people and he was very powerful, in Italy, so I could have never win over him and that I had answered him that even if he knew many people, I needed to get back my money.

The following day I went there to the police in San Severo, but I know that they were collaborating with Mbaye, because they didn't listen to me. After he reported me to the police, saying that I wanted to burn his car and his office. Now I have a lawyer that is following the case.

I made many videos where I explained this situation on my Facebook page, I have also tried to explain it to Cgil. I don't know if Cgil is with them, but if they are not, they should listen to us. The problem of *Casa Sankara* is that Italians don't want to listen to us, they only listen to Mbaye. Even if Mbaye says something that is not true, they used to believe him." (*author's translation from Italian,* Int. with Mohamed).

Indeed, as also Mitola maintained, when Mohamed explained to her the issue, she tried to put pressure on the secretary general of Flai-Cgil Foggia to publicly denounce *Casa Sankara* for their misconduct, but she didn't succeed.

"I explained the issue to the secretary, in order to take a step against *Casa Sankara*'s misconduct. He reassured me telling me that we would have treated them as any other employer, even if we normally collaborated with them. However, it didn't go like that. He called them and Mohamed and they reached an agreement for the payment of the 45 days he had worked. But there was no public condemnation, no reporting to National Labor Inspectorate, nothing. It is starting from this story that I really started understanding that *Casa Sankara* was totally different from the way they used to portray themselves. I also have to say that when I used to go there for Cgil, I received many complaints from people living there telling me that they didn't trust the managers of the structure. Indeed, many of them used to come

> until Cgil in Foggia to meet us, because they didn't like to meet us in the office that was provided by them. They didn't feel safe there. […]
> Another issue emerged when their light was cut for many months, until they blocked the main road. Also in that occasion, I asked the secretary to take a step to publicly denounce what was going on. But nothing happened. However, we had many interlocutions with a group of residents, and especially one, Ibrahim (pseudonym) who was leading the protests. He came many times to us in Cgil, asking what we could do to help them. At a certain point they wanted to know how to enter *Casa Sankara* association so that they could manage it by themselves, removing those who managed until that time. However, after those meetings, we didn't have any news about it. But I know that *Casa Sankara* came to know about those meetings, and they were not happy about it, they thought Cgil was inciting the residents against them." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with E. Mitola, former Flai-Cgil secretary, Dec. 2023).

Finally, in more than one instance Casa Sankara was accused of taking money to proceed with civil registration as well as to provide other services, while managers of the structures have always denied those allegations.

> "All our services are free. During a period, there were rumors that we asked money for *ospitalità*. It was the responsibility of a bad guy who had some problems with us. We were called by the police, and they told us to be very careful, that many voices were circulating about us, and someone wanted to spoil our name. So, we decided to stop issuing proofs of address until people understood that those rumors were detrimental to them, and after we started again issuing proofs of address." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with H. Faye, Casa Sankara – Ghetto Out, Nov. 2022)

Ultimately, while it is not possible here to investigate on criminal responsibilities, it can certainly be maintained that the narrative developed around *Casa Sankara* and reproduced by both institutions, unions and NGOs is functional to legitimize a form of legalized exploitation and segregation, contraposing it to informal settlements and *caporalato*. However, this contraposition is purely discursive rather than factual, and it based on the dichotomy between legality and illegality, between formality and informality. In each of their speech *Casa Sankara* managers remark the difference between "the ghettoes" and *Casa Sankara*, discursively associating the former with illegality and organized crime and the latter with legality anti-mafia. However, as it has been reported through the cited interviews, *Casa Sankara* does not seem to be much more than a "clean ghetto" or "a ghetto 2.0" as some have defined it, masking the issues of racialized migrant workers spatial and social segregation and labor exploitation behind a narrative of integration and anti-*caporalato*, fully implementing what Federico Oliveri (2015) defined as the "juridification of exploitation" and what we could define as the "institutionalization of segregation".

## Conclusion

The intervention of institutions and NGOs in countering migrant farmworkers precarious living and working conditions has rarely been explored through a critical lens, looking at the ways in which the humanitarian management of agricultural workforce further reproduces conditions of oppression. Dines and Rigo (2015) contribution regarding the refugeezation of the workforce has been crucial in in highlighting the increasing implementation of techniques of humanitarian management in the context of agricultural labor and the ways in which this affects the framing of labor exploitation as an individual issue to be countered through a human rights-based approach. The present chapter has been dedicated to further investigate this relationship by looking at the shape of what we have previously defined as the "nonprofit industrial complex" and the "NGO-ization of resistance" in the province of Foggia.

As it has been highlighted, the characterization of migrant labor exploitation and ghettoization as a criminal and humanitarian matter, rather than a consequence of structural factors first and foremost promoted by national and European policies on labor and migration, has favored the surge in EU funded projects aimed at countering the exploitation of migrant labor through individualized actions and emergency driven projects. From 2019 to 2023, more than 60 million euros have been spent in Southern Italy for projects related to countering the precarious living and working conditions of migrant farmworkers. While in some cases projects funded through these resources have brought much needed services to informal settlements inhabitants, such as water supply, waste disposal, healthcare assistance, they have done so by endlessly reproducing the emergency driven approach that has characterized the management of rural informal settlements since decades. In addition to that, the allocation of resources as well as the accountability both to the wider public and the beneficiaries has been opaque, with any online open access report regarding the expenditure of the projects and the achieved results. On the contrary, in other to gather the information presented in this chapter, it has been necessary to examine all the Puglia Region official bulletin page in order to find the official decision through which resources were allocated. However, these do not include the actual expenditure of those resource, which should instead be publicized by those NGOs that have received the funding. The lack of accountability can be defined as one of the three key features of the NGO-ization of resistance in the context of racial capitalism. The second key feature is the professionalization of activism that goes hand in hand with the increasing interdependence between NGOs and institutions, dramatically impacting on the possibility of NGOs of effectively criticizing institutions and

carrying out advocacy rather than mere assistance. Finally, the NGO-ization of resistance in the province of Foggia is characterized by white saviorism, a colonial attitude aimed at further reproducing asymmetric relations of power between the “helper” and the “helped” as well as denying the oppressed of the right to speak for themselves. The chapter has been concluded with the analysis of two concrete experiences funded through Su.pr.Eme. and P.I.U. Su.pr.Eme, P.I.U. Su.pr.Eme and *Casa Sankara*.

While different in their organization and main objectives, both projects are emblematic of the ways in which the individualization of labor exploitation and its transformation into a matter of humanitarian assistance favors the implementations of projects that despite the grandiose narrative surrounding them are ultimately ineffective, if not counterproductive, in countering processes of exploitation, ghettoization, illegalization and racialization.

# CHAPTER 9

# UNIONIZING, MOBILIZING AND SELF-ORGANIZING AGAINST AGRICULTURAL RACIAL CAPITALISM: AN ANALYSIS OF WEST AFRICAN MIGRANT FARMWORKERS' FORMS OF RESISTANCE AND STRUGGLE IN THE PROVINCE OF FOGGIA

The previous chapters have been dedicated to exploring the structure of agricultural racial capitalism in the province of Foggia. As we illustrated, the shape of racial capitalism is characterized by the intersection of four dimensions (ghettoization, exploitation, illegalization and racialization) determining the experience of racialized migrant workers. The intersection of these four dimensions exceeds the idea of exploitation in the workplace on which most labor studies as well unions have based their understanding of the condition of oppression of migrant workers. As a matter of fact, if in the past years an improvement has been recorded on the side of labor exploitation, the same cannot be said for the other three dimensions, that have continued to exacerbate due to institutional and widespread racism. The non-profit industrial complex established around the issue of migrant labor exploitation in the context of agriculture as well as the phenomenon of NGO-ization of resistance analyzed in the previous chapter represent a constitutive element of the nature of the oppression of racialized migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia. Indeed, rather than dismantling the unequal structure of power based on the management of racial and statuses differences, the work of NGOs and unions in the area often goes in the direction of reinforcing those same structures, by re-affirming the dichotomy between legality-illegality, us-them, civilized-uncivilized, etc. Furthermore, the NGO-ization of resistance, by systematically excluding migrant farmworkers from the right to speak, adds a new element in the already complex structure of oppression that they experience, which is the epistemic violence inherent to the denial of the right to represent oneself.

The present chapter will be dedicated to investigating the ways in which West African migrant farmworkers living in the province of Foggia have mobilized and organized in the past few years in order to resist against the oppression of racial capitalism, manifested in all the above illustrated forms.

The first part of the chapter will be focused on assessing the approach adopted by unions and other political collectives that in the past decade have presented themselves as representatives of migrant farmworkers' claims. The analysis will be developed by looking at the ways in which the relationship existing between race, class, eurocentrism and

coloniality affects the attitude of these actors and their relationship with racialized migrant farmworkers. The second part of the chapter will be dedicated to analyzing West African migrant farmworkers' mobilization that took place in the past five years (2017-2023), looking at the ways in which the multidimensionality of the oppression they experience was articulated in the context of those mobilizations.
In the last part of the chapter, the self-organization of West African migrant workers in the province will be explored, with a particular focus on the experience of Torretta Antonacci, former Gran Ghetto. This analysis will allow to delve into the processes of self-organization of migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements, looking at the challenges and opportunities emerging along the way.

## 9.1 Racialized migrant workers, labor unions and the politics of representation in the province of Foggia: class, race, status, and eurocentrism

Labor unions as modern organizations emerged in a specific period of European history, in correspondence with the industrial revolution, having as a privileged sphere of action industrial workers and meant to represent the claims and demands of workers in the working place. However, as we have already explored in the first and second chapter, following the fragmentation of the workforce along lines of race, status, gender, etc. the organization of the workforce in the workplace became more complex, and the idea according to which workers were to be organized first and foremost as workers was increasingly questioned. Jörg Nowak (2021) suggested that it is time for labor studies to abandon their Eurocentric perspective, according to which unions are meant to represent workers in the workplace, specifically about labor issues, and unions' organized actions are to be juxtaposed to "unorganized" struggles. This Eurocentric perspective is not only inherent to labor studies, but to labor unions themselves. In Italy, despite the surge in migrant workforce recorded in the past thirty years, most of Italian labor unions failed to reorganize their structures in order to be able to effectively represent migrant workers and their claims. This appears to be particularly true in the agricultural sector and in the province of Foggia, where the majority of unions are made of white Italian citizens who are employed full time as unionist, but claim to represent the interests of racialized farmworkers living in informal settlements. Their role as representatives of migrant workers is weakened by the lack of representational mechanisms aimed at actively including migrant farmworkers in the decisional structure of the organization. This dramatically affects their ability to fully

understand the issues at stake and effectively represent the claims of the workers, allowing them to speak for themselves rather than deciding what is better for them following a colonial and patronizing attitude.

In the province of Foggia there are various labor unions as well as other political actors and collectives claiming to be the bearers of migrant farmworkers' demands.
Most of the unions operating in the province works almost exclusively as service providers, offering services such as application for unemployment benefits and other social benefits.
The only two labor unions that have tried in the past few years to organize migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia are Flai-Cgil and USB, so the following analysis will focus on their work and trajectory. Nevertheless, the fact that most labor unions are only operating as service providers is by itself an important element to be considered in the analysis of the evolution of labor unions from being representatives of workers' claims to become mere bureaucratic apparatuses.

### 9.1.1 Flai-Cgil: between eurocentrism and assistance

Flai-Cgil (*Federazione Lavoratori Agroindustria - Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* - Agro-Industrial Workers Federation – Italian General Confederation of Labor) is the agro-industrial branch of Italian largest union, CGIL. Differently from other unions, Cgil history is deeply rooted in the agricultural sector and in farmworkers struggles. Flai-Cgil Foggia considers itself the legitimate successor of the Trade Union Center of Foggia, founded in 1902 and characterized from the beginning by the centrality of farm labor and day laborers. Furthermore, the province of Foggia is home of the unionist Giuseppe Di Vittorio, a central figure in the Italian farmworkers struggle and founder of the labor union CGIL in 1944.
In continuity with its roots, Flai-Cgil conceives migrant farmworkers first and foremost as "farmworkers", identifying the role of unions as the defense of "workers' rights inasmuch as workers" (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with R. Falcone, Flai-Cgil Foggia, June 2019). In the past few decades, Flai-Cgil has attempted, yet with poor results, to rethink its internal structure as well as to experiment new ways of operating in order to include an increasingly relevant section of the workforce made of precarious, illegalized and racialized migrant workers. *Sindacato di Strada* (Street Union) represents one of the major initiatives promoted by the union in an attempt to get closer to the working and living experience of migrant farmworkers. At the same time, through their office in Foggia, Flai-Cgil offers

support not only with regard to labor issues, but also to issues related to immigration, such as the renewal of residency permits, citizenship applications as well as residence for people of no fixed abode (upon the payment of a 100 euros membership fee). However, for one thing, Cgil Foggia does not offer any support for asylum request and procedure related to asylum, which as we have seen in the previous chapters, represent the major tool of regularization for West African migrant workers living within informal settlements. For another thing it seems that the assistance offered to individuals is hardly transformed into political claims towards institutions.

According to Raffaele Falcone, former secretary of Flai-Cgil Foggia, while on the side of immigration there has been some improvement, the issue of housing continues to be critically overlooked by Cgil, also at the national level.

> "From the point of view of documents, we have experienced major improvements in the past few years. Most of the people who have documents problem turn to us now. But these are bureaucratic practices, such as renewal of residency permits, family reunions, citizenship applications, and so on. On the side of asylum request, I don't know about other cities, maybe they are organized differently, but in Foggia we have a limit given by the fact that there aren't lawyers doing this service free of charge. We collaborate with a lawyer, but he is not part of Cgil. However, in one way or another, Cgil has taken some steps on the side of immigration, and it also attempts to develop some analysis, whether they are embraceable or not. But on the issue of housing, there I think we have a major limit, also in terms of understanding the phenomenon of informal settlements, as well rural areas. We have a structure within Cgil called SUNIA, taking care of issues related to tenants, but it is only a service provider, while I think it should also develop some political analysis. I pointed it out to the national representatives. I hope that something will change." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with R. Falcone, Flai-Cgil Foggia, June 2021).

Yet, according to former secretary of Flai-Cgil, Emanuela Mitola, who was appointed as a secretary following Falcone transferral to Flai-Cgil national branch, the union approach has been dramatically inadequate in representing the claims of West African migrant workers living in informal settlements, and more specifically of undocumented migrant workers. Indeed, recalling her experience as a secretary of the union, she remembers the extreme difficulty she experienced in trying to convince other secretaries of the importance of being present also in the informal settlements, even if no formal membership could be promoted among undocumented workers.

> "You know at a certain moment they asked me why I should go to Borgo if there people don't have documents and we cannot proceed with their formal membership. I felt like their only purpose was to

> find more members, which however are so only on paper. Because they are not really participating to Cgil activities and decisional structure. They are only paying their membership fee every year. That is why when the period of agricultural unemployment benefit arrives, we were like hunting people so they would come to Cgil to present their demand. Because they live with this source of revenue. So, in the end, they see people only functional to that." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with E. Mitola, former Flai-Cgil secretary, Dec. 2023).

From the interviews carried out with Flai-Cgil local and regional secretaries, as well as thanks to field observation and analysis of their public meetings, social media pages and press releases, Flai-Cgil does not appear to have carried out a deep reflection regarding the intersection of multiple forms of oppression in defining the experience of racialized migrant workers, thus going beyond an approach largely centered on class and working sector. As a matter of fact, Flai-Cgil promotes the idea according to which every worker is the same, independently from their race, gender, nationality, etc. However, this color-blind, gender-blind, etc., narrative, that we could define as "universalistic approach" recalling Alberti et al (2013), while apparently positive, ignores the different treatment that different workers are experiencing within the society. An example of the underlying racist bias inherent to this color-blind approach was highlighted by the collective *Razzismo Brutta Storia* when, following an episode of racism, discrimination and labor exploitation taking place in Basilicata Region, in the context of which agricultural employers defined their African employees "n*****s" and "monkeys", the three confederate unions Flai-Cgil, Fai-Cisl and Uila, called a demonstration under the slogan of "We are all Monkeys". As Angelica Pesarini (2020) maintained:

> "Looking at each of those words, one cannot understand how it was possible to create a message with such a racist connotation in order to promote an event that was intended to be advocating for the opposite. Are we really all monkeys? The term is used by *caporali* in a situation characterized by such precariousness and exploitation to not even have right to a bottle of water, to even be seen as human beings, to be defined as "simply monkeys".
>
> So, how is that possible that various unions validated such a slogan, maintaining that "we are all monkeys" without thinking that a white Italian citizen will never be called a money or made to work, live, and die in the same condition in which hundreds of African farmworkers find themselves, thanks to a right to citizenship acquired from birth and to centuries of white appropriation and accumulation.
>
> Despite the temptation of being willing to believe in the equality of human beings and affirming that we are all equal, that color does not exist but only people do, this claim hides, in reality, a great privilege: the privilege of invisibility in which only non-racialized people can take refuge, that is, those who belong to the so-called "somatic norm" and are enabled not to pay attention to their color because their

color, white, reflects the norm and does not impact on their lives. If white people are just "people" without a color, all the other ones are defined and categorized precisely for their color.
How is that possible to use the same dehumanizing and racist insult, historically situated, as an antiracist slogan? In which ways the normalization of racist language can be of use in the fight against racism? This is the paradox of Made in Italy antiracism, that is performed without mentioning race, that is talked about without listening to racialized people, that is voiced without priorly informing oneself and in which those who promote it are offended if the harmfulness of certain "good intentions" is highlighted." (*author's translation from Italian*)

*Figure 38 Flyer for the promotion of the demonstration under the slogan of "We are all monkeys". Source: Razzismo Brutta Storia.*

Another example of the unwillingness to name race and racism while trying to advocate for racialized migrant farmworkers rights can be drawn from a press release issued by Flai-Cgil Foggia following the shooting of Sinayogo Boubakar, on the 27th of April 2021, already mentioned d in chapter 7.2.2.

"This morning we went to the hospital to talk to the doctors who are taking care of "Biggie".
Sinayogo Boubakar, who was involved in the shooting last night, lost sight from one eye and his face is full of fragments exploded from the criminals' gun, who attacked the tree workers while they were going back home in Torretta Antonacci (commonly called ghetto di Rignano, now they renamed it because ghetto is not trendy, the righteous elite considers it a place deign of a name, but it nevertheless

> remains a ghetto). We are tired of this condition, we are tired to assist to a massacre without end, a massacre of lives, rights, and dignity. We are in a land of excellency, in a welcoming land, the land of Peppino di Vittorio, the land of *Cafoni* (ndr: historical negatively connotated definition of peasants living in Puglia) who achieved their freedom from their masters, we cannot continue to assist to this massacre […] There are clear and evident responsibilities, we very well remember the words of the Prefect. Dott. Grassi, who, in one of our meetings, maintained: if in this land there are *caporali,* it is because they are instrumental to someone. And we add, if ghettoes exist, it is because they are instrumental to those same people. […] We are just a small community, we are faced with the hard mission of give voice to the invisibles and to all those workers of a sector that too often suffer in silence, but we can hear their thoughts, they speak in African, Romanian, Bulgarian, Italian, they speak the dialects of Cerignola, San Severo, Gargano and Sub-Apennine, these are voices of men and women. And they tell us that Biggie is one of them. And if Biggie name was Antonio?" (*author's translation from Italian*, Flai-Cgil Foggia, 27th April 2021).

This press release entails more than one issue. For one thing, Flai-Cgil suggests that the moral responsibility of the shooting of Sinayogo lies in the same hands of those who benefit from the existence of *caporalato* and ghettoes. However, in stating so, they recall the words of Foggia Prefect, Raffaele Grassi, meaning that is unlikely that they consider responsible for those conditions the Italian State and its segregating policies. While not clearly mentioned, it is likely that they were referring to some sort of organized criminal organization, thus relieving institutions from their responsibilities in determining the conditions of exploitation, ghettoization and illegalization of migrant farmworkers, and fostering the Manichean narrative according to which on one side there is criminality, profiting from migrant workers exploitation, and on the other side there is the State, fighting against it. This narrative has been commonly promoted by the union and will be further explored in the next paragraphs. Therefore, the union decides not to mention racism, both social and institutional, neither as a motive behind the attack nor as a reason for the ghettoization of West African workers. Yet, in a video interview, Raffaele Falcone, a member of the secretaryship, he maintained that the attack to Sinayogo was to be defined as a "black hunt", in that he was attacked just because he was black, following the report issued by some inhabitants of Torretta Antonacci to local authorities following the theft of some fuel.

In addition to that, the last part of the press release reproduces the idea according to which "we are all the same" independently from our origins and language. However, in attempting to do, the union commits a dramatic debacle, by refencing to the language spoken by Africans as "African" and adding it to a list of other European languages as well as local dialects. Far from being a mistake, this definition is emblematic of the lack of knowledge

regarding the socio-cultural context which they claim to be representing. Sinayogo is a Malian citizen, they could have written Bambara, Pulaar, Mandinka, Soninke, etc. And yet, they wrote "African" thus associating an entire continent to one homogeneous identity.
In addition to that, the press release is concluded by stating that the voices of farmworkers claim Sinayogo as "one of them" and asking what would have happened if Sinayogo's name was Antonio. Maintaining that the voices of farmworkers from different origins and language are claiming Sinayogo as one of them, the union makes explicit its underlying ideological assumption according to which farmworkers are unified in their identity inasmuch as farmworkers. However, this presumed class solidarity among farmworkers has never manifested itself in the province of Foggia anytime African farmworkers have suffered violent attacks and killings. Furthermore, as in the example examined by Pesarini, the union failed to identify the motive of the attack, unwilling to speak about race and racism. The answer to the union question "if Sinayogo's name was Antonio?", implicitly assuming that he would have been white and Italian, is that he would have not been shot. Not because Italians aren't shot for criminal retaliation, but if that happens, the members of criminal organization will target a specific person, not a random Italian.

From a point of view of representation, while Flai-Cgil Foggia might have many formal members among West African migrant workers, following the deduction of their membership fee either from agricultural unemployment benefit or from the fee requested to access other services, such as residence for people of no fixed abode, these members are such mostly on paper, in that they neither appear to be included in the decisional structure of Flai-Cgil nor they appear to hold a particular ideological attachment to Cgil as a union. Indeed, as it will be further explored in following paragraphs, while unions and other political collectives attempt to establish an exclusive relationship with migrant workers living in the province, in the context of multiple mobilizations and public events, I was able to assess the fluidity with which West African migrant workers support one organization's initiative rather than another according to the specific claims that are brought forward. On the other hand, while the general assembly of Flai-Cgil must respect specific proportion in the relation to delegates' representativeness of the diversity of the workforce, both in terms of gender and in terms of nationality, according to former secretary Mitola, foreign citizens are often chosen just to respect the proportion and without any regard for the actual representativeness of the group or community to which they belong. In addition to this, while in the past Flai-Cgil attempted to organize assemblies within informal settlements in order to better understand the issues faced by migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements

and represent their claims, this aspect of their work appear to have vanished in the past few years, also following their leadership turnover. Due to the lack of an effective representational mechanism, Flai-Cgil is mostly made up of white, Italian unionist who are not employed in the agricultural sector but rather work full time as unionists. In some instances, West African migrant workers have been employed by Flai-Cgil, but only for short periods of time and mostly assisting the provision of services, rather than for an organizing purpose.

This has various implications on the ability of Flai-Cgil to effectively represent racialized migrant farmworkers' claims as well as to achieve any improvement with regard to their living and working conditions. From a point of view of working conditions, the union has offered individualized support to migrant workers experiencing conditions of exploitation both through the suing of employers according to art. 603-bis of Italian Criminal Code, as well as through the launch of labor disputes. Yet, while it is true that an increase in per hour salaries has been recorded in the past few years, this appears to be more the result of workforce shortage, as illustrated in chapter five, rather than of the success of unions' bargaining strategies. According to former secretary of Flai-Cgil Foggia, Raffaele Falcone, the issue of organizing migrant workers in the agricultural sector descends from the nature of agricultural labor contracts, which do not guarantee workers against unfair layoff.

> "As long as the agricultural contract remains as it is now, with worked days declared a posteriori as well as the possibility for farmers to terminate the contract in any moment justifying it with productive reasons, it will be extremely hard to effectively unionize and organize farmworkers. Indeed, as it is going right now, the right to strike is not actually guaranteed in the agricultural sector. For one thing, considering the monthly salary is based on worked days, if you go on strike, you will not be paid. In addition to that, the employer can terminate your contract or never call you to work again if you go on strike. So I believe that the real fight should be that for changing the agricultural contract, in a way that it would really guarantee workers. Only after that happen, I think farmworkers will actually be able to organize." (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with R. Falcone, Flai-Cgil Foggia, Nov. 2022)

From the point of view of living conditions and informal settlements, Flai-Cgil has adopted in the years an ambiguous attitude, moving from the call to evict and eradicate informal settlements to more cautious demands regarding the need to also provide alternative solutions. In 2017 Flai-Cgil supported the eviction of Grand Ghetto and the relocation of its inhabitants in *Casa Sankara* and, since then, it has publicly been one of the main supporters of *Casa Sankara*. Their public support of Casa Sankara has been unwavering and displayed not only through the election of *Casa Sankara* managers as Flai-Cgil delegates, but also

through the organizing of public events in *Casa Sankara* as well as the contiuous praising as a model of integration and fight against *caporalato* and labor exploitation, despite the profound opaqueness of *Casa Sankara,* recognized also by Flai-Cgil secretaries though never in public context. The support of Cgil to Casa Sankara has always been done in contraposition to Grand Ghetto, which has instead been criminalized by the union and more than in one case described as ruled by a criminal organization.

*Figure 40 CGIL sponsored event on PNRR held in Casa Sankara. Source: photo by the author.*

*Figure 39 CGIL flags outside Casa Sankara. Source: photo by the author.*

On some occasions, Flai-Cgil Foggia has highlighted the intersection between processes of illegalization and the ghettoization of West African migrant workers, but has not been able, or willing, to actually bring forward the issue in the context of public meetings and events, despite the great political power it holds both at a local and national level.

Finally, with regard to issues of racism, while Flai-Cgil has promoted in one instance a mobilization against racist attacks following 2019 throwing of stones to migrant workers

living in *Casa Bianca*, the union has not carried out a deep analysis regarding the intertwining between labor exploitation, racialization and illegalization.

The approach of Flai-Cgil in the province of Foggia has undoubtedly evolved in the past few years, in correspondence the leadership turnover. While in the past there was a larger focus also on collective organization, revindication and representation, in recent years this attitude has vanished in favor of an approach centered on bureaucratic assistance rather than on collective organization. More specifically, it appears that the main focus of Flai-Cgil's relationship with migrant farmworkers lies in the importance they represent as a source of income through the deduction of 150 euro for each agricultural unemployment benefit application, from which Flai-Cgil Foggia earns more than 300.000 euros per year. However, this money, together with the one charged for the application of residence for people of no fixed abode (100 euros for each request), are mostly spent to reproduce the bureaucratic structure of the union rather than to finance the collective organization of migrant farmworkers and their revindications. This way of operating recalls' Francesco Caruso (2015:155) definition of "cartel unionism" as a type of unionism only focused on the safeguard of financial interests and privileges together with the manipulative use of the monopoly of workers' representation. Ultimately, the union does not appear to have rethought its approach both in terms of strategies of organizing and representation, if not only superficially. From an organizational and ideological point of view, Flai-Cgil remains largely centered on class and working sector as its main reference for the representation of workers, unable to fully grasp the differences existing between the 20$^{th}$ century farmworkers' struggles and the forms of organization of migrant racialized workers, experiencing multiple forms of oppression based not only on class but also on race, status and gender.

### 9.1.2 USB: between struggle and performativity

The story of USB (*Unione Sindacale di Base* – Base Tade Union Confederation) in the province of Foggia is tightly related to the failure of Flai-Cgil to effectively represent the claims of migrant farmworkers as well as to their inability in dealing with the existence of informal settlements and the forms of internal organization. Differently from Flai-Cgil, which has been rooted in the agricultural sector and in the province of Foggia since its inception, USB was founded in 2010 in Rome as the merging of two pre-existing unions, SdL (*Sindacato dei Lavoratori Intercategoriale*) and RdB (*Rappresentanti Sindacali di Base*). USB defines itself as "a struggle-based union, aimed at the attainment of new rights

and safeguards for workers, for a bargaining aimed at improving the living and working conditions of millions of workers rather than merely operating for harm reduction" (USB 2022). The union, similarly to other grassroots unions such as Si Cobas, contraposes its goals and strategies to those of the three confederate unions, Cgil, Cisl, Uil, that are perceived as too institutionalized and reproducing the interests of the ruling classes rather than those of workers. Until 2016, USB was not involved in the representation of migrant farmworkers and its delegates in the province of Foggia were mostly employed in the public sector. However, from 2016 the union started to be increasingly involved in the representation of migrant farmworkers. In 2016, under the leadership of the unionist of Ivorian origin Aboubakar Soumahoro, the union organized a demonstration in front of Basilicata Region aimed at raising awareness on the conditions of exploitation and marginalization suffered by West African migrant farmworkers, followed by a meeting between a delegation of farmworkers employed in the farms of Palazzo San Gervasio (Potenza), Region Basilicata and Venosa Municipality. In the same year, thanks to the relationship estanlished with farmworkers employed both in Basilicata and in Calabria (Rosarno), the union started organizing meetings and assemblies with West African farmworkers residing in Foggia province informal settlements, and in particular, in former Grand Ghetto.

The real turning point for USB presence in Foggia was the eviction of Grand Ghetto in March 2017, supported by most of the NGOs and unions, and especially by Cgil that was, as already highlighted, among the main proponents of the eviction and relocation of Ghetto's inhabitants to *Casa Sankara*. Following the eviction of Grand Ghetto, USB organized an assembly with all those who were unwilling to leave a place that, despite the precarious living conditions, still represented a home for many. The assembly decided to call a demonstration in Foggia on the 8th of March, in order to denounce the misrepresentation of Ghetto's inhabitants offered by institutions, unions and NGOs, as well as calling out the inhumane treatment suffered by the informal settlement inhabitants following the eviction, with the cutting off of water supplies. From that moment on, USB became the reference point for the inhabitants of Grand Ghetto who refused to be transferred to *Casa Sankara* and *L'Arena* (another regional structure inaugurated in San Severo following Grand Ghetto eviction). The unwillingness of a portion of Grand Ghetto inhabitants to transfer to other structures was explained by Flai-Cgil and other organizations as an imposition of *caporali*, who according to them, prevented people from entering the buses directed to *Casa Sankara* and *L'Arena*. However, as explored in chapter five, informal settlements, despite the

precarious living conditions, also represent places of self-determination where migrant farmworkers can live with higher degrees of autonomy if compared to governmental structures, such as *Casa Sankara*.

USB was able to fill a void left by both NGOs and unions following Grand Ghetto eviction, being able to gain Ghetto inhabitants' trust after the delusion and betrayal of seeing NGOs and unions who they thought being on their side, such as Cgil, supporting the eviction. Indeed, as USB claimed in a press release issued on the 3rd of March 2017, "carrying out the eviction of Rignano camp without involving workers who inhabit it was an act of institutional arrogance that cannot be accepted" (USB 2017). USB was able to fill that void thanks to a different understanding of the role of unions in the context of the struggle of marginalized and precarious social groups, sedimented during years of practice alongside grassroot social movements as well as thanks to the leadership of Aboubakar Soumahoro.
USB trajectory had, since its inception, been related to the claims of grassroots social movements, such as the struggle for housing rights, the struggle of undocumented migrants (*Coalitions International de Sans Papiers*), the struggle for land rights (*La Via Campesina*), etc. In this sense, it was ideologically prepared to support to struggle of Ghetto's inhabitants against the eviction, even though it wasn't specifically articulated as a labor struggle. However, thanks to the leadership of Soumahoro, USB did not only fill a void in strategical and political terms, but also in terms of representation. Indeed, as we have previously highlighted, other major unions operating in the area were only service providers and Flai-Cgil was made only of white Italian unionist who had nothing to share with racialized West African migrant farmworkers living in rural informal settlements and working under severe conditions of exploitation. On the other hand, Soumahoro was not only original from Ivory Coast, and thus very close from a socio-cultural point of view to then inhabitants of Grand Ghetto who were mostly from Mali, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast, but had also gone through a very similar life experiences. Indeed, arrived in Italy in the late 1990's, Soumahoro was initially employed as a day laborer near Villa Literno, experiencing conditions of exploitation and segregation. In the following years, he participated to various grassroot movements in Italy and at the European level, being among the founders of the *"Coalition Internationale des Sans-Papiers et Migrants" (*International coalition of sans-papiers and migrants) in 2011. The Coalition, of which Soumahoro was the Italian representative, was created as a Euro-African platform aimed at claiming the right of free movement and circulation for every human being, regardless of their nationality, race, origin, etc. Soumahoro joined USB in 2007 and was since then appointed to organizing workers and

migrants for the right to work, to free movement, for residency permits and against racism. (Soumahoro 2019)

The intersection between exploitation, racialization, illegalization and ghettoization represented a central element of Soumahoro's discourse when analyzing not only the struggle of migrant farmworkers living in Italy's rural informal settlements, but more broadly the structure of Italian society. Thanks to his previous experience as part of the *sans-papiers* movement, Soumahoro was able to borrow techniques of struggles not belonging to the standard repertoire of unions, such as the occupation of churches, as it happened with the occupation of Foggia Cathedral on the 10th of October 2017. Between 2017 and 2019, the union gained enormous support as a representative of migrant farmworkers' claims. Following the shooting of Soumaila Sacko in San Ferdinando (Calabria Region) on the 2nd of June 2018, taking place in an increasingly tense atmosphere characterized by multiple racist attacks, as already explored in chapter five, Soumahoro became increasingly popular and considered as a reference point for the Italian left. In an interview at the program Propaganda Live, on the 8th of June 2018, the unionist offered a rich analysis of the condition of exploitation, illegalization, ghettoization and racialization suffered by migrant farmworkers.

> "We are living in a society characterized on the one hand by racialization, racialization through labor exploitation, racialization through cultural exploitation, that is, those who are different are inferior, the migrant represents precariousness, poverty, marginality. These equations are the result of a way of thinking that express itself through laws, approved by the Parliament, such as the Bossi-Fini law. So, this normative framework has implications in defining our contemporary culture […] If we look at those images [of migrant farmworkers], we think at migrants, as a type of human sub-species, the result of a politics of dehumanization […] But those are workers, we don't need to hear <<the fun is over>>, we never knew it. The Minister of Labor must take a step to counter exploitation and *caporalato*, because we hear talking about increasing controls and, at the same time, we see labor inspectors disappearing. Let's start talking about this supply chain, about labor conditions, about farmworkers, not only migrants, but farmworkers as such, independently from the color of their skin […] In these years, we have seen the consequences of those policies in places like Calabria that have favored an impoverishment and looting. From the other point of view, if we look at the subject of migration, we realize that there is a culture accompanying these norms. It is the culture of ghettoization, both from a normative and a social point of view. You can see laws such as Bossi-Fini, Turco Napolitano, the common element among those is the issue of vulnerability, the fact of blackmailing the migrant, transforming him into the problem of society. Because if we cannot make ends meet, if youths are studying but they do not find any employment, the cause of all of this is migrants, so there is this leitmotif, this culture of persecution of those who are different. So, if you ask me what is the left? On the subject of migration, the left and the right have had the same policies. On the subject of wealth redistribution, they also implemented the

> same policies. The left does not exist. It must be rebuilt starting from the social contradictions existing in our society. Bringing together pieces of society that should not be at war with each other, but should rather complement each other in light of their common needs. From suburbs to rural areas, from the center to those margins that, until a unionist, a worker, is shot dead, are unknown. Those places have been existing for years, but we only became aware of them now. Until those conditions of exploitation and oppression will be existing, you will find us in the countryside. […] We are organizing two demonstrations. On the 16th of June there will be a big demonstration in Rome, on the subject of inequalities, there will be delegations from farmworkers and unemployed. And on the 23rd of June there will also be a demonstration in Calabria to demand "Equal work, equal pay" and "Truth and Justice for Soumaila Sacko" […] We need active solidarity, we don't need heroes, we no more need people shot dead like Soumaila, because it is time to overcome those conditions of ghettoization legitimized and institutionalized by the State. (*author's translation from Italian*, A. Soumahoro, Propaganda live 2018).

In this interview, Soumahoro offered a lucid analysis of the dynamics that ultimately caused the death of Soumaila Sacko, as well as the continuing ghettoization and exploitation of migrant farmworkers, highlighting the intersection between immigration normative framework, social and labor policies, as well as forms of racialization and marginalization. The Italian left was particularly impressed by Soumahoro in that he embodied the exact opposite of the Minister Matteo Salvini, who had just taken office the day before the killing of Sacko. Soumahoro was considered as a representative of the most discriminated and scapegoated social group in Italy at that moment, that of African migrants racialized as Black, but he also amazed the public thanks to his fluent Italian, eloquent and well-educated way of speaking that differed from the stereotypical racist representation of Black African in the context of Italian media. At the same time, he was able to bring together different issues and struggles, referring at the same time to leading figures in the context of Italian unionism - such as Giuseppe Di Vittorio, the founder of Cgil and one of the historically leading figures of farmworkers' struggle – as well as to African revolutionaries, such as Thomas Sankara. Further consolidating his rise in the Italian political panorama, one of the most prominent Italian left-wing magazines, *L'Espresso*, dedicated him their front cover in of their issue in June 2018, contraposing his picture to that of Salvini, and taking the two as emblematic of two opposite ways of being in the world, under the title "Men and Not Men".

*Figure 41 L'Espresso front-cover with Soumahoro and Salvini, June 2018.*

In the following days and months, USB organized multiple demonstrations both at the national level and in Foggia. Following the two car accidents in which 16 people lost their lives while returning back from work, on the 8th of August 2018, USB launched "the march of red caps" a demonstration from Grand Ghetto to Foggia, where hundreds of people marched under the sun to the cry of "No more slaves". On the 15th of December 2018, USB organized a demonstration in Rome under the slogan of "Get up, Stand Up" from the title of the famous Bob Marley's song. Despite Soumahoro's ability at organizing demonstration and gathering support, at this moment USB was unable to satisfy concrete requests of migrant farmworkers with regard to their residency permits and access to social benefits. As reported by members of the union, and as I could acknowledge my-self thanks to my activity of legal support in collaboration with USB starting from 2021, people submitted their papers to the organization, whether they needed a support for the renewal of a residency permit or apply for a new asylum request, but never received a response. According to Francesco Caruso, a member of USB agricultural labor coordination, Soumahoro gathered hundreds of papers during his visits in the informal settlements only to pack them or throw them at the first occasion. Nevertheless, the popularity of Soumahoro continued to increase, while USB didn't inhibit the centralization of the power and visibility on his figure.

Unions and NGOs from the province of Foggia started accusing USB of adopting a monopolizing approach, according to which no one except from their members was allowed to enter Grand Ghetto, were the union was particularly strong. Starting from 2019, various organization were prevented from fully operating in Torretta Antonacci. At the same time, USB, recalling Grand Ghetto eviction, denounced the speculation on the part of unions and NGOs on the issue of migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements, defining it as a lucrative business. In addition to that, USB was accused on relying on *caporali* in order to gain support inside the informal settlement, as well as in order to be able to effectively organize demonstrations with full participation of informal settlements' inhabitants. As a matter of fact, USB relied on and strengthened internal forms of self-organization particularly present in former Grand Ghetto following 2017 eviction. These structures, aimed at organizing the functioning of the informal settlement, also included among their members labor intermediaries. Hence, while the accusation regarding the relationship between USB and *caporali* was to a certain extent true, it was the very conceptualization and representation attributed to the figure of *caporali* by those accusing and by USB that differed. Indeed, as we have already explored in previous chapters, mainstream narratives tend reproducing a representation of *caporali* as the evil par excellence, in a Manichean representation of reality contraposing legality and illegality. In the province of Foggia *Casa Sankara* and the union Cgil have been among the main proponents of this narrative, that in more than one instance, has favored the misrepresentation of *caporali* as members of criminal organizations and of informal settlements as hubs of criminality. However, the structure of power internal to informal settlements is much more complex than this and has undergone considerable changes in the past few years, with *caporali* increasingly losing their power thanks to the workforce shortage experienced by the province of Foggia following Covid-19 pandemic, the increasing autonomy of workers following the stantialization of informal settlements as well as due to the increasing risk of being arrested. Nonetheless, the reliance of USB on few figures situated at the vertex of informal settlements' power structure has certainly affected their ability to effectively represent and organize racialized migrant workers living in informal settlement. For one thing, relying on these figures prevented the organization of mobilization and strikes specifically focused on labor conditions directed against employers, in that labor intermediaries were not willing to compromise their relationship with employers. On the other hand, relying on few apical figures whose power was increasingly strengthened thanks to the collaboration with USB,

prevented the union from implementing effective mechanism of representation of racialized migrant workers living within informal settlements.

Following the breakout of Covid-19 pandemic, Soumahoro organized a crowdfunding under the title "We bring food on your table, but we are hungry". The presentation text read:

> "We are Paola, Abdul, Michele, Mamy, Patrizia, and many other invisible farmworkers, forgotten diggers and derelict pickers of the fruits and vegetable you find on your tables. Our sweat is one of the ingredients of your daily diet. Every morning, we wake up, we break our backs for the entire day, and we come back in the night to sleep in our hovels, our shacks or abandoned farmhouse […] If we don't go work, we wouldn't be able to feed so many people, such as doctors and nurses in the trench. We work without gloves, masks and without respecting distancing […] It is for these reasons that today we launch a call so that you can offer us a donation that will enable us to bring food and rights on our tables as well." (*author's translation from Italian*, Campagna Braccianti 2020)

The crowdfunding obtained wide resonance and was funded for a total of 225.000 euros. Nevertheless, the funds weren't channeled through USB, but Soumahoro created a new association under the name of "*Lega Braccianti*" (Farmworkers League) depositing the money on the association account. On the 21st of May 2020, Soumahoro and USB organized a demonstration in Torretta Antonacci and Foggia, under the name of "Strike of the invisibles" to raise awareness on the working conditions of farmworkers during the pandemic.

*Figure 42 Strike of the invisibles. Torretta Antonacci, 21st May 2020. Source: photo by the author.*

At the end of July 2020, following multiple frictions between USB and Soumahoro, the unionist abandoned USB, simultaneously launching the new association "Lega Braccianti". USB issued a press release stating that the decision did not come unexpected, in that "since a while his participation to collective decision-making processes had waned, and his commitment had been increasingly manifested itself in other ways" (USB 2020). The press release went on by saying that despite the sadness for his departure, USB would have continued to organize farmworkers and carry on the work started by Soumahoro. Finally, the wished him good luck.

Despite the apparently peaceful separation, in the first years following the departure of Soumahoro USB ability to organize farmworkers in the province of Foggia as well as in other parts of Italy was dramatically affected.

Indeed, in the province of Foggia, both in the settlement of Torretta Antonacci and in Borgo Mezzanone, the referents of USB initially followed Soumahoro to Lega Braccianti, thus leaving the union with low support among the leaders of the settlements. Following this rupture, in few instances USB Italian white unionists experienced from *Lega Braccianti* members the same degree of obstructionism that other NGOs and unions, such as Cgil, had experienced in previous years. In the first months of 2021, USB unionists were prevented from operating by *Lega Braccianti* members in more than one instance. However, the unionists were still recognized by a part of Torretta Antonacci informal settlement as their comrades, in light of the support obtained in the previous years. As a consequence, while Soumahoro pushed for their expulsion from the settlement, other members of Torretta Antonacci internal organization preferred avoiding direct confrontation. The breaking point took place when a member of *Lega Braccianti* threatened USB unionist while they were supporting Torretta Antonacci inhabitants to apply for the emergency income (*Reddito di Emergenza*) approved by the government to help economically disadvantaged social strata affected by Covid-19 pandemic.

As Francesco Caruso, member of *USB Coordinamento Lavoro Agricolo* (USB Farm labor Coordination), recalls:

> "We were there, in the wintertime, receiving applications for *Reddito di emergenza*. Following Abou departure from USB, we had experienced increasing difficulties in operating in Torretta. However, we went on, because we knew that people needed our support and Abou was just showing up but not really solving people's problems. One day, Ousmane came to us saying that we should leave, that we weren't anymore welcome there. There were hundreds of people queuing in front of us, waiting for their turn to apply for the bonus. However, we said that if we were not welcome, we would have left. So, we took

> our things and went home. The following day, another member of the City Council, as I call the system of self-organization and self-government of Torretta, called us, saying that they were very sorry for what had happened the previous day, and that we were welcome in Torretta. We went there and Ali was forced to ask us pardon in front of everyone" (*author's translation from Italian*, Int. with F. Caruso, USB Lavoro Agricolo, Nov. 2022).

Following this episode, there were increasing frictions between those sided with *Lega Braccianti* and those willing to avoid direct confrontation with USB.

Nevertheless, in the following years, one after another, those who sided with *Lega Braccianti* returned to USB, when they understood that Soumahoro's management of the economic resources gathered through the various crowdfunding campaigns was opaque and that he was likely using them as a stepping-stone towards a larger involvement in politics.

In addition to that, in November 2021 the members of Torretta "city council" created their own association, under the name of "*Terra e Libertà*", further explored in the last part of the chapter, and started offering legal support to the settlements' inhabitants. This allowed them to gain further recognition among settlements' inhabitants who, after years of broken promises, while fighting for collective solutions, were also able to solve their individual problems.

Nevertheless, following the departure of Soumahoro and the fracture that it generated within USB stronghold, the union was unable to mobilize a number of people comparable to those of the period 2017-2019. At the same time, if during the leadership of Soumahoro the union was characterized by a high level of performativity and a limited capacity of obtaining concrete results, following his departure and the partnership with the newly created association *Terra e Libertà* the union was able to achieve various achievements, such as the civil registration of people of no fixed abode in Torretta Antonacci, further explored in the last part of the chapter. In May 2023, the union launched a campaign aimed at the occupation of abandoned lands, starting from a piece of land adjacent to Torretta Antonacci informal settlement.

USB continued to organize and represent migrant farmworkers both in Foggia and elsewhere by giving priority to forms of self-organization and allowing racialized migrants workers to speak for themselves, both in the context of public demonstration as well as in the context of the union's general meetings. In these contexts, USB delegates have been able to stress the intertwining between the functioning of racism, the exploitation of migrant labor as well as the neocolonial politics tormenting the African continent. In addition to that, USB created a coordination between different sectors in their confederate organization, dedicated

to workers employed in the context of precarious labor relations, named SLANG (*Sindacato Lavori di Nuova Generazione* – New Generation Labor Union s), to which also farmworkers belong. In this way, the union was able to overcome the idea according to which workers' organization should be centered on the employment sector rather than the nature of employment relations and position of workers within the broader society.

*Figure 43 USB delegate from Torretta Antonacci at a meeting of SLANG -USB in Rome, October 2022. Source: photo by the author.*

USB continued promoting an understanding of unionism closer to the model of "social movement unionism", characterized by "horizontal organization, building of large coalitions, participation of vulnerable subject, grassroots activism, direct action and anti-bureaucratism" (Waterman 1993; Caruso 2016:278). Compared to the highly institutionalized Cgil, aimed at the reproduction of its bureaucratic apparatus, USB was able in the years to maintain a struggle-oriented attitude, continuously reporting on the malfunctioning of Foggia public offices, through demonstrations and press releases, as already mentioned in chapter seven and further explored in the next paragraphs. However, for one thing, the lack of a strong and specialized structure has inhibited USB from effectively supporting migrant workers providing them with all the required services. For another thing, the reliance on few leading figures in Torretta Antonacci as well as the exclusive focus on this informal settlement in the entire Foggia province has strongly limited

USB ability to effectively organize and unionize racialized migrant farmworkers in the entire province, somehow becoming hostage of Torretta Antonacci's informal settlement power dynamics.

### 9.1.3 Campagne in Lotta: in the name of self-organization[78].

The last actor involved in the representation of migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia, despite not being a labor union, is the political collective *Campagne in Lotta* (Fields in Struggle). The collective was created in 2011, following Rosarno racist attacks and Nardò farmworkers' strike, in order to create a connection between migrant farmworkers employed in the Italian agro-industrial sector, and militants, with the aim of promoting processes of self-determination and self-organization (Campagne in Lotta, no date). As illustrated in the presentation published on their website:

> "Our experience started in August 2011 from the encounter of two paths. On the one hand, the Assembly of Rosarno African Workers (ALAR), created in Rome following the famous Rosarno Revolt (January 2010). On the other side, workers and those standing in solidarity participating to the equally well-known Nardò strike (August 2011). The struggle of Rosarno and Nardò have to a certain extent highlighted the harshness of living and working conditions to which farmworkers have been subjected, but also their readiness to struggle. The network was therefore created as a tool to break their isolation, support their revindication to self-determination and enact concrete forms of solidarity on different levels, from the juridical one, to that of exchange of information and knowledges, from sociability to political discussion. Nowadays, the network "*Campagne in Lotta*" is made of precarious, foreigners and Italian workers, unemployed, individuals and collectives. In the years, we have been able to build and practice interventions in various areas, especially in Capitanata (Foggia Province) and Piana di Gioia Tauro (Reggio Calabria Province), places well known for the production of tomatoes and citruses respectively. […] The quasi-total absence of rights for waged workers is accompanied by an extreme social and housing precariousness (favored by immigration laws and other administrative mechanisms of differentiation) favoring the exploitation of reproductive labor. As it often happens, women are those taking care of the satisfaction of workers' primary needs, upon payment, from cooking to sex work, in the large shantytowns as in the abandoned farmhouses and in the urban areas. At the same time, women employed as farmworkers (mostly from Romania and Bulgaria), are forced to experience sexual harassment from their employers, being thus subjected to a double, brutal form of exploitation.
> In this context, institutions and NGOs are committed to the containment, control and commodification of the existential precariousness of some migrant workers, especially those coming from Sub-Sahran Africa. Since decades this endemic marginality is managed as an 'emergency' through the establishment

[78] The analysis of *Campagne in Lotta* work and ideology did not include any interview to their active members in that the group, while contacted, was not available to release interviews.

> of camps and tent camps, which have had as the only consequence its endless reproduction while at the same time favoring the expenditure of public funds.
>
> At the same time, the spectacularization operated by the military-humanitarian machine of "black ghettoes" emergency hides the much more significant mass of Eastern European workers, who every year migrate from their countries and are subjected to equally dramatic working conditions, if not even worse. The producers' organization and large consortiums are those benefitting from this neo-colonial semi-carceral management of migrant farm labor, at the expenses of workers and small producers, ultimately favoring the profit of mass retailers.
>
> Given the multiplicity of the forms of exploitation, the practices of struggle and revindication that we have sustained in the past years have being concerned with the administrative level (residency permits, residences, right to healthcare), with housing (against camp tents and ghettoes and the isolation they produce, promoting structural solutions that oblige those who mostly benefit from the agro-industrial system to take care of the housing and transport of seasonal farmworkers) as well as the working one.
>
> Investigation as well as the building of collaboration and networks, at the local, national and international level, appear to be fundamental tools to reinforce and recompose struggles along global exploitation supply chains." (*author's translation from Italian*, Campagne in Lotta, no date).

As it is possible to understand from this presentation, *Campagne in Lotta* ideological standpoint takes into account the intersection of various forms of oppression, underscoring the intertwining between process of labor exploitation, illegalization, ghettoization and racialization, while at the same time stressing the role of reproductive labor mostly performed by women. In addition to that, the collective also denounces the speculation taking place at the expenses of migrant workers on the part of institutions and NGOs, which has favored a reproduction of the conditions of precariousness and marginalization through the establishment of institutionalized ghettoes. Ultimately, *Campagne in Lotta* calls for a diversification of strategies of organization aimed at struggling against various forms of oppression, promoting self-organization and enacting concrete forms of solidarity.

In the province of Foggia, starting from 2012, Campagne in Lotta has carried out various initiatives of support, raising awareness and solidarity in the context of the province's informal settlements. It was among the founders of Radio Ghetto, a project of co-participated radio created in the informal settlement of Grand Ghetto with the aim of spreading the voice of seasonal migrant farmworkers employed in the agricultural sector of the province, and particularly active during the summer season. Following the eviction of Grand Ghetto in 2017, the radio station moved to Borgo Mezzanone, where it was active until 2019. However, at a certain moment, the experience of Radio Ghetto and that of Campagne in Lotta took different paths. As a matter of fact, in the first years of the experience, the collective collaborated with various organizations operating in Foggia,

among which also the Scalabrinian missionary Padre Arcangelo Maira founder of "*Campo Io Ci Sto*", an initiative aimed at promoting the encounter between young Italians and migrant farmworkers living in the informal settlement.

Indeed, as various representative of NGOs active in the province of Foggia maintained, before 2015 there was a higher level of collaboration between them and *Campagne in Lotta,* as well as among various organization operating in Foggia. In the following years, both at the regional and at the national level, *Campagne in Lotta* collaborated with various actors (NGOs, social centers) and unions. However, in the coming years, as it will be further explored in following paragraphs, *Campagne in Lotta* became increasingly more isolated, interrupting forms of collaboration with most of the actors operating on the issue and adopting an explicitly hostile attitude against almost everyone not belonging to their group.

In the past few years, *Campagne in Lotta* has carried out numerous actions of revindication and mobilization, some of which have been characterized by a high level of strategical organization. For instance, on the 25th of August 2016, the collective organized a strike in front of two of the largest tomato processing facilities in Europe, *Princess Industrie Alimentari S.R.L* and *Futuragri S.C.A*., blocking the delivery of tomatoes for more than six hours. As the collective maintained in an English press release published on their website few days after the strike:

> "The blockade aimed to tie the companies to their responsibilities for the appalling living and working conditions to which farm workers are subjected, as a result of the low price that industries and supermarkets pay for raw produce. Many truck drivers also expressed their solidarity with the struggle given the working conditions imposed on them by the companies, which unlawfully force drivers to long waits outside the factories before they can offload their cargo, without any form of compensation for the time they spend in forced inactivity.
>
> This is the last episode in a mobilisation that continues since last September, and that demands both the regularisation of all workers without residency permits and the respect of collective labour agreements, blatantly violated in all their provisions. Workers should have the right to free transport and housing, whilst they work without any form of guarantee or insurance for salaries that amount to half the minimum wage, way above the established working hours. As a result, they live in shantytowns and abandoned farmhouses, often controlled by gangmasters, without electricity and water, in conditions which lead to the deterioration of their physical and psychological wellbeing. Yet, since 2008 the agro-industrial sector in Italy has increased its profits, and the tomato industry alone is worth more than 3 billion euros a year, with the district of Foggia farming just under half the total amount of processed tomatoes in the country, Italy being the lead producer of peeled tomatoes in the world. Princes alone processes around 40% of all tomato farmed in Foggia, which it exports all over the world (mainly to the UK). But tomato is not the sole crop farmed in the area. According to official data, which does not

> take into account the widespread employment of irregular labour, migrant farm workers in the district of Foggia amount to over 20,000." (Campagne in Lotta 2016).

The action was successful, allowing to raise awareness on the issue of labor exploitation in the agricultural sector, while at the same time securing a commitment to participate to a multilateral meeting by the National Association of Canning Industries (ANICAV – *Associazione Nazionale Industrie Conserviere*). Just a month before the strike, in July 2016, Campagne in Lotta had organized a simultaneous demonstration in Bari (Puglia) and San Ferdinando (Calabria) with the participation of multiple actors, such as Si Cobas, Solidaria Bari, Si Cobas, Diritti a Sud (Nardò), MFPR Slai Cobas (Taranto), Meticcia (Lecce), CSOA Sparrow (Cosenza), Sole di Calabria.

In the follwing years, the collective promoted multiple mobilizations, often simultaneoysly organized in Puglia (Foggia) and Calabria (San Ferdinando) and aimed at stressing the interconnection between citizenship rights, labor rights, racism and sexism, as well as the institutional responsibilities for the ghettoizaiton and exploittion of migrant farmworkers. Some of their more common slogans have been "Documents for everyone, repression for no one", "Stop Racism, Documents for everyone", "Houses for everyone, ghettoes for no one", "Documents, Houses, Contracts for everyone", "Immigration is not an offence, solidarity is not a crime." For instance, in September 2019, few weeks after the fall of the League-Five Start Movement government, the collective organized a demonstration in front of the Territorial Commission for the Recognition of International Protection situated in Borgo Mezzanone, next to the informal settlement, and later blocked the road passing through Borgo Mezzanone village to the cry of "No Blacks, No Tomatoes". On the 6th of December 2019, they simultaneously blocked Gioia Tauro port, one of the major industrial ports in Italy nearby San Ferdinando (Calabria), and the Grandapulia Shopping Mall, situated at the periphery of Foggia, to the cry of "You block our documents, we block your roads".

*Campagne in Lotta* actions of revindication and mobilization have certainly been oriented by an ideological perspective attentive to the fucntioning of racial capitalism, and they have been characterized by a strong level of political and strategical organization. However, the main issue with regard to the collective's ways of operating rests in their composition, in the use they make of the word "self-organization" as well as in the ways in which they operate beyond acts of mobilization. For one thing, while in the past *Campagne in Lotta* active members were both Italian/European white activists and racialized migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements, mainly from West Africa, in the past few years

the active core of the organization has increasingly been made of white Italian activists, not employed in agriculture and living in other parts of Italy and Europe. According to former members with whom I was able to exchange informal conversations, the collective underwent an increasing closure towards the outside as well as a verticalization of decisions within the collective, pushing those non-aligned to exit the collective.

*Figure 44 Campagne in Lotta simultaneous demonstration in Gioia Tauro and Foggia, 6th of December 2019. Source: Comitato Lavoratori delle Campagne Facebook page.*

In light of this composition, it is relevant to investigate the ways in which the collective define their actions as "self-organization" as well as the implications of the implementation of conflictual ways of demonstrating on the status of racialized migrant workers. The locution "self-organized struggle" (*lotta autorganizzata*) to define the mobilization they organize has been consistent in the past few years, while their coommunication makes large us of the personal pronoun "we" when referring to racialized migrant farmworkers. For instance, in the context of the demonstration organized simultaneously in Gioia Tauro and Foggia, on the 6th of December 2019, the organization wrote on their Faceboom page:

> "We are here to respond to the repression, eviction and laws that want us always more controlled and exploited. We do so simultaneously from the province of Foggia and from Gioia Tauro, two of the areas

> where many of us, farmworkers, live, and where too many of us died in the past few years, as a result of the violence of laws that want us segregated, poor and silenced.
> We are tired of saying it, we cannot anymore accept the business profiting on the containment and control of immigrants, through temporary housing units, tents and reception centers. We are workers and we have the right to live in houses, with a regular house contracts and residence!" (*author's translation from Italian*, Comitato Lavoratori delle Campagne, 2019b).

Similarly, following the demonstration organized oin Foggia n the 6th of May 2019, the collective wrote:

> "We were more than 700 hundreds this morning in the streets of Foggia, united and determined to say "Stop" to evictions, to racist propaganda at the expenses of immigrants and workers, to the lies and false promises of institutions, to the exploitation of masters who are still invisible. Today we didn't go to work to show that we can organize, that we are not scared and no one can fool us. Wihtout us, agriculture will collapse both in the province of Foggia as well as in the rest of Italy. As we say from 2015, to remove ghettoes we need documents, contracts, houses and transports for everyone, not bulldozers!" (*author's translation from Italian*, Comitato Lavoratori delle Campagne, 2019a)

As it is possible to highlight from these excerpts, which are proposed as examples of a great number of social media posts following the same narrative structure, in their social media communication the collective commonly impersonates the role of farmworkers and thus voice their claims and concerns starting from their position. While it is certainly positive to center the experience of migrant farmworkers, to do so by pretending that it is them is to a certain extent deceiving, in that conveyes the false idea that the leadership of the movement is among migrant farmworkers themeselves.

This connects to the other issue, that is, the one regarding the use of the defintion "self-organized" to define instances of protest and mobilization implemented by the collective. In more than one instance, the collective has referred to the struggle of migrant farmworkers organized in the province of Foggia under their leadership as a form of "self-organization", attributing at this locution a positive connotation, to be contraposed to other forms of organized struggles, such as those promoted by unions, seen as instrumental to promote their own interests. As a matter of fact, their role in the organization of instances of mobilization and protests is never made explicit, while the presence of *Campagne in Lotta* activists is always characterized as the presence of "people who stand in solidarity". As a consequence of this narrative it appears as if the mobilizations are effectively self-organized by migrant famrworkers and Campagne in Lotta just "stands in solidarity".

This idea is further reinforced by the account given by the collective regarding "USB appropriation of self-organized struggles". Indeed, the relationship between Campagne in Lotta and USB has been particuarly tense, mainly due to the fact that while Campagne in Lotta has tried since the inception to establish a collaboration with USB, these have ignored them and refused to collaborate. Following multiple frictions, in June 2019 the collective published a long piece on their website, under the title of "ghettoes, self-organized struggles and those who appropriate them: USB deeds and misdeeds".
In this statement, *Campagne in Lotta* maintains that USB has ignored the instances of self-organization carried out by African farmworkers living in the context of informal settlements despite their multiple attempts to establish a collaboration until 2016 when, under the leadership of Soumahoro, they decided to exploit them for their own visibility. The last straw was the organization of a demonstration, just a month after the one organized by *Campagne in Lotta* in May 2019. As they write:

> "On the 6th of May 2019, about 600 people, residents of the informal settlement next to the CARA of Borgo Mezzanone (FG), together with dozens of people standing in solidarity, organized a demostration to say no to the eviction without alternative that since months is taking place in the settlement. This farmworkers' strike, is just the last instance of a long series of self-organized mobilizations started from 2015. Since then, African farmworkers, and more broadly those living in the ghettoes, have been the one to organize everything, to bring their claims in front of Prefect and it is with them that institutions and farmers' organizations had to discuss.
>
> Unfortunately, as it already happened in the past, the lack of political sponsors not only has prevented their struggle to find the support it deserves, with the exception of people standing in solidarity, who have always been present. There are also some who tried their best to profit from this 'void', that nevertheless represents the only possibile and real form of struggle, one that sees as protagonists those directly affected. […] Having followed and supported the self-organized struggles of those living in ghettoes for years, this is the last straw." (*author's translation from Italian*, Campagne in Lotta 2019).

The analysis goes on listing all the instances in which USB has failed to acknowledge the pre-existence of a self-organized struggle of migrant farmworkers and has, on the contrary, "gained visibility at the expenses of struggles hardly put together by others" (*author's translation from Italian,* ibid.). The detailed accusations are certainly well founded in that, as already explored in previous paragraphs, the work of USB under the leadership of Soumahoro has certainly been oriented towards visibility and performativity of struggles, preventing collaboration with actor operating on the ground.

Nevertheless, what appears interesting to assess for the purpose of the present analysis is the defintion *Campagne in Lotta* gives of the struggles organized by them as "self-organized struggles". While, as already mentioned, the approach adopted by the collective has been remarkable in political and organizational terms, while at the same having allowed for racialized migrant farmworkers and informal settlements inhabitants to be the protagonists of the demonstration, that does not automatically imply that the demonstration and struggles are self-organized and the network members are solely standing in solidarity. As a matter of fact, and as it has been possible to highlight from the organization of other demonstrations taking place starting from 2019, *Campagne in Lotta* does not merely stand in support of self-organized struggles but rather plays a pivotal role in organizing them. As a consequence of that, the very defition of self-organized struggle can be questioned in light of the crucial role played by an external organization in promoting those mobilization. The fact that the collective is not a union, a political party and does not hold flags does not mean that it is not an external organization with a clear ideological structure and prefixed goals. In addition to that, the issue concerning the definition of those struggles as self-organized conflicts with the composition of the collective, formerly mentioned, made largely of White Italian/European activists being present in the province of Foggia for just few months in a year.

As a consequence of this, the militants who conceived the mobilizations, thus including struggle tecniques and eventual lack of authorizations, did so from a position of privilege, from a race, status and class point of view. In this sense, they are allowed to take the actions to a level of conflict that, while for them can be just another criminal proceeding on the list, to be somehow promoted as a a badge of honour, for a racialized migrant worker with an already precarious status can represent a point of no return.

For instance, following the demonstration taking place on the 6th of December 2019 simultaneously in Calabria and Puglia, two members of *Campagne in Lotta* were issued an expulsion order, bieng considered as the agitators and organizers of the port blockade.

> "Racism and paternalism add to the lies: indeed, in the offered riconstruction, not only the active and well-informed protagonism of migrants to the day of struggle is questioned, but people standing in solidarity, rushed to support the struggle, are defined as the sole promoters and dangerous instigators, highlighting the fact that they were Italian. It seems as if the watchdogs of power are unable or unwilling to understand that an African, a Black, does not need an Italian to speak up and make his voice heard, he doesn't need an association or a union to perform as their interpreter" (*author's translation from Italian*, Comitato lavoratori delle Campagne 2020).

However, despite denying their role as promoters and organizers of the demonstration, this is a fact proved by the lack of similar initiatives promoted by migrant farmworkers living in the context of informal settlements without their support. As a consequence, while acknowledging this does not deny the well-informed protagonism of those who participated, the refusal to ackowledge it implies an intention to distort the reality.
Ultimately, the nature of radical political choices does not appear to be the same when these are taken from a position of privilege or from a position of oppression. Hence, while for *Campagne in Lotta* members can be easy to maintain that "in order for actions of struggle to succeed, it is necessary to block the production and don't go to work" they are not in the position to say so, not sharing the experience of economic and social oppression lived by racialized migrant farmworkers. While their approach situates itself at the diametrical opposite of the patronizing attitude of unions such as Cgil, it nevertheless emerges from the same unaknowledged privileged position. Indeed, the members of *Campagne in Lotta* neither acknowledge their position of privilege nor develop an in-depth account regarding the extent to which they are entitled to ultimately define these struggles as "self-organized". Refusing to ackowledge the privilege from which they perform their actions, *Campagne in Lotta* fails to use it in a strategical way to safeguard those in a position of oppression.

Following 2019, their ability to mobilize settlements' inhabitants progressively vanished and the mobilization organized by the group counted fewer and fewer participants. In addition to that, the lack of active and stable members among informal settlements inhabitants is highlighted by the turn over of their spokerpersons and representatives in the context of mobilizations. In more than one case, in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone, where they have been active since 2018 following Ghetto's eviction of which they were accused of being complicit, inhabitants who participated to some of their initiatives later broke ties with them considering their actions ineffective to solve concrete problems, as well as due to an attitude that they didn't approve on the part of the collective members. Some people who had been part of their organization for various years maintained that, despite their commitment and struggle, they had never seen any improvement in the personal living and working condition. They often continued to be undocumented, without residence, unable to work with a regular contract and not being in the condition of leaving informal settlements. This raise the central issue at the core of unions and other organizations need to balance collective revindicative actions with individualized concrete support in order to be able to gain the trust of informal settlements' inhabitants who, experiencing a condition

of extreme precariousness and marginalization, can hardly support a movement without seeing any improvement in the material life conditions.

With regard to their attitude, more than one person complained about the ways in which they tended imposing on people their point of view, and excluding those who were not aligned. Following a demonstration organized by the collective on the 10th of August 2023 in Borgo Mezzanone, calling for the opening of temporary housing units situated next to the informal settlement, already planned for the 21st of August, a former member of the group stated:

> "I don't like them how they are doing. It is not fair to block the road and not allow anyone to pass. If someone wants to participate to the demonstration, they can go. But, if they don't want, I don't think you have to force them. Many people were angry at them this morning, because they wanted to go to work and they couldn't. That is why now you will not see many people at their demonstration. Because it is not in this way that things works. You have to convince people, not impose choices on them. Last year I participated to some of their initiatives, but now I see how they are doing and I don't like them" (*author's translation from Italian*, Conv. with Sheriff, Borgo Mezzanone, August 2023).

### 9.1.4. Looking for hegemony: the politics of representation of West African farmworkers living in informal settlements between fraternalism and coloniality

The former paragraphs have focused on developing an in-depth analysis of the ideology and actions of the three main actors operating in the province of Foggia for the representation of racialized migrant farmworkers, mostly of West African origin. As it has been possible to highlight from the proposed account, Flai-Cgil, USB and *Campagne in Lotta* have been in the past seven years attempting to gain the hegemony over the representation of the claims and revindications of West African farmworkers and settlements inhabitants living in the settlements of the province. The relationship between these three actors has been conflictual, characterized both by ideological, political and pragmatic differences. Cgil has been criticized by both USB and *Campagne in Lotta* for their institutionalized approach, too close to the interests of both institutions and employers' organizations, USB has been criticized by both Cgil and *Campagne in Lotta* for their attitude concerning the self-organization of informal settlements' inhabitants through the reliance of specific figures within informal settlements as well as for their ouster from Grand Ghetto. *Campagne in Lotta*, while not having been publicly accused or criticized by Cgil and USB, is perceived as being too sectarian in their approach towards migrant farmworkers' organization. Overall, the three organization, despite their differences, have often preferred

to criticize each other rather than looking at their work and strategy through a self-critical perspective, exploring their own fallacies and shortcomings.

The priority of the three organizations has been that of gaining of the hegemony of the representation of racialized migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements, also through the delegitimization of other organizations in farmworkers' eyes. This, rather than strengthening the self-organization and mobilization of migrant farmworkers in the area, has further fragmented it, by putting supporters of different organizations against the other. This happened in Torretta Antonacci between supporters of USB and *Lega Braccianti*, as already explored in previous paragraphs, but also among supporters of Cgil, USB and *Campagne in Lotta*. However, despite the rigid way in which union and political membership is perceived by those actors, migrant farmworkers have demonstrated in the past a high level of fluidity, whereby their commitment to one struggle rather than another did not lied on the organization promoting but rather on the issue for which the demonstration was called. As a consequence of that, I have seen in the past years, people participating to USB demonstrations and after going to Cgil to apply for unemployment benefits, as I have seen people participating both to a Cgil demonstration and to a *Campagne in Lotta* one just few weeks later. This does not underscore a change in their political orientation, but rather the willingness to pursue their objective independently from the organization advancing it. Yet, the various organizations rather than taking this fluidity as the starting point to establish a common platform, have rather preferred furthering extreme fragmentation and a conflictual approach among themselves.

The organization of demonstrations and mobilization has been a central way in which the various groups have attempted to show their hegemony over the representation of racialized migrant farmworkers. While in the case of unions, such as Cgil and USB, this has been expressed also by filling the participants with flags, t-shirts, caps, etc., with the union symbol in order to mark their presence, the same has not happened for *Campagne in Lotta* that, as we have already seen, do not characterize their actions as even promoted by the collective, but rather as self-organized. Nevertheless, even though *Campagne in Lotta* do not mark their territory through symbols and flags, they still claim the hegemony by stating that the self-organized struggles which they have supported over the years represent the sole and only effective way of struggling against the oppression experienced by migrant farmworkers.

However, it is remarkable to stress that the attempt to gain the hegemony over farmworkers' representation has not stopped to the organization of demonstrations. In certain cases, it has even involved the ability of each organization to succeed in the repatriation of corpses to the countries of origins, following the countless instances of death to which racialized migrant farmworkers are subjected in the context of racial capitalism. As a consequence of this, the ability to effectively manage the repatriation of bodies has represented a tool used by these organization, and most specifically by Cgil and *Lega Braccianti* in order to gain consensus among farmworkers. With regard to Cgil, between from 2022 to 2023, the union has followed the repatriation of three bodies of Gambian nationals. The union has used these instances to build consensus for the union among fellow nationals and friends of the deceased, thus instrumentalizing death for their own gain. In July 2022, following the death of Yusupha Joof in the informal settlement of Torretta Antonacci, the union arranged a prayer for the deceased next to their headquarters in Foggia, to which many participated, and later capitalizing on the high participation, organized a demonstration. Nevertheless, many of those who participated maintained that they were

*Figure 45 CGIL gathering and demonstration following the death of Yusupha Joof, August 2022. Source: photo by the author.*

unaware of the demonstration and that they had come just for the final farewell to their brother and friend. Furthermore, in January 2023, following the death of Ibrahima Sowe due to the inhalation of carbon dioxide, the union organized an assembly in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone, relying on the pre-existing platform of the Italian-African

Farmworkers Assocaition for its organization, while promoting the assembly as a Flai-Cgil delegates assembly, and further building on the consensus gained following the repatriation of the body to secure their presence in the informal settlement.

On the other hand, *Lega Braccianti* exploitation of the death of racialized migrant farmworkers and informal settlements' inhabitants has been mainly oriented to the obtainment of donations from the public through crowd funding campaigns.

These events show the ruthlessness of these organizations in capitalizing on every possibility in order to gain support, both in political and economic terms, regardless of the squalor of using the vulnerability to premature death of racialized migrant farmworkers to gain consensus.

In conclusion, we can maintain that with various degrees, the relationship between the actors involved in the representation of racialized migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements in the province of Foggia and racialized West African workers has been characterized at best by what Césaire defined as "fraternalism" and at worst by pure coloniality.

While some actors, such as Cgil, have clearly missed to understand or represent the condition of oppression of racialized migrant farmworkers, not solely defined on the basis of class, USB and *Campagne in Lotta* have grasped the multiplicity of the form of oppression experienced by racialized migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia. Nevertheless, in different ways, also these actors have projected on West African workers their expectations and ideologies, being unable to effectively represent them and their claims.

It appears useful to recall the statement made by Césaire in his 1956 letter of resignation from the French Communist party, which, despite having been voiced more than seventy years ago, is still relevant and could represent a point of reflection for those actors involved in the representation of racialized migrant workers.

> "One fact that is paramount in my eyes is this: we, men of color, at this precise moment in our historical evolution, have come to grasp, in our consciousness, the full breadth of our singularity, and are ready to assume on all levels and in all areas the responsibilities that flow from this coming to consciousness. […] In any case, it is clear that our struggle — the struggle of colonial peoples against colonialism, the struggle of peoples of color against racism— is more complex, or better yet, of a completely different nature than the fight of the French worker against French capitalism, and it cannot in any way be considered a part, a fragment, of that struggle. […] In the case of Stalin and those of his sect, it is perhaps not paternalism that is at stake. It is, however, definitely something that resembles it so closely as to be mistaken for it. Let us invent a word for it: "fraternalism." For we are indeed dealing with a brother, a big brother who, full of his own superiority and sure of his experience, takes you by the hand

(alas, sometimes roughly) in order to lead you along the path to where he knows Reason and Progress can be found. […] what I want is that Marxism and communism be placed in the service of black peoples, and not black peoples in the service of Marxism and communism […] I say that there will never be an African, Malagasy, or Caribbean communism because the French Communist Party conceives of its duties toward colonized peoples in terms of a position of authority to fill, and even the anticolonialism of French communists still bears the marks of the colonialism it is fighting. […] We are offered solidarity with the French people; with the French proletariat and, by means of communism, with the proletariats of the world. I do not reject these solidarities. But I do not want to erect solidarities in metaphysics. There are no allies by divine right. There are allies imposed upon us by place, time, and the nature of things. And if alliance with the French proletariat is exclusive; if it tends to make us forget or resist other alliances which are necessary and natural, legitimate and fertile; if communism destroys our most invigorating friendships — the friendship uniting us with the rest of the Caribbean, the friendship uniting us with Africa — then I say communism has done us a disservice in making us exchange living fraternity for what risks appearing to be the coldest of cold abstractions […] In short, we shall henceforth consider it our duty to combine our efforts with those of all men with a passion for justice and truth, in order to build organizations susceptible of honestly and effectively helping black peoples in their struggle for today and for tomorrow: the struggle for justice,
the struggle for culture, the struggle for dignity and freedom." (Césaire 2010 [1956]).

## 9.2 From victims to subjects. The mobilization and self-organization of West African Farmworkers in the Province of Foggia

In the past few years, West African farmworkers and inhabitants of informal settlements in the province of Foggia have implemented multiple forms of resistance against racial capitalism, both in the form of mobilization and protests, in the form of self-organization in the context of informal settlements as well as through the implementation of experimental projects of agriculture in Italy and in the countries of origin.

The first part of this subchapter will be dedicated to investigating more in depth the major claims brought forward by demonstrations organized between 2017-2023. In the second part, an analysis of the forms of self-organization and self-government carried out by West African workers living in the informal settlements of the province will be developed, looking at the ways in which these have struggled against the coloniality of assistance, while at the same time risking being co-opted by similar mechanism. The last paragraph will be dedicated to exploring those forms of self-organizations aimed at inverting the paradigm and reappropriating the means of production, through which racialized migrant farmworkers have attempted to transform themselves from farmworkers to farmers, both in Italy and in the countries of origins.

### 9.2.1 Mobilizing: an analysis of West African farmworkers mobilizations and protest in province of Foggia between 2017 and 2023

As explored in the previous paragraphs, in the past few years West African farmworkers and inhabitants of informal settlements in the province of Foggia have been protagonists of multiple instances of mobilization and protest. The fact that, in the majority of the cases, those initiatives were promoted by external organizations, such as Flai-Cgil, USB, *Campagne in Lotta* and *Lega Braccianti*, does not in any way diminish the relevance from a political point of view of the mobilization of racialized migrant farmworkers in the province. Indeed, as already highlighted in paragraph 9.1.3 when discussing the claim of *Campagne in Lotta* according to which maintaining that a demonstration was organized by the collective meant sustaining that Africans were not able to make their voices heard by themselves, these mobilizations have succeeded because racialized migrant workers have willingly and consciously participated to them, regardless of the organizers.

For the purpose of the present discussion, and in order to understand the dynamics of forms of mobilization, the following analysis will focus on exploring the main claims brought forward by the demonstrators, as well as highlighting tendencies in the participation, attempting to explain higher or lower rates of participation to mobilization experienced in different periods going from 2017 to 2023. Most of demonstrations organized between 2017 and 2023 in the province of Foggia have included a multiplicity of claims, connected both to the right to housing, the right of residence, as well as against racism and the right to a fair salary. While the organizers have often called the demonstrations on a specific issue, the participants have commonly highlighted the intersection between the various form of oppression they experience, often defining as a primary cause their juridical status as well as their racialization as "black Africans".

In the examined period of time, the demonstrations characterized by a higher level of participation have been those aimed at countering the eviction of informal settlements. Indeed, both in 2017, following Grand Ghetto eviction as well as in 2019, following multiple instances of eviction carried out in Borgo Mezzanone, hundreds of people participated to demonstrations, both self-organized, as in the case of 2$^{nd}$ of March 2017, as well as organized by other actors, such as *Campagne in Lotta* on the 6$^{th}$ of May 2019 and by USB on the 8$^{th}$ of March 2017 and on the 6$^{th}$ of June 2019. These demonstrations have been a reaction to acts of institutional violence, aimed at destroying the houses and goods of people without any prior interlocutions with inhabitants and no effective alternative solution. The anger and

despair of inhabitants of informal settlements following instances of eviction, compared to the praises of those acts by NGOs and unions, represents an unquestionable example of the lack of representativeness of those who claim to represent the interest of racialized migrant farmworkers and informal settlements' inhabitants. Nevertheless, while these demonstrations have been a reaction to evictions, they have also brought forward other claims, emphasizing the interconnection between the existence of informal settlements, the lack of valid residency permits as well as the exploitation experienced in the workplace and widespread racism.

*Figure 46 Campagne in Lotta and USB demonstration against Borgo Mezzanone eviction, 6th of May 2019 and 6th of June 2019. Source: Comitato Lavoratori delle Campagne Facebook Page and Aboubakar Soumahoro instagram page.*

Forms of resistance against eviction have not only manifested themselves in the form of demonstration but also in the form of confrontation with law enforcement agencies during evictions operation. For instance, on the 11th of July 2019, during the eviction of Borgo Mezzanone, the informal settlement inhabitants enacted various form of resistance, including physical confrontation with the police through the throwing of stones, as well as verbal confrontation and strategies of non-violent resistance aimed at using their bodies to inhibit the destruction of buildings. In particular, the higher level of tension was reached when bulldozers approached the toilets, and their destruction was saved thanks to the resistance of the informal settlements' inhabitants. Majority of NGOs and unions present

that day, apart from *Campagne in Lotta* activists, did not take any step in order to stop the eviction in support and solidarity with the inhabitants.

*Figure 47 Resistance of the inhabitants to the eviction in Borgo Mezzanone, 11th of July 2019. Source: Comitato dei Lavoratori delle Campagne Facebook page.*

As it can be highlighted from the narration of the episode in my fieldnotes from that time, settlements' inhabitants rightly explained the eviction in light of the racist policies of Italian government, while at the time stressing that even if "you treat us like animals, but you can't do without us".

> "On the morning of the 11th of July 2019 in the little village of Borgo Mezzanone, 15 kilometres from Foggia, everything was quiet. Yet, it was enough to drive few kilometres into the countryside until the informal settlement next to the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers to be immersed in a completely different atmosphere. Hundreds of policemen in riot gear had arrived early that morning to facilitate the destruction of a certain number of shacks located in the area adjacent to the centre. Few bulldozers were ready to start their action. In the first place, the inhabitants of the shacks meant to be demolished started taking out their stuff and dismantling the pieces which might have turned up useful to construct their new houses, not too far from where their previous ones had just been destroyed. In the meanwhile, groups of inhabitants were watching the operation and commenting among them, with anger and frustration. "Italians don't like blacks" echoed almost as a mantra in response to the destructive violence of bulldozers. "You treat us like animals, but you can't do without us" was another sentence stemming as a gloomy soundtrack of the bulldozers' demolition activities. When bulldozers approached toilet

services, less than ten toilets for more than a thousand people, desperation was palpable. Inhabitants' protests succeeded in bringing bulldozers away from toilets' building and towards other shacks.

Policemen and ghettoes' inhabitants shared the same space on the paved road of the former military airstrip around which the informal settlement developed in the last decade. Suddenly, dozens of people tried to oppose the destruction of a dark wooden shack with their vey bodily presence. Policemen's reaction was not long in coming. To the firing of tear gasses, some ghetto's inhabitants replied by throwing stones. After about five minutes of rioting, the atmosphere calmed down. The dark wooden shack was the last one to be hit by the digger's cold metal.

Policemen remained, monitoring the area until the removal operation was over. Opposite the area where, almost one hour before, the last demolition had just taken place few policemen were discussing with some inhabitants. They agreed with the uselessness and cruelty of destroying the only place where people could stay, without giving them any alternative solution. Yet, this was their job. So, regardless of their own opinion, they said, they had to obey. And the question on "where are all these people going to sleep tonight?" kept flowing, unanswered." (fieldnotes, July 2019)

The eviction taking place on July 2019 was the last episode of eviction in the province of Foggia. Nevertheless, the threat of eviction was used in multiple occasion by some actors, such as *Lega Braccianti* in Grand Ghetto, in order to mobilize informal settlements' inhabitants, being aware that it represented the highest concern and the central issue to favor mobilization. As a matter of fact, eviction represent the most serious threat to the very existence of informal settlements that are home to many who, despite precarious conditions, built their house there, crafting a space for their existence despite having been subjected to multiple mechanisms of expulsion from the Italian society.

Instances of mobilization and protest related to housing were also carried out by the inhabitants of Torretta Antonacci and Borgo Mezzanone informal settlements concerning the establishment, opening and management of the so-called "Regional Guesthouses" (*Foresterie Regionali*) made of temporary housing units.

In particular, in Torretta Antonacci, following a fire that destroyed all the settlement in December 2019, the inhabitants, with the support of USB, demanded Puglia Region the placement of temporary housing units, as it had already been done in *Casa Sankara* few months before. Following the installation of some tents, which were destroyed by the wind after few days, the Region, under the pressure of Foggia Prefecture, agreed to place one hundred temporary housing units. In the following years, the inhabitants of the temporary housing units and informal settlement participated to other instances of mobilization and protests concerning the management or opening of these structures. In February 2022, after six-months during which Torretta Antonacci Regional Guesthouse was left without a management, the inhabitants participated to a demonstration organized by the union USB,

demanding the immediate publication of the call for the management of the structure by Puglia Region.

*Figure 48 USB demonstration for the management of Torretta Antonacci, February 2022. Source: photo by the author.*

On the other hand, in Borgo Mezzanone, temporary housing units were placed by Puglia Region in an area adjacent to the reception center starting from 2021, which nevertheless remained closed until August 2023. In the summer of 2023, following various fire incidents taking place in the previous months destroying dozens of houses, the union Flai-Cgil first and the collective *Campagne in Lotta* later, organized a demonstration demanding the opening and allocation of the units, despite this had already been planned to start on the 21st of August, following the demolition of some old and unstable housing units. On the 1st of August 2023, Flai-Cgil organized a demonstration in front of Foggia prefecture demanding the opening and allocation of housing units, that saw the participation of about fifty inhabitants of the informal settlement. Flai-Cgil leaders with a delegation of few inhabitants had a meeting with the prefecture in the context of which they were reassured of the imminent opening of the housing units, which nevertheless were supposed to be allocated only to those living in the old housing units. The demonstrators, after hours of waiting the delegation to come out from the meeting, were quite disappointed of the poor results.

*Figure 49 Flai-Cgil demonstration for the opening Borgo Mezzanone temporary housing units, 1st of August 2023. Source: photo by the author.*

Building on this dissatisfaction, on the 10th of August 2023 *Campagne in Lotta* organized a demonstration in the area where the housing units were placed demanding their immediate opening by the authorities. About fifty people participated to the demonstration, which however did not succeed in opening the temporary housing units, which were instead opened on the 21st of August, as already planned.

*Figure 50 Campagne in Lotta demonstration for the opening of temporary housing units in Borgo Mezzanone, 10th of August 2023. Source: photo above Comitato Lavoratori delle Campagne, photo below courtesy of an inhabitant of Borgo Mezzanone.*

In addition to housing, other instances of mobilization and protests both self-organized and organized by various actors, have been concerned with the issue of housing and service provision to informal settlements. For instance, USB occupation of Foggia Cathedral on the 10th of October 2017 was aimed at restoring water furniture to the informal settlement of Grand Ghetto that, after the eviction, had seen the water supply cut off in order to force its inhabitants to abandon the area. The issue of water emerged again in 2023, when the water furniture in Borgo Mezzanone was subjected to cuts and reductions. In particular, the tanks filled by *AQP* were filled just few days a week, while the supply from water arriving from the reception center had been cut off. As a consequence, in December 2023, the collective *Campagne in Lotta*, together with a dozen of inhabitants of the settlement organized a protest in front of the reception center, obtaining a meeting with a referent of AQP who assured an increase in the filling of water tanks.

*Figure 51 The occupation of Foggia Cathedral in October 2017. Source: ANSA.*

In addition to that, in multiple instances informal settlements' inhabitants, as well as inhabitants of Regional temporary housing structures, have demonstrated against the cut of electricity. During the wintertime of 2019, 2020 and 2021, the inhabitants of Borgo Mezzanone organized protests in front of the reception center in order to call for the electricity furniture supplying the informal settlement to be re-established, following continuous cuts. In particular in the winter months between 2020 and 2021, the light was cut from the informal settlement for about a month, while the reception center continued to be served by electricity, making the living conditions of the settlement inhabitants

unbearable, given the extremely cold temperatures and the poor thermal insulation of shack houses. As a result of their mobilization, the central transformer was substituted by Enel (the Italian National company for electricity) and the electric furniture was partly restored. Nevertheless, during the wintertime the electricity furniture remains highly unstable in the informal settlement. Finally, as already mentioned in chapter 7.2.2, between March and May 2023 the inhabitants of *Casa Sankara* experienced a cut in the furniture of electricity following an electrical fault. On that occasion, *Casa Sankara* residents launched two self-organized protests, in March and May 2023, blocking for various hours the traffic on route S.S. 16, connecting Foggia to San Severo. Thanks to their mobilization the inhabitants were able to meet representatives of both the police as well as of Puglia Region, in order to voice their concerns and call for the reactivation of the furniture, which was eventually restored in June.

All these instances of mobilization and protest were aimed at reclaiming the satisfaction of basic needs, such as housing, water and electricity, highlighting that for migrant farmworkers living within informal settlements the precariousness of living conditions represents one of most crucial and most felt issues.

The issue of documents has undoubtedly been a crucial one that has characterized as a cross-cutting topic most of the instances of demonstrations and mobilization organized in the past five years in the province of Foggia. Indeed, also in the context of the demonstrations previously examined having as a subject housing and the satisfaction of basic needs, the issue of status was always pinpointed by participants as the central reason for which people were forced to live in those precarious conditions in the first place. While being voiced as a claim on every occasion of mobilization and protests, the issue of documents has also been the specific subject of some demonstrations. In particular, on the 2nd of September 2019, the collective *Campagne in Lotta* organized a demonstration in front of the Territorial Commission for the recognition of international protection demanding the immediate unblock of documents waiting for more than a year the issuance of the judgment necessary for their renewal. In February 2022*, Campagne in Lotta* organized a demonstration in front of Foggia Immigration office aimed at denouncing the emerging business around special protection requests. Another demonstration specifically organized on the subject of residency permits was that promoted by USB on the 21st of July 2023 in the context of the national movement “Not on Our Skin” launched following the approval of law 50/2023. In particular, the demonstration to which about thirty people participated, demanded the Immigration office to be the bearer of demonstrator’s demands

to the Ministry of the Interior, requesting the amendment of 1st June 2023 circular preventing the conversion of special protection into residency permit for working reasons.

*Figure 52 Not on our skin demonstration in front of Foggia Immigration Office, 21st of July 2023. Source: photo by the author.*

However, while the issue of residency permits remains the most felt issue and it is indicated by most West African farmworkers living in the context of informal settlements as the major cause at the heart of their oppression, mobilizations specifically organized on this subject have not been able to gain much support and participation in the past few years. This is likely related to two intersecting issues. First, following the "refugeezation of migration" migrants have increasingly perceived the gaining of a residency permit as an individual issue related to the ability of specific lawyers to succeed in winning their case. As a consequence of the individualization of the right to stay, as well as following the systematic failure of mobilizations aimed at claiming the regularization of migrant farmworkers to achieve tangible results, West African farmworkers living in the informal settlements of Foggia province have been increasingly discouraged with the effectiveness of these protests.

Similarly, the issue of labor conditions within the agricultural sector has been a cross-cutting issue, characterizing the claims of demonstrators in the context of most instances of mobilization. For instance, in the context of mobilizations against evictions, the demonstrators maintained that "we are here to work, and we are not going away" as

well as “we are workers, stop treating us like animals”. Similarly, in the context of the demonstration taking place in Borgo Mezzanone on the 10th of August 2023, some demonstrators highlighted that despite being central to the productive agro-industrial system of the area, they were not given a place to live nor a document with which to work. As matter of fact, in the past few years, following the strengthening of controls by law enforcement agencies, the issue of work has been increasingly related with that of residency permit, being the latter the precondition of the former. Nevertheless, despite exploitative labor conditions being a core issue voiced by migrant farmworkers in most of the demonstrations, very few have been specifically organized on this topic, bringing forward this claim. In particular, in addition to the strike organized by *Campagne in Lotta* on the 25th of August 2016 already explored in chapter 9.1.3, very few mobilizations were organized specifically demanding for an improvement on the side salaries and labor conditions. The two “strikes of invisibles” organized by Aboubakar Soumahoro in Foggia on the 21st of May 2020 and in Rome on the 18th of May 2021 can be counted among those. Indeed, even though they did not achieve any tangible result and they didn’t result in employers’ organizations signing any commitment, these strikes were organized around the issue of agricultural labor, also visually through the display of seasonal agricultural product harvested by farmworkers.

*Figure 53 Strike of the invisibles, 18th of May 2021. Source: Lega Braccianti Facebook page.*

Carried out in the context of Covid-19 pandemic, the strikes were aimed at stressing the invisibility in which farmworkers were forced to live, due to their migration status and housing conditions, despite having been considered as essential workers and therefore allowed to continue to work during the lockdown. In the context of these strikes, exploitative working conditions were voiced by the demonstrators, who highlighted the presence of exploitation also for those holding a regular contract, through the under-declaration of worked days. During the demonstration of the 18th of May 2021, Soumahoro, after voicing a series of requests related to the food supply chain, threatened that if no answer was going to be given to the demonstrators in the following days "this season will be characterized by strikes, strike and strikes. And then it will be the President Mario Draghi to go and hoe the ground" (fieldnotes 2021). Nevertheless, despite the threaten, no strike took place. As a matter of fact, despite the multiplicity of instances of mobilization and protest enacted by West African migrant farmworkers in the province of Foggia between 2017 and 2023, no strike of more than a day achieving an effective stop of the production was ever implemented.

Finally, the last issue that has been cross-cutting to various demonstrations as well as being the specific subject of some has been that of racism. Similarly to those of labor and documents, the issue of racism has been present in most of the instances of mobilization, being a central way of West African farmworkers to frame the oppression they experience. In particular, demonstrators have often voiced their indignation for the living and working conditions experienced by maintaining that "we are not animals, we are human beings". The refusal of being compared to animals hits back to the racist narrative associating Black African to animals, such as monkeys, as also explored in paragraph 9.1.1, as well as to the widespread belief that they would be characterized by extraordinary physical strength, allowing for the justification of their hyper exploitation. In addition to being a cross-cutting issue, in light of which also segregating and discriminating institutional policies are explained, the subject of racism was at the core of mobilizations taking place in July 2019 as well as in June 2022. Both demonstrations were organized as a reaction to the violent racist attacks at the expenses of West African workers living in the so-called *Casa Bianca*, an abandoned building at the periphery of Foggia where about 100 mostly Senegalese and Gambian workers live. On the 30th of July 2019, Flai-Cgil organized a "critical mass" aimed at condemning acts of racism and showing support to the workers attacked with stones while going to work with the bicycle, participate by a hundred people. On the 11th of June 2022, the collective *Campagne in*

*Lotta* organized a demonstration in the streets of Foggia to condemn violent attacks at the following a pattern similar to that of 2019. The demonstration was participated by few dozens of people.

*Figure 54 Flai-Cgil demostration against racism on the 31st of July 2019 (above) and Campagne in Lotta demonstration against racism on 11th of June 2022. Source: photo above by the author, photo below from Comitato Lavoratori delle Campagne Facebook page.*

### 9.2.2 From victims to subjects: organizing for self-determination against the coloniality of assistance

In the previous paragraphs we have offered an analysis of the forms of mobilization and protest carried out by West African migrant farmworkers and informal settlements' inhabitants between 2017 and 2023. As it has been maintained, while most of the instances of mobilization have been organized by other actors (Cgil, USB, *Lega Braccianti, Campagne in Lotta*), racialized migrant farmworkers have actively participated and brought forward their claims. While instances of mobilization have also taken place as the result of self-organization, such as in the case of Grand Ghetto eviction as well as in the context of *Casa Sankara*, also in the case of mobilization organized by third parties, forms of self-organization and self-government present in the context of informal settlements have often allowed high rates of participation.

In the following paragraphs, we will develop an analysis of the different forms and degrees of self-organization and self-government of the two largest informal settlements of Foggia Province, highlighting the ways in which these has affected the ability of informal settlements inhabitants to advance their claims and make their voices heard by institutions. The analysis will then focus more specifically on the informal settlement of Torretta Antonacci, whose inhabitants were able to develop more structured and effective forms of self-government favoring processes of self-determination and institutional recognition, being able to challenge the coloniality of assistance.

As already explored in chapter six, the two largest informal settlements of the province of Foggia, Borgo Mezzanone and Torretta Antonacci, inhabited mostly by West African migrant farmworkers, configure themselves as small cities, characterized by internal rules and ways of living together. The challenges faced by the actors above illustrated in the organization of migrant farmworkers living informal settlements also emerges as a consequence of the overlapping of relations between working places and living places. All the above illustrated actors focused on the organization of migrant workers starting from their living places, and thus often clashed with pre-existing forms of internal self-organization and self-government. As a matter of fact, informal settlements are characterized by peculiar structures of power, within which those occupying positions as representatives are also the same involved in the management and intermediation of labor force. However, contrarily to what assumed by media and some academic reports defining the issue as a matter of "infiltration of organized crime within informal settlements" the fact that labor intermediaries are also often among spokespersons or representatives within informal settlements descends from their position as those who are more settled within Italian society, more capable of speaking the language as well as making their way through the complex Italian bureaucracy.

In Torretta Antonacci, following the eviction of Grand Ghetto, perceived as an external attack to very existence of the settlement, the internal organization was strengthened, with the creation of an assembly representing most of the communities living within the settlement.

This assembly, that the USB delegate Francesco Caruso describes as "Torretta city council" was aimed to solve both internal controversies as well as taking collective decisions in relation to the requests of external actors. The "council" used to gather about once a week in order to discuss major issues. In addition to that, if some settlements' inhabitants had a dispute, they could bring the case to the council, also called by the settlements' inhabitants

as “Ghetto police” to solve the matter. According to Caruso, before the fracture taking place as the result of Soumahoro exit from USB and creation of Lega Braccianti, every decision concerning Torretta Antonacci had to be discussed in the context of the assembly and “no matter how much different members with different positions could fight during the assembly, at the end the council was supposed to go out with a unified position that was to be implemented as the position of the Ghetto” (*author’s translation from Italian*, Int. with Caruso, USB Lavoro Agricolo). However, following the fracture between USB and Lega Braccianti, the unity of the “city council” was endangered and the two conflicting factions stop discussing collectively all the matters concerning Ghetto.

This system of self-organization and self-government specifically characterizing Torretta Antonacci has been defined by some members of NGOs and unions as a “form of power that has little to do with grassroots revindications” (Int. with A. Verona, INTERSOS) or as a “form of power that I wouldn’t define neither as self-organization nor as self-government” (*author’s translation from Italian*, Int. with R. Falcone, Flai-Cgil, Nov. 2022), following threats received by members of those organization to stop operating in the informal settlement. There is no doubt that members of Torretta Antonacci self-government entity have in certain instances adopted techniques of confrontation with regard to external actors, characterized by rough manners, if not at the edge of violence. However, those have coexisted with forms of self-organization and self-government aimed at improving the living conditions in Torretta Antonacci, both through the pressure on Puglia Region for the placement of temporary housing units, through the refusal of separation between formal and informal settlement, through the fight carried out against San Severo municipality for the civil registration of Torretta Antonacci inhabitants, as well as through their contact with local police commissioner and other authorities in case of emergency. As a matter of fact, thanks to this form of self-government, Torretta Antonacci was able to critically improve its recognition from being an out-law place to become increasingly recognized by institutions.

In November 2021, those who joined again USB following the split decided to create a new association, under the name of *Terra e Libertà* (Land and Freedom).

This association is uniquely made of inhabitants of Torretta Antonacci informal settlement and can therefore be defined without any doubt as a form of self-organization. The association legal headquarter is in Torretta Antonacci, and this represents by itself a major element in favoring the formal recognition of the informal settlement by Italian authorities. One of the first action of the association was the opening of a mailbox in San Severo Post Office. Indeed, despite the Regional Guest House having been created for more than a year,

mail was not delivered due to the "inability" of postal workers to locate the settlement. As a consequence, the residents of the Regional Guest House, despite being registered, were unable to receive mails. Therefore, the opening of the letter box was a major step in favoring the visibilization of Torretta Antonacci inhabitants. Following the opening of the mailbox, the association carried out a struggle against San Severo city Council in order for them to recognize the address of the association as valid for the purpose of the registration of people of no fixed abode. In a first moment, following an interlocution with the assessor of social policies, it was established that the association was not eligible to present those requests autonomously, and that these should have been sent through the intermediation of Caritas San Severo. However, after months of delays caused by the complexity of the procedure, the association finally succeeded to make their request recognized by the municipality without any intermediary. However, the fight with municipality did not end there, in that, as already explored in chapter 7.1.2, San Severo Municipality implemented a series of illegitimate practices aimed at preventing the civil registration of Torretta Antonacci settlement inhabitants. It is only thanks to the relentless pressure operated by the association on the municipality that major results had been achieved, not only in terms of respect of national legislation, such with the civil registration of holders of "*cedolino*", but also in the approach of San Severo Municipality with regard to the informal settlement and Regional Guesthouse inhabitants.

In the past few years, the association *Terra e Libertà* also struggled against what we have previously defined as "the coloniality of assistance" with the intention to reaffirm the right to self-determination of Torretta Antonacci inhabitants. In particular, in 2022, following multiple requests of the association directed towards Puglia Region calling for the reactivation of the management of the Regional Guesthouse, which had been left without a managing entity for more than six-months thus preventing the civil registration of its inhabitants as well as any maintenance work, the notice was finally published. However, the call was won by an NGO (ANOLF) having no historical presence in the settlement, while the organization that had previously managed it and was indicated by *Terra e Libertà* as a partner, did not secure the place, despite being attributed the same score in the ranking. As a consequence of that, and following an extremely poor management of the Regional Guesthouse by ANOLF that saw very few inhabitants of the settlements being employed with the NGO as well as a very poor taking charge of the inhabitants from a legal and juridical point of view, ANOLF was subjected in multiple instances to verbal attacks from the members of *Terra e Libertà* association and more broadly the former "city council"

members. Indeed, in their fight against this external organization, the competing factions regained a certain degree of unity. ANOLF Puglia President accused the members of the organization of "physically assaulting him and kidnapping him" a narrative around which the NGO, its partner union CISL, as well as all the NGOs and unions of the province furthered promoted the criminalization of Torretta Antonacci. However, various witnesses, among whom also an employee of ANOLF, maintained that the facts were much less serious than how it was maintained. Few days following the presumed aggression, the newspaper *L'Avvenire* published an article titled "Migrants. In the ghetto wasteland of workers, illegality and decay win" full of racial-colonial stereotypes where NGOs and unions workers were portrayed as saviors and the inhabitants of the settlements either as helpless victims or as criminals, while the association *Terra e Libertà* was accused of selling residences for 80 euro each. The association *Terra e Libertà* sent a reply to the newspaper as well as to the NGOs interviewed in the article criticizing the white savior approach of both and calling for the newspaper to tackle the real issues forcing people to live in informal settlements rather than looking for scapegoats. The letter concluded by stating:

> "We invite the journalist to come to Torretta Antonacci and talk to those who actually benefitted of the services provided by the association in order to assess their effectiveness and gratuitousness, to understand whether it is true, as Anolf president maintains, that Torretta Antonacci inhabitants need Anolf, or is it rather Anolf to need us. We would like to know why, after a long absence, the association is now coming back, just when 27 million euros have been allocated by PNRR to San Severo Municipality? To understand if, the much-vaunted critic to illegality does not hide the desire of participating to the partition and waste of European funds, maybe legal but not less criminal, aimed at reproducing unsuccessful policies characterized by an endless reproduction of the emergency. We need houses, documents, driving licenses, autonomy. Not assistance, control and repression." (*author's translation from Italian*).

The letter was followed by a public meeting held in Torretta Antonacci in the context of which the same points were reaffirmed and the coloniality of assistance was attacked.
Nevertheless, Anolf continued to manage the structure until February 2023, when the convention expired. In May 2023, the association *Terra e Libertà* presented their application to manage the structure, and, in September 2023, they were eventually appointed as the new managers of Torretta Antonacci Regional Guesthouse. This achievement undoubtedly represented as success of the self-organization of Torretta Antonacci inhabitants, who, from being considered criminals were recognized by institutions as reliable interlocutors and were able to finally manage independently the reception structure. Nevertheless, the progressive

institutionalization of Torretta Antonacci self-government entity also entails the risk, already tangible after few months of management, of being co-opted by the same functioning mechanism of the non-profit industrial complex.

In Borgo Mezzanone, on the other hand, there is no such level of internal self-organization and self-govenrment as in Torretta Antonacci. This difference, while being perceived positively by NGOs and unions who are allowed to operate undisturbed, is considered negatively by the inhabitants, who often perceived Torretta Antonacci, normally called Ghetto, as more organized and united. Indeed, in more than one occasion, while discussing with inhabitants of Borgo Mezzanone, I was told that "you know Borgo is not like Ghetto, here everyone does what he likes, and no one care about no one else." As a matter of fact, at the time when USB was led by Soumahoro, as well as following the creation of *Lega Braccianti*, there was an attempt of creating a self-government structure similar to that of Torretta Antonacci. However, it was neither long lasting nor effective. Other associations aimed at representing inhabitants of Borgo Mezzanone were created, such as *Il faro di Borgo* and the Italian-African Farmworkers Association, but weren't able to fulfil the mission, likely due the lack of social recognition within the community. Indeed, contrarily to the association *Terra e Libertà* created by formalizing a process of self-government already existing, the attempt of these organizations to create one did not come from the inside but rather from the outside. The consequences of the lack of a cohesive and well-structured form on self-government in Borgo Mezzanone can be highlighted from a multiplicity of issues, including the failure to implement a participated management of the Regional Guesthouse situated in the adjacency of asylum seekers reception center, which is nowadays managed more like a prison than a Regional Guesthouse for farmworkers.

In sum, it can be maintained that while Torretta Antonacci was able to develop a form of self-organization and self-government advancing the interests of the settlements, also improving conditions from a material and administrative point of view, the failure to organize a similar form of self-government in Borgo Mezzanone resulted in the settlement being less able to effectively interlocuter with institutions to advance its inhabitants' claims.

### 9.2.3 From farmworkers to farmers: reclaiming lands, building alternative futures beyond agricultural racial capitalism

The last form of self-organization and resistance against agricultural racial capitalism enacted by West African migrant farmworkers examined is that concerning the reclaiming of lands for cultivation, both in Italy and in the countries of origin. By reclaiming lands for

cultivation, racialized farmworkers go beyond their role as waged laborers, reappropriating the means of production and becoming farmers themselves. This path has been followed by the inhabitants of Torretta Antonacci and Borgo Mezzanone settlements in different, yet complementary, ways. Indeed, while in the case of Torretta Antonacci, members of the association *Terra e Libertà* with the support of USB have occupied a land close to the informal settlement in order to cultivate there their their own products, in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone some inhabitants, mostly of Gambian and Senegalese origin, have founded an association, under the name of Italian-African Farmworkers association, whose main goal is that of promoting the exchange of techniques of production between Europe and Africa in order to improve both agricultural systems.

The occupation of the land in Torretta Antonacci took place on the 26th of May 2023, following various months of analysis regarding the property of the various lands surrounding the settlement, carried out by the association *Terra e Libertà*. Finally, they were able to find out that an uncutlivated land adjecent to the informal settlement was owned by a regional public entity, *Ente per lo Sviluppo dell'Irrigazione e la Trasformazione Fondiaria in Puglia, Lucania ed Irpinia*. On the 26th of May 2023, about one hundred farmworkers residing in the informal settlement of Torretta Antonacci occupied the land, reclaiming it from the state of neglect in which it had been left for decades. In that occasion, the president of the association Terra e Libertà delivered the following speech.

> "We are here today as association *Terra e Libertà* to occupy this piece of land, abandoned since decades, wasted, and we are occupying it to dedicate our work and commitment to agriculture as farmworkers. Land does not betray. Land and Freedom. And we are here today to send a message, to give value to land, we are here with the union USB, with whom we flighted for years, and until nowadays is sustaining us in our struggles. We are here to thank them and also everyone who sustained our association and the union USB. We are here today to demonstrate that we are willing to work the land, and we are not here to commit crimes, we are here to show that land has always been an answer, that land never betrays someone. And we are ready to continue our struggle with the union. Long live *Terra e Libertà*, long live USB!" (fieldnotes, May 2023).

The occupied lands were symbolically named after Giuseppe Di Vittorio, the leader of 20$^{th}$ farmworkers struggles, who had promoted land occupation as a major tool of the struggle between farmworkers and landowners. Following the occupation, *Terra e Libertà* attempted to set up a negotiation with Puglia Region for the recognition of their right to use the land. However, until December 2023, the Region did not reply to their requests. Nevertheless,

*Figure 55 Land occupation in Torretta Antonacci, 26th of May 2023. Source: photo by the author.*

also thanks to the essential economic support offered by the union USB, the association was able to start cultivating the land in June, planting tomatoes. USB contribution was necessary in order to buy the plants, hire the tractor and buy all the necessary fertilizers and pesticides, for a total investment of about 8000 euros. The field was mainly cultivated with tomato, even though two rows were left for the cultivation of horticultural products as well as traditional West African products, such as okra and red pepper. The field was self-managed by members of the association, who distributed the horticultural products to the rest of the settlements' inhabitants free of charge. This was a way to reaffirm their role as leaders of the settlement while at the same time showing generosity. The tomato was harvested on the 9th of October, filling three trucks, for a total of 27 tons of tomato. The tomato was processed as tomato sauce, bottled and distributed through USB headquarters spread around the Italian territory with the name *Terra e Libertà*. In the bottle leaflet, the tomato sauce was promoted as being produced with a "unique and extraordinary ingredient: the cry of anger of the wretched of the earth, who call for social justice, land and freedom". While only time will tell of the economic and social sustainability of the project, what is certain is that the land occupation transformed the way in which involved racialized migrant farmworkers perceived themselves and were perceived. No more only as exploited workers, but as farmers able to produce by themselves for themselves. This role transformation was blatant in the relationship they established with the neighboring farmers, who would ironically

request whether they needed workers for their farm. This, despite being a mockery, underscores all the power inherent to the transformation from farmworkers to farmers.

The last example explored concerns the creation of the association Italian-African Farmworkers and their mission. The association was created building on an idea of Babucarr Sawo, a farmworker of Gambian origin living in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone. In 2020, he started exposing me his desire of creating an association promoting effective changes in the production techniques employed by most of the farmers in West Africa and, more specifically, in his country of origin, The Gambia. As he explained:

> "Before coming to Italy, I had never been employed in agriculture. In The Gambia I was employed in a power plant in Brikama, my hometown. However, I always thought that agriculture was the key to the development of a country, especially a small country like The Gambia. Most of the food we consume in The Gambia is imported, either from Senegal, or from China or the United States, if we talk about rice, our staple food. Our former president, Yahya Jammeh, despite being a dictator had a vision on food self-sufficiency, making his own the motto <<Eat what you grow, grow what you eat>>. During his ruling, while things where hard, there was a limit to the price of food and rice cultivation was promoted. However, since the new president Adama Barrow came to power in 2017, The Gambia has been experiencing dramatic inflation on primary goods. In addition to that, the president didn't really invest on agriculture, promoting some measures useful more for his self-promotion than to effectively improve the living conditions of Gambians. Since I came to Italy and started being employed in agriculture, around 2017, I realized how different the techniques employed by farmers in Italy differed from those used by our farmers in The Gambia. First of all, I realized how important it was for agriculture not to be dependent on rain. Indeed, in The Gambia, most of our agriculture is done during the raining season, from June to September. It is only four months on an entire year! For the year, farmers just try to live on what they earned in those four months. Secondly, agriculture in The Gambia is not mechanized, so that all the work is performed through manual labor. This makes it so hard for farmers to make a living out of their work, while at the same time leaving so many lands uncultivated. For these reasons, I thought that creating an association made of farmworkers living in Italy who could introduce in The Gambia, as well as in neighbouring countries such as Senegal and Mali, the cultivation techniques learned during all these years of work in agriculture would represent a valuable contribution for the development of our countries. If successful, this would also avoid the mass migration of West African youths to Europe, who will be able to find working opportunities in their home countries, without the need to emigrate away their land and family, undergoing hardships in foreign countries. Africa is rich of resources. However, many of us prefer to leave rather than developing our countries of origins, due to the difficulties we face and the corruption of our leaders. We have all the resources we need to be independent and self-sufficient. We only need to learn how to take care of them. So, I hope that with this association we will be able to make changes. There is a long way to go, but as they say, also Rome was not built in a day!". (Int. with Babucarr Sawo, May 2023)

*Figure 56 The founder of the association, Babucarr Sawo (on the left) and another member of the Italian-African Farmworkers association in the association's garden in Borgo Mezzanone, June 2022. Source: photo by the author.*

As highlighted by Sawo, the creation of the Italian-African Farmworkers association brings together the willingness to improve living standards in the countries of origin, with the issue of migration and the role that can be played by agriculture. In this sense, the project entails a deep understanding of the functioning of racial capitalism, from the root causes to the most visible expressions. The association was eventually registered in The Gambia in September 2021 and in Italy in February 2022. The association formed in The Gambia is a made of Senegalese and Gambian citizens residing in Italy and employed in the agricultural sector, as well members from The Gambia employed both in the agricultural sectors as farmers and in the non-profit sector. On the other hand, the one created in Italy is made only of people of Senegalese, Gambian and Malian living in Italy, most of whom residents of the informal settlement of Borgo Mezznaone, as well as of some Italians, among whom myself. Following its foundation, the association promoted a series of actions aimed at advancing their mission, while encountering various challenges mainly due to the lack of funds. Nevertheless, in December 2022, the association was granted a land in The Gambia, in the village of Sare Jatta (Basse area), where their agricultural project could be started. At the same, the association created a series of videos published on their Youtube channel[79], aimed

[79] See the association YouTube channel for more insights: https://www.youtube.com/c/ItalianAfricanFarmworkersAssociation

at narrating the ways of doing agriculture in The Gambia and Senegal. In particular, the videos highlighted the challenges encountered by farmers living in the rural areas of Senegal and The Gambia, as well as promoting innovative projects and techniques implemented by farmers in The Gambia.

In Italy, the association organized monthly meetings in order to discuss the main achievements and the step forwards, as well as to collect monthly contributions from its members to be invested in their project in The Gambia. Between November 2022 and February 2023 it also promoted an interluction with Manfredonia Municipality, on the subject of PNRR resources aimed at the overcoming of Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement, by writing down a series of proposals, including the distribution of land to the settlement inhabitants as well as the purchase of agricultural machineries aimed at promoting the transformation of farmworkers into farmers. However, despite a meeting with the Municipality taking place in February 2023, the association was not able to secure any of their demands. In addition to that, both in 2022 and 2023, the association created a garden in the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone, where it produced some Western African products, such as okra, bissap, djakathou, red pepper, and so on. However, the success in the development of the garden experienced many challegnes, due to the lack of funding entities as well as due the difficulty of securing a stable water supply and an effective distribution of the cultivated crops.

*Figure 57 Italian-African Farmworkers association monthly meeting in front of their headquarter in Borgo Mezzanone, June 2023. Source: photo by the author.*

Nevertheless, the members of Italian-African Farmworkers Association are committed to pursue in their journey for the improvement of agricultural systems in rural areas of West Africa, focusing on The Gambia.

The challenges encountered by the Italian-African Farmworkers as an entirely self-funded organization, both in the cultivation of their garden in Borgo Mezzanone informal settlement as well as in the implementation of the project in The Gambia, if compared to the rapid successes achieved by the association *Terra e Libertà* with the lands' occupation in Torretta Antonacci and production and selling of *Terra e Libertà* tomato sauce within less than six months, further highlight the essential role played by the initial funding offered by USB for the launching of their agricultural production.

**Conclusion**

The present chapter has been dedicated to exploring the different types of struggle and forms of resistance implemented by West African migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements in the province of Foggia. The analysis developed has allowed to shed light on the ambivalent role of unions and political collectives involved in the representation of racialized migrant workers claim in the area. Indeed, if one the hand they have organized various instances of mobilization bringing forwards the claims of West African migrant farmworkers living in the province, on the other hand, they have done so while being unable to implement effective representational mechanisms. Indeed, each of the examined actor had flaws. Among them, Flai-Cgil was the one most characterized by a Eurocentric universalistic approach based on the primacy of class, and committed to represent workers inasmuch as workers. As a consequence of this approach, Cgil was unable to grasp the differences in terms of organization and representation between 20$^{th}$ century Italian farmworkers and contemporary racialized migrant farmworkers, failing to develop an adequate approach. They weren't able to achieve an in-depth understanding of the interconnection between exploitation, housing, racialization and status, and this inhibited them from fully representing migrant farmworkers' claims. In addition to that, Flai-Cgil has become an extremely institutionalized union, focused on service provision and often backing institutional policies, rather than contraposing it. On the contrary, USB approach was more centered on promoting the self-organization of racialized migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements, being a grassroots union with a history of solidarity with grassroots struggles. However, on the one hand, during the leadership of Soumahoro, USB while able

to effectively mobilize migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements, USB was unable to prevent the centralization of the power in the hand of a single individual and did not inhibit his increasingly performative attitude to activism. On the other hand, if following the departure of Soumahoro, USB was able to carry out concrete battles, effective in improving the lives of migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements, their capacity of mobilization dramatically reduced. In addition to that, in terms of representation, USB has preferred relying on forms of internal self-organization and self-government already present within informal settlements. This while positive for the space left to self-organization, implies also risks in relation to the democratic nature of those mechanisms.

Finally, *Campagne in Lotta*, while not being a union and promoting their actions as "self-organization", can be considered for all intents and purposes a political collective active in the organization and representation of racialized migrant farmworkers. While their ideological framework has been oriented toward a deep understanding of the interconnection between the multiple forms of oppression experienced by racialized migrant farmworkers in the context of racial capitalism, their unwillingness to explicit their role, hiding behind a presumed self-organization, prevented them from critically reflecting on their positionality. As a consequence of that, the collective failed to understand the success of Soumahoro also as a result of the need of representation of racialized migrant farmworkers, who could identity with him, and rather preferred to attack Soumahoro and USB considering them as enemies. In addition to that, Campagne in Lotta failed to fully integrate within their collective racialized migrant farmworkers. Overall, all these three actors favored to a certain extent the mobilization of migrant farmworkers, but not necessarily did so for the purpose of advancing their claims. Nevertheless, through their active and conscious participation to many instances of mobilization and protest taking place in the province of Foggia in the past five years, West African migrant farmworkers proved of being ready to struggle for their rights, refusing to be conceived as mere victims in need of humanitarian assistance. In addition to mobilizations, West African migrant farmworkers living in the informal settlement of the province of Foggia also enacted various forms of self-organization and self-government aimed at reaffirming their self-determination and rejecting the coloniality of assistance. This was done both through informal forms of self-government and through the establishment of associations. Finally, West African migrant farmworkers have also manifested their willingness to resist and build alternative futures beyond racial capitalism by reclaiming lands both in Italy and in their countries of origins, and transforming themselves from farmworkers to farmers.

# CONCLUSIONS

The present dissertation intended intervening on the debate regarding the forms of exploitation and resistance of migrant farmworkers employed in the context of industrial agriculture. The literature produced on the topic, explored in the first chapter, has been prolific and shed light on the structural nature of migrant labor exploitation in the context of globalized agriculture. However, while some contributions have investigated the role of racial and ethnic labor market segmentation, this has mainly been done by looking at the impact it had in promoting fragmentation among workers and preventing unionization. Indeed, various analysis have been developed on the topic looking at the impact of ethno-racial segmentation in limiting workers' organization in the workplace. Nevertheless, literature on the topic developed in the field of labor studies has mostly privileged the class dimension, often conceiving racial oppression only as a tool of class division. Only few authors, mainly from the United States, have offered a reading of the role of race and ethnicity beyond a mere tool of class division. Overall, it appeared that most of the literature was unable to fully grasp the multidimensionality of the oppression experienced by racialized migrant farmworkers, which went well beyond exploitation on the workplace, as well as to offer a conceptualization of racism beyond the mere discrimination against foreigners. This did not only affect the possibility to better grasp forms of oppression, but also to develop an in-depth analysis regarding forms of unionization, organization and mobilization of migrant farmworkers within and beyond unionism. Few insights were offered by authors such as Alberti et al (2013) who proposed the concept of "intersectional unionism", in order to better analyze the ability of unions to effectively organize migrant workers. Nevertheless, also this approach did not offer an in-depth analysis regarding the difference in terms of oppression, as well as organization, of differently racialized migrant groups.

The understanding of race and racism advanced by labor studies appeared to be rooted in the "White Marxist" understanding of race as an element of the superstructure and of anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles as secondary struggles compared to the major class struggle. In order to address and overcome these issues, I built on the theoretical framework of Black Marxism and racial capitalism, two theoretical perspectives that have been fruitful in exploring the interconnection existing between race and class oppression, examining the role of racism in the building of capitalism, as well as to shed light on the autonomy of anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles from class struggle. The analysis of these theoretical

perspectives was fundamental to offer a deeper understanding of racism, not as a general discrimination against foreigners, but as a system of power rooted in the hierarchization of human species in races for the purposes of exploitation, that saw its full application with the selling of West Africans and West Central Africans during the Transatlantic slave trade as well as with the following colonization of the African continent. Nevertheless, even though race as a social construct was created for the purpose of exploitation of human labor, in the centuries following its theorization in Western Europe, racism and class oppression became two interdependent, yet autonomous, systems of oppression. The sedimentation of internalized racism within Western societies allowed it to affect, and infect, also revolutionary social theories, such as Marxism. As a consequence of this, Marxist theories, from which most of labor studies have been inspired, have been characterized at best by a lack of theorization regarding the central role of racism and colonialism in the building of capitalism and, at worst, by an explicitly racist-colonial attitude. On the other hand, the theoretical perspective of racial capitalism, while stressing the centrality of race and the intersection of various forms of oppression, allows to avoid the essentialization inherent to identity politics, increasingly popular in the past decades. Indeed, as maintained by Gargi Bhattacharyya (2018), racial capitalism can be helpful in analyzing how various systems of oppression have been increasingly structured following the hierarchizing logic of race, without yet transforming this analysis into a battle between different forms of oppression. At the same time, in order to account for the transformation of activism and struggle following the rise of NGOs in the past decades, the theoretical framework of racial capitalism has been combined with other theoretical perspectives, allowing to shed light on the ways in which resistance has been increasingly co-opted into mechanisms of commodification, through the surge in what has been defined as the "NGO-ization of resistance".

Thanks to the adoption of the above-mentioned theoretical perspectives, I was able to expand the scope of previous analysis developed on the subject of migrant labor exploitation and resistance in the context of industrial agriculture, carrying out an in-depth analysis regarding the forms of oppression and resistance of racialized migrant farmworkers in the context of Italian agriculture, with a focus on West African migrant workers living in the province of Foggia.

I decided to focus on the province of Foggia, which I defined as a center of Italian agricultural racial capitalism, in light of a series of features of racial capitalism, which I considered particularly pronounced in the province of Foggia.

First of all, the large share of migrant farmworkers and racialized migrant farmworkers employed in the agricultural sector of the province and the relevance of the province in terms of agricultural production at the national level. Secondly, the presence of Italy's largest rural informal settlements, inhabited by racialized migrant farmworkers, mostly of West African origin. Third, the national relevance given to the province of Foggia in relation to the fight against "*caporalato*" and the spectacularization of racialized migrant farmworkers' exploitation in the national and international media. Fourth, the presence of an increasing number of non-governmental actors involved in the implementation of projects, mostly funded by the EU, aimed at countering the labor exploitation of migrant farmworkers and their precarious housing status through the realization of individualized actions. Fifth, the centrality of the province of Foggia in terms of the struggle of racialized migrant farmworkers, mostly of West African origin, who have enacted in the past five years countless instances of resistance to racial capitalism, as well as the presence of unions and other political actors particularly active in attempting to gain hegemony over the representation of racialized migrant farmworkers living in the province.

The focus on West African migrant farmworkers has been chosen not only in light of the position they occupy in the history and present of racial capitalism - coming from a place that was central to the development of racial capitalism, still implicated in neo-colonial relations both with former and new colonial powers - and experiencing nowadays the intersection of multiple forms of oppression, being subject to racial discrimination and ghettoization, adding to processes of exploitation and illegalization also suffered by other social groups in the area, such as EU workers and Northern African workers - but also due to their almost exclusive participation to struggles against racial capitalism, which have not yet seen the participation of any other ethnic or national group in the province of Foggia.

The high rate of participation of West African migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements to instances of mobilization and struggle appears to be in sharp contrast with the wide-spread representation of African migrants, rooted in humanitarianism and white saviorism, as helpless victims in need of assistance. At the same time, rather than conceiving it as an inherent predisposition to mobilize, it appears useful to analyze it by looking at the role played by the intersection of multiple forms of oppression experienced in determining their willingness and readiness to mobilize. As shown in the analysis developed in chapter nine, the precariousness of living conditions coupled with the daily racial discrimination suffered by West African migrant workers have represented major issues at the core of their mobilization in the past five years. Indeed, as explored in chapter sever, racism is a central

lens through which conditions of ghettoization, exploitation, and illegalization have been interpreted, also in light of the historical awareness regarding the role of racism and coloniality in shaping contemporary relations between Europe and Africa.

Being Black and African appeared to be the major frame for self-identification, in light of which also other components of the oppression experienced, such as that related to illegalization and exploitation, could be explained, proving the materiality of Stuart Hall famous claim, "race is the modality through which class is lived" (Hall 1980:341).

Nevertheless, contrarily to labor studies' common assumption of race as a tool of class division, in the examined case race represented a way to understand one's condition of oppression but not a parameter of hierarchization regarding the relevance of one struggle compared to another. As a matter of fact, and as explored in chapter nine, while West African migrant farmworkers have participated to a multiplicity of struggles being called upon different issues, such as housing precariousness, basic needs (water, electricity), residency permit, racism and labor conditions, they have often brought forward claims at the intersection of the various forms of oppression they experience, demanding documents in the context of demonstration for housing precariousness, as well as denouncing racism when protesting for the access to basic services, as well as demanding fair salary and contracts during demonstrations against racism. If some unions, such as Cgil have failed to understand the need to adopt an intersectional approach in order to better represent racialized migrant farmworkers' claims and being able to grasp the multiplicity of forms of oppression experienced beyond the workplace, other actors active in the province of Foggia for the representation of migrant farmworkers, such as USB and *Campagne in Lotta*, have been able to shape their approach in order to account for the intersection of various forms of oppression, articulating struggles connecting racism, illegalization, exploitation and ghettoization. Nevertheless, both actors have struggled to achieve an equilibrium between the mobilizations of migrant farmworkers and the resolution of concrete and urgent issues. The ability to transform individual assistance into collective claims, in the realm of labor, migration status, housing precariousness, increasingly represent a crucial challenge for actors involved in the representation of migrant farmworkers, that has become more urgent following the "refugeezation of migration" and the increasing individualization of both labor exploitation and the right of stay. Indeed, the trajectory of USB highlights an increasing difficulty, following the departure of Soumahoro, to effectively mobilize migrant farmworkers, to which nonetheless has corresponded an increasing ability to solve individual problems, also through strategies of lobbying of institutions beyond mobilization,

achieving, for instance, the right to civil registration for inhabitants of Torretta Antonacci as well as an effective legal assistance. On the other hand, *Campagne in Lotta*, while still able to mobilize, even though increasingly lower numbers of people, has failed to effectively address individual issues, thus increasingly losing the trust of their members, who have not seen an improvement in their individual living conditions despite participating to multiple instances of mobilization. The increasing individualization of social and political issues, such as labor exploitation, the access to housing as well as the right to residence, can be considered at the same time the cause and the consequence of the NGO-ization of resistance, that has increasingly characterized the action of civil society organization concerned with the issue of migrant farmworkers exploitation. Indeed, the past decade saw the rise in EU funded projects concerned with countering the exploitation of migrant farmworkers living in the informal settlement of Southern Italy. This went hand in hand with the rising in projects funded in countries of origins, such as Senegal and Gambia, as explored in chapter four, aimed at countering of "irregular migration". These projects have been often funded through AMIF funds, and in the case of Southern Italy also EFS, and have been grounded on similar assumptions. The dichotomy between "regular" and "irregular" migration, the possibility of countering both "irregular" migration and labor exploitation through an individualized approach based on the raising awareness regarding, respectively, the harshness of living conditions in Europe and on the journey, or the rights to which workers are entitled, without actually changing structural conditions of inequality to access to resources and movement characterizing the border regime, at the heart of "irregular migration" as well as favoring the exploitability of migrant labor. With regard to projects developed in Southern Italy, the action of raising awareness and information, has been coupled with the development of governmental structures used as models of the fight against *caporalato* and labor exploitation, such as *Casa Sankara*, based on the fictious dichotomy between legal and illegal, formal and informal. The NGO-ization of resistance implemented through the development of EU funded projects apparently aimed at improving living and working conditions of "irregular migration candidates" in West Africa and of "exploited migrant farmworkers" in Europe, have turned NGOs into implementers of EU policies. Indeed, the extreme bureaucratization of EU funds' accountability procedures has increasingly transformed NGOs from non-governmental actors looking for funds to implement their projects, to actors involved in the implementation of projects designed in order to be suitable to satisfy EU funds' accountability procedures. This transformation is tangible, for instance, by looking at the rising number of projects developed in the context

of Southern Italy in the past few years for the countering of migrant labor exploitation in the agricultural sector that have had no impact on the living and working conditions of racialized migrant farmworkers living in informal settlements. Nevertheless, this mechanisms of NGO-ization of resistance is not only useless but it is actually dangerous, in that it blurs the lines between NGOs and institutions, dramatically reducing the potential of conflicts, while at the same time allowing NGOs to self-appoint themselves as representatives of racialized migrant farmworkers' claims without having never been entitled to do so, both in West Africa and in Italy.

In this panorama, the resistance of racialized migrant farmworkers has not only manifested itself only in the form of demonstrations against ghettoization, exploitation, illegalization, and racialization, but has been also concerned with re-affirming the right to self-determination, in light of an increasing attempt implemented by NGOs and institutions to control their freedom and impose restrictions in exchange for a presumed improvement of material conditions of life. However, West African migrant farmworkers have reaffirmed in multiple instances, both through their self-organization and self-government in the context of informal settlements and for the management of Regional Guesthouses, as well as through acts of demonstration and protests in the context of governmental structures, such as Casa Sankara, that they are not ready to compromise between living conditions, freedom and self-determination. Nevertheless, while it is too early to assess the outcome of the process of recognition of Torretta Antonacci's mechanism of self-government, following the management of the Regional Guesthouse by the association *Terra e Libertà*, there are few signals suggesting that also in this case the self-organization of racialized migrant farmworkers could be co-opted by institutions in order to deprive it of its potential in terms of social conflict. Similarly, the reclaiming of lands by West African farmworkers, both in Italy and in the countries of origins, poses the same set of question regarding the ability of those involved to be able not to be co-opted by agricultural racial capitalism, both with regard to the exploitation of labor and natural resources, as well as with regard to the inscription of these struggles into processes of NGO-ization of resistance.

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