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**The Fine Line Between Decent and  
Indecent Work in Italy and the US:  
Agricultural Work at the Intersection of the  
Community, Supply Chains and the State**

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## Introduction

Labour exploitation has always been at the centre of political, media, and academic discussion since the concept of democracy began to circulate in our homes, political arenas, schools and universities. This crucial discussion has always taken different paths according to the political orientation and interests of those who work and mean their lives with the concept of labour, both from a productive, legislative and academic point of view. Labour exploitation contains in itself the seed of intellectual exploitation when it becomes an exercise of contribution and internal debate, a theme at the service of the survival of a discipline or a party, rather than a theme of normative and consequential value, a subject worthy of regulatory protection and with consequences beyond the workplace. This research is part of this academic and practical debate in order to address the issue of labour exploitation in a very specific economic sector and organizational field, namely agriculture. The reasons behind this research path regarding the exploitation of work in agriculture can be varied, the knowledge of abuses in agriculture in my province, the close link between agriculture and a utopistic vision of the world, and the inherent resilience of the agro-food supply chains to regenerate in the forms and practices of exploitation. Nevertheless, it is not to exclude an interest in the subject dictated by personal interests and ambitions in a world where right and wrong exist, and where the image we have of ourselves or aspire to is the underlying motive for any choice we make. In the first chapter, I will discuss the concept of exploitation as a continuum, from the concept of decent work to severe labour exploitation. I will then discuss agricultural work focusing on two case studies, Italy and the US. The rationale behind the choice of these two cases/countries is the following. First, Italy is the country where I was born and spent all my formative years, and where I had intercultural exchanges with the African community of Brindisi, the Southern Italian province where I grew up. Besides, my enrollment in a Ph.D. program at the University of Genoa, Italy, made the collection of data more cost-effective. Besides the focus on agriculture is driven by my previous awareness of abuses in this context. The choice of the US is motivated by the literature review about alternative organizing and its centrality in the debate on community unionism. A context with the absence of federal laws protecting farmworkers is an important driver for creativity. Therefore, an in-depth study of these two countries can be useful to have a more profound and contextualized understanding of the abuses and labour exploitation in agriculture, but also to understand better the context of this research.

Considering the importance and centrality of agricultural supply chains in the global economy and the related structures of vulnerability that are intrinsic in how food is produced, where food represents both a need and an important source of profit, and therefore of inequality, agriculture can be viewed as one of the organizational fields most characterized by episodes of labour exploitation and abuses. The nature of labour in agriculture is characterized by an interconnection of different social domains, that is immigration, housing, transportation, and health, as well as a lack of labour protections to cite some of the diverse areas of intersection. Hence, agriculture compared to other industries and economic sectors represents the area of the economy where alternative and creative forms of labour organizing appear to be more necessary and required. On this, “*community unionism*” represents one important response and intervention (Fine, 2005; Tattersall, 2008; McBride & Greenwood, 2009; Fine et al., 2018). In the literature on alternative organizing for the purposes of this doctoral research and work, the concept of “*community unionism*” appears the most relevant and most appropriate, from a theoretical point of view, to explain the experiences of struggle and resistance put in place not only by unions but also by community organizations and informal groups of migrants and workers. Besides, this explanatory power is also observable in the importance of ethnicity and community in describing organizing, beyond a single issue of content. In my opinion, all these elements seem to be missing in other literature on the theme of alternative labour organizing. However, despite the peculiarity of agricultural work in intersectional terms, research at the intersection of agriculture and community unionism is still underdeveloped, especially with a comparative approach aimed to show, systematically, the common trends at the global level. Thus, this work aims to advance this stream by proposing a conceptualization of community unionism in agriculture, and empirically grounded on comparative research about community unionism in Italy and the US. From a theoretical point of view, I draw on “*critical sensemaking*” (Aromaa et al., 2018), the concept of “*sensegiving*” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), and Freire’s “*critical pedagogy theory*” (Freire, 2017). This choice is driven by the use of popular education by many worker organizations, but also by the desire to propose a framework that is a critical reconstruction of organizing in agriculture as a set of sensemaking and sensegiving processes aimed to reshape agriculture. This work expands existing literature on community unionism, and by proposing a conceptualization of exploitation and community unionism in agriculture. This conceptualization is based on three different levels at which challenges to decent work – and therefore responses to them - happen, i.e., community, supply chains, and the state.

# 1.

## **Labour Exploitation in Agriculture: A continuum of Abuses**

## 1.1. (In)Decent Work: Definition and Heuristic Power

*“Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men” (ILO, 2023).*

The concept of “decent work” has its origins in the “Report of the Director-General” to the International Labour Conference meeting in its 87th Session in 1999 (Ghai, 2003). This report presented the main purpose of the “International Labour Organization” (ILO) during a period of global transition. The purpose is to guarantee and secure decent work for women and men. Decent work is a widespread need, and therefore a challenge for political and business leaders and the way we address this issue shapes much of our common future. In detail, the context for the development of the concept of decent work can be identified in the transformation of the social and economic environment by the (at that time) emerging global economy and that has shaped the fulcrum of the ILO’s activities, namely normative action, public policies, and institution building. The ILO (notably constituents such as employer organizations and unions) has been influenced by policies of economic liberalization that have influenced the relations among the state, business, and labour. Besides the global economy, other contextual factors have been: the changing social consciousness, emerging political concerns such as insecurity and unemployment, the need to give a human face to the global economy, the new relevance of the ILO, and the facilities it provided to the international community, including being the centre of normative action in the world of labour. However, as highlighted in the cited report, the ILO had to overcome two issues: 1) institutional tendency to propose programs without a set of operational priorities to organize activities; 2) after the Cold War the sense of common purpose among the ILO’s constituents was weak and further eroded by the globalization.

*“The primary goal of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity” (ILO, 1999, p. 3).*

*“Decent work is the converging focus of all its four strategic objectives: the promotion of rights at work; employment; social protection; and social dialogue. It must guide its policies and define its international role in the near future” (ILO, 1999, p. 3).*

As concerns the measurement of decent work, in September 2008, the ILO organized an international Tripartite Meeting of Experts on the Measurement of Decent Work and adopted and presented a specific framework of indicators. This framework was presented at the 18th Conference of Labour Statisticians in 2008 (ILO, 2013). In greater detail, the framework covers ten elements linked to the four strategic objectives included in the Decent Work Agenda: 1) rights at work; 2) employment; 3) social protection; 4) social dialogue. As to the ten elements, under these structural and substantive ten elements of the framework, statistical and legal indicators are classified (ILO, 2013, p. 12). These ten substantive elements are:

- 1) employment opportunities;
  - 2) adequate earnings and productive work;
  - 3) decent working time;
  - 4) combining work, family, and personal life;
  - 5) work that should be abolished;
  - 6) stability and security of work;
  - 7) equal opportunity and treatment in employment;
  - 8) safe work environment;
  - 9) social security; and
  - 10) social dialogue, employers, and workers' representation
- 11) a contextual element: *"economic and social context for decent work"* (ILO, 2013, p. 12).

The concept of decent work is about our jobs and future aspirations and prospects, as regards working conditions, work-life balance, including the possibility for our kids to attend schools and not have to work, gender equality, employability, having a voice in our workplaces, and not being discriminated, among the many work-related aspirations (ILO, 2001).

*"But to bridge reality and aspiration, we need to start by confronting the global decent work deficit. It is expressed in the absence of sufficient employment opportunities, inadequate social protection, the denial of rights at work and shortcomings in social dialogue. It is a measure of the gap between the world that we work in and the hopes that people have for a better life"* (ILO, 2001, p. 7).

In this respect, the label *“labour exploitation”* perfectly summarizes indecent work and the concepts of precarity, vulnerability, and insecurity that characterize many labour relations in the economy. Labour exploitation has become in its different nuances a central argument in current political and academic debates, but still superficially. In detail, labour exploitation, considering its conceptual, empirical, and analytical extent within the realm of labour, can be defined as a *“continuum ranging from the positive extremity (desirable situation) of decent work to the negative extremity of forced labour (most serious form of labour exploitation)”* (Skrivankova, 2010, p. 18). Indecent work cannot be explored in dualistic terms, as freedom vs. unfreedom, but as a long continuum of labour violations (Skrivankova, 2010; Strauss, 2012; Barrientos et al., 2013; Christ et al., 2020). Thus, we can view (in)decent work as a continuum: *“The continuum of exploitation is not, however, pre-determined by teleological structural relations of capital accumulation but is rather a constantly evolving and contested set of processes in which space and place play a key role”* (Strauss, 2012, pp. 138–139).

As mentioned above, the four strategic priorities and goals concerning the concept of decent work are: 1) rights at work; 2) employment; 3) social protection; 4) and social dialogue. These strategic goals have many implications for management and business research. For instance, the implications for human resource management (HRM) research are manifold for each goal, and for each indicator, especially if devised as drivers for different streams of research and practice to evaluate decent work in a company, or to identify additional statistical indicators. For instance, the objective that regards the rights at work is concerned with discrimination, freedom of association, but also child labour and forced labour and many of the exploitative working conditions that are labelled *“modern slavery”*. From a human resource perspective, modern slavery research has been discussed in terms of slave labourers, slavery perpetrators, the recruitment process and the working conditions of modern slavery (Phung & Crane, 2019). Additional analysis focused on the developments, drawbacks, and deviations of this research (Caruana et al., 2021). The progression concerns the forms and drivers of exploitative working conditions, the impact of efforts against it, and the organizational and policy determinants of precariousness (Caruana et al., 2021, p. 257). The drawbacks are a focus on legitimate work settings and main disciplinary frames, and a reliance on surveys (Caruana et al., 2021, p. 257). Opportunities regard new actors, contextual contingencies, as well as the role of alternative organizational forms in sustaining or disrupting modern slavery (Caruana et al., 2021, p. 257).



In addition to HRM research, also the implications for supply chain scholarship are manifold: *“These workers are all embedded in supply chains of one kind or another—and we contend that those supply chains should be managed to ensure that such workers are afforded decent work”* (Soundararajan et al., 2021, p. 3). Indeed, supply chains are crucial cornerstones in the discussion concerning (in)decent work, also given their significant contribution to abuses and exploitation in diverse regions of the world, both in developing and developed countries, and in different economic sectors. Therefore, it seems important to investigate and problematize supply chains’ dynamics, but more importantly, the relations that sustain their development. Supply chains are above all relational fields. Here, the concept of *“supply chain”* includes both product and labour supply chains, given the diverse contributions to exploitation. Specifically, a *“product supply chain describes the discrete stages that a product goes through to transform it from raw materials to a finished product”* (Allain et al., 2013, p. 39). A *“labour supply chain consists of the sequence of employment relationships that a worker goes through in order to be deployed in a productive capacity”* (Allain et al., 2013, p. 42). Thus, from this point of view, (in)decent work arises from relations both inside and outside supply chains. All these relations are daily constructed both by perceiving others and absorbing their interpretations. As argued by Holzberg investigating suppliers’ (ir)responsible employment practices, it can be helpful to apply a crossvergence lens: *“Global, local and business considerations come together and lead to different types of employment responses”* (Holzberg, 2019, p. 311). Product supply chains are important units of analysis, considering that (in)decent work is often the result of buyers’ predatory purchasing practices (Anner, 2019). Nevertheless, product supply chains are also sustained by labour supply chains in their operations, but these are still under-investigated, apart from some research on severe labour exploitation (Allain et al., 2013; Crane et al., 2021).

Currently, supply chain management research on decent work appears to be focused on the buyer (Soundararajan et al., 2021), as shown in existing research on voluntary corporate social responsibility (CSR) responses to modern slavery legislation (Stevenson & Cole, 2018; Christ et al., 2019; Flynn & Walker, 2020; Rogerson et al., 2020). Also, on this subject, buyers usually address the problem of decent work through voluntary CSR initiatives, such as social audits, ethical certification schemes, or even by being part of industry associations (LeBaron, 2020). Nevertheless, as discussed by LeBaron: *“CSR is failing because prevailing labour governance initiatives do little to nothing to disrupt corporate business models”* (LeBaron, 2020, p. 27).

## 1.2. From Modern Slavery to Routine Exploitation

In the context of this research, and before presenting existing management research about (in)decent work and severe labour exploitation, I believe that it is important to define and set the meaning of the terms that I will use in this document to refer to severe working conditions and extremely abusive labour relations, and together with the principal streams of research engaged with these labour-related themes. For the aims of this research and with an attentive eye towards the language that I believe we could use when we discuss (in)decent work, I draw on the diverse definitions of “*exploitation*” and “*severe labour exploitation*” proposed by the “*European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights*” in the European Union context (FRA, 2015). I believe that the following type of language is more considerate of workers’ agency.

*“The term ‘exploitation’ denotes work situations that deviate significantly from standard working conditions as defined by legislation or other binding legal regulations, concerning in particular remuneration, working hours, leave entitlements, health and safety standards and decent treatment” (FRA, 2015, p. 10).*

*“The term ‘severe’ refers to forms of exploitation of workers which are criminal under the legislation of the EU Member State where the exploitation occurs. Hence, severe labour exploitation includes coercive forms of exploitation, such as slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour and trafficking (Article 5 of the Fundamental Rights Charter), as well as severe exploitation within the framework of an employment relationship, in particular employment situations covered by Article 9 (1) of the Employer Sanctions Directive” (FRA, 2015, p. 10).*

### **“Article 9 - Criminal offence.**

*1. Member States shall ensure that the infringement of the prohibition referred to in Article 3 [Prohibition of illegal employment] constitutes a criminal offence when committed intentionally, in each of the following circumstances as defined by national law:*

*(a) the infringement continues or is persistently repeated;*

*(b) the infringement is in respect of the simultaneous employment of a significant number of illegally staying third-country nationals;*

*(c) the infringement is accompanied by particularly exploitative working conditions;*

*(d) the infringement is committed by an employer who, while not having been charged with or convicted of an offence established pursuant to Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA, uses work or services exacted from an illegally staying third country national with the knowledge that he or she is a victim of trafficking in human beings;*

*(e) the infringement relates to the illegal employment of a minor”*

(Directive 2009/52/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 Providing for Minimum Standards on Sanctions and Measures against Employers of Illegally Staying Third-Country Nationals, 2009)”.

As regards severe labour exploitation, in this research, I will focus on forced labour, a form of indecent work clearly defined by international law, and that a portion of the interdisciplinary literature on severe labour exploitation adopts to describe the worst forms of labour abuses. According to the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No.29) *“the term forced or compulsory labour shall mean all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily”* (ILO, 1930). Hence, forced labour appears to be the label most used by prominent scholars in the field to describe severe labour exploitation. However, in my doctoral research about the connection between human rights and (in)decent work, a crucial moment was my encounter with the interdisciplinary literature on *“modern slavery”*. Indeed, my specific interest in the concept of decent work and the ideas offered here were prompted by this literature and the preliminary consideration that the literature on *“modern slavery”* had an explanatory power concerning what I read up until then about Southern Italian agriculture. Thus, the label *“modern slavery”* as a discursive tool appears to be a stimulus for our reflection on (in)decent work.

*“Modern slavery covers a set of specific legal concepts including forced labour, concepts linked to forced labour (i.e., debt bondage, slavery and slavery like practices and human trafficking) and forced marriage. Although modern slavery is not defined in law, it is used as an umbrella term that focuses attention on commonalities across these legal concepts. Essentially, it refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power”* (ILO, 2022, p. 13).

The term *“modern slavery”* is an alluring concept that is often used in place of forced labour. Immigrant work is often depicted in terms of *“modern slavery”*. In academia, this image has been enriched by many disciplines. The book *“Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy”* by Kevin Bales (Bales, 1999) has been crucial in the construction of this narrative. This interdisciplinary literature has been built around two core arguments. The first thesis is about the idea that a novel form of slavery is growing in the contemporary global economy. The second thesis is on the marked difference between modern slavery and historical slavery, usually concerning plantation slavery in the US during the XIX century (LeBaron, 2018).

This literature about “*modern slavery*” has different merits. It contends that modern slavery generates great profits for businesses, an assumption that is distant from the idea widespread in many social sciences that coerced labour would have been eradicated by free labour during globalization, and it is especially distant from what political economy assumed on capitalism and free labour, namely the incompatibility of forced labour with capitalism (LeBaron, 2018). Therefore, the modern slavery literature presents discursive and narrative merits. However, the modern slavery literature has many limits. First, this literature is not sustained by evidence and tested hypothesis: “*Efforts to raise awareness about the problem of forced labour have thus often involved covering up gaps in our knowledge instead of bringing them to light*” (LeBaron, 2018: 9). A second limitation is about the tendency to represent modern slavery as something isolated from the structural dynamics of the global economy and with narratives based on the morality of individual perpetrators, criminality, and poverty, and with solutions focused on criminal justice, legislations, and awareness raising. That means attention to the symptoms and not the social, economic, and political causes of forced labour, particularly the State’s role and corporate power (LeBaron, 2018). The third problem highlighted by LeBaron concerns the real-world impact of the information produced, especially when it is inaccurate. Indeed, inaccurate information can create ineffective policies and responses (LeBaron, 2018). Another important consideration is that research on forced labour cannot be apolitical, either in the quantification of this grand challenge, or in the use of data generated (Phillips, 2018).

*“Ring-fencing forced labour to the extent that the problem is presented as being ‘exceptional’ is a considerably safer political approach, and one that lends more easily to political consensus. The quantitative estimates, corresponding with a high definitional threshold, paint the scale of the problem as being less challenging to business and less demanding of significant change to core business models and practices”* (Phillips, 2018, p. 49).

A novel view of forced labour is required. Exploitation cannot be understood in binary ways. Indeed, the boundaries between forced labour and exploitation more generally are porous (LeBaron, 2018). The idea of a continuum of labour exploitation is useful (Skrivankova, 2010). Besides, to highlight the political nature of labour exploitation, when we study forced labour it is also useful to conceive the threat of economic coercion (e.g., the threat of destitution or starvation), although the ILO does not consider that in its interpretation of the definition. Still, subsistence is an important reason for the enactment of a labour relation (LeBaron, 2018).

Thus, it is essential to go beyond the individualistic nature of the definition of forced labour, to understand coercion as forged by structural relations, inequalities in the areas of gender, sexuality, citizenship and historic injustice (LeBaron, 2018). Forced labour is difficult to study, but management and organization research can be an important contribution to the debate about this grand challenge. For instance, LeBaron and Crane have discussed two management concepts that can be adopted to investigate the business of forced labour, namely, business models and supply chains (LeBaron & Crane, 2018). Particularly useful for this research is the discussion on supply chains. Indeed, drawing on Gereffi et al. (2005), they have proposed four useful dimensions that can be useful to investigate forced labour in supply chains: structure, geography, governance, and institutional context (LeBaron & Crane, 2018). In addition to this, forced labour can be understood only when we are open to challenge the existing narratives: *“use of conventional frameworks should not preclude serious engagement with counter-definitions and narratives on forced labour, especially those from communities and actors whose livelihoods and lived experiences are impacted by these definitions”* (Okyere, 2018, p. 95). This is also a necessity that emerges from possible biases in research and practice on this topic, as evidenced by Okyere in their research regarding NGO research on modern slavery:

*“First, uncritical reliance on mainstream discourses and definitions reinforces their dominance and further delegitimizes counter-narratives; second, it gives rise to methodological issues that adversely affect research quality; and, third, it increases the risk of empirical findings being distorted or divergent findings ignored”* (Okyere, 2018, p. 97).

Indeed, a critical analysis of textual data carried out by Okyere highlighted how *“community’s opinion about childhood, hazardous work, exploitative labour, forced labour and other phenomena were delegitimized in the knowledge produced and disseminated by the project”* (Okyere, 2018, p. 100); and in such cases, there is always the risk to show a sort of superiority.

*“Researchers, NGOs and other actors who subscribe unequivocally to the mainstream international definitions and discourses may also presume that they are better informed and unbiased, or that their opinions are more rational and legitimate than those held by the people whose lived experiences they seek to study”* (Okyere, 2018, p. 104).

Issues concerning research on forced labour and severe labour exploitation can be manifold. For instance, those who perceive their labour as exploited are still at the margins of research on severe labour exploitation and forced labour:

*“a major explanation for why extreme exploitation is so frequently misrepresented lies in the very simple fact that far too few researchers actually talk to the people they wish to understand, analyze or represent when researching the shadow economy. Such is the contemporary fetishisation of quantitative data and so un-reflexive the acceptance of received institutional (or media) reports that scholars and institutions alike often overlook the most basic of research approaches: talking to those especially concerned by any particular phenomenon”* (Howard, 2018, pp. 113–114).

All these limitations are important for empirical, political, ethical and epistemological reasons (Howard, 2018). The epistemological reason is particularly relevant. From a post-structuralist point of view, meaning is relational and possibly shaped by someone’s power with direct and indirect agency: *“concepts do not possess any definitive ‘essence’; rather, they are ‘fixed’ only ever partially and as a consequence of the ongoing exercise of power”* (Howard, 2018, p. 115). Therefore, severe exploitation is always constructed through discourse within certain socio-political contexts, in which meanings are contested by diverse social actors (Caruana, 2018). The issue is that *“as a dominant understanding of what constitutes severe labour exploitation comes to settle in public discourse as the view, it may well (perhaps inadvertently) mask other realities”* (Caruana, 2018: 179). On that, given the difficulty of collecting data individually and during a short period, group interviews or focus groups are a useful solution (Howard, 2018). Focus groups can be useful given the assumption that there are shared social norms among immigrant farmworkers (e.g., Italy), an assumption that is confirmed by the internal flows of workers across Italy, also sustained by their social capital (Sagnet & Palmisano, 2015, p. 19).

As concerns the management research on *“modern slavery”*, for a long time there has been a *“denial of slavery in management studies”* (Cooke, 2003, p. 1895). Still, during the last years, there has been a growing interest, beyond a mere concern regarding the ethical implications of labour exploitation in businesses. The first groundbreaking study about modern slavery in management research is Crane’s paper entitled *“Modern slavery as a management practice: Exploring the conditions and capabilities for human exploitation”* (2013). In this paper, Crane presents: institutional conditions enabling modern slavery (industry context; socioeconomic context; geographic context; cultural context; regulatory context); organizational exploiting and insulating capabilities (access and deployment of violence; debt management; accounting opacity; labour supply chain management); and finally organizational sustaining and shaping capabilities (moral legitimization together; domain maintenance) (Crane, 2013).

Management literature agrees that modern slavery persists because of the challenges that derive from governing global value chains (GVCs), and due to triggers such as the complexity of the value chains, business logic for slavery, and enabling conditions, such as outsourcing or multi-tiered subcontracting (Stringer & Michailova, 2018). According to existing literature, supply chain practices and CSR may be ineffective and part of the problem (New, 2015), and further research into capabilities, detection, and remediation is needed (S. Gold et al., 2015). Gold and colleagues offered useful insights on the indicators systems needed to detect slavery (they must be based on risk monitoring, data triangulation, and inspections), and along with effective remediating responses (multi-stakeholder initiatives, community-centred approach, supplier development, and capacity-building) (S. Gold et al., 2015). Therefore, management scholars have started to research modern slavery, along with systems designed to combat it. Still, they mainly focus on multinational corporations and downstream actors and compliance with the non-financial disclosure regulations (Stevenson & Cole, 2018; Flynn & Walker, 2020; Monciardini et al., 2021; Schaper & Pollach, 2021). That is also true for public organizations, such as universities in the UK (Rogerson et al., 2020). At a general level, there is a gap between corporate social responsibility (CSR) standards and the business models effectively employed by companies. Thus, extant standards are ineffective (LeBaron, 2021). Literature also started to propose new conceptual discussions, as well as new ideas on how to reduce vulnerability to modern slavery, through blockchain technology (Christ & V Helliar, 2021), whistleblowing (Stevenson, 2021), and worker-driven social responsibility (Rosile et al., 2021), together with intra-industry and horizontal collaborations (Benstead et al., 2018; Trautrimis et al., 2021).

On this specific topic, the intuition proposed by Christ and Burritt about the roles of business scholars in supporting the United Nations “*Sustainable Development Goals*” (SDGs) through knowledge generation and application, about the modern slavery issue, appears informative (Christ & Burritt, 2019). There is also a growing interest in understanding modern slavery on the consumer side. Indeed, consumers can use several legitimizing and neutralizing strategies to understand modern slavery, but also to plan their responses, and to justify their inaction (Carrington et al., 2021). Research has also been carried out on stakeholders' perceptions of the role of businesses in tackling modern slavery, with issues such as lack of transparency for consumers, inability of domestic unions to engage, overlapping of different standards, and difficulty in engaging small businesses (Christ & Burritt, 2018).

In this literature, a challenging framework has also been proposed, grounding modern slavery in capitalism, contrasting the neoliberal consumer's activism and its understanding of slavery (Page, 2017). This literature is also enriched by research on the ethical and moral discourses employed by businesses to construct the issue of modern slavery, to diminish accountability and boost minimal legal responsibility (Dahan & Gittens, 2010; Wray-Bliss & Michelson, 2021), or also by activists and NGOs to capture attention (Dahan & Gittens, 2010). Empirical research shows how citizens discuss child slavery in terms of individual responsibility and not corporate accountability (Vestergaard & Uldam, 2022). Management research is also starting to explore modern slavery in organizational contexts, namely how specific types of labour control create slavery-like situations (Shahadat & Uddin, 2022); the business models of organizational actors (that is, models based on risk reduction, asset leveraging, evading legal minimums, or workers as consumers) (Crane et al., 2021); how non-economic reasons can explain the retention of modern slavery relations (Salmon, 2020); and how clusters and relations between employers reinforce exploitation (Chesney et al., 2019). However, this research area is still superficial.

*“business and management accounts overlook the dynamics most closely aligned with their disciplinary focus, namely, an in-depth analysis of the business of modern slavery, including the nature and prevalence of modern slavery within the businesses and supply chains of various sectors and parts of the world; the organizational and supply chain dynamics that give rise to it; and the business actors and models through which it flourishes”* (Caruana et al., 2021: 252).

The organization of forced labour is often neglected and mistaken, but that is the result of the academic and media eradication of this crucial topic from the broader discussion about labour exploitation, but it is also the consequence of methodological and conceptual inconsistencies. Only if we consider forced labour embedded in the economy, and linked to (and part of) the broader debate about decent work, we can understand slavery-like practices. Indeed, labour exploitation is a business-driven process. Forced labour is a solution and a choice, but not a decontextualized choice, it is a decision that derives from the failure of the previous phases, in product supply chains, and labour relations (here I do not consider descent-based slavery). Violence and subjugating coercion unveil and leave in short periods (LeBaron, 2021), due to last-minute contracts, heavy orders, as well as unexpected personal emergencies. Therefore, it seems important 1) to conceptualize labour exploitation as a process; 2) not to overestimate the modern slavery narrative; and 3) not to separate severe abuses from minor labour abuses.



A broader frame offers more insights, rather than a restrictive focus on exceptional narratives. We must study forced labour because it is the gravest form of labour exploitation, as well as a possible outcome (I discuss the idea of a continuum later). In terms of gaps in management and business literature on modern slavery, several aspects are still unexplored. An important gap concerns the limited attention (perhaps because of the obstacles in empirical research) devoted to the organizational contexts where modern slavery and severe labour exploitation take place and the organizing practices and business models employed by the actors involved. Human resource management (HRM) scholars can be important contributors to the debate about modern slavery, for example by exploring *“the lived experience of pivotal agents within and around modern slavery businesses”* (Caruana et al., 2021, p. 263), or the *“boundary work”* carried out by sourcing agents in managing the relationships between buyers and suppliers, concerning the working conditions in the global value chains (Soundararajan et al., 2018), and the HRM practices to coerce workers (Caruana et al., 2021). More research on *“(alternative) organizing could help throw light on how different organizational forms can be deployed to both sustain as well as interrupt coercive labor practices”* (Caruana et al., 2021, p. 263). Hence, labour supply chains represent an opportunity to contribute to research on the role played by intermediaries on working conditions within supply chains, along with their role in linking product and labour supply chains (Soundararajan et al., 2018, 2021; Caruana et al., 2021).

Modern slavery laws represent a very fertile research area. On that, laws have been proposed in different countries, such as the UK, Australia and California. These laws focus on mandated disclosures and are based on the assumption that the transparency achieved, resulting from these disclosures, can be used to discourage modern slavery (Harris & Nolan, 2022). Still, the language adopted in these laws is diversified. For instance, the *“UK Modern Slavery Act 2015”* does not define modern slavery, but the offences included in this law are slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour, and human trafficking (UK Modern Slavery Act, 2015). Also the *“California Transparency in Supply Chains Act”* does not cite modern slavery, but cites slavery and human trafficking (SB 657 Home Page, 2015: 2(a)). The *“Australia Modern Slavery Act”* sets modern slavery as: the action that would be an offence under the Division 270 or 271 of the *“Australian Criminal Code”* (slavery, servitude, forced labour, deceptive recruitment for labour or services, forced marriage, debt bondage, trafficking in persons, organ trafficking); trafficking in persons; the worst forms of child labour (Australia Modern Slavery Act, 2018).

What is shared by these laws is the common approach to enforcement, based on disclosure and market enforcement (Harris & Nolan, 2022: 227). The *“Australian Modern Slavery Act”* requires entities that are based or operate in Australia, with an annual consolidated revenue of more than \$100 million, to report annually those risks concerning modern slavery in their supply chains and operations, together with actions to tackle those risks. On the other hand, other entities, that are based or that operate in Australia, may decide to report voluntarily (*Australia Modern Slavery Act*, 2018). They do not financially penalize if they fail to report, if not with the risk of being identified on the public register that is operated by the government (Harris & Nolan, 2022). *“This tactic seeks a compromise between regulation of business on the one hand (evidenced by mandatory reporting requirements targeting a broadly defined social evil) and deregulation (evidenced by a weak framework that outsources enforcement to the market) on the other”* (Harris & Nolan, 2022, p. 227). Overall, these modern slavery disclosure models can be considered soft, given the limited responsibility for non-compliance with the law’s requirements, the absence of penalties and mechanisms to escalate enforcement, and the reliance and outsourcing of the enforcement to the market (Harris & Nolan, 2022). Thus, a crossover between the state, businesses and stakeholders (e.g., workers’ representatives) to share a regulatory burden is suggested. State and market-based enforcement dynamics are *“mutually essential”* to efficiently regulate global supply chains (Harris & Nolan, 2022, p. 241).

As to the UK, different scholars studied the *“UK Modern Slavery Act”*. For instance, LeBaron and Rühmkorf compared the *“UK Modern Slavery Act”* and the *“UK Bribery Act”*, comparing two different legislative approaches to promote accountability in global supply chains, and to explore the impact of these laws on corporate behaviour (LeBaron & Rühmkorf, 2017, p. 15). In detail, the *“UK Bribery Act”* is a *“home state regulation”* that determines extraterritorial criminal liability and binding public standards, but also sanctions in case of non-compliance. The *“UK Modern Slavery Act”* increases the duties of businesses on reporting and disclosure on the voluntary initiatives against forced labour, but without extraterritorial criminal liability, non-binding public standards or fines for non-compliance (LeBaron & Rühmkorf, 2017, p. 16). What they observe is that laws that generate criminal corporate liability seem to stimulate changes in corporate strategy that are deeper; and that voluntary reporting, instead of strict public labour standards, such as in the case of the *“UK Modern Slavery Act”*, appears to have weakened the efficacy of initiatives against forced labour (LeBaron & Rühmkorf, 2017, p. 15).

Additionally, this law presents a risk of managerialization, where symbolic structures end up being linked to legal compliance, when instead they are ineffective (Monciardini et al., 2021). Besides disclosure-based regimes, an additional type of business and human rights regulation is the due diligence compliance, focused on lead firms. It includes a positive responsibility to deploy vigilance, and in case of deviance, also the possibility of penalties or vulnerability to civil action (Marshall et al., 2022, p. 263). Examples are the “*French Due Diligence*” legislation and the “*German Human Rights Due Diligence Act (‘Draft law’)*” (Marshall et al., 2022, p. 263). The “*French Due Diligence*” law requires that certain companies [that have, at the end of two consecutive financial years, at least five thousand workers (within itself and in direct/indirect subsidiaries) with head offices on French Territory; or firms with at least ten thousand workers (within it and in direct/indirect subsidiaries) with head offices on French Territory or abroad] determine and effectively implements a vigilance plan. This vigilance plan includes measures to identify risks and to prevent serious violations of fundamental freedoms and human rights, health and safety of people and environment, and that result from activities of the company, but also of those that the company controls directly or indirectly, subcontractors or suppliers. Another prevision is that the plan is thought to be designed with different stakeholders, but also if appropriate, through multi-party initiatives at the sectorial or territorial level of action, and including these measures: mapping of risks for identification, analysis, and prioritization; measures for the evaluation of subsidiaries, subcontractors, or suppliers with which they have commercial relations, and with regard to risk mapping; proper actions to relieve risks or avert grave damages; alert mechanism and collection of reports on the onset or existence of risks, determined in consultation with representative unions in the firm; a system to monitor these measures and evaluate the effectiveness. A major element of this law is the penalties that the company can have in case of deviance. According to this law, when a company with a formal notice to comply, does not comply within three months from that notice, the competent court can order it to comply with the obligations, if necessary under penalty, and upon request of any person establishing an interest (Law No. 2017-399 of March 27, 2017, Relating to the Duty of Vigilance of Parent Companies and Ordering Companies, 2017, Article 1). Another element of this law is the prevision that a failure to comply generates accountability, and requires to repair the harm that the compliance would have made it possible to avoid, an action taken by any person establishing an interest (Law No. 2017-399 of March 27, 2017, Relating to the Duty of Vigilance of Parent Companies and Ordering Companies, 2017, Article 2).

A business and human rights regulation is the trade-based regime. Often, this regime regards the source country's government and their respect of standards, usually at the sectoral level. An example of that is the "GSP+" of the European Union, through which incentives are given to developing countries to achieve good governance and sustainable development by cutting their import duties to zero on more than two-thirds of the tariff lines of the exports. In return, countries have to implement 27 international conventions about labour rights, human rights, environment and good governance (*Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+)*) (Marshall et al., 2022, p. 263). Some trade-based regimes are about blocking imports of certain products such as the case of "Section 307" of the "US Tariff Act of 1930 (19 U.S.C. § 1307)" that forbids import of products mined, produced or manufactured fully or in part in any foreign country by convict, forced or/and indentured labor (*19 USC 1307: Convict-Made Goods; Importation Prohibited*) (Marshall et al., 2022). Hence, existing legislation is a fertile field of research.

Therefore, "modern slavery" or "forced labour" represent serious problems that management and business literature is trying to tackle and address with theoretical and empirical research. The issue is that a focus on the most severe forms of labour exploitation, as conceptually and empirically autonomous practices, covers its main characteristics and conceals minor abuses. We need to address not only extreme cases (France, 2016) for different reasons. First, "minor" violations can evolve into severe exploitation. Abuses that can create a further vulnerability to severe labour exploitation are: (a) non-payment of minimum wage/withholding of wages: when in poverty, workers are less inclined to complain for fear of losing their jobs, and wages are necessary for their survival; (b) excessive charges for accommodation and the equipment: when debts tied to excessive charges hold workers in abusive workplaces, or accommodation tied to their job increases the dependency of workers; (c) withholding of passports: without documents, they can feel unable to leave or can have fear of being caught by the authorities; (d) bullying: workers can feel incapable of complaining because of threats or also harassment (France, 2016, p. 4). Factors that are not labour violations are: isolation, insecure immigration status, poverty and lack of alternative options, long labour chains/subcontracting, language barriers, and lack of awareness of labour rights (France, 2016, p. 5). Then, they can also have barriers in dealing with abuse or exploitation: lack of reporting and remedy (e.g., lack of access to reporting mechanisms, lack of self-identification and not identification as victims of abuses, unwillingness to report abuse), lack of regulation and enforcement (France, 2016, pp. 7–8).

Second, we also need to study minor abuses because labour cannot be understood as a binary concept (forced or free labour), but it is better thought of as a continuum (Skrivankova, 2010) in which severe exploitation represents the tip of the iceberg, the worst type of violation.

*“Things are rarely this straightforward. Life rarely features binary choices between forced or free. The far more common question is instead ‘are you worse or better off?’ This question is routinely asked by workers around the world, whatever their individual circumstances, as they try to make sense of both big and small differences in wages, conditions, and alternative livelihoods. Conventional models which juxtapose slavery with freedom are frequently unhelpful and misleading here, since the vast majority of people tend to be somewhere in between, rather than at the ends of the scale. Informal and precarious work is the norm, rather than the exception, and economic systems have been designed to take unfair advantage of this vulnerability”* (Quirk, 2020).

I support the use of the idea of *“decent work”* as an ideal type from a behavioural perspective, for workers, employers, activists, and other societal actors, starting from the assumption that we can observe deviations from this utopistic situation in the forms of *“decent work deficits”*. I believe that this open-ended understanding is a way to bring closer diverse types of workers in the fight against indecent work, and to improve our understanding of severe exploitation, for the mentioned reasons, and beyond the concept of modern slavery. *“Many governments and other actors are attracted to this formula. It concentrates attention upon a small number of ‘exceptional’ cases, and thereby ends up tacitly legitimating – or at least de-prioritising – everyday abuses and systems”* (Quirk, 2020). The idea of a continuum guarantees that abuses that are less grave than severe exploitation and that not meet the criminal threshold (namely *“routine exploitation”*) are not overlooked (Davies, 2019). Routine exploitation is an everyday exploitation normalized as part of supply chains, abuses that if reported are usually addressed through labour, civil or regulatory law (Davies, 2019). Davies (2019) shows six issues lived by migrant workers that can be read through Scott’s idea that a high level of low-wage labour is featured by significant degrees of control that, if excessive, become exploitative (Scott, 2017), namely, recruitment and fees, substandard accommodation, flexibility, workplace pressure, health and safety, and payment problems (Davies, 2019). The harm perspective adopted by Davies is very informative in this discussion concerning the continuum of labour exploitation: *“Adopting a harm perspective means that processes and consequences, rather than criminal intent, become important focal points, which places ‘low-hanging fruit’ or seemingly ‘less severe harms’ at the centre of discussion”* (Davies, 2019: 307).

Decent work deficits are often tackled in isolation from each other, and forced labour is rarely addressed with the concept of decent work and the other deficits that can pave the way to severe labour exploitation. One of the causes is the neo-abolitionist tendency to use the label modern slavery to depict the severe forms of labour exploitation, and different scholars tried to challenge such blurry and misleading label (Davidson, 2015; LeBaron, 2020; Quirk, 2020). Low-wage workers can move in and out of forced labour situations quickly (LeBaron, 2021). Therefore, it is useful to analyze forced labour not in isolation, but in relation to decent work, and it appears necessary to study how minor abuses and forced labour coexist, also through the forced labour indicators proposed by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2012): *“the same systemic features contribute to temporary labour migrants’ vulnerability to abuse and exploitation in both its routine and exceptional forms”* (Davidson, 2015, p. 159).

*“forced labour has to be understood as a process and not as a static relationship between workers and employers. The vulnerability of migrants often increases over time as they are under pressure to repay their debts, or as they have been subjected to immigration controls and extortion from criminal networks. Moreover, employers often “test” the resistance of workers before they squeeze them into more exploitative situations. One could think of this process of an ever narrowing labyrinth where the decision making power of the worker is surrendered in the end”* (Andrees, 2008, p. 22).

Forced labour can be more intelligible if we try to explore how labour relations move towards the most severe forms of labour exploitation (Yea & Chok, 2018; Boersma & Nolan, 2022). Useful is the research on Bangladeshi contract migrant construction workers in Singapore that challenged the depoliticized and enumerative tendencies (check-box with indicators) adopted in approaching unfree labour (restrictions to workers’ freedoms, like exit labour relations and freedom of movement) and identifying victims (Yea & Chok, 2018). Their idea is a cumulative approach to unfree labour, that recognizes the interlocking impact of various forms of duress and compulsion on migrant workers’ choices and with limited alternatives (Yea & Chok, 2018). Their study showed how migration-induced debt, condition papers, document substitution, wage theft, the manipulation of salary documents, excessive hours of work and overtime, and threats, were adopted to make sure that workers could not contest their working conditions or exit from these relations, and by noting the cumulative impacts (Yea & Chok, 2018, p. 937). Therefore, it appears crucial and essential to adopt a dynamic approach towards (in)decent work as a continuum (Skrivankova, 2010; Christ et al., 2020; Boersma & Nolan, 2022).

The continuum idea is useful to study the situations between decent work and forced labour, and how work can evolve (Skrivankova, 2010, p. 19). Sub-standard conditions and the lack of economic alternatives are not forced labour, but should be examined in terms of vulnerability and how it can be abused to get workers' consent (Skrivankova, 2010, p. 19).

*“The motivation, demand and socio-economic factors allowing the exploitation to happen need to be addressed too. That way we can come closer to resolving the underlying problem of impunity enjoyed by those who exploit and the ignorance of labour legislation and workers' rights. Exclusive focus on extreme situations ignores underlying causes of real situations, where the permissibility of lesser forms of violation ensures the existence of forced labour”* (Skrivankova, 2010, p. 29).

Three observations proposed by Boersma and Nolan (2022) appear to be informative. Firstly, a focus on abuses generally can be helpful: 1) to understand how exploitation can evolve into modern slavery and 2) to study how to prevent labour abuses from becoming modern slavery. A second consideration is on the need for interdisciplinary research, particularly to develop a better grasp of regulatory solutions. A third point regards the need to study how exploitation evolves with novel economic and social conditions (Boersma & Nolan, 2022, p. 173). On this, useful is the research from Caspersz et al. (2022) about modern slavery in global value chains, through a global factory framework, to conceptualize how and when global value chains can turn vulnerable to modern slavery. The argument is that there is a continuum of exploitation that can lead to modern slavery. The conjunction of three features (complexity, appropriation arrangements and obligation's cascade) can contribute to an environment in which modern slavery takes place, with different degrees of visibility and based on the combination of these features, and that by themselves do not result in modern slavery. The relations between these features can be moderated by external factors, such as the intervention of non-governmental organizations, or exaggerated by shocks (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic) (Caspersz et al., 2022). Another study is the one on upstream/producers' perspective on downstream labour abuses in global value chains by exploring the Australian cotton industry and through the interesting premise that producers have limited information on sites where their cotton is exported to, on labour abuses that take place there, and with a scant attempt to identify and prevent them (Boersma et al., 2022). What is important to note is the use of a sensemaking lens to identify labour abuses in global value chains and by suggesting the possibility of applying a “book-end” approach that integrates downstream and upstream actions (Boersma et al., 2022).

Another research that considers exploitation as a continuum is the study of how a factory's relations and practices may mediate the impact of institutional changes on worker conditions, by investigating and exploring how a labour governance system influenced relations between workers and management, and their impact on workers' outcomes as far as procedural rights and substantive consequences, and by exploring the Rana Plaza building collapse of 2013, and the "Accord on Fire and Safety in Bangladesh" and the "Alliance" as labour governance system (Frenkel et al., 2022, p. 273). Useful is the framework proposed to explain workers' outcomes in the garment sector in Bangladesh: 1) *political-economic context* (international soft laws, competitive pressures); 2) *labour governance systems, with public regulation* (international trade agreements; state policies), *private individual firm regulation* (firm-suppliers' relations and codes of conduct), and the *private collective lead firm regulation* (lead-firm affiliation).

These forms of regulation shape workplace labour regimes by driving factory managers to use practices that can respect or undermine workers' outcomes that are internationally accepted. Workers' outcomes are *procedural* (participation of workers in decision-making, rights to be members of a union, to collectively bargain), *substantive* (e.g., wages, job security and safety). *Workplace relations* have *structural components* (e.g., firm structure, workplace size, growth of sales and type of production) and *relational components* (relations between workers and managers, along with workers' responses) (Frenkel et al., 2022, pp. 275–276). In detail, they present two types of workplace labour regimes: a) *hardship regime* (unilateral management control, situation that is moderated by a limited consultation with workers or their workplace representatives; workers' outcomes that respect international standards, and others that are substandard, because not considered important by lead-firms, also due to the awareness that relations with lead-firms depend on the capacity to respect standards prioritized by them); b) *sweatshop regime* (unilateral management control; and evenly workers' outcomes that are evenly sub-standard, and the law that is absent or evaded). In addition to these two regimes, although is rare as a regime, there is a *fair work* regime (workers' outcomes meet or exceed minimum standards) (Frenkel et al., 2022, pp. 276–277). Exploitation occurs in the workplaces following the first regimes, and with the *hardship regime* as the average. Political economy, labour governance systems and factory relations explain these patterns. In their study, they also discussed the chance that after the COVID-19 pandemic, modern slavery emerge among small domestic producers, with short-term issues in the export sector (Frenkel et al., 2022).



Aligned with this idea of labour exploitation as a continuum of labour abuses, is the research on the precariousness of transnational Romanian live-in care workers in Austria, and through a useful five-dimensional concept of work-related precariousness: a) *reproductive-material*; b) *social-communicative*; c) *legal-institutional (participation)*; d) *status and recognition*; e) *meaningful-subject-related aspects* (Hopfgartner et al., 2022). This study evidenced situations from minor abuses (e.g., low status and recognition, inadequate training, and the fulfilment of excessive requests for a strong sense of commitment) to severe forms of exploitation (e.g., work without compensation, withholding of sanitation and food, need to work beyond care) (Hopfgartner et al., 2022, p. 315). Unfree labour and precarious employment, together with precarious legal status are actively enacted by the state and employers, together with the workers who negotiate and contest these concepts not as separate classes and categories, but rather as interconnected conditions of labour market participation. Hence, unfree labour is not intrinsic to migrant workers and their jobs but describes relations enacted by the state and employers. Unfreedom does not always fit with situations of forced labour or trafficking (Strauss & McGrath, 2017, p. 200). On that, the concept of “*hyper-precarity*” is informative (Lewis et al., 2015). Indeed, the interplay of deregulated labour markets (e.g., demands for flexible and low-cost labour) and restrictive asylum and immigration policies and their impact on basic rights (residence, work, welfare) creates the conditions for precarity. Still, insecure, and dangerous jobs along with an insecure legal status due to restrictive immigration regimes, can create “*hyper-precarity*”, extreme experiences of unfreedom (Lewis et al., 2015, p. 594).

Therefore, exploitation can be understood as a continuum from less severe forms of labour exploitation to severe forms of exploitation in which the less severe forms can generate the conditions for grave manifestations to occur (Davies & Ollus, 2019). Labour exploitation can also be understood as a corporate crime and harm, given the role that businesses and supply chains have in facilitating labour exploitation practices, and together with a limited regulatory oversight (Davies & Ollus, 2019). In greater detail, this corporate crime continuum can be integrated with a labour exploitation continuum, considering that the contested concepts of crime (viewed in terms of legal intervention, not only criminal law) and harm (breaches of stakeholders’ interests) are useful to figure out routine exploitation, given that usually routine exploitation is not linked to criminal codes, but it is embedded in the same systemic problems that concern supply chains and the political-economic context (Davies & Ollus, 2019, p. 90).

Hence, volatile industry dynamics, routine subcontracting, and limited regulatory oversight contribute to the exposure of workers to routine exploitation (Davies & Ollus, 2019, p. 102). This attention to labour exploitation as a continuum is also growing in management research. An example of that is the call for supply chain researchers to humanize research on working conditions in supply chains, and to build a path to decent work (Soundararajan et al., 2021). Also, in accounting research there is a recent conceptualization of exploitation as a continuum ranging from the illegitimate, illegal and criminal practices of modern slavery, passing through unethical, and often illegal practices (e.g., wage theft), and to decent work (Christ et al., 2020). In line with this understanding, an example of research on poor working conditions (grey area) of exploitation, is the one carried out by Yang et al. (2020) about accounting for emancipation from wage theft, and by exploring how two retail workers in an Australian supermarket chain challenged their employer about inequality and wage theft, and by exploring how accounting can have both an emancipatory and repressive role (Yang et al., 2020). Research that connects accounting in the grey forms of exploitation on the retail side of food production can improve our understanding of the extreme forms in the upstream (Christ et al., 2020, pp. 1496–1497).

Labour can also vary because of different framing acts, as shown in research on sustainability reporting boundaries (Antonini et al., 2020). In detail, Antonini et al. explored how the setting of sustainability reporting boundaries shapes the definition and distribution of social risks in supply chains, especially those linked to human rights and labour. They argue that accounting fixing contested boundaries is subpolitical because built outside usual political processes; and that the way by which risks are framed makes personal experience abstract, and knowledge of the risks impersonal, generating a distance between consumers and workers. Nevertheless, supply chain boundaries are constantly contested. In addition, Siddiqui et al. (2020) explored the emergence of private sector responsabilisation to address the governance issues in global supply chains. In detail, they explored the Rana Plaza case, and particularly how a frameshift caused by a disaster can shape the efficacy of the certification process in a context featured by a strong state-business relationship (Siddiqui et al., 2020, p. 1569). The Rana Plaza collapse created diverse frameshifts about labour governance in Bangladesh from the point of view of multinational corporations, with improvements, but with the sustainability of the established governance mechanism that appeared to be influenced by the dubious ability of the state to engage in a catalyst role, mostly for the state-business relation (Siddiqui et al., 2020, p. 1569).

### **1.3. Labour and Human Rights in the Agricultural Sector**

Agriculture represents a sector that deserves continuous attention and research for different reasons: 1) a large part of severe labour exploitation is rooted in agriculture; 2) agriculture is often about food production, thus represents a sector that should interest the whole society; 3) agriculture is the result of co-production among human and nature (Martino, 2018, p. 118). Indeed, with the transformation of the agrifood systems, and the domination of production, distribution and consumption by large transnational businesses, food production is more and more disconnected from natural processes, and the agricultural businesses are dependent on other actors along food supply chains: a) multinationals that control the market of seeds and that produce chemicals and mechanical means; b) the large-scale organized distribution and processing companies. The result is a pressure on prices, indebtedness, and the depletion of peasants with the failures of businesses and labour exploitation (Corrado, 2021, pp. 24–25). In addition, the private and public regulations to guarantee the quality of food and processes can be considered as a mechanism of exclusion of small companies (Corrado, 2021, p. 32).

To describe labour practices and abuses in agriculture considering the institutional, social, and organizational differences among countries, and considering the case studies at the basis of this research about agriculture and alternative organizing, I draw on grey literature developed about two countries, Italy, and the US. The rationale behind the choice of these two countries, as stated in the introduction, is the following: Italy is the country where I was born and spent all my formative years, and where I had intercultural exchanges with the African community of Brindisi, the Southern Italian province where I grew up. Besides, my enrollment in a Ph.D. program at the University of Genoa, Italy, made the collection of data more cost-effective. Besides the focus on agriculture is driven by my previous awareness of abuses in this context. The choice of the US is driven by the literature review on alternative labour organizing and its centrality in the debate on community unionism. A context with the absence of federal laws protecting farmworkers is a crucial driver for creativity. Therefore, an in-depth study of these two countries can be useful to have a more profound and contextualized understanding of abuses in agriculture, and also to understand better the context of this research. However, considering the differences, it is useful to discuss the differences between Italy and the US in terms of employment relations, and by highlighting how agriculture fits within these systems.

## a) Italy

First, Italy is characterized by a complex representation system, given the highly fragmented labour and employers' organizations, with functional and ideological divisions. As to unions, there are three major confederations representing the majority of unionized workers, retired and active workers. These confederations are characterized by divisions in terms of ideology, and past relations with political parties (now limited). These unions are a) the "*Italian General Confederation of Labour*" (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro, CGIL); b) the "*Italian Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions*" (Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori, CISL); c) the "*Italian Union of Labour*" (Unione Italiana del Lavoro, UIL). These confederations are organized vertically (sector-based) and horizontally (cross-industry) (Dorigatti & Pedersini, 2021, p. 132). On the other side, employers' associations are divided both functionally (e.g., type of company represented) and ideologically. (Dorigatti & Pedersini, 2021, p. 134).

As to agriculture, the sector-based unions linked to the mentioned labour confederations are a) the "*Workers Agro Industry Federation*" (Federazione Lavoratori Agro Industria, FLAI-CGIL); b) the "*Italian Agricultural Food Environmental Industrial Federation*" (Federazione Agricola Alimentare, Ambientale Industriale Italiana, FAI-CISL); c) the "*Italian Union of Agro-Food Jobs*" (Unione Italiana dei Lavori Agroalimentari, UILA-UIL). The employers' associations that signed collective agreements (protecting farmworkers and florists) with these unions, are as follows: a) the "*General Confederation of Italian Agriculture*" (Confagricoltura - Confederazione Generale dell'Agricoltura Italiana); b) the "*Coldiretti's National Confederation*" (Coldiretti - Confederazione Nazionale Coldiretti); c) and the "*Italian Farmers' Confederations*" (CIA - Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori) (CCNL 2022-2025 - Operai Agricoli e Florovivaisti, 2022).

As to collective bargaining, the Italian model can be considered as multi-tier, featuring varied bargaining levels: interconfederal cross-industry, industry-wide, as well as local decentralized. At the cross-industry level of bargaining, confederal organizations define general procedural rules for representation and bargaining. At the industry/sector level of collective bargaining, sectoral unions, and employer associations establish the scope and the procedure for the next and decentralized level of bargaining. Decentralized bargaining can take place at the company and territorial levels. As to agriculture, territorial bargaining is the main typology at this level, considering the high number of small companies (Dorigatti & Pedersini, 2021, pp. 136–137).

As regards exploitation in agriculture, to outline the main practices, I will draw on grey and academic literature, especially through a critical reading of the fourth, fifth, and sixth reports “*Agromafie e Caporalato*” of the Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto of the Italian union “*FLAI CGIL*”. In Italy, agriculture represents the industry that is more associated with poor labour. Indeed, among the five occupations with the highest incidence of poor workers, four are agricultural jobs. What is common among the sectors with a high incidence of poor labour is the following: regular work is short-term during the year; low intensity of paid hours; low hourly wages; and also high incidence of non-regular employment (De Gregorio & Giordano, 2022, pp. 22–23). A first consideration about Italian agriculture that is coherent with the idea of a continuum of exploitation, concerns the argument that non-regular employment is connected to regularity. Employment of non-regular workers is featured by frequent transitions from irregularity to precarious regularity with the same employer, or also through the transitions among different economic sectors, unemployment, and low salaries (De Gregorio & Giordano, 2022, p. 17). Standard employment, grey employment (formally legal) and black employment (fully illegal) can coexist as distinct instances, but a worker can also transit from one type of employment to another, notably in the grey and black areas (Carchedi, 2022d, p. 185). Another topic that emerges from the Veneto region is that we can assist in a segmentation of the labour market in dual terms: a) *workers with a contract* (main typology); and b) *workers without a contract*. If they have a contract, there may be standard and non-standard labour relations (e.g., with retribution and social security costs in part hidden). Without a contract, there may be informal relations, and severe exploitation if these relations are servile (Carchedi, 2022d, pp. 186–187).

### **I. Recruitment and Illegal Intermediation**

Among recruitment practices, as evidenced in Friuli, in the province of Pordenone, there is a) *word of mouth* among employers about the information on potential workers, but also among workers; b) *direct recruitment* and direct calls between employers and workers, and based mostly on relations that have been built over time; c) *reception centres, Caritas organizations, night schools for migrants, vocational training centres*. This last typology of recruitment is not illegal because one of the socialization goals of these organizations is to find jobs for guests. The issue is that employers agree to specific working conditions, but then do not apply them; d) *indirect intermediation through specialized figures*, namely gangmaster/labour contractor, not infrequently concurrently with the other cited methods (Carchedi, 2022b, pp. 154–156).

That can be done through an individual enterprise (holder of a VAT), a spurious cooperative (without mutualism), or a multiservice company (Carchedi, 2022d, p. 198). Recruitment can also be carried out directly by employees. These figures receive a surplus in their salaries, and if exploitative, they can require monetary recognition from workers (Carchedi, 2020e, p. 213).

As concerns illegal gangmastering or labour contracting (*“caporalato”* is the label in Italian), it is an informal system of intermediation of labour in which the intermediary detracts part of the salary of the worker and provides services (against payment) to workers and employers, such as transportation to workplaces and other places, the management of housing, food and water and the supervision of work (Perrotta, 2015, p. 18). The relations between workers and gangmasters can assume several forms: a) the farmworker within the *“community discourse”* with the building of a sense of community; b) the gangmasters as a model of social ascent; c) instrumental relation to finding a job or a house; d) *“I will never tell that a black boss is good”* (black bosses is the way farmworkers natives of Sub-Saharan Africa call African gangmasters) and refers to the perception of abuse at the basis of the relation (Perrotta, 2015, pp. 19–20). On the other hand, based on research on the employers’ motivations underlying the choice of gangmasters, the mentioned author, Perrotta, received three different responses: a) denial of gangmasters; b) illegal gangmastering is an organizational form autonomously chosen by farmworkers; c) a list of services that renders gangmasters essential for farmers/employers (e.g., mediation with farmworkers who do not speak Italian) (Perrotta, 2015, pp. 21–22). Still, it is useful to mention a possible *modus operandi* of these figures, as it is in Calabria, in the province of Cosenza (Carchedi, 2022a). First, there is an instrumental use by employers, with the task to find a workforce in the short-term, with a maximum pay of 25/30 euros a day, and to fulfil assigned jobs. In this context, the gangmaster imposes that workers not have relations with voluntary organizations or unions, or also file complaints to labour inspectors (Carchedi, 2022a, p. 259). In addition, these intermediaries can have the same nationality as the workers, but not always. Indeed, in the province of Cosenza, there are gangmasters from Morocco and Bulgaria who organize workers from Africa, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, usually because they know the territory and the employers (Carchedi, 2022a, p. 260). From what emerges in the province of Cosenza, when the number of workers organized by gangmasters is high, and local medium-large businesses deploy and use many gangmasters, this structure can become more hierarchical, with gangmasters working in the fields and controlled by employers’ overseers.

As shown in this context, a business with around 100 workers has 5/7 gangmasters, while a business with around 1000 workers can have 70/100 gangmasters (Carchedi, 2022a, p. 261). With different gangmasters and teams, competition can emerge and gangmasters can push their workers to work better, to maintain relations with employers, (Carchedi, 2022a, p. 263). In this context, becoming a gangmaster can be conceived as a career progression from being a farmworker, to assuming the role of worker/foreman by respecting or disrespecting workers (Carchedi, 2022a, p. 265). Furthermore, the pyramidal organization of illegal gangmastering has also been shown in Emilia-Romagna, in the provincial area of Forlì-Cesena, with organized structures, with common illegal gangmasters driving vans, and gangmasters with leading roles (Carchedi, 2018c, p. 169). This pyramidal organization can also have a multinational structure, as in the known case of the Romanian macrostructure in the area of Cesena, with individuals with different roles, from control to logistics (Carchedi, 2018c, p. 171).

The role of the gangmaster can be ambivalent. On one side, relations between workers and gangmasters are community relations (e.g., family, same nationality), and some gangmasters can also be respected, when workers consider them as reference points in a hostile territory. On the other side, gangmasters control the job placement of workers, they have relationships with employers and decide which farmworkers can have jobs and where, and in the case of piecework, they can also have an impact on how much farmworkers can earn by deciding the workplaces, by sending farmworkers to a field full of grass, stones or rotten tomatoes fields, and where it is difficult to pick many buckets of tomatoes, or rather fields with ripe tomatoes. (Perrotta et al., 2021, pp. 116–117). Professional intermediation in exchange for money can coexist with occasional intermediaries. That is the case of the recruitment of Panjabi workers in the supply chains regarding the “*Grana Padano*” and “*Parmigiano Reggiano*” in the Pianura Padana. In this context, it is also possible to distinguish between professional and occasional intermediaries. In the case of occasional intermediaries, there is a worker who facilitates the recruitment of a relative or a friend, and that is a way to acquire prestige within their family. In this instance, the occasional worker usually is hired by the business, and takes care of the newly hired in terms of training and control. Another case is the substitution for holidays or sickness, with the commitment and guarantee for the substitute, but also the training. While, with regard to professional intermediaries, they receive money, usually they do not work for the firm, but they take care of the recruitment for different firms (Azzaruoli, 2021, p. 133).

Besides, in addition to the above, procurement contracts and business leases are increasingly used within the agri-food supply chains, also through the use of business consortia that then subcontract to S.R.L. simplified, or even false cooperatives, and with the costs of labour that can be reduced, especially because the contractors apply national collective agreements that are inadequate in relation to the contracted out activities, and to the productive cycles of the food industry. Often these businesses apply collective agreements that concern multi-service, logistics and transport and with minor retribution (Franciosi, 2022, pp. 51–52). In agriculture, those businesses that contract out their activities (agricultural, zootechnical), more and more often contract out to cooperatives formally administered by individuals who are “*frontmen*” (Franciosi, 2022, p. 56). In this part, it is useful to mention some practices identified in Friuli, in the province of Pordenone (Carchedi, 2022b). In detail, a practice is emerging in which the intermediary opens a VAT number to allow the tracking of economic transactions. In this way, the intermediary can result as an entrepreneur or independent contractor, and hence invoice individually or collectively (e.g., through a cooperative) the amount decided by the employer.

Another tool is a procurement contract between an employer and an independent contractor with the latter hiring workers regularly or off the books. A third way is when the independent contractor hires workers with a VAT number or who are invited/forced to open a VAT number, by building a relation between contractors, but also a cascade sub-contracting with those who do not have a VAT number. Another practice is when the employer directly hires workers with a VAT number to work as contractors (Carchedi, 2022b, pp. 151–152). In addition, in Tuscany, in the areas of Siena and Grosseto, the management of foreign workers can be performed by gangmasters individually, but also by establishing (disguised) intermediary agencies of labour, such as cooperatives “*without land*”, as well as also service companies with different juridical personalities, namely individual company with VAT number, general company, limited liability company, limited company, labour lawyers and accounting firms (Carchedi, 2020d, p. 200). An intermediation form is the use of fake/spurious cooperatives. Usually, these cooperatives are dissolved after an order. However, later, the same persons can form other cooperatives, but with a different assignment of the vertical roles, also with the help of consultants who are experts on procurement contracts. Another method of recruitment is the use of multi-service agencies composed of white and black collars (e.g., lawyers, labour consultants, accountants) tasked with intermediation (Carchedi, 2020e, p. 214). These are “*cooperatives without lands*”.



As highlighted in Friuli, these are fictitious organizations with foreign-born individuals with experience in agriculture and with links with employers, and often with accountants, or labour lawyers (Carchedi, 2022b, p. 152). In detail, these cooperatives use a corporate form based on mutualism and collective work to generate profits for the top figures or a unique top figure, the president. Often, as shown in Lombardia, in the area of Brescia, these fake cooperatives can be also established directly in the countries of the workers, in this case in East European countries, and with part of the salary intended to repay the debt concerning their hiring and the round trip, and to pay for their accommodation and transportation, and by offering whole packages for the expat with pay and expenses to reimburse (Carchedi, 2018e, pp. 148–149).

Recruitment can take regional, national, and transnational trajectories. For instance, in Italy, at the national level, it has been noted that there is an internal migratory flow of farmworkers (Sagnet & Palmisano, 2015, p. 19). At the transnational level, an investigation showed a case of human trafficking for labour exploitation (Court of Catania, Judge's Section for Preliminary Investigations, Judgement n. 1397/2019 – N.R.G. 2151/2018 – N.R.G.G.I.P. 3889/2019). This case showed the existence of a criminal group composed of persons of Romanian nationality who recruited compatriots in Romania in conditions of high vulnerability, convincing them to move to Italy through the promise of a job in agriculture, regular salary, and decent housing. Still, the problem is that once arrived in Italy these citizens found themselves in conditions of severe labour exploitation, namely unsustainable working hours without pay, the subtraction of identity documents, isolation, and being forced to live in crumbling houses without heating. They were punished with violence if they tried to escape (Giammarinaro & Palumbo, 2020). Human trafficking for labour exploitation has also been investigated in the Agro Pontino area, in Lazio. In this context, the agricultural businesses in this area in need of workers turns to the first intermediary available in the area who has connections in Punjab. Then, this intermediary turns to an intermediary in Punjab who takes care of the arrival of farmworkers in Italy with a cost that varies from 5000 to 10,000 euros, based on the typology of relation (e.g., relative) and the complexity of the process. These costs are sometimes paid in advance by the firm and then recovered by retaining the entire or part of their salaries (Omizzolo, 2021, pp. 146–147). Immigration status can also generate extorsions related to the stay permits. It happened that employers asked for money (4000 – 6000 euros) for a contract, necessary for the stay permit, and if unable to pay, workers were forced to work to repay the debt (Omizzolo, 2021, p. 147).

On this point, an example of cross-country recruitment is the mobility of Romani citizens from Bulgaria to Mondragone (Caserta), Campania (Carchedi, 2018b). Indeed, next to autonomous mobility to Italy, there is also an organized recruitment, often featured by false promises, and with an organization of the migratory flow operated by subordinates, while the bosses remain in the home country (Carchedi, 2018b, pp. 217–218). Recruitment can take place within their families or closest families, and secondarily among other families and strangers. Besides, they can differently relate with workers in the case of family links (Carchedi, 2018b, pp. 218–220).

## **II. Housing**

Housing conditions experienced by migrant workers vary based on the time period, territory, the organization of mobility with regard to home countries, civil society's action, and solutions proposed by the local institutions (Perrotta et al., 2021, p. 110). Migrant workers' housing in agriculture is more precarious compared to other sectors for two reasons. Firstly, given that agriculture labour is often seasonal and characterized by high geographic mobility, housing stability is hard. Second, migrants look for housing near the workplaces, hence in the suburbs where there is a poor availability of houses. The result is the growth of informal settlements increasingly occupied by asylum seekers (Bilongo, 2020). On the issue of informal settlements, as shown in Basilicata, these housing solutions built by migrant workers can be characterized by tensions: a) between community solidarity and a segregation from the urban populations; b) between the informal management of some immediate needs and the lack of services from local institutions; c) between auto-organization and the discipline imposed by gangmasters (Perrotta et al., 2021, p. 113). These informal settlements or "*ghettos*" can be understood as places where living conditions are dramatic with tin shacks, rural buildings in ruin and without hygienic services, electricity, water and a service of waste collection. These shacks are often flammable and as a consequence fire incidents are common, with the deaths of workers and the loss of personal belongings. In addition to this, considering the isolation and distance from nearby towns, it can be difficult to move for grocery shopping, to go to the train or bus station, or to go to the hospital. There is no public transport that connects these settlements to towns. A solution may be a bicycle or to pay to get transportation, paid services usually provided by gangmasters (Perrotta et al., 2021, pp. 113–114). On the other hand, "*ghettos*" have also an important community dimension, with the building of public spaces, such as parking spots, bars, and restaurants, in addition to the strengthening of social relations.

If unemployed, many may live thanks to loans and credit from friends, family or co-nationals (Perrotta et al., 2021, pp. 114–115). Gangmasters may also play a role in the management of “ghettos” (Perrotta et al., 2021, p. 116). Nevertheless, the housing problem is not just about seasonal labour. For instance, in the province of Ragusa, Sicily, there has been a passage from seasonal to permanent production (Giammarinaro & Palumbo, 2020). This passage created a systemic provision of accommodations in old warehouses, garages, and sheds located in the countryside, or within business units (Giammarinaro & Palumbo, 2020). Hence, farmworkers may reside nearby or inside greenhouses, but also as mentioned in garages where employers can store chemical products, and that without protections can produce respiratory problems. Hence, housing is closely related to health problems. Yet, another problem that may emerge is hypochondria due to isolation and stress (Carchedi, 2018g, p. 289). Still, the housing issue may be linked to contractual issues. Contractual deficiencies may affect all dimensions of life. As evidenced in Veneto, when there is a discrepancy between the declared working days and those effectively worked, and paychecks are shown to potential tenants, it may happen that tenants do not take paychecks into account, because from what it is written on the paychecks, days do not appear enough to rent an apartment (Carchedi, 2022d, p. 205). The fact that they receive a portion of their wages off the books can only be useful in the case of “*co-habitation*”, when the rent is contracted with a worker (formal reference), but in practice they also involve other workers and with whom they share the rent and its expenses (Carchedi, 2022d, p. 205).

Grey labour and the discrepancy between formal contracts and practice, between paychecks and substantial working hours, is tied to housing and the possibility of renting a decent house. A response to this can be the reception centre for seasonal farmworkers. The problem is that intermediaries and employers can be aware of that and can decide to reduce the retribution (Carchedi, 2022d, p. 206). For those most vulnerable, housing can be inadequate farmhouses, often abandoned, arranged by the intermediary even with rent (Carchedi, 2022d, p. 206). Still, in addition to large concentrations of houses or informal settlements, migrants may also live in small and medium informal settlements, as in the case of Metaponto (Matera), Basilicata. The problem is that this fragmentation of houses produces an underestimation of the housing issue because it is not very visible. Paradoxically, living conditions can be even worse in these small settlements considering the absence of those services created within the large ghettos and informal settlements and that can soften their living conditions (Carchedi, 2018a, p. 266).

However, in terms of housing, it is also important to note how next to a permanent presence of migrant workers, there is also a permanent emergency-based management of seasonality, as shown in Piemonte, in the town of Saluzzo, with the establishment of temporary reception centres and delegated, for some years, to humanitarian organizations (in this case, the local “*Caritas*”). In this case, the underlying problem is that the presence of workers is not viewed in structural terms, as a phenomenon that occurs every year (Brovia & Ippolito, 2021, p. 91). This approach has led to actions carried out by the municipal administration to stop the arrival and the number of migrants, in this case through flyers and letters to the migrant population of Saluzzo, as well as ordinances to discourage the installation of camps, and camp clearances (Brovia & Ippolito, 2021, p. 92). This emergency-based approach of the migrant workforce is often improvised, as well as ongoing, and every year faced with the same issues, namely the overpopulation of reception centres, the control of the informal camps, and the management of the end of the season, with the absence of options for those who are precarious (Brovia & Ippolito, 2021, p. 94). Reception centres may be an issue for two reasons: a) workers can leave these centres to return to ghettos, because is there that gangmasters guarantee that they will be brought to the workplaces; b) these centres can have regulations that can restrict mobility, and they can offer suboptimal housing conditions, for instance when workers cannot manage the kitchen on their own; c) lack of inclusion of migrant workers in the urban centers and local communities, and division of workers among them and from NGOs (Perrotta et al., 2021, pp. 119–120). Hence, the reception system for migrants can be part of the process of exploitation, especially at the end of the path in the centre, with the common denial of the application for “*international protection*” and the decree of expulsion after which the informality becomes a living condition for migrant workers (Avallone et al., 2021, p. 163).

### **III. Transportation**

Transport is a crucial need in agriculture given the distance between workplaces and homes. As an example, in the province of Brindisi, in Apulia, farmwork is characterized by the mobility of farmworkers, especially women (Sagnet & Palmisano, 2015, p. 42; Carchedi, 2020b, p. 331). The mobility of workers can occur within the same province or also among different provinces (Carchedi, 2020b, p. 331). Many farmworkers who live in the province of Brindisi, especially Italian women, move towards Bari, and the Ionian coast, through travel agencies or bus rental agencies, with gangmasters and those demanding labour (Carchedi, 2020b, pp. 336–337).

Other actors involved are the manager of the bus rental agency and other intermediaries who interact with workers, the *“fattora”* and *“sottofattora”*, namely women intermediaries who travel with workers and who are responsible for monitoring during work. The working groups may be composed of more than 15/20 workers (Carchedi, 2020b, p. 337). For transportation, gangmasters can request an almost fixed price, from 10 euros if transportation is within the provincial confines or the surroundings, to 18/20 if the bus travels to Metaponto or Northern Calabria, for an average cost of transportation of 15 euros requested and deducted from their daily wages (Carchedi, 2020b, p. 338). Transportation can also be viewed as a duty, as workers who find jobs through intermediation cannot go to work autonomously once they are part of the team of the gangmaster. They risk not working or being threatened with losing their job. The charge for transport has two meanings: a) *economic*: workers are charged for the service; and b) *symbolic*: discretionary power exerted by gangmasters (Carchedi, 2022c, pp. 292–293).

#### **IV. Retribution**

Piecework is one of the ways through which farmworkers are retributed, based on how many caissons they fill, which is an issue given the pressure that can be exercised on workers. Also, the salary is often different from the one established by the contracts (Omizzolo, 2019, p. 82). A practice used to reduce pay is to hire workers with a contract, but that does not correspond to the working days, salaries received, and working hours, and with a strong discrepancy that is labelled *“grey labour”* (Carchedi, 2022d, p. 194). This practice consists of contracts that are formally standard, but in practice different. The main advantage for the employer is that they save on social security costs and can prevent penalties in case of fields controls and workers’ disputes because contracts and paychecks are formally clean. The benefit for migrant workers is that by having a contract, they can obtain a stay permit, residency, as well as social security (Carchedi, 2022b, p. 168). On this subject, it is useful to mention the use of *“fake part-time”* (Carchedi, 2022d, p. 196). In this case, employers can also enter part-time contracts, but with working hours that may be like or more than a full-time relation. The main benefit for migrant workers is that they can obtain a stay permit, and for Italian workers the possibility to accrue social security benefits (Carchedi, 2022d, pp. 196–197). *“False paychecks”* are also common to avoid controls (Omizzolo, 2019, p. 91). As shown in Veneto, workers who have subscribed paychecks may not receive full wages, mainly because working days are not fully registered, and because employers may confiscate social security costs (Carchedi, 2020f, pp. 246–247).

One of the employer's excuses for justifying off-the-books payments may be that workers are thieves and steal work tools, as told by a trade unionist in Tuscany (Carchedi, 2020d, p. 279). These fake paychecks with fewer working days declared are undersigned by the farmworker, and become legitimate and flawless, according to a trade unionist that operates in Campania (Carchedi, 2020a, pp. 311–312). Besides these manipulations of paychecks and working days, payment through transfers or checks is also spread. After the payment, workers cash out the money and then they return part of their salary to their employers (Carchedi, 2020d, p. 279). In this practice, after the employer weekly pays the worker through a trackable bank transfer, and the worker signs the paycheck and accepts the pay, after 2/3 days the worker withdraws part of the salary and returns it to their employer (Carchedi, 2018g, pp. 295–296). As regards e-payment, a shortcut is the double credit card to withdraw money. One signature is of the employer, or someone trusted, while the other is of the farmworker (Carchedi, 2020d, p. 279). Grey contracts can be different in terms of the concretely attributed days. For instance, if the worker works all month and the official days are 24, in the paycheck businesses can decide to register from 1 to 24 days. Working days that are not registered can be ulteriorly negotiated regarding salary (e.g., cash, petrol coupons, food vouchers, mobile recharges, or even by bank transfer but returning a portion of the salary) (Carchedi, 2022c, p. 304). Grey labour also exists for farmworkers that are hosted by reception centres. What is interesting in this case is that employers may adjust the working days in a way that workers do not pass a certain threshold, (e.g., the 5,800 euros that are necessary to renew the stay permit) (Carchedi, 2022c, p. 305).

In the case of foreigners, situations characterized by formal contracts and paychecks, but with different remuneration, can be even worse. In more detail, foreign farmworkers can obtain lower retribution than their Italian colleagues, as well as discretionary wages. This happens especially among the most vulnerable, such as irregular workers or the guests of the reception centres, and those who have lost their contracts (Carchedi, 2020b, p. 340). Employers through the use of unemployment benefits can make use of the general taxation to integrate salaries, to allow the acquisition of the benefits the following year. This is done by registering working days, but not paying overtime and non-working days (Carchedi, 2020f, p. 215, 2020d, p. 281). If workers have contracts, as discussed above, they can receive a part of their wages off-the-books or through meal/food vouchers (Carchedi, 2020e, p. 225). As far as falsified paychecks, the name of the business and the signature of the consultant may also not be clear.

Still, in this discussion, relevant is the so-called “*market of working days*” highlighted in Apulia, in Borgo Mezzanone (Carchedi, 2018f, pp. 247–248). In this case, the employer declares just a portion of the working days effectively worked (on 51 days effectively worked, the employer declares just 10 days), and carries out the paperwork necessary for the employment benefit behind the backs of the workers, because they do not know the laws and because they return to their countries. Then, the employer receives the unemployment benefit and resells part or all working days (41 days: 51 – 10) within the market of working days. These working days are usually bought by Italian citizens for pension counting, or to get the unemployment benefits (Carchedi, 2018f, pp. 247–248). As evidenced in Basilicata, some firms may regularly register workers with a few working days, with the majority of social security contributions that may also be allocated to some family members of the owners (Carchedi, 2018a, pp. 262–263).

The paychecks can also be influenced by the pay defined by the employer or the gangmaster before starting to work, regardless of the working days, but with regards to the days necessary to form the fixed salary, with the rest of the workdays paid less, or off-the-books (Carchedi, 2020c, pp. 399–400). Employers by the contract can formally declare that the job position is a common worker when in practice is a specialized worker (Carchedi, 2020c, p. 380). In terms of retribution, as shown in Calabria, in the province of Cosenza, retribution can vary based on the nationality of workers, and with diverse degrees of exploitation, not for a preference, but for workers’ seniority and time of permanence within the territory, and thus for the different bargaining power (Carchedi, 2022a, pp. 264–265). Newcomers can be more vulnerable to low wages. In Cassibile, in Sicily, for those with a permanence of at least 10 years, the pay for 8/10 hours can be 45/50 euros; in the case of 5 years of permanence, the pay can be 35 euros; for those with a permanence of 3 years, the pay can be 30 euros; for seasonal workers with less than 1 year of permanence, pay does not exceed 20 euros. The consequence can be the hiring of newcomers and seasonal farmworkers instead of permanent workers (Carchedi, 2022c, pp. 311–312). A practice that emerged in Sicily is the signing of a species of an open contract with a first employer, a contract that has validity from 3/4 months to a year, and that guarantees their regularity. If the contract is for 3 months and predicts 20/50 days, and after 1 month the worker ends work for the employer with whom they signed the contract, the contract is still valid for the other 2 months. Therefore, they can work for other employers concurrently and off-the-books, while they are regulars from an occupational and socio-legal point of view.

If needed, the gangmaster can also make the workers sign another contract but with minimal presumed working days to prevent penalties from inspectors (Carchedi, 2022c, pp. 302–303). Labour off-the-books is a practice that nowadays is less practiced, but that has not completely disappeared. Indeed, those that use workers off-the-books, seek to reduce risks by alternating workers with contracts that are formally regular, to workers who are hired off-the-books; or simultaneously employing workers who are formally regular, with workers off-the-books, but in different positions in the fields in terms of visibility (Carchedi, 2022c, p. 306).

## **V. Performance Management**

In terms of performance management, a practice that can be used by the gangmaster or the labour intermediary to ensure that their crews are efficient is the “*rotation strategy*” as shown in the Friuli region (Carchedi, 2022b). In detail, this practice works this way: they take to work a crew of 10 workers for 2/3 days, then they leave them at home, while during the other 2/3 days they take to work another crew of workers, always within the same company, and so on. The rationale behind this practice is that workers are under tension, considering that they do not know if they will work again, and if happens, they will do their best in terms of productivity and efficiency (Carchedi, 2022b, p. 153). The piecework is also a performance management practice. To those who excel in harvesting, the employers can propose to recruit, form, and manage workgroups and they can receive an increase in their wages (Carchedi, 2020d, p. 275). In addition to that, performance management in Italian agriculture can also be conceptualized as multilevel in strategic efforts to improve performance and profits. For instance, Omizzolo evidenced the use of drugs among Indian Sikh farmworkers in the Agro Pontino area, in Lazio, to handle the required work rhythms (Omizzolo, 2019, p. 114). When these substances were sold directly in the workplaces, this was done with the tacit but also conscious permission of the owners that allowed drug dealers to enter and sell these substances, also considering the difficulty of entering workplaces without their permission (Omizzolo, 2019, p. 119).

In greater detail, the substances were seeds extracted from poppy bulbs, and more. Indeed, methamphetamine and antispasmodic circulated (Omizzolo, 2019, p. 123), but also heroin in some cases, also coming from Campania, in the area of Castel Volturno, and causing a specific connection between the mafia system in that area (Nigerian mafia, the Casalesi clan and some Camorra clans) and the agromafia in the Agro Pontino area (Omizzolo, 2019, pp. 127–128).



## **VI. Safety and Health**

As to safety, employers often do not provide individual protection devices to their employees. Farmworkers can be compelled to buy such devices for themselves, as showed by Omizzolo telling the story of an Indian Sick in the Agro Pontino area, who told the researcher that they bought safety shoes on their own (Omizzolo, 2019, p. 34). However, it may also happen that farmworkers with protections (gloves, sturdy shoes, protective suits and glasses) coexist with those without all these protections, workers who therefore have to buy the necessary to work (Carchedi, 2018e, pp. 156–157). Safety is also about contact with the chemical products in the fieldwork when they must spread such products on the field. Among the consequences, there is the irritation of the skin (Omizzolo, 2019, p. 34). Omizzolo also highlighted the use of toxic substances (e.g., Afalon, Cycocel, Adrop) in the treatment of fruit and vegetables to stimulate maturation and increase the similarity between products, which were also sprayed during the harvesting, and inhaled by workers (Omizzolo, 2019, pp. 291–292). In the Agro Pontino area, it may also happen that employers do not train workers on safety risks, and do not apply the prevention measures (e.g., protective clothing), or also reductions of working hours foreseen by provincial collective agreements in case of dangerous chemicals (Omizzolo, 2021, p. 145). Always in this context, accidents at work are often concealed to avoid potential controls, or complaints against agricultural businesses. In this case, Indian farmworkers are accompanied by employers to a hospital or emergency room, and with the recommendation/blackmail to not describe the dynamics of the accidents (Omizzolo, 2021, p. 144).

## **VII. Gender-based Control Systems**

The exploitation of women farmworkers in Italy is numerically significant. Still, until recently, it was overlooked for different reasons and that concern not only female farmworkers. Firstly, the normalization of immigrants' exploitation triggered by stringent migratory policies and anti-immigration rhetoric. Second, employers' interests that benefit from underpriced labour. Thirdly, with respect to the labour of women, the cultural roots concerning patriarchal power relations, with the related division between production and social reproduction, and the male identification of production and exploitation (Giammarinaro & Palumbo, 2022, pp. 67–68). Female exploitation is different from male exploitation in different areas, especially in terms of systems of control. The first feature is the wage inequality and the pay gap between them.

Second, the segregation of women in tasks that are coherent with the gender stereotypes on their strengths and abilities. For instance, women often work in the harvesting of tomatoes, strawberries, onions, and other horticultural produce, and sometimes fruit or in the packaging along the supply chains, while they are less employed, for instance, in the harvesting of citrus, given the idea they cannot transport fruit cases (Giammarinaro & Palumbo, 2022, pp. 69–70). Third, they may not have maternity protections. According to the “*Testo Unico on maternity and paternity*” (art.63), seasonal farmworkers could get a maternity allowance if the previous year worked at least 51 days, as registered at the “*National Social Insurance Agency*” (INPS). The problem is that employers do not declare all the working days, sometimes also an average of 10 days per month, such as in the nurseries in Ragusa, in Sicily. Another related theme that can emerge is the voluntary termination of pregnancy and the high presence of conscientious objectors in Italian hospitals that can force many women to pay to go to private doctors, while those persons who turn to the public sanitary service have to face long waiting times. Those who cannot access public sanitary services, especially migrant women workers, can make use of unsafe ways to abort (Giammarinaro & Palumbo, 2022, pp. 71–72). In Ragusa, Sicily, a rise in the number of abortions has been noted. In 2014, at the Hospital of Vittoria, it was reported that every week around 8 women had abortions (and 5/6 were Romanians), and a study of official data revealed that of the total abortions in the province of Ragusa in 2014, 20,7% were performed on women from Romania. Also significant is the number of conscientious objectors in the hospital of Vittoria, and that represents an important risk in terms of women's rights. (Palumbo & Scirba, 2018, p. 24). Fourth, an issue is the balance between jobs and care work. In some cases, female farmworkers (e.g., from Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania) come to Italy with their entire family. In this case care work is interlinked with transportation and housing, (housing that is often isolated, precarious, and unhealthy). This connection can be viewed as a way for employers or gangmasters to profit from transportation and water, while the access to diverse services as a way to blackmail workers. Also, in this context, the absence of welfare services in many rural areas is a further issue, with the subsequent scholastic dispersion, given parents do not have transportation, because of the working hours, and the absence of public transport to urban centres, like in Ragusa. Children can also be used by employers as a means to blacklist their mothers (Palumbo & Scirba, 2018, p. 25). Children if they don't have to take care of their siblings, may work as farmworkers (Giammarinaro & Palumbo, 2022, pp. 72–74).

Fifth, hard working conditions may coexist with blackmail, harassment, and violence, which can be physical, psychological, sexual, or verbal, with the aim of maintaining women workers in subjection. Transportation, for instance, is a moment that can be affected by exploitation. For instance, in the province of Latina, in Lazio, migrant workers are forced to enter in the van last, because jobs have to be secured firstly to the men. The last seats are the most dangerous and more inclined to harassment (Giammarinaro & Palumbo, 2022, pp. 75–76). Women can also work in contexts characterized by isolation, segregation, and dependency on employers, therefore environments in which everything can remain hidden. For instance, they can sleep on farms, far from inhabited centres, producing a context that is conducive to exploitation, accompanied by abuse and sexual blackmail, as investigated in the rural area around Ragusa (Palumbo & Sciarba, 2018, p. 24). Sixth, women can suffer exploitation also in other sectors. In moving among different sectors (domestic work, cleaning, and restaurants) they also move among different typologies of exploitation (Giammarinaro & Palumbo, 2022, p. 78). Seventh, important is the relation among the informal settlements of migrant farmworkers developed in areas of intensive seasonal agricultural production and the growth of a population that can carry out “*re/productive labour*” (Peano, 2017). Workers in these contexts can live segregated in terms of national, ethnic, or racial criteria and hence with different patterns. For instance, in black African shantytowns in the province of Foggia, the population is mainly composed of male farmworkers, in which re/productive services can be performed by paid female workers (mainly Nigerians). In this context, many of the women workers are unmarried or do not live with their partners, with a sort of hierarchical dependency that is somehow female-centric. For instance, in the “*Grand Ghetto*”, a large informal settlement in the province of Foggia, senior women usually manage abandoned houses or also shacks, where the food is sold. Here, younger women may be employed as sex workers, cooks, and waitresses. In some cases, they may be subjected to debt bondage (Peano, 2017, pp. 29–31). For an overview on agriculture and gender in Italy (Palumbo & Sciarba, 2015, 2018; Giammarinaro & Palumbo, 2020, 2022).

## **VIII. Agri-Food Supply Chain and Organized Crime**

The Agri-food business is attractive to organized crime for two reasons. First, agri-food supply chains allow the reinvestment of illicit capital that sinks into the opacity of the sector. Second, this irregularity conveys a “*demand of regulation*”, a demand for goods and services, covered by groups capable of organized and professional violence (Donatiello et al., 2022, pp. 32–33).

Illegal intermediation with reduced wages, contractual irregularities with extended hours of work, intimidations, and violence can be tied to the interests of individuals or criminal groups. Illegal gangmastering is also considered a “*sentinel offence*” to identify other illicit behaviours in supply chains. Some illegal behaviours that may co-exist with illegal gangmastering are the management of horticultural markets, extorsions against local producers, unfair competition, land takeover to receive European contributions, provision of illegal or formally legal services, and the control of distribution for money laundering (Donatiello et al., 2022, p. 34). Besides, about the relationship between organized crime and agriculture, relevant is also the case of the Bulgarian criminal groups involved, among others, in the exploitation of prostitution, and labour exploitation with gangmasters or fake cooperatives (Carchedi, 2018d, pp. 341–342). These groups may also build relationships with the Italian mafia, if essential and convenient. Labour exploitation is one of the areas where alliances have been built, especially according to the information collected by Italian trade unions. In these cases, the Bulgarian counterparty recruits in the country of origin, or in the most vulnerable area, and then deals with transport to different Italian areas, and with the job placement within businesses that are complacent, colluded or influenced by local/Italian mafia. Therefore, the first two phases (recruitment and transportation) are independently carried out by Bulgarian criminal groups, also given their specialization in those areas, while the third phase requires an alliance with the local mafia, considering the territorial control, also because of the presence of businesses that are directly controlled by the Italian mafia, or also subjugated to them (Carchedi, 2018d, pp. 344–345). Smuggling and trafficking for multifaceted exploitation are central to these criminal groups. They are highly organized: a) associates that operate in the fields; b) second-level executives, functional managers, or also operators involved in logistics; c) those capable of strategically designing alliances and pursuing the group’s interests (Carchedi, 2018d, pp. 345–346).

## **IX. Agro-Mafia Resilience**

As argued by Omizzolo, an important characteristic of the systems of exploitation is resilience, namely the capability to reorganize based on the experience, and to adapt to labour disputes, institutional interventions, as well as media investigations (Omizzolo, 2021, p. 140). In detail, on this point, Omizzolo showed that after the strikes and occupations of Indian workers in the Agro Pontino area, in Lazio, this so-called “*agro-mafia*” reorganized and restructured itself (Omizzolo, 2019). In greater detail, this reorganization has been of three main typologies:

The first type consisted of a violent response towards workers to reestablish the situation of subjugation that existed before the strike organized by the Indian workers in the city of Latina (Omizzolo, 2019, p. 236). The second type consisted of the substitution of the Indian workers with the African asylum seekers in the province of Latina, and therefore in the substitution of the economically and socially fragile subjects with even more fragile subjects recruited within the reception centres (Omizzolo, 2019, p. 237). Finally, the third strategy that was adopted to overcome the effects of the cited strike of Indian farmworkers consisted in breaking the unity of the agricultural working class in the area. Some agricultural firms, often those large, started to compose a team of workers, no longer homogeneous (mostly Indians) but heterogeneous, composed of Indians, Romanians, and African asylum seekers (Omizzolo, 2019, p. 246).

Labour exploitation often requires the collaboration of accountants, public officials and other white collars, central to the resilience of exploitation in agriculture (Omizzolo, 2021, p. 143). Thus, the complicity of labour inspectors and unionists can also be an issue (Omizzolo, 2019). For instance, in 2019, with the operation “*Commodo*”, the Public Prosecutor of Latina and the local quaestorship revealed a system formed by a cooperative that supplied labour, although not registered in any register, and a business that provided the means necessary to transport workers to the workplaces. This system involved a labour inspector who guaranteed coverage and suggestions to avoid controls in exchange for money, and a unionist who in exchange got workers signed to the union. The unionist also dealt with the unemployment procedures for which the union legally got a quota of refund from the state (Omizzolo, 2019, pp. 273–275).

## **b) United States**

As done for Italy, before describing labour abuses and exploitation in agriculture, I will briefly outline the employment relations system in the US. To understand exploitation in agriculture, it is useful to understand how much power unions and employers have, and what rights have in terms of organizing and collective bargaining in general and more specifically in agriculture. Firstly, in the United States, employers may be conceived as the most powerful actors in the employment relations system. Still, employers’ organizations are somewhat weak in the US. Indeed, US employers never had national employers’ confederations that have been involved in all the activities that regard industrial relations. On the other hand, law firms that represent employers and management consultants have important roles (Katz & Colvin, 2021, p. 57).

As to unions, the labour movement is marked by an apolitical “*business unionism*” ideology. The “*AFL-CIO*” (The American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations) plays an important role. The “*AFL-CIO*” is a federation of national trade unions and has a substantial share of US union members. The “*AFL-CIO*” is a political voice for the labour movement at the national level, is involved in resolving the jurisdictional disputes of members, enforces policies against discrimination, and links the US labour movement with the international movement. Within the US labour movement, national unions keep the power on the collective bargaining function, they can institute or dissolve local unions, and they can withdraw from the national federations if wanted (e.g., Change-to-Win). Instead, local unions are involved in day-to-day work (Katz & Colvin, 2021, p. 59). The “*National Labor Relations Act*” (NLRA) of 1935 defines rights to collective action, bargaining and union certification in the private sector. Through a multi-step process of union certification, the “*National Labor Relations Board*” (NLRB) defines the voting unit, leads the secret ballot election, and if the union gets the majority, it certifies the union as the unique bargaining agent, and rules if allegations (Katz & Colvin, 2021, p. 62).

As to the agricultural industry, when the cited “*National Labor Relations Act*” was approved, farmworkers were excluded from these rights to collectively organize, and to bargain free of retaliation, and thus remaining without a federal right to collective bargaining. Nevertheless, some states in the US have passed laws to secure collective bargaining rights for farmworkers (e.g., California). Many others remain without this protection (*Collective Bargaining Rights for Farmworkers - National Agricultural Law Center, 2023*). The “*Fair Labor Standards Act*” (FLSA) of 1938 represents a further important source. The “*FLSA*” is a federal law that sets overtime, minimum wage, recordkeeping, and youth employment standards. However, in agriculture, there are some exceptions for certain workers on minimum wage and overtime provisions, or both, for instance, if the employer did not use, in any calendar quarter of the previous year, more than 500 man-days of farm labour (*Fair Labor Standards Act in Agriculture, 2023*). Still, in this context, states can enact their laws, for instance about minimum wage. Farm labour policies and practices in the US may be linked to a legacy of racism, the enslavement of African people, the genocide of natives, and stolen indigenous lands. Also, immigration policies at the basis of farmwork are constructed on exploited terms enacted under the “*Bracero Program*”, a program then modified by the “*Immigration and Nationality Act*”, the “*H-2 Visa Program*” and then the “*Immigration Reform and Control Act*” (Goldman et al., 2021, p. 10).

With regards to the “*H-2 Visa Program*”, while the above-mentioned “*Bracero Program*” (the guestworker program abolished in 1964) was active, the “*Immigration and Nationality Act*” in 1952 established the “*H-2 Visa Program*”. In 1986, the “*Immigration Reform and Control Act*” subdivided the H-2 visa into two diverse temporary visas, namely the H-2A visa for agricultural workers and the H-2B visa intended for non-agricultural workers (Goldman et al., 2021, p. 11). In addition to the above-mentioned, relevant in the organization of agricultural labour in the US is the “*Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act*” (MSPA). In more detail, the MSPA protects migrant and seasonal farmworkers by defining labour standards regarding wages, transportation, housing, recordkeeping, and disclosure, and as concerns relationships with labour contractors or “gangmasters” (and with the required certificate of registration for farm labour contractors) (*Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (MSPA)*, 2023). With respect to the main practices adopted in the context of agricultural employment, to describe the labour abuses experienced by farmworkers in the United States, I build on the existing academic and grey literature produced on the intersection of labour and agriculture in the United States, drawing on descriptive reports and statistics on agricultural employment, as well as reports about health and safety issues in agriculture.

## **I. Recruitment and H-2A Visa Program**

According to findings from the “*National Agricultural Workers Survey*” (NAWS) concerning the years 2019-2020: a) circa 57% of workers reported that they found their existing jobs through friends or relatives; b) circa 32% of workers have gotten their jobs after applying on their own; c) circa 8% were recruited by growers, labour contractors, or foremen, d) circa 3% found their jobs through a welfare office or an employment office (A. Gold et al., 2022, p. 22). However, what it is important to highlight is that the “*NAWS*” sampling does not include those who do not perform crop-related work, and farmworkers with an H-2A visa (A. Gold et al., 2022, p. 1). In greater detail, the H-2A temporary agricultural program is a program that allows employers who operate in agriculture, and anticipate a shortage in terms of domestic workers, to recruit and bring nonimmigrant foreign workers to the United States to carry out work or services in agriculture with a temporary nature. A major factor is that the department must determine: a) that there are not willing and qualified United States workers to perform these jobs; b) that the employment of H-2A workers will not adversely impact the working conditions and wages of workers in the US fulfilling similar jobs (*H-2A Temporary Agricultural Program*, 2023).

As to H-2A visas, at the beginning of the process, employers apply to the “*US Department of Labor*” for the certification that they are unable to find workers in the US, and once obtained, the “*Department of Homeland Security*” approves the application, and it grants permission to start the recruitment of workers who then apply to the “*Department of State*” that administer the process through the consulates of reference of guestworkers. Usually, employers (in some cases are not agricultural businesses, but labour contractors) contract with recruiters in other countries to find workers (Crowe, 2018, p. 20). Generally, the exploitation of guestworkers is rooted in two important elements: a) workers often incur debts with recruiters in their home countries and with family as collateral during their time abroad; b) once in the US, workers are unable to change employers, given the legal status is linked to their employment and this can create situations of control or subjugation (Coalition of Immokalee Workers, 2021). Thus, the exploitation of both H-2A and H-2B guestworkers starts with the recruitment in their own home countries, usually through private individuals or agencies on which the employer relies to find guestworkers. Exploitation can consist of: a) the charging of fees by recruiters to cover the costs of visas, travel, and the profit for recruiters; b) high-interest loans to come up with the money required to pay the fees; c) recruiters can also ask for collateral (e.g., deed to their houses) to ensure they fulfil their obligations (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 9). As to the fees required, the debt can be an important and chronic challenge for guestworkers, and sometimes with exorbitant interest rates on that debt. Laws in the US provide obligations for employers with regard to reimbursement to workers as concerns the costs of visas and travel, but it still is rare that workers are fully reimbursed (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 9). Also, as above mentioned, the H-2 visa program requires that guestworkers work only for the employers in the US who sponsored the visa (and leave the country once the visa has expired), and the recruiters often exploit the needs of workers by promising lucrative jobs in the US, by deception. Once in the US, in front of the recruiter’s deception, they have to decide whether: a) they remain in the abusive situation; b) return to their home countries with few possibilities to repay the debt; c) leave the employer and become undocumented, and risking the chance to return to the US for work (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, pp. 12–13). Still, regulations are in place that prohibit US employers from using recruiters who charge fees, but these are rarely enforced (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 13). Employers also confiscate identity documents to prevent workers from leaving and use the threat of calling the “*US Immigration and Customs Enforcement*” to exert control (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, pp. 14–15).



As to recruiting, labour contractors play a relevant but contradictory role in the H-2 program. Indeed, labour contractors have a permanent need for workers to supply to employers, while the program was built to allow employers to hire temporary foreign labour. The participation of labour contractors is problematic for either US workers and foreign temporary workers: a) it can erode protections in place for US workers; b) for foreign workers, who usually do not speak English and do not have the means to move on their own, labour contractors appear to be essential for housing, transportation, and food (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 28). H-2A labour contractors are required to get a surety bond, a contract in which a surety takes responsibility for the contractors' financial obligations when they fail to pay wages or benefits (Wage and Hour Division (WHD), 2023). Still, labor contractors to avoid the bond requirement, can also claim that are growers or employers (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 29).

## II. Labour Trafficking

As concerns the relation between exploitation, human trafficking and the H-2A visa program, important is the work carried out by "*Polaris*". Indeed, research by "*Polaris*" based on data from the "*National Human Trafficking Hotline*", from January 1, 2015, to December 31, 2017, detected 814 victims of trafficking (797 for visas shown in the report) who were in the US and worked with temporary work visas. Of 1,919 victims of labour trafficking detected, circa 49.2% were foreign nationals on visas or with legal status as refugees or asylees (Crowe, 2018, p. 4). As to trafficking on H-2A agricultural visas, during the period analyzed, there were circa 323 victims of labour trafficking, and 4 victims of sex and labour trafficking (Crowe, 2018, p. 20). As regards labour trafficking, in detail, the "*Trafficking Victims Protection Act*" (TVPA) defines labor trafficking as "*the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery*" (Public Law 106 - 386 - *Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000*, 2000, sec. 103. 8(B)). Into detail, of the 327 H-2A visa victims of trafficking identified through the National Hotline, the majority were males from Mexico, a country that between the fiscal years 2008 and 2017 got 93% of America's H-2A visas (Crowe, 2018, p. 21), and 302 (93,50%) worked in agriculture, farms or animal husbandry (Crowe, 2018, p. 22). A story shows how this system can be abusive, with a worker forced to work without breaks or water, under unsafe weather conditions, workdays lasting 10-12 hours, and paid by the bucket although the contract determined an hourly wage.

If the worker raised concerns or not worked quickly enough, the employer could threaten the worker to call the law enforcement and to have him deported (Crowe, 2018, p. 24). In addition to H-2A visas, interesting is the presence of victims who worked in agriculture (nearly 10%) among victims holders of H-2B temporary non-agricultural worker visas (Crowe, 2018, p. 26). In addition to these data, according to the subsequent report *“Labor Trafficking on Specific Temporary Work Visas. A Data Analysis: 2018-2020”* by Polaris, an entire industry concerning recruitment developed around the H-2A visa program. The most significant examples of these recruitment agencies are the *“H-2A Labor Contractors”* (H-2ALCs), namely businesses without fixed locations of employment and that provide a service to farm owners, the recruitment of workers on temporary visas, and sometimes also the management of the employees at work. Labour contractors or growers also employ recruiters in local communities, visa processors, recruitment agencies or other middlemen to recruit workers and take care of the paperwork, transportation or cross-border process (Polaris, 2022, p. 24). To add to previous data, from 2018 to 2020, the *“National Human Trafficking Hotline”* identified 2,841 H-2A visa holders, as victims of labour trafficking, and the majority were males from Mexico (Polaris, 2022, p. 25). An interesting piece of information to note is that 13% of the victims of labour trafficking who were holders of H-2A visas (they can be hired only for agricultural jobs) recounted that they have worked in jobs outside the agricultural industry (e.g., construction, landscaping, fishing or aqua farming, hospitality, and illicit activities) (Polaris, 2022, p. 26). As regards the methods of control of workers, among the practices of control used (statistics are non-cumulative): a) 58% of the victims of labour trafficking holders of H-2A visas recounted being threatened with consequences concerning immigration, such as deportation in case they required the wages that they were promised, or also decent working and living conditions; b) circa 32% were also threatened about being blacklisted from a return to the US to work; c) circa 58% reported that they worked excessive hours; d) circa 41% of the workers reported the withholding of earnings/wage theft; e) circa 39% of workers reported the denying of food, shelter, water, hygiene, transportation, appropriate clothes or necessary items; f) around 33% reported that documents (e.g., IDs, passports, or immigration documents) were withheld or destroyed by the traffickers; g) circa 24% of workers recounted that a quota or a debt was used to forced them to work (Polaris, 2022, p. 26). In addition, as above mentioned as concerns the period 2015-2017, interesting is the data regarding the period 2018-2020 concerning H-2B workers victims of labour trafficking and who worked in agriculture (circa 22%) (Polaris, 2022, p. 32).

Research from “Polaris” entitled “*Labor Exploitation and Trafficking of Agricultural Workers During the Pandemic*” pointed out how there was some evidence that labour trafficking has increased among farmworkers during the pandemic (Polaris, 2021, p. 3), and illustrated how the pandemic has exacerbated the issues of the temporary visa system (Polaris, 2021, p. 8). As regards the relation between the H-2A visa program and labour trafficking is important to mention the 54-count indictment in “*USA v. Patricio et al*”. This case is relevant and significant in the discussion concerning the H-2A visa because the US Department of Justice indicts the “*Patricio Transnational Criminal Organization (TCO)*”, a transnational criminal organization, with members and associates involved, among other crimes, in mail fraud, money laundering, and international forced labour trafficking in the Southern District of Georgia, Middle District of Georgia, Northern District of Georgia, Middle District of Florida, Southern District of Texas, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, elsewhere (*USA v. Patricio et Al.*, 2021, sec. Introduction (1)). In more detail, this criminal organization appeared to fraudulently use the H-2A visa program to smuggle persons from Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, into the US with the pretext of being agricultural workers, and with the further attempt to profit by exploiting these workers and the sequent laundering of illegal proceeds (*USA v. Patricio et Al.*, 2021, sec. Introduction (2)). They exploited these workers by asking they paid unlawful fees, holding hostage their identification documents, by asking that they performed work that was physically demanding for little or no pay, requiring they lived in unsanitary, crowded and degrading living conditions, and threatening violence and deportation (*USA v. Patricio et Al.*, 2021, sec. Labor Trafficking and the H-2A Visa Program (10)). In detail, the object of the conspiracy was to make money with illegal activities, particularly by mailing fraudulent petitions for H-2A visas, by financial exploitation of workers through forced labour, and by hiding the illegal proceeds of money laundering (*USA v. Patricio et Al.*, 2021, sec. OBJECT OF THE CONSPIRACY (40)). As concerns the exploitation of the workers, among the different activities that are consistent with their goals, there were: a) the charge of unlawful fees; b) confiscation of identification documents to prevent workers from leaving; c) not payment as required under the H-2A visa program; e) selling of the farmworkers to other conspirators; d) unlawful employment of workers in other industries after the work in the fields; e) workers forced to live with other workers in a single room trailer with limited plumbing, without safe drinking/cooking water, with little/no food; f) workers threatened with violence and deportation; g) and workers detained in a work camp surrounded by an electric fence (*USA v. Patricio et Al.*, 2021, sec. Exploiting the Workers).

As concerns the H-2A program, this system can be read also as a discriminatory mechanism from different points of view. First, the H-2A program can generate discriminatory practices towards US workers. Indeed, the H-2A program requires that employers in the US can hire foreign workers only if US workers are unavailable, and therefore they have to demonstrate that there are not enough US workers to perform such temporary work. Nevertheless, given that many H-2 employers prefer vulnerable foreign workers instead of domestic workers, they can adopt discriminatory practices to exclude workers in the US, discrimination that can be based on race and national origin, as shown in the case of a large agricultural grower in 2011, with the termination of US employees and the hiring of H-2A workers, but also relations with US farmworkers based on fewer hours or the denying of work. The termination of US workers included the termination of African Americans, coupled with race-based comments on behalf of a management official. Second, discrimination can occur also among foreign guestworkers, for instance, based on their age or gender (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, pp. 31–32).

### **III. Retribution**

In terms of retribution, as concerns the basis for pay and hours worked, according to findings from the “*National Agricultural Workers Survey*” (NAWS) concerning the years 2019-2020: a) 82% of workers reported that the basis for their retribution was an hourly wage; b) 8% of workers reported that they were retributed with a salary; c) circa 7% reported that they were paid by the piece (A. Gold et al., 2022, p. 23). On the other hand, as to wages, farmworkers in 2019-2020 reported on average \$13.59: a) those paid by the hour earned on average \$13.05; c) those paid by the piece received on average \$14.63; d) hourly wages rose with the number of years worked for their actual employer (on average \$12.97 in case of 1 to 2 years; \$13.44 in case of 3 to 5 years; \$13.93 in case of 6 to 10 years; and \$14.26 in case of 11 years or more) (A. Gold et al., 2022, p. 25). As just stated, the NAWS sampling does not include those who do not perform crop-related work and farmworkers with H-2A visas (A. Gold et al., 2022, p. 1). As concerns retribution, farmworkers in the US appear to have the lowest family incomes per year among salary and wage workers (National Farm Worker Ministry, 2023b). Hence, income appears to be a crucial factor in labour choices, also at the cost of health. On that, research carried out in Oxnard, California, among farmworkers who harvest strawberries, raspberries, and leafy green vegetables, showed how farmworkers can prefer conventional production to organic one (less environmentally hazardous) if they can earn more money (Soper, 2021).

Therefore, in this context, exposure to pesticides can be considered much less than economic considerations related to income, with a preference for a typology of production explained at the level of the place that offered the highest income and that, for most interviewees, given the piece rate wage structure, signified conventional production (Soper, 2021, pp. 729–730). With the piece rate wage structure, farmworkers are paid per bucket, and the more buckets they fill up, the more money they get. Farmworkers can prefer piece rates to hourly wages because they can earn more in less time (Soper, 2020, p. 730). As shown in Oxnard, California, with strawberry workers, by harvesting organic strawberries (in this case, in large mono-crop organic farms) they can earn less money than in conventional production, given the piece rate system and the fact that the conventional strawberries are larger (while organic strawberries are smaller). Thus, farmworkers need fewer strawberries to fill up a bucket. What is important to note is that the wage structure and the size of the strawberries explain why farmworkers can make less money in organic farms and production (Soper, 2020, p. 326). Still, the piece wage system can have different negative aspects. Firstly, it discourages possible breaks for shade or water during the work shift, considering that such breaks would affect productivity and therefore would generate reductions in their retribution. Second, retribution by piece rate can be a way to pay the worker less than the minimum wage, for instance, if the growers change the way quantities are measured. Third, small farms are not subjected to federal law concerning the minimum wage and one-third of farmworkers work in small farms (National Farm Worker Ministry, 2023b). Therefore, the piece rate results to be ambivalent.

As concerns retribution for H-2A guestworkers, the federal law requires the payment of the so-called “*Adverse Effect Wage Rates*” (AEWRs), namely the minimum hourly wage rates that the employers must pay to H-2A workers, rates established and adjusted annually by the OFLC Administrator. The wage offered, advertised, and paid to workers must be at least equal to “AEWRs” when is the highest applicable wage to the job opportunity. For range occupations, wages for the H-2A workers and for the workers in corresponding jobs must be equal to or exceed the monthly “AEWRs”, agreed collective bargaining wage, or the minimum wage that is imposed by the Federal Law or the State Law, or by the judicial action, and whatever is the highest. For non-range occupations, wage must be equal to or exceed the hourly “AEWRs”, prevailing wage rate if available, Federal minimum wage, or agreed collective bargaining rate, and whatever is the highest (*H-2A Adverse Effect Wage Rates (AEWRs) | Flag.Dol.Gov*, 2023).

Many workers get less than the federal minimum wage (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 18). Wage theft towards guestworkers (H-2A and H-2B visas) can assume different forms: a) minimum wage violations that are disguised by intricate piece-rate payment schemes; b) underreporting of working hours; c) failure in the payment of the overtime compensation; d) and unlawful deductions from workers' pay (2013, pp. 18–20). As to the relationship between retribution and visa workers, it is important to mention the issue of worker misclassification. For instance, often farmworkers who harvest produce in the fields and should be classified as H-2A visa workers (temporary agricultural employment), instead are enlisted as H-2B workers (temporary non-agricultural employment) and therefore diversely labelled (e.g., packing shed workers), and therefore being paid less than the wages that they should be paid, in addition to being denied legal protections guaranteed under the H-2A program in terms of housing, for instance (2013, p. 23). Another abuse is the practice of sending H-2A workers to work in other contexts owned by the employers or their relatives (e.g., home construction), contexts where US workers should be paid more than the *"Adverse Effect Wage Rates"* (2013, p. 24).

#### **IV. Transportation**

The lack of transportation is an additional problem for different reasons: a) it isolates migrant workers; b) they have to depend on others to move out of the farm: c) getting an appointment to get a driver's license can be difficult due to work schedules or lack of rides; d) the lack of transport with the limited ability to get a driver's license can be a limit as concerns the access to health services; e) in rural areas, the system of public transportation can be weak and poor; f) and in many cases, migrant workers do not own a vehicle (Panikkar & Barrett, 2021, p. 12). According to findings from the *"National Agricultural Workers Survey"* (NAWS) concerning the years 2019-2020: a) 72% lived fewer than 25 miles (40 Km) from their farm jobs, 14% lived between 25 and 49 miles (between 40 and 78 Km) from their jobs, and 12% lived in the place where they worked; b) 73% drove a car to go to work, 7% rode with a *"raitero"* (person who charge for a ride), and 2% used a truck, van or a labour bus to go to work; c) 33% of workers that did not provide their own transportation communicated that they had to pay a fee for the ride, 37% reported they paid just for gas, 30% communicated that they not paid fees for the rides on buses, with the *"raitero"* or other means (A. Gold et al., 2022, p. 17;21). As already mentioned, it is important to note that the *"NAWS"* sampling does not include those who do not perform crop-related work, and farmworkers with an H2-A visa (A. Gold et al., 2022, p. 1).

As to H-2A visa workers, and with regard to transportation to the place of employment, if not provided otherwise, and if not previously advanced such costs, the employers have to pay the workers the reasonable costs they sustained for the transportation and the daily subsistence, from the location from where workers have come to work for their employers, and if workers complete 50% of their work contract period (20 CFR 655.122(h)(1)). Besides, with regards to transportation from the place of employment, if the workers complete their work contract period or they are terminated without cause, and workers do not have an immediate further employment, the employers must pay or provide for the transportation and daily subsistence of the workers from the place of employment to the location from where the worker has left to work for the employer (20 CFR 655.122(h)(2)). As to transportation between living quarters and the place of employment, the employers have to provide transport between the housing secured or provided by the employers and the workplaces, but at no cost for their employees (20 CFR 655.122(h)(3)). In addition, as concerns employer-provided transportation, transport must comply with the local, State or Federal laws and regulations, and must provide the same safety standards, vehicle insurance and driver's license, as required under 29 U.S.C. 1841, 29 CFR 500.104 or 500.105, and 29 CFR 500.120 through 500.128 (20 CFR 655.122(h)(4)).

As concerns transportation for H-2A workers, several problems can emerge. First, employers can violate the law by not paying and reimbursing the workers for the costs sustained for visas and transportation from their hometowns, as shown in a class action lawsuit against a tomato operation based in Arkansas, in 2007 (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 20). Therefore, the reimbursement of travel costs can be difficult. Second, labour contractors play a crucial role in the H-2 program (H-2A and H-2B workers), and given that H-2 guestworkers usually do not speak English or cannot move by themselves, they can depend on the labour brokers for housing, and food, but also transportation (2013, p. 28). Housing (as discussed in the next section regarding housing) for H-2A workers (but also H-2B workers) is often situated in rural areas and that can lead to social isolation, together with a dependence on the employers for transportation to workplaces, but also grocery stores, banks, sometimes through the charging of exorbitant fees. This dependence can be caused by the lack of vehicles, as well as access to a system of public transportation where houses are located (2013, p. 36). All these problems, that are connected to transportation, are common not only to H-2 guestworkers, but also to farmworkers in general, as discussed at the beginning of this section.

## V. Housing

According to findings from the “*National Agricultural Workers Survey*” (NAWS) with regard to the years 2019-2020: a) 16% of farmworkers lived in a dwelling that was owned or managed by the employer (13% on the farm of the grower for whom they worked; 3% off-the-farm); b) 56% lived in detached, single-family houses, 21% in mobile homes, 20% in apartments; 3% in other types of housing (e.g., dormitory or barracks); c) unauthorized workers appeared to be less prone to live in single family homes (41%) as opposed to authorized workers (69%), and more prone to live in mobile homes (25% unauthorized and 17% authorized) and apartments (29% unauthorized and 13% authorized); d) 30% have lived in a dwelling defined as crowded; d) 72% lived fewer than 25 miles (40 Km) from their farm jobs, 14% lived between 25 and 49 miles (between 40 and 78 Km) from their jobs, and 12% lived in the place where they worked; e) 73% drove a car to go to work, 7% rode with a “*raitero*” (the person who charge for a ride), and 2% used a truck, van or a labour bus to go to work (A. Gold et al., 2022, pp. 17–21). Still, what it is important to highlight is that the NAWS sampling does not include those who do not perform crop-related work, and farmworkers with an H2-A visa (A. Gold et al., 2022, p. 1).

As concerns H-2A visa workers, as above mentioned, the employers have to provide housing to H-2A workers, as well as to those workers in corresponding employment, who are unable to return to their residence within the same day, housing provision at no cost for the workers (20 CFR 655.122(d)(1)). Housing must be provided through: a) **Employer-provided housing** and that has to comply with the DOL Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards set forth at 29 CFR 1910.142, or the full set of standards at §§ 654.404 through 654.417 of the chapter, whichever are applicable under § 654.401 (20 CFR 655.122(d)(1)(i)); b) **Rental and/or public accommodations** and that must meet local standards for these types of accommodations, or in the absence, they must respect State standards, or in the absence of local and State standards, DOL OSHA standards at 29 CFR 1910.142(b)(2), (3), (9), (10), and (11), (c), (d)(1), (9), and (10), (f), (g), (h)(2) and (3), and (j) (20 CFR 655.122(d)(1)(ii)). However, the quality of housing and accommodation that is provided to the H-2A guestworkers is often substandard or even dangerous. Indeed, housing for H-2A workers (but also H-2B workers) is often situated in rural locations, and increasing isolation and dependence on their employers (e.g., for transportation, sometimes with a fee) (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 35). Hence, in general terms, farmworkers appear to experience substandard housing conditions.



In detail, housing for farmworkers can be subdivided into three types: a) government housing; b) grower-owned housing (is required that growers offer housing to non-immigrant seasonal workers with the H-2A visa. Still, H-2A visa workers are around 10% of agricultural workforce); c) privately rented housing (rent paid to a private owner). Also, in the case of grower-owned or privately-owned housing, inflating prices is possible, given owners may have a monopoly. This is particularly true in isolated rural areas where there are no housing options, and hence they have no choice as concerns housing. In addition, considering the high costs of housing, farmworkers or families can decide to live in the same place, and in the case of disproportion among utilities and workers, that can have negative consequences in terms of health with the spread of diseases. An issue can be the rent charged per person, rather than for the building, and that is problematic for those families that need to pay for their children. Besides, for those living in areas where population density and housing are high, workers can live in abandoned houses, tents, converted school buses and caves (National Farm Worker Ministry, 2023a).

Hence, the geography of housing can contribute to substandard housing conditions. Indeed, hidden farmworker housing, distant from the public, can be: a) less subjected to surveillance; b) more vulnerable to crime, such as substandard housing, theft, but also human trafficking and slavery; c) more likely to limit access to advocacy groups and individuals who can provide services to farmworkers (Summers et al., 2015, p. 2570). Farmworker labour camps that are hidden can restrict knowledge of the public about housing conditions lived by farmworkers. In particular, labour camps with barracks (built specifically to provide houses to farmworkers) can have a higher probability of being hidden, given the implied premeditation on where to build the buildings for farmworkers (Summers et al., 2015, p. 2572). As shown in Vermont with dairy workers, farmworkers can live in or near the barn and with a lack of heating in their housing. As concerns barns, they can become very hot during summer and cold during winter, and they can be dirty and infested by rodents and bugs (Panikkar & Barrett, 2021, p. 11). Still, as shown with farmworker family households in North Carolina: a) households can be stable in membership, but crowded, with a large number of children and adults; b) most farmworker families can live in rented houses as opposed to labour camps, and with also the possibility to being homeowners; c) migrant farmworker housing (workers who change their residence for their temporary labour) can be of lower quality as opposed to seasonal farmworker housing (workers who retain a single residence) (Arcury et al., 2017, pp. 7–8).

## VI. Health and Safety

Farmworkers are faced with different hazards in their workplaces, from repetitive motion and heavy machinery to illness from heat, pesticides, and zoonotic disease. Reproductive health issues are common for migrant women farmworkers, with work-related fatalities for children, and a lack of access to health care, also considering the low wages and wage theft. In addition, climate change has worsened some of these issues (Beyranevand & Nelson, 2021, pp. 6–7). According to a report produced by the *“Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future”*, entitled *“Essential and in Crisis: A Review of the Public Health Threats Facing Farmworkers in the US”*, health impacts affecting crop and livestock workers can be different. First, for crop workers:

- a) **Work hours and break:** In terms of working hours, there may be the following issues: long hours without breaks (also pushed by the piece rate system); there is no federal standard that mandates protection from heat stress; poor oversight in terms of access to water and sanitation; health outcomes linked to these issues may be acute kidney illness (AKI), and chronic kidney disease (CKD) (Goldman et al., 2021, pp. 26–27);
- b) **Heat, sun, and climate change:** issues may emerge due to hot temperatures, without protection on rest, water, and shade, heat acclimatization, heavy or improper clothes, lack of water, or cooling conditions. As a result, health-related illness symptoms (HRIs) may also be heat cramps, heat syncope or heat exhaustion, fatigue, nausea, dizziness, dehydration, and heat stroke. As to heat stroke, stories of farmworkers dying due to this condition caused by extreme heat are not rare (Goldman et al., 2021, pp. 29–30);

The *“Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970”* (OSH Act) (29 U.S.C. § 651 et Seq., 1970) is the US federal law on occupational health and safety, regardless of immigrant status, and the *“Occupational Safety and Health Administration”* (OSHA) is the agency designed to enforce it (is enforced by state agencies in states with OSHA-approved state plans) through the general duty clause, and the occupational safety and health standards. As far as agriculture, given the few standards designed, the general duty clause works basically as a palliative, while as far as heat hazards, no specific standards exist (in any sector), but rather non-binding guidance for outdoor workers or a hazard alert (*OSHA Heat Hazard Alert*, 2023). The general duty clause is one of the only tools to enforce the Act, and hence without rules on heat illness, some states designed rules through OSHA-approved state plans (Beyranevand & Nelson, 2021, pp. 8–12).

- c) Pesticides:** The usage of pesticides is often driven by the need to control fungi, weeds, insects, and other organisms that could threaten the nature of crops and with human health risks that vary depending on the type of pesticides. Besides, overexposure may occur when farmworkers have direct contact with pesticide residuals on crops or soil, or even through drifts from fields nearby, and because of problems with the pesticide labelling, leakages, and defective equipment. Moreover, exposure to pesticides occurs usually through skin or inhalation. As to health outcomes, symptoms of acute pesticide illness may be irritation, damage to eyes, nerves, or skin, nausea, confusion, dizziness, headaches, vomiting, fatigue, abdominal pain, and diarrhea, but given the similarities with flu, acute pesticide illness may be misdiagnosed and unreported. Chronic health issues may also emerge with a prolonged exposure to pesticides (high risks to certain typologies of cancer, metabolic and thyroid disorders, DNA damage, lowered fertility, neurological hazards, and hormone disruption (Goldman et al., 2021, pp. 33–35).

Overall, the system of law enforcement concerning the problem of pesticides is based on the *“Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act”* (FIFRA), a federal law that regulates the use of pesticides and with the *“US Environmental Protection Agency”* (EPA) designed with the authority to administer it (Guarna, 2022, p. 9). The *“EPA”* also promulgated and implemented the *“Worker Protection Standard (WPS)”* to reduce pesticide-related illness and injury among workers and pesticide handlers, and requiring the employers to provide specific information and protections to workers, handlers, and other persons, when pesticide products are utilized on agricultural establishments (US EPA, 2014). Among the protections that are guaranteed by this federal regulation, important but fragile is the protection guaranteed against retaliation. In this regard, the *“WPS”* does not protect the confidentiality of agricultural workers when reporting violations related to the use of pesticides. The result of this may be underreporting (Barbour & Guthman, 2018, pp. 334–335; Goldman et al., 2021, p. 38). Although the *“WPS”* is a federal regulation, states are widely involved in its administration (Guarna, 2022, p. 10).

- d) Repetitive motion injuries:** risks for musculoskeletal disorders, strain, as well as injury (e.g., back, hand, wrist, and shoulder) can derive from a repetitive, swift, and exertive work-related motion. As to health outcomes, particularly musculoskeletal disorders, such disorders if left untreated may also lead to more serious injuries, persistent pain, bursitis, tendonitis, and inability to move normally (Goldman et al., 2021, pp. 41–43).

In addition to crop workers, according to the cited report *“Essential and in Crisis: A Review of the Public Health Threats Facing Farmworkers in the US”*, health impacts for livestock workers can be different, from exposure to animal waste to dangerous machinery. In more detail:

- e) **Animal waste:** Different alarming elements for the health of agricultural workers may be present in animal waste (e.g., bacteria, pathogens, hormones, antibiotics, nitrogen, and phosphorus) to which they may be exposed in different ways, such as the manure generated on concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs). Besides, workers may be in direct contact with this typology of waste when they work in livestock barns, but bacteria also colonize surfaces and farm premises. As to health outcomes, pathogens in manure can create gastrointestinal disease (Goldman et al., 2021, pp. 44–48);
- f) **Dangerous machinery and animals:** injuries deriving from falls and other incidents can derive from work performed with machinery (e.g., tractors) and animals. For instance, hearing loss caused by machines can increase the risk of injury, and livestock handling can be seen as a disability and injury risk (Goldman et al., 2021, pp. 48–50).

Always according to the report by the *“Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future”*, and based on a literature review, entitled *“Essential and in Crisis: A Review of the Public Health Threats Facing Farmworkers in the US”*, health impacts that affect crop and livestock workers similarly are: mental health, gender-based violence, and food insecurity (Goldman et al., 2021, p. 50). As regards mental health, farmworkers operate in places that may be isolated, rapidly paced, with high-stress and poor salaries, and without protections, and with consequences in terms of mental health, and which can lead to depression or high levels of stress. Besides, immigrant workers may also face dehumanization (e.g., “illegal alien”) (Goldman et al., 2021, pp. 50–51). As far as gender-based violence, women farmworkers can face verbal and sexual harassment, and often they are expected to live *“double workdays”*, with jobs with income, and gendered cultural expectations of family care, but also with a lack of childcare. Gendered discrimination and violence can lead to psychological and physical stress (Goldman et al., 2021, pp. 52–53). As concerns food insecurity, economic difficulties and food insecurity may be common among agricultural workers, and particularly in terms of lack of access to accessible, safe, or culturally appropriate food. Some barriers to access to culturally appropriate and healthy food can be: a) low wages; b) transportation; c) lack of food preparation equipment; d) poor quality of food donations; e) inadequate/inaccessible food assistance (Goldman et al., 2021, p. 55).

Farmworkers can face several health and safety risks. For instance, in Vermont, it was shown that migrant dairy workers may be exposed to different typologies of chemicals during work: chlorine, footbaths, iodine, and acid. In the study, workers were concerned with the exposure to iodine, acid, and formaldehyde. The greatest exposure appeared to be in the cleaning and maintenance of the barn. With formaldehyde (generally utilized to kill fungi on the hooves) impacts on workers can range from nausea, feeling dizzy, vomiting, to nosebleeds. The use of antibiotics can also be another concern for dairy workers. In addition, contact with chemicals may occur not only during the activities of milking, cleaning, and disinfection, but also in the application of pesticides in the fields of dairy farms (Panikkar & Barrett, 2021, pp. 7–8). Still, in dairy farms in Vermont, access to safety and protective devices can be lacking in many dairy farms, for example with the lack of protective masks, safety glasses, winter gloves, and aprons (Panikkar & Barrett, 2021, p. 9). Farmworkers in this sector may also be unaware of the risks of these chemicals, with a lack of access to adequate training (Panikkar & Barrett, 2021, p. 9). In the dairy industry, injuries may occur due to injuries by an animal, unsafe animal doors, or because kicked or bitten by an animal, or from the use of milking machines, and which can be linked to a lack of training or maintenance of machines (Panikkar & Barrett, 2021, p. 13).

As shown in Idaho among women farmworkers, workers may not even know if pesticides have been sprayed in the fields where they operate. In addition, they may also have to work where shown and without details on the application of pesticide (Curl et al., 2021, p. 7). Farmworkers may also have issues in terms of access to extant health services (Goldman et al., 2021, p. 21). Indeed, as evidenced in the dairy sector in Vermont and New Hampshire, the lack of insurance and communication issues may be perceived as barriers to health care (Buckheit et al., 2017). As regards acute occupational pesticide-related illness (AOPI), underreporting to public health authorities can derive from: a) a fear of job loss, demotion or reduced chance of being rehired (Prado et al., 2017, p. 3); b) limited knowledge of english, lack of formal education of workers, seasonality of work that affects the continuity of care for agricultural workers, along with poor compliance (on the part of health-care providers) with the “*National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services*” (CLAS standards) in the healthcare (2017, pp. 3–4); c) limited access to health care (due to the role of supervisors in facilitating or impeding access, distances to clinics, high cost of care, and lack of insurance, mistrust of health care providers) (2017, pp. 4–5); d) lack of clinical recognition and underreporting to public health authorities:

because health-care professionals are rarely trained about the collection of occupational and environmental histories; pesticides poisoning can be rare in developed countries; or can view the provision of medical care as the priority, and the public health prevention as secondary; laboratory tests to confirm the diagnosis may not be available; clinicians can be concerned about the potential violations of the “*Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act*” (HIPAA), along with the possibility that they are not familiar with the “*HIPAA*” exceptions; and even if properly diagnosed, patients may also not be reported due to a lack of comprehension of the conditions, or also due to the fact that doctors may be afraid of retaliation against them or against their patients (2017, p. 5); e) ineligibility for worker compensation benefits; workers unawareness of worker compensation coverage; but also barriers to the use by the providers (uncertainty about work-relatedness and a lack of familiarity; delayed reimbursement; often occupational history is not collected and occupational etiology is unrecognized) (2017, p. 6); f) constraints as regards state’s interagency coordination (e.g., in sharing personal identifiers) (2017, p. 7); g) staff shortage and a lack of resources for state-based surveillance (2017, p. 7). Also, research with thoroughbred Latino farmworkers (horse farms) showed how work stress, supervisory unfairness, a long tenure at the farm, and supervisor’s inability to speak Spanish may be associated with higher probability of occupational injury (Clouser et al., 2018, p. 894). Besides, health and injuries at work may be linked to discrimination. On that, there is relevant research conducted in 2009 in Texas, on how perceived discrimination may affect how Latino farmworkers come across injuries and then explore treatment to injuries (Snipes et al., 2017). In more detail, the workers who were included in this cited research were Latino farmworkers who migrated from the Texas-Mexico border to Texas, in more detail the region of Panhandle, to work in different types of crops in the region (Snipes et al., 2017, p. 4). Among the injuries, there were: cuts to hands and arms; musculoskeletal injuries (e.g., sprained backs or ankles); bruises from falls, blows from machinery; and broken bones (Snipes et al., 2017, p. 6). In terms of discrimination, bosses or farm owners were perceived as the primary agents and sources of discrimination, while workers’ immigrant status as a relevant influence on their perceptions of discrimination. In more detail, to explain the discrimination that farmworkers encountered, farmworkers mentioned some characteristics, that is the ability to speak English, their country of birth, and ethnicity. Besides, as far as the relationship between health and discrimination, the authors highlighted how the depictions of discrimination were linked to the perception of health, for instance with workers required to work through injuries (Snipes et al., 2017, p. 7).

Moreover, in terms of health and safety related to the use of pesticides, workers can consider agrochemicals as necessary devices for the plants to bear more fruit and grow properly, and then to give the opportunity to pick more boxes, and earn more money (Soper, 2021, p. 742). This may also be the reason for most farmworkers' preference for conventional fields rather than organic production, also considering the use of chemicals to make plants grow more and mature faster. Conventional fields can produce more fruits than organic (Soper, 2021, p. 742). Finally, as far as pesticide exposure, obstacles to worker protection can have little to do with a lack of information on the part of workers. Indeed, a workplace featuring power dynamics could limit the ability of workers to use the information (Barbour & Guthman, 2018, p. 340).

## **VII. Gender-based Exploitation**

Women farmworkers can be centered in the lowest-paying farm jobs, as well as neglected for promotion, they can be subjected to harassment and denied benefits that are offered to men, and they can live a "*double day*" (with their jobs, and gendered cultural expectations as far as family care), or sexual assault, and inadequate healthcare (Barbour & Guthman, 2018, p. 336). Indeed, women farmworkers can be more economically vulnerable compared to men and for different reasons: a) in many cases they are responsible for household work and childcare; b) private and public work may be in conflict and create malaise; c) they have higher chances to live high symptoms of depression (Curl et al., 2021, p. 2); d) they are more likely to have work and family conflicts, and along with lower mental and physical health as opposed to men; e) they can have less supervisor support than men, support that can reduce work-family conflict and work distress, for instance, as evidenced in existing research; f) women can work fewer months compared to men (TePoel et al., 2017, pp. 8–9). Also, in terms of occupational health, a study conducted among Latinas in farmworker families in North Carolina showed that two interpersonal stressors, namely family conflict and perceived discrimination, as well as one social stressor, namely economic insecurity, can be positively linked to depressive symptoms (Zapata Roblyer et al., 2016, p. 8). Besides, research on the experience of sexual harassment among indigenous Mexican farmworker women in Oregon noted: a) how indigenous women who do not speak Spanish can be more vulnerable to sexual harassment, partially due to the language; b) sexual harassment can be linked to threats of losing or having to leave farm jobs; c) also, the double burden of a desperate need to work and language isolation can contribute to a greater sense of vulnerability to sexual harassment by indigenous women farmworkers;

d) although not labelled as sexual harassment, women farmworkers can recognize behaviours and effects on their lives; e) worker can also do not know how to deal with sexual harassment, also with a lack of information coming from the company (Murphy et al., 2015, p. 7). Besides, as shown in research conducted in Idaho among women farmworkers who identified as Latina or Hispanic, the challenges regarding their roles in agriculture may regard long working hours, pesticide exposure, and a lack of enforcement of regulatory protections. Long days and long working hours may hinder access to medical care, as well as engagement in household work (Curl et al., 2021, p. 7). Instead, as far as well-being and work in the private domain, the main themes regard food security and provisioning, childcare responsibilities, and social inclusion. As regards childcare and domestic responsibilities, issues may be: a) the challenge of working in agriculture while raising children; b) gender-based inequality concerning the distribution of household work, especially during planting and harvesting, given the long hours; c) the issues in the management of domestic tasks and paid labour may be more marked for single mothers (Curl et al., 2021, pp. 8–10). Social isolation may be another theme (Curl et al., 2021, p. 10). Research among Latina farmworkers from the Central Valley of California, in particular from the counties of Fresno and Tulare, highlighted some experiences of Latina farmworkers in the workplace (Areguin & Stewart, 2022). The mentioned research described both negative and positive features of women's working experiences. In more detail, these experiences concern: a) the oppressive structure of work; b) discriminatory and harassing treatment; and c) positive features of working situations. The experiences regarding the structure of work are as follows: 1) fruit and machines may determine how good or bad the workdays are (machines in case of women workers working in packaging; the quality of the fruit for those working in picking); 2) inconsistent work and salary, namely work schedules and their pay may also be variable and may vary every day, without certainty about schedules; 3) surveillance at work by supervisors and other coworkers with cameras or watchful gazes (Areguin & Stewart, 2022, pp. 994–996). Second, as to the experiences of discriminatory and harassing treatment, some features are: 4) differential treatment between workers, for instance by preferring some workers or also by underestimating some other workers; 5) the research among Latina farmworkers in these counties of California shows that interactions with men may be perceived as irrelevant given the gender-segregated work and the fact that men are not around them; or if men are around women farmworkers, men may harass or tease them for the assumed inability to do their job; besides, a worker also reported vulgar comments with sexual meanings and groping at work;



men can also talk about women in demeaning ways or use English to say discriminatory things and with the assumption that Spanish-speaking women would not understand what was said; 6) employers' efforts to prevent harassment may be about women's dress, with a dress code to protect them from the potential disrespect of men; 7) the fear or knowledge of retaliation, for instance in the case of workers who defend other workers who do not want to speak up, then ignored or treated badly for that; or when there are excessive demands and they do not want to talk about it because they may be fired (Areguin & Stewart, 2022, pp. 996–998). Third, besides these negative features, this research among women farmworkers in California also noted some positive features that may occur in the workplaces: 8) the work setting and the related process (e.g., clean, attractive work processes); 9) the good working relationships with supervisors and coworkers; 10) the coping with stress with different types of strategies (e.g., self-encouragement); 11) and also pride and praise for productivity (Areguin & Stewart, 2022, pp. 998–1001). Overall, what is important to highlight about Areguin and Stewart's research is the emerging capacity of women workers to bear the difficult aspects of their employment by emphasizing positive elements and by rarely explicitly describing conditions in the first two categories as oppressive or unfair situations (Areguin & Stewart, 2022, p. 1001).

# 2.

## **Alternative Organizing: Union Renewal and Community Organizing**

## 2.1. Alternative Organizing and Community Unionism

All the working conditions discussed in the previous chapter are the result of the ways global and domestic supply chains operate in a capitalist society. Capitalism can be conceived as an economic system in which capital is invested to generate more capital, in a process of capital accumulation with different manifestations. Since the first industrial revolution, the main way of capital accumulation is through production and by hiring people (Parker et al., 2018a, p. 3). The tenets of capitalism are: a) private appropriation of the means of production and division among capital and work; b) “free” market; and c) profit motive (Parker et al., 2018a, pp. 4–7). Capitalist dynamics are also: a) efficiency; b) market expansion and growth; c) and producing capitalist subjects (Parker et al., 2018a, pp. 7–10). On the other hand, the cost of the freedom, wealth and growth generated by capitalism has different costs in terms of poverty, violence, crisis of public health, and environmental degradation. Thus, the “dark side” of capitalism is: a) flexible labour markets and boundaryless careers can generate atomization, alienation, and psychological disorders; b) externalities or hidden costs of production and consumption that are pushed to other actors, such as future generations and marginalized; c) inequality, given that wealth is accumulated partially through dispossession (Parker et al., 2018a, pp. 10–13).

Therefore, during our history, capitalism has produced growth and wealth for many of us, but has produced many negative consequences, from irreversible environmental degradation to economic inequality (Parker et al., 2018b). Hence, novel forms of organizing are possible and needed in this time of human impoverishment. Indeed, “almost no particular forms of human organizing are inevitable” (Parker et al., 2018c, p. 35), and there are always alternatives, other possibilities and choices on the relations between means and ends. Thinking about alternative organizing is also a way to operate critically in our everyday lives because it requires identity and awareness of our identity, our responsibility, and the way we recall such concepts.

*“However, opening up the politics and possibilities of organizing like this doesn’t solve our problems. It makes things much more difficult because we can longer admit to any arguments about inevitability, and instead have to justify our individual and collective choices on the basis of what forms of rationality we wish to encourage. These will have to be reasons which encompass both means and ends, both processes and purposes, and rest upon some sort of idea about the kinds of society and people we wish to encourage” (Parker et al., 2018c, p. 36).*

Labour is also strictly linked to immigration, and represents a crucial domain of social justice. Thus, alternative forms of organizing can be developed in the arena of immigration.

*“Alternative organizations in this arena are best defined by their values and the emergent trajectory they embody: (1) valuing human dignity, well-being, and agency for immigrants in the face of state regulation and repression; (2) championing the particular needs of refugees from violence and persecution; and (3) transcending the dehumanizing treatment of immigrants as controlled units of labor in managed migration programs”* (Heyman et al., 2018, p. 135).

As argued by Heyman et al. (2018), alternative immigrant organizations in their development, cannot separate themselves from the dynamics of the wider society. The starting point usually concerns repressive policies or acts, and discriminatory patterns generated and developed in the wider society. What it is important to highlight about the trajectories posed by alternative immigrant organizations is that, from this challenging starting point, they create *“positive forms of sociality, culture and politics, grounded in a vision of human worth beyond narrow nation-state membership”* (Heyman et al., 2018, p. 147). This path concerns the relationship between cosmopolitanism from above (based on the interests of different forms of capital across boundaries and creation of a mobile world) and cosmopolitanism from below (creation of strong organizations of workers around dignity and solidarity) (Heyman et al., 2018, p. 148).

It is generally agreed that unions are suffering a union decline related, as explored in the US, to structural changes in the national and global economy, shifts in the function and structure of corporations, the increasingly important influence of financial markets, the privatization of public services, the decreasing power of workplaces in terms of collective power, as well as a polarized political system, and that eroded worker bargaining power (McCartin, 2018, p. 169). In front of these challenges, for instance, the US labour movement generated and produced different innovations: a) *reconstructing the bargaining*: by organizing and bargaining beyond individual employers, and by organizing entire markets or bargaining with buyers/financiers; b) *public goods unionism*: organizing and bargaining aligned with community needs/interests (e.g., affordable housing); c) *capital strategies/public investment*: with investment strategies, such as labour-friendly private equity; d) *alternative union recognition strategies*: to prevent contested NLRB elections, for instance through neutrality agreements; e) *creative militancy*: with unions’ attempts to revive strikes and other actions; f) *alternative worker organizations*: such as worker centers and minority workplace organizations (McCartin, 2018, pp. 168–173).

Thus, innovations take also place in the bargaining arena (Smiley, 2018). Pioneering models and experiments of bargaining can be subdivided into: a) *broadening the scope of traditional bargaining* (e.g., Bargaining for the Common Good); b) *bargaining with the ultimate profiteer* (e.g., Asia Floor Wage Alliance); c) and *community-driven bargaining* (e.g., Justice for School Workers Campaign in Atlanta, Georgia) (Smiley, 2018). To understand how innovative models of labour organizing are rooted in past and present labour movements, it is important to cite the types of power workers can use: a) *structural power* (labour market bargaining power and workplace power); b) *associational power* through collective organizations, such as unions; c) *symbolic power* by organizing “*public dramas*” that move from workplaces to the community.

In this literature on alternative organizing, the concept of “*community unionism*” appears the most relevant and appropriate, from a theoretical point of view, to explain the experiences of struggle and resistance deployed not only by unions, but also by community organizations. This explanatory power is also evident in the importance of ethnic and geographical features in organizing beyond a single issue of content. Besides, this concept is enriched by research from different institutional and economic contexts. The existence of a comparative literature and the ability to heuristically explain most of contemporary alternative organizing, represent the reasons to adopt the concept of community unionism in this literature review. The label “*community*” can assume different meanings: (community) organization; group with common interests/identities; and place (Tattersall, 2008, 2009b). Community unions “*are modest-sized community-based organizations of low-wage workers that focus on issues of work and wages in their communities. These organizations are mediating institutions that are based in specific ethnic and geographic communities (as opposed to specific workplaces)*” (Fine, 2005, p. 154). These organizations can be divided into: 1) “*Community organization/no union partner*”; 2) “*Labor union or unions/no community partner*”; 3) “*Community/labor partnership but with community organization dominant*”; 4) “*Community/labor partnership but with labor union dominant*” (Fine, 2005). This is a way to unify extant research on alternative organizing under a common label. “*There are a number of forms that CU can take and ways in which CU might be cognized. Indeed, CU is best understood as a strategic intervention that is contingent upon a range of issues*” (Greenwood & McBride, 2009, p. 211). On this subject, useful is the idea of a spectrum of community unionism, built according to the centrality of unions’ involvement, and their commitment towards this organizing (Greenwood & McBride, 2009, pp. 216–217).

In detail, at one end there is community unionism based on vestigial traditional unionism, and based on geography, industrial, and occupational memory, and manifested through former union's activists, rather than through a directed union's strategy (Stephenson & Wray, 2009); while, on the other end, forms that are based on unions using qualitatively diverse strategies (Byford, 2009; Urano & Stewart, 2009). Still, along this continuum, other initiatives can exist (Fitzgerald, 2009; Holgate, 2009; Lucio & Perrett, 2009b; Moody, 2009; Tattersall, 2009b) (Greenwood & McBride, 2009, pp. 216–217). Still, another framing of community unionism is *“as a descriptive term that refers to the broad set of strategies that involve the interconnection of unions with organizations, common interest/identity and place”* (Tattersall, 2009b, p. 163), and that includes three strategies: coalition unionism, when unions partner with community organizations (community as organization); organizing workers based on identities/interests, on the part of unions or community organizations (community as common interest/identity); place-based organising, to increase their impact at local, global or multiple scales (community as place) (Tattersall, 2008, p. 418). I divide this literature on alternative organizing into three parts: community, supply chains, and state. In detail, as far as the community level, I discuss community-based union strategies, coalitions, and community organizations labour-focused. As regards supply chains, I discuss collaborations between the market and civil society groups. Finally, concerning the state level, some experiences of policy advocacy will be discussed.

## **2.2. Union Renewal and Community-based Organizing**

Firstly, as regards community-based union strategies: a) community initiatives can be variable (e.g., initiatives about minimum wage, ethically based networks, community learning center); b) can fail to have a clear vision and structure; c) they can be accompanied by the ambivalence of the state; d) black and minority engagement may not be central (Lucio & Perrett, 2009a). As shown with union community initiatives, and regarding *“Black And Minority Ethnic”* (BME) communities in the UK: a) there is no specific template of needs or social activities, especially in changing communities; b) there is a variety of structures, strategies and initiatives (service, organising, mobilizing models); c) community unionism can emerge also without an explicit goal despite they see community as a portion of the work; d) the variety of initiatives with an absence of links may emerge because of the absence of community structures; e) there may be an absence of strategies aimed to prepare unions to such efforts (Lucio & Perrett, 2009b).

Also, according to Lucio and Perrett, community unionism is a strategic phenomenon, rather than a structural and organizational phenomenon (Lucio & Perrett, 2009b). In addition to this, in this discussion about community-based union strategies, Fitzgerald (2009) by investigating how several unions engaged with Polish workers to address employment abuse and the need for information on Polish workers in the north of England, noted how often collaboration has led unions into the Polish community through different means, including through church, and showed how unions are aware that such engagement may be limited from a temporal point of view without the formalization, resources and the recognition of community links and their importance (Fitzgerald, 2009). Also, on this topic, Mustchin (2012) explored the relationship among union involvement in organizing, and organizing strategies regarding migrant workers, and showed how the strategic integration of these features can vary and can be accompanied by tensions within and among the unions, other organizations, and the state, and within union memberships (Mustchin, 2012). On this subject, community forms of organizing by unions have also been investigated in the UK under the name of indie unions, namely grassroots and small independent unions co-directed by precarious migrant workers. Here, empowerment is facilitated by the organization around a “*community of struggle*” surrounding mutual support, campaigning, mobilization, and informal bargaining (Però, 2020). What is useful to highlight is their efforts to tackle different forms of precarity: *economic precarity* (e.g., agency work), *legal precarity* (e.g., immigration status), *social precarity* (e.g., scant integration in the city), and *cultural precarity* (e.g., scant knowledge of the dominant language) (Però, 2020, p. 907).

On this subject, another important example of community unionism is the experience of the “*Warehouse Workers United*” (WWU) campaign in Southern California’s warehouses, funded by the leaders of the “*Change to Win*” (CTW) labor federation. What is useful is that the WWU campaign borrowed from community unionism’s models three types of tactics: 1) the hiring of a nonunion affiliated community organizer to seek regional community support; 2) at the beginning they recruited workers mainly in the community, rather than at the workplace; 3) the provision of services, such as English classes, to recruit and serve their members, and by borrowing some ideas from the activities of organizations, such as worker centers, and other nonprofit organizations, and that usually offer services of this type. On this point, the WWU and their allies founded a worker center, the “*Warehouse Workers Resource Center*” (WWRC) to educate workers on their rights and labour violations (De Lara et al., 2016, pp. 310–311).

However, among the limits, similar to worker centers' limitations (Fine, 2006), the reliance of WWU/WWRC on external funding has made its financial sustainability uncertain, and several of the gains concerned the application of labour rights in specific workplaces, without gains at the industry level (De Lara et al., 2016, p. 326). On this topic, community unionism in Japan is informative (Suzuki, 2008; Urano & Stewart, 2009; Royle & Urano, 2012; Watanabe, 2015). In Japan, enterprise unions are the main form of union organization. However, several unions have structures of regional representation, with members drawn from different enterprises. These regional unions are often called "*community unions*" in Japan, and cover workers who are not represented by the cited enterprises unions (e.g., part-time workers, workers in small firms, and foreign workers) (Suzuki, 2008, p. 493). They were organized at first by the regional labour councils of the national confederation "*Sohyo*" (the General Council of Trade Unions), namely voluntary federations of labour unions in specific geographical areas, during the first half of the 1980s (also considering the liberal union recognition procedure under the Japanese labour law). Nevertheless, not all the community unions in Japan originated in these activities of regional labour councils. In 1990, 60 community unions established the "*Community Union Nationwide Network*" (CUNN), but not all community unions are part of this national network. However, "*Sohyo*" in the early 1990s was dissolved with the creation of a new confederation, "*Rengo*" (unifying "*Sohyo*" and other confederations), and that led to a restructuring of the regional structures. Some community unions dissolved, while others raised their membership and became financially self-sufficient (Suzuki, 2008, pp. 502–505). A pioneer and an example of a community union is the "*Edogawa Union*" (Urano & Stewart, 2009, p. 130). Suzuki (2008) studied "*community unionism*" in the Japanese context in comparison to other industrialized countries, by noting the weakness of coalition-building in Japan, and explaining the difference by highlighting the underdevelopment of civil society and industrial relations institutions in Japan (Suzuki, 2008). Also, taking as a reference the types of community unions proposed by Fine (2005), Suzuki argues that community unions in Japan are similar to the second typology in their forms, that is "*labour union or unions/no community partner*", and to the first typology in their activities, namely "*community organization/no union partner*" (Suzuki, 2008, p. 512). Also, in this context, I believe it is important to discuss an important argument from the paper that I mentioned, namely Suzuki's claim that there may be different varieties and typologies of community unionism, "*and that its forms are mediated by civil societal and institutional contexts of labour movements in different countries*" (Suzuki, 2008, p. 515).



*“Community unions have performed roles that enterprise unions often do not, such as providing assistance for union members with individual labour disputes over illegal and discriminatory treatment. By performing these roles, community unions have helped improve the working conditions of non-regular workers and unorganised regular workers”* (Watanabe, 2015, p. 524).

An important research on alternative forms of union organizing in Japan is the study about the *“Japanese Community Union Federation”* (JCUF), a federation that represents community unions at a national level and representing economically marginalized workers, together with unemployed workers with their affiliation to *“Rengo”*, namely the main union confederation in Japan, and by discussing the structuration of community unionism (Urano & Stewart, 2009). In addition, I believe that this latter research is very informative, especially in the adoption of a framework that problematizes mainstream unions (Urano & Stewart, 2009). Additionally, the story of *“McUnion”* (*Nihon Makudonarudo Union*) in the Japanese context dominated by enterprise unions is particularly interesting (Royle & Urano, 2012). Indeed, *“McUnion”* cannot be viewed as an enterprise union, since it recruits individually, includes part-time, hourly-paid workers, and women, and it is also independent of employers (Royle & Urano, 2012, p. 618). Nevertheless, *“McUnion”* cannot even be viewed as a *“community union”* in the usual sense. Unlike community unions, is organized around one large employer and nationally, is not based on gender and ethnicity, is formed by activists with salaried jobs, and is also supported by the direct involvement of *“Rengo”*, the main union confederation in Japan (Royle & Urano, 2012). As far as community-based union strategies, useful is Byford’s research on union renewal in Canada and how can be achieved by reconnecting unions and their members with the shared interests of the local communities and by studying the *“CAW”* (Canadian Auto Workers Union) pursuing a *“Social Unionism”* strategy (Byford, 2009, p. 187). As stated in CAW’s Constitution: *“Social Unionism means unionism which is rooted in the workplace but understands the importance of partnership in, and influencing, the general direction of society”* (Byford, 2009, p. 187). Their essence is that goals and methods are rooted in CAW’s union policy and practice with a deep immersion in the workplace, as well as wide relations with the local communities (Byford, 2009, p. 187). In detail, there are potentially positive aspects that can lead to a union renewal and social change, by reconnecting unions and communities. Three themes identified in the cited research are: participation, identity, and union effectiveness. A potential negative finding concerns the ability to extend this activity beyond the workplace (e.g., misfits between rhetoric and policy at the union’s national level, and practice at the workplace) (Byford, 2009).

Important is the study undertaken by Dibben in Mozambique on union renewal in emerging countries, countries with issues, like post-conflict situations, the devastation of infrastructure, weak enforcement, and large informal sector (Dibben, 2010). In more detail, the Mozambican model, while different and facing much more challenges, resembled the community unionism experience in the US, especially through the provision of training programs, political activity, and collaborations with organizations representing broader interests (Dibben, 2010, p. 481).

### **2.3. Workers' Representation Beyond Trade Unions**

In addition to community-based union strategies, different community organizations engaged in workplace justice have been established. In more detail, the term community organization can have different meanings, and their organizational structures can assume different forms. For instance, a typology is the *"Industrial Areas Foundation"* (IAF) model, with origins in the organizing efforts of Saul Alinsky in 1930s Chicago. Some features of IAF organizations are: a) they are embedded in geographic communities; b) the members that pay the dues are civil society institutions (e.g., unions, schools, and congregations); c) multiple-issue campaigns and concerns regarding the labour market as by-products of a larger agenda; d) public advocacy and collective action to raise power and get social change; e) and leadership development to raise power (Tapia, 2013, p. 669). This is an example of a model of community organization. An example of a community organization, based on Saul Alinsky's model, is *"London Citizens"* in the UK, a large alliance of faith communities, universities, schools, and few union branches, as well as a small number of non-profit organizations. An important effort of this broad-based alliance is the *"Living Wage campaign"* (Holgate, 2015). By drawing on Tapia's research (2013) important features of *"London Citizens"* are the following: a) they work on multiple issues; b) the issues come from members; c) members start to work on potential issues through house meetings, one-to-one meetings (to build and maintain relations), meetings with institutions; d) participatory democracy with formal decision-making through large assemblies and regular strategy teams; e) campaigns composed by large and small actions, once identified the issues; f) actions represent a way to build power, reinforce relations among members and develop leadership; g) if they organize events, member institutions shall set quotas of persons to bring, as a mechanism of liability; h) a yearly assembly with a ritual in which representatives of the members say *"we pay the dues to the community organization"* (Tapia, 2013, pp. 674–677).

Thus, besides efforts implemented by unions to develop community-based strategies and to recruit immigrant workers, different community-based organizations have been created to address economic justice (Milkman, 2007, p. 107). Despite they are not unions, most of these community organizations focus on advocacy to improve local working conditions and through direct action against employers and the state. Still, some community organizations have ties with unions, while others are more detached. While they can share similar aims on workers' rights, they can assume different organizational forms and deploy diverse strategies or tactics. An example of a community organization engaged with labour is the immigrant "*Hometown Association*" (HTA), and increasingly engaged in workplace advocacy (Milkman, 2007, p. 108). However, "*worker centers*" in the US are the most institutionalized and formalized instances of community-based initiatives (Fine, 2015; Fine et al., 2018; Fine, 2006): "*Worker centers are hybrid organizations that combine the service provision of traditional voluntary organizations with political advocacy focused on labor and immigrant rights and often focus on gender, race, and broad critiques of neoliberalism*" (Fine et al., 2018, p. 10). In more detail, worker centers, as community-based organizations that work at the intersection of labour and immigration, although their structural and organizational variety, can be defined in the following way:

*"Worker centers are community-based mediating institutions that provide support to and organize among communities of low-wage workers. As work is the primary focus of life for many newly arriving immigrants, it is also the locus of many of the problems they experience. This is why, although they actually pursue a broad agenda that includes many aspects of immigrant life in America, many of these organizations call themselves "worker centers" (Fine, 2006, p. 11).*

Worker centers in the US can engage in many different activities: a) helping workers with the claim of unpaid wages; b) working with state agencies to enhance enforcement; c) organizing campaigns and direct action against specific employers or across industries, in some cases; d) popular education and leadership development (Fine, 2006, p. 12). In addition, although the variety and differences among worker centers, some features that they have in common are: hybrid organization, service provision, advocacy, organizing, they are place-based rather than work-site based, strong ethnic and racial identification, leadership development and internal democracy, popular education, thinking globally, broad agenda, coalition building, small and involved memberships (Fine, 2006, pp. 12–14). These are some of the characteristics of these worker centers operating in the US. An example of this model is the day labor worker center.

As shown by Theodore et al. (2009), day labor worker centers may perform human resources management (HRM) practices: wage setting, job allocation, wage claim, grievance resolution, workers' education (Theodore et al., 2009, p. 426). Also, Martin et al. (2007) by studying the "*Economic Development Center*" (EDC), a worker center in Chicago's Southwest Side, argued that "*the EDC has been able to overcome the geographic and social isolation of workers in a migrant enclave while also representing workers who have little recourse to the state given their status as undocumented migrants*" (Martin et al., 2007, p. 156). On that, research about informal day-labor markets in South Africa and the US is explicative (Theodore et al., 2015). In detail, in the US, worker centers appear essential in the informal day-labor markets, usually through the building of local hiring halls (Theodore et al., 2009). Besides, day labor organizing in the US took place mainly under the "*National Day Laborer Organizing Network*" (NDLON). In South Africa, the coordination of interventions has been managed by "*Men on the Side of the Road*" (MSR), a social enterprise with different affiliates (Theodore et al., 2015, p. 819).

Worker centers in the US have also shown a path toward building federations and networks (Fine, 2011a, 2011b; Cordero-Guzmán, 2015; Narro & Fine, 2018), and relations with the state and unions (Fine, 2011a, 2011b). On this subject, networks of worker centers are as follows: "*National Day Laborer Organizing Network*" (NDLON); "*Restaurant Opportunities Center*" (ROC); "*National Domestic Workers Alliance*" (NDWA); "*National Taxi Workers Alliance*" (NTWA); "*National Black Worker Center Project*"; "*National Guestworker Alliance*" (NGA); "*Interfaith Worker Justice*" (Narro & Fine, 2018, pp. 71–72). An example of these networks is the "*National Black Worker Center Project*" (Pitts, 2018). Their activity can be divided into: a) building member-driven organizations; b) organizing and policy campaigns; c) changing the narrative. As to "*building member-driven organizations*", activities that are aimed to identify members are: one-on-ones, information tables at events, neighborhood canvassing, surveys, outreach, listening sessions (Pitts, 2018, p. 130). As far as "*organizing and policy campaigns*", campaigns can be subdivided into: getting black workers into good jobs; conducting broader policy fights; encouraging civic engagement; and exploring economic alternatives (Pitts, 2018, pp. 131–132). As concerns their focus on "*changing narrative*", important was the national campaign "*Working While Black*" (WWB). The goal of this campaign was to collect and divulge stories from members that provided a view of the crisis of black work but "*from below*", and to change the existing narrative about black work and the job crisis (Pitts, 2018, pp. 132–133).

The challenges were: developing vibrant affiliates, and building a proper national “*footprint*” (Pitts, 2018, pp. 133–135). Nevertheless, besides the existence of worker centers, in reaction to the informalization of migrant workforce, the distrust of migrants among unions, unions’ ambiguity, and the gaps between unions and migrant workers, Roca and Martín-Díaz (2017) showed the emergence of self-organized networks, labelled “*interstitial trade unionism*” that can perform some of the functions usually performed by unions (Roca & Martín-Díaz, 2017).

## 2.4. Coalition Unionism and Workers' Rights

In addition to community-based union strategies and community-based organizations, such as “*worker centers*” in the US, coalition building is another typology of community unionism. The community meanings mentioned above can also be used to identify the key elements of coalitions: 1) the coalition’s organisational relationships and structure; 2) common concern; 3) and the coalition’s scale (Tattersall, 2009b, pp. 164–165). “*Coalition unionism, as a union strategy, is an attempt to rebuild support for unionism beyond the membership of unions across society at large in order to influence decision-makers and to help shape the political climate*” (Tattersall, 2009b, p. 180). On this, Tattersall offers a benchmark of coalition success:

*“Firstly, coalitions are successful if they support political outcomes; secondly, if they help change the political climate; thirdly, if they allow unions and community organisations to sustain relationships with external organizations; and fourthly, if they help participating unions and community organisations increase their internal capacity”* (Tattersall, 2008, p. 420).

Coalition building can be challenging. Thus, a study of what works is crucial. Preexisting union identities, common interests, and decentralized union structures can make the formation of a coalition more likely, and influence the participation of union members (Tattersall, 2009a). As argued by Wills (2001), unions by building alliances with community groups have four aims: 1) these alliances can tackle questions of economic justice beyond specific workplaces; 2) with community groups they can reach workers who are usually marginalized by trade unions; 3) alliances can be useful to reach those who are hard to organize, and through the help of local community facilities for outreach and advice sessions; 4) having allies beyond workplaces can increase the pressure on employers (Wills, 2001, p. 466). Wills also debated the usefulness of community-union organizing, by drawing on UK living wages campaigns, and by showing the relevance of alliances with parties, and with/without the involvement of unions (Wills, 2009).

Wills and Simms also proposed three eras of development of the union-community relation: 1) *“community-based trade unionism”*; 2) *“representational community unionism”* 3) and the idea that there is scope to develop a *“reciprocal community unionism”* (Wills & Simms, 2004). At the basis of unions’ interest in community organizing there may be the current economic climate, declining bargaining power, and the success of new labour actors (Holgate, 2015).

*“The main points of agreement, though, are that the changing geographies of employment, the economic crisis and its devastating impact upon workers, and the inability of unions to motivate their members to act, are all leading to a realisation that unions need to broaden the scope of their activity. And, that, unions cannot do this alone”* (Holgate, 2015, p. 437).

Relations between unions and community organizations have been studied in other contexts. Tufts (1998), by studying Canadian postal workers and homeworkers in the garment industry, argued *“that alternative approaches to labor organization can overcome “the imposed spatial reorganization of capitalism” and allow workers and communities to produce more preferable economic geographies”* (Tufts, 1998, p. 228). In greater detail, the *“Canadian Union of Postal Workers”* during the restoration years of the Canadian postal service, mobilized community support, improved public relations, and reinforced their collective bargaining power against the *“Canada Post Corporation”*. The former *“International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union”* started to organize a fragmented labour force of garment homeworkers by joining forces with Asian immigrant community associations (Tufts, 1998, p. 233). Union renewal has also been investigated in Australia by studying an inter-union organization, and by showing how unions’ structures change (Ellem, 2003). Another study is the one conducted by Cockfield et al. in the state of Victoria (2009). As to community-union relations, there is a diversity of aims, forms, sustainability, member participation types, and leadership commitment in union-community relations, with forms of charity, and variations between public and private sectors. However, not all the alliances between unions and their communities can form the basis of renovation: *“This involves unions, often working with community groups, reshaping community values and setting a new social agenda where industrial issues are entwined and inseparable from social justice concerns”* (Cockfield et al., 2009, p. 479). Besides, an initiative based on this tradition is the *“Bargaining for the Common Good”* (BCG), which emerged in the public sector, with the goal to redefine collective bargaining in response to the austerity imposed on local and state governments (Sneiderman & McCartin, 2018). The main features of BCG-style campaigns are:

a) *expanding the scope of bargaining*; b) *bringing the community to the table*; c) *unifying identities* of union members (e.g., union members, potential union members); d) *confronting systemic/racial injustice*; e) *strengthening internal organizing and member engagement*; f) *identifying, exposing, and calling to account the economic elite*; g) *challenging wealth inequality*; h) *putting capital to work for the common goal*; i) and *building a positive perception of organized labor* (Sneiderman & McCartin, 2018, pp. 222–224).

As shown in the US, worker centers, immigrant advocacy, and faith-based organizations, that work with immigrants, and are often located in immigrant communities, can help unions with the outreach of workers. In fact, they often work in industries that appear difficult to unionize, given the small size of the businesses, isolation of work, and decentralization of the industry. These types of organizations can unify different categories of workers, promote support for union organizing campaigns, and promote unions among immigrants, also by expanding union agenda (e.g., housing). In addition, these organizations can also play a crucial role in helping trade unions win recognitions outside the “*National Labor Relation Board*” (NLRB) process of election (e.g., neutrality agreements), and can legitimize union power within the community and local policy, also thanks to their exercise of moral capital, in addition to union strong-arm tactics (Bada et al., 2018, p. 97). Besides, at the intersection of immigrant and workers’ rights, unions cannot lead advocacy alone, their activity is contextual. Some considerations are: a) union’s power; b) local political dynamics; c) possible and willing partners; and d) fit between national and local trade unions (Bada et al., 2018, pp. 108–109). Nevertheless, collaborations and partnerships between unions and community organizations can be also characterized by issues in terms of ideology, structure, and culture (Fine, 2007).

As far as relations among unions and worker centers, Hetland (Hetland, 2015) studied through a case of a successful collaboration (between the “*Retail Wholesale Department Store Union*” (RWDSU) and “*Make the Road by Walking*” (MRBW)), the motives for the creation of these collaborations, challenges, and the reasons of success. Hetland argued that this collaboration emerged due to organizational crises, economic shifts, and individual learning from partially successful organizing campaigns. Additionally, intra and inter-organizational collaboration has overcome challenges through two conditions: bridge builders; state support (Hetland, 2015). Also, this partnership launched community-based campaigns, and targeted stores and chains with the victory of back-pay awards and some collective agreements (Fine, 2011b, p. 50).

On partnerships with unions, Fine et al. (2008), by studying relations between worker centers and construction trade unions in the US, noted how these unions have the capability to train, represent construction workers, and analyze the sector, they know labour laws, they have a history of organizing workers and resources in terms of staff, finance, membership, economic power, and a political capacity. Nevertheless, many unions are still linked to old views of the construction sector (Fine et al., 2008, pp. 43–44). On the other end, worker centers have close relations with marginalized workers, are aware of what happens in non-union construction workplaces and immigrant communities and they have an interest in leadership development. Nevertheless, worker centers have scant resources, a fluid membership, and poor expertise in industry analysis, and their staff is small (Fine et al., 2008, pp. 43–44). On this subject, useful is Moody's research (2009) on immigrant workers' efforts to organize. Crucial questions are:

*“Are the strategies and structures of today's unions fit for the job? Are they even looking at some of the immigrant groups with the most potential bargaining power? Are unions able to see worker centres as part of the same movement?”* (Moody, 2009, p. 158).

Despite early tensions among unions and worker centers, a growing convergence of interests is visible. This development was visible in the recognition by “AFL-CIO” of worker centers as legitimate representatives, and by an agreement with the “*National Day Labourer Organizing Network*”, namely a network of day labor organizations based in communities (Moody, 2009). On this subject, these partnerships between “AFL-CIO” (and its affiliates) and worker centers have been explored by Narro and Fine (2018). Partnerships with worker centers are useful to unions for different reasons: a) a strong solidarity base can be built when industrial-related identities are linked to other identities (e.g., ethnicity, race, immigration status, gender); b) considering they are community-based groups, they use labour market-wide strategies to organize non-union environments: c) they shed light to the entire industry and especially on how to raise standards in contexts characterized by subcontracting, by going after businesses that lead supply chains; d) they offer education and training, advocacy, legal representation and flexible agreements (that can raise standards without collective agreements) for workers without long-term relations with employers (Narro & Fine, 2018, p. 86). Still, to be effective, this collaboration needs to be based on union investments to ensure that worker centers can become self-sufficient and stay viable in the long term. On this subject, the establishment in 2012 of the “*LIFT*” Fund (Labor Innovations for the 21st Century) was really important.



In detail, this fund was established by “AFL-CIO” in partnership with philanthropic institutions to sustain *“collaborative and innovative cross-sector learning between communities, the labor movement, and organizations working for a fair economy”* (Narro & Fine, 2018, p. 83), and to support collaborations among unions and worker centers, to disseminate novel strategies, to promote labour advocacy and philanthropy, and other sectors operating to construct worker power. Particularly, the LIFT fund supported organizing campaigns led by worker centers (e.g., CLEAN Carwash Campaign) (Narro & Fine, 2018, p. 83). On these relations among unions and community, according to Dibben and Nadin, issues can be: 1) unions may not share the same concerns as community organizations; 2) unions may not see community unionism as crucial for their strategy; 3) there may be diverse degrees of benefit for them; 4) these coalitions may not be durable in the longer term (Dibben & Nadin, 2011, pp. 57–59). In Mozambique, faced with the growth of the informal economy, the “OTM” federation established “ASSOTSI”, an affiliate organization representing informal workers. The organization appeared to be central to the plans of the federation. “ASSOTSI” provided legitimacy and a large number of workers (Dibben & Nadin, 2011), while “OTM” provided resources, training, help with lobbying, and links with international organizations. Still, the issue was their long-term sustainability due to the different sectors represented, the relations with the government, and because “ASSOTSI” represented only African workers, and the whole informal economy (Dibben & Nadin, 2011, p. 67). In terms of problems, research on *“London Citizens”* is also informative, mostly on the opposition of unions to work with religious groups, a sense of a lack of democracy within the community group and the diverse approaches to campaigning and organizing (Holgate, 2009).

Alberti (2016) argued how neither workplace-based nor community unionism is effective in boosting union activism among precarious workers. Among the limits of community unionism there is the risk of ignoring workers’ voice: *“By ‘contracting out’ the protest to other actors in civil society, community organising risks employing ‘extra-workplace’ sources of power to the point of bypassing those directly concerned, whose specific demands and needs risk remaining in the shadow”* (Alberti, 2016, p. 87). Besides, Alberti also discussed the need for trade unions to address the impacts of different precarities on workers’ voices, union’s commitment, and representation (Alberti, 2016). Also, as argued by Engeman, by studying union involvement in the immigrant rights marches organized in Los Angeles in 2006, the organizational dimensions of trade unions may influence the dynamics of social movement unionism (Engeman, 2015):

*“the practice of SMU involves distinctive considerations particular to organizations – considerations regarding member representation and long-term capacity for mobilization – and these considerations influence strategic decisions regarding allies, goals and tactics. The practice of SMU involves a delicate balance of union organizational and movement dimensions; and to understand union social movement activity, it is necessary to consider the constraints and opportunities embedded in organizational responsibilities and structures”* (Engeman, 2015, p. 456).

Upchurch et al. (2009) in their research on the crisis of social democratic unionism in Britain, Germany, and France, noted how unions in these countries, due to neoliberal restructuring, have taken changes in political orientations, bureaucratic approaches, and willingness to work within civil society, with a split in the party-union nexus that featured postwar western Europe (Upchurch et al., 2009). *“The development of new strategic orientations around “partnership” and competitive corporatism reflects a weakening of the union–party nexus that has been induced by the institution-dissolving dynamic of neoliberalism”* (Upchurch et al., 2009, p. 520). In response to the need to grow the ability to address precarious work, *“TUC”* (Trades Union Congress) encouraged its affiliates to use community unionism strategies to organize workers beyond the workplace (Wright, 2013). Holgate (2021) studied the effort of *“Unite”* to broaden its scope by recruiting non-workers (e.g., retirees), and whether was linked to a reorientation of union’s purpose: *“Without an ability to lead organisational change throughout the union, unions will remain wedded to their traditions and routines, which are no longer effective, as well as the sectional interests that work against a unitary approach”* (Holgate, 2021, p. 242).

## **2.5. Supply Chains and Market-based Organizing**

Nongovernmental organizations and community groups have launched initiatives to improve labour standards across supply chains, like in the case of the *“Asia Floor Wage”* campaign and the workers’ rights campaign at *“C.J.’s Seafood”* (Theodore, 2018). In front of global economic integration and the related downward pressure on prices, wages, and working conditions, the advocacy and organizing of workers’ organizations appear to be essential, especially through transnational strategies aimed at tackling and addressing the interpenetration of product and labour markets. In more detail, some approaches on this subject proposed by Theodore are: a) setting regional labour standards (e.g., the *“Asia Floor Wage”*); b) supply chain organizing; c) developing alternative forms of labour market intermediation (e.g., worker centers’ hiring halls); d) extending labour rights to migrant workers (Theodore, 2018, pp. 353–356).

Alternatives in the labour realm can assume different forms from worker-recuperated firms (Ruggeri & Vieta, 2015; Atzeni & Vieta, 2018), to the experience of communes and intentional communities (Pitzer et al., 2018). In greater detail, the self-management of work is one of the alternative possibilities of organizing (Ruggeri & Vieta, 2015; Atzeni & Vieta, 2018). Significant instances of this type of alternative organizing based on self-management are the so-called “*empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores*” (that is, worker-recuperated enterprises, ERTs). With regard to the self-management of work (the direct democratic control of production by the workers, together with its administration), two theoretical foundations are essential: a) self-management is rooted in spontaneous and self-directed workers’ class-based actions and struggles, led from below workplace organizing; b) self-management is transformative, with collective ownership and decision-making, the co-management of work by the workers, and coordination rather than authority in its organizing (Atzeni & Vieta, 2018, pp. 48–51). Hence, worker-recuperated enterprises (ERTs) represent the most famous examples of this typology, namely firms that were investor or privately owned, in trouble, and that were then converted to workers cooperatives by its workers, especially during the socio-economic crisis that shook Argentina during the years 2001/2002 (Atzeni & Vieta, 2018, p. 48). The main model adopted by these worker-recuperated enterprises is the worker cooperative. At first, the reasons were pragmatic: a) re-establish the business as a productive unit rapidly; b) adopt an organizational model that is legally recognized; c) get legitimization with customers, suppliers, and financial institutions; d) to protect worker-members from a seizure of personal property in the case of failure of the cooperative. However, this organizational model, despite these initial reasons, appears to be the most adequate model to give a procedural shape to their self-management (Atzeni & Vieta, 2018, p. 55). On worker cooperatives, regardless if they originated from the conversion of a failing firm, see the work by Webb and Cheney (2018) on definitions, scope, common principles, and practices of worker cooperatives, along with the organizational and institutional challenges, as well as opportunities, and through the analysis of the Mondragon cooperatives and those in Northern Italy (Webb & Cheney, 2018, p. 67). Still, as concerns the worker-recuperated enterprises, two crucial features are: a) horizontalized decision-making and labour processes; and b) egalitarian pay schemes linked to common struggles, solidarity, and the size of ERTs (Atzeni & Vieta, 2018, pp. 57–58). Still, worker-recuperated enterprises face a tension between the need for survival (pay salaries they need to maximize production) and the need to consider social and solidarity objectives (Atzeni & Vieta, 2018, p. 55).

Therefore, workers' recuperated firms can be considered as important experiences of agency, conflict and reaction to precarious labour and unemployment, through the regeneration of a firm after its shutdown, but also through labour undertaken in self-management. In this area, *"empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores"* (ERTs) in Argentina may be deemed as the most important example of workers' recuperated firms, and of this type of resistance and conflict:

*"ERTs refer to companies that produce goods or services and that have at some point gone through the process of converting from private management to collective management by the original enterprise's former employees. In the conversion process, workers take charge of the economic activity of the enterprise under self-management. Generally, these enterprises (usually sole-proprietorships, family businesses, partnerships, or firms owned by a small group of investors) were abandoned by their owners and their employees experienced some form of lockout. The workers' primary motivations in taking over the firm, re-opening it, or keeping it open and productive is to save their jobs"* (Ruggeri & Vieta, 2015, p. 77).

On labour-market integration, important is the case of union-cooperatives alliances (Ji, 2018). Two conditions are necessary to form transformational collaborations: a) members of worker cooperatives should identify as workers and not as business owners; b) unions and worker cooperatives should exceed individual goals of income growth and engage in broader political and social movements as forms of worker and civil solidarity (Ji, 2018, p. 370). An example of a transformational union-cooperative model in the US is the *"New Era Windows Cooperative"* in Chicago, a worker takeover, and then conversion to a worker cooperative characterized by important levels of labour militancy (Ji, 2018). In this case of a union-cooperative partnership, the *"United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers Union"* (UE) has been a crucial ally. Indeed, cooperative' workers remained union members and established a union contract, while the union was involved in training on leadership, business operations, and marketing techniques (e.g., through social media) (Ji, 2018, p. 384). Moreover, this partnership also highlights the importance of strong rank-and-file leadership among workers, the effects that a collaboration with a class-conscious and radicalized union can have, as well as the centrality of a political congruence for a broader social change (Ji, 2018, p. 386). Therefore, all these initiatives show how civil society can be a field of experimentation. For instance, in terms of alternative labour organizing, the landless workers' movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra, MST*), is a Brazilian social movement that fights for land reform with their important and evocative slogan *"Occupy, Resist, Produce"* (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra, Website, 2023*).

## 2.6. Co-enforcement and Political Action at the State Level

Besides, workers' organizations with expertise in an industry and with relations with workers, can be crucial partners of the government or state in the co-enforcement of labour standards (Amengual & Fine, 2017; Fine, 2017; Fine & Gordon, 2010). The co-enforcement results to be lasting when both parties recognize each other abilities, there is attention to specific sectors, and political support (Fine, 2017). Also, private regulatory practices have been created with a "worker-driven" approach and with community-based enforcement beyond checklist auditing (Fine & Bartley, 2019). These two models have been explored by Fine and Bartley, by studying two different cases in the US: a) the "Seattle Office of Labor Standards" (public enforcement); b) and the "Fair Food Program" developed by the "Coalition of Immokalee Workers" (CIW) (private enforcement) (Fine & Bartley, 2019). The "CIW" and its "Fair Food Program" (one of the case studies at the basis of my doctoral research) is also an example of the "worker-driven social responsibility" paradigm (Asbed & Hitov, 2017; Asbed et al., 2018; Rosile et al., 2021). As regards the regulation and co-enforcement of labour standards, relations and partnerships between workers' organizations and the state have been explored in Argentina and the US in comparative terms, and by focusing on the dynamics of these partnerships at the meso-level (Amengual & Fine, 2017). With respect to Argentina, the state-union partnership model has been in place for years. However, unions suffer from legitimacy, as well as a weak shop floor presence, and political struggles aimed to generate real partnerships appear to be necessary. In response, in the Argentinean province of Córdoba, an action led by a union resulted in the creation of a formal consultive commission, a forum to enhance dialogue in the construction industry. What is important to highlight about this case is that: a) state and union capabilities were different; b) ties between unions, inspectors and businesses have created the conditions to combine these capabilities through on-site training and information sharing; c) the union (UOCRA) adjusted their demands by realizing the needs of the state agency (CYMAT), allowed inspectors to utilize their skills, and generated a diversity in terms of targeting techniques; d) the politics of enforcement had support for the collaboration (Amengual & Fine, 2017, p. 135). On the other hand, in the US, explicit partnerships between workers' organizations and state agencies are limited or largely unknown, given that state agencies seem to be uncomfortable with such collaborations, and due to the fear that it could undermine the sense of neutrality of government agencies. Important in this case is the experience of San Francisco.

In greater detail, by drawing on the mentioned Amengual and Fine's comparative research (Amengual & Fine, 2017), very informative is the experience of a community-based program mandated by the Board of Supervisors in San Francisco, to conduct outreach to workers, and to conduct education. In detail, in this experience, workers' organizations involved sign yearly contracts that require engagement in workers' training, outreach, one-to-one conversations, referral services, assistance with complaints, as well as to bring employees and employers to find a solution, but also to respect certain protocols (e.g., workplace organizing is forbidden). Instead, the "*Office of Labor Standards Enforcement*" (OLSE) accept cases and documentation and participates in quarterly meetings. In addition, one of these organizations involved is the "*Chinese Progressive Association*" (CPA), with their wage clinic, funded through the program, and that helps workers with claims and counseling on rights (Amengual & Fine, 2017, p. 135). As an example, the CPA and the OLSE investigators discovered that workers in a specific firm, Dick Lee Pastry, were not paid minimum wage, overtime, or also double time compensation, and found that the company falsified the payroll records. Besides, an investigator of the OLSE (also a former member of the CPA), lauded the CPA's ability to build trust and get information that they demonstrated in the cited and other cases (Amengual & Fine, 2017, pp. 135–136). According to this research, Amengual and Fine make three claims: a) co-enforcement can be a sensible policy response to enforcement crisis; b) political support internal to agencies and workers' organizations, and non-substitutable capabilities, must be taken into account in the analysis of enforcement partnerships; c) interactions between labour inspectors and workers' organizations depend not only on macro conditions. Meso and micro levels are also important for creative action and analysis (Amengual & Fine, 2017, pp. 138–139).

Besides co-enforcement, a typology of organizing at the state level is through political action. The "*Fight for \$15 campaign*" in the US is an example. While fast food strikes have been crucial to getting popular support for the asked \$15 wage, campaigns that succeed in getting wage increases at the local level depended on alliances built between the community, the labour movement and the government (e.g., Seattle) (Rhomberg, 2018, p. 260). The "*Fight for \$15*" shows the relevance of symbolic power and strikes in the mobilization of workers' grievances against low wages (Rhomberg, 2018, p. 265), and the significant role of alliances between the labour movement, community and the government. For an overview of the strategies based on local and state policy change (Burnham & Mercado, 2018; Jacobs, 2018; Rhomberg, 2018).

# 3.

## **Three-Level Community Unionism: Field Research in Italy and the US**

### 3.1. Research Question

Agriculture together with its institutionalized legacy of racism and classism can be conceived as one of the organizational fields most characterized by episodes of labour exploitation, also considering the importance and centrality of agricultural supply chains in the global economy and the related structures of vulnerability that are intrinsic in how food is produced, that is the vulnerability of workers and consumers in a capitalistic world, where food represents both a need and an important source of profit and therefore of inequality, especially in this world ruled by a small number of businesses. These structures of vulnerability and oppression have become visible through reports and news of abuses in agriculture around the world, and are at the centre of many studies about how exploitation unfolds, as discussed in the first chapter. Another consideration about agriculture concerns the nature of farmwork. Indeed, the nature of agriculture work is characterized by an interconnection of different domains, immigration, housing, transportation, and health, as well as a lack of labour protections to cite some of the different areas of intersection. So, agriculture compared to other industries represents the sector where alternative or creative forms of labour organizing appear to be more necessary. From an academic point of view, existing literature and research about community unionism, as discussed in the second chapter, represents an important stream of reflection on the topic (Fine, Burnham, et al., 2018; McBride & Greenwood, 2009). However, existing research at the intersection of agricultural work and community unionism is still underdeveloped, especially through a normative and comparative approach aimed to show systematically the common trends at the global level. In more detail, the field research at the basis of this doctoral study aims to respond to two main research questions: *a) How do alternative workers' organisations make sense of agricultural issues? b) How do they give sense and tackle agricultural issues?* The goal is to offer a first sight on community unionism in agriculture, through comparative research between Italy and the US, case studies selected for the reasons already mentioned. From a theoretical point of view, I draw on critical sensemaking theory (Aromaa et al., 2018; Helms Mills et al., 2010) and the correlated concept of sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), and combined with Freire's thinking about the tensions between oppressors and oppressed, as expressed in the book *"Pedagogy of the Oppressed"* (Freire, 2017). The main reason behind this theoretical integration is the need and will to approach sensemaking theory critically and politically and to offer a new perspective on critical sensemaking (Mills, 2008).



## 3.2. Theoretical Framework

From a theoretical point of view, it's useful to mention the research of Stephenson and Wray (2009) about the survival and development of community, union and activist relations in the post-employment and industrial mining communities of the Durham coalfield (2009, p. 24). An important contribution is the adoption of a critical sociological approach to investigate the question of community unionism in a post-employment context and by arguing that such an approach requires a political, historical and therefore critical approach to social problems and hence enables an understanding of the relations between unions and community, in addition to an understanding of the concepts of unions and community as evolving rather than as static ideas, along with the centrality of non-crisis based community unionism, a form of community unionism that is grassroots-driven. *"From this critical sociological standpoint, community is not simply about geography or common work interest, it is also about acceptance and belonging"* (Stephenson & Wray, 2009, pp. 45–46). The process of generation of meaning has been studied by exploring the meaning generation of community groups during a campaign to organize Haitian nursing assistants in Boston, in the US, with the underlying idea that there was significant research about the labour-community coalition's formation, while less on how repertoires are generated in the community and how it affects the organization (Yu, 2014).

*"A deep understanding of community-generated meanings, then, allows room for on-going strategizing aimed at aligning union strategy to variable community needs instead of a one-off strategy durable for only the lifetime of a campaign. Meanings generated in the community, in short, contribute to the construction of injustice frames that mobilization theory has argued is essential for collective action"* (Yu, 2014, p. 367).

To study community-based workers' organizations that work in agriculture in Italy and the US, I adopted a conceptual framework developed during my doctoral research and that combines critical sensemaking (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Aromaa et al., 2018), the concept of sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and critical pedagogy theory as in Freire's book *"Pedagogy of the Oppressed"* (Freire, 2017). According to sensemaking theory, sensemaking is *"a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances"* (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409).

In more detail, compared to other explanatory processes (e.g., interpretation, understanding, attribution), according to Weick, the properties of the process of sensemaking are as follows: 1) grounded in identity construction; 2) retrospective; 3) enactive of sensible environments; 4) social; 5) ongoing; 6) focused on and by extracted cues; 7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995, p. 17). *“These seven characteristics serve as a rough guideline for inquiry into sensemaking in the sense that they suggest what sensemaking is, how it works, and where it can fail. This listing is more like an observer’s manual or a set of raw materials for disciplined imagination”* (Weick, 1995, p. 18). Thus, these properties represent a guideline.

Sensegiving *“is concerned with the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality”* (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). Nevertheless, I approach sensemaking theory critically and I contribute to research on critical sensemaking (Mills, 2008; Helms Mills et al., 2010; Helms & Mills, 2017; Aromaa et al., 2018). Critical sensemaking stems from a reflection on the limits of sensemaking theory. The first limitation is *“Weick’s paradoxical treatment of sensemaking as drawing on interpretive insights that are often times presented as grounded in a more positivist notion of epistemological certainty”* (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 187). The second limitation concerns the limited focus on structure, knowledge, power, and past relationships (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 188). The first problem is addressed in three ways: a) triangulation of interpretism, poststructuralism, and critical theory; b) by focusing on the heuristic power of the social psychological properties at the basis of sensemaking, instead of their scientific character; c) by adopting a *“consciously reflexive”* approach (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 188). On the other hand, on the second issue of structure, context and discourse, the starting point is the centrality of identity construction together with the focus on how specific assumptions and organizational power may prioritize specific identities instead of other diverse identities, and that may be perceived as meaningful by all the actors involved. An important argument is the understanding that some organizational actors may influence organizational meaning more than others (Helms Mills et al., 2010, pp. 188–189). A second property that emerges as crucial is plausibility, the sense that a specific explanation may be more meaningful compared to other explanations (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 189). Three important elements at the basis of critical sensemaking are: a) formative context (Unger, 1987a, 1987b), that is structures that limit individuals, as a link between social values and actions (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 189);

b) organizational rules (Mills, 1988; Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991), that shape the organizing and may limit sensemaking: *“as much as rules inform our understanding of how organizations may retain unity and cohesiveness, they also constrain the ways in which individuals may act and the possibility of appropriate interpretations of meaning”* (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 190); c) discursive practice (Foucault, 1979), to tackle the embeddedness of sensemaking in powerful discourses, narratives that are also temporally contextual (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 190).

*“critical sensemaking provides a framework for understanding how individuals make sense of their environments at a local level while acknowledging power relations in the broader societal context. The critical sensemaking framework takes a very complex combination of variables including social psychological properties, discourse, organizational rules, and the formative context in which organizations exist and offers an analysis of how these forces combine to allow individuals to make sense of their environments and take action on a day-to-day basis”* (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 190).

Therefore, in summary, the theoretical elaboration underlying critical sensemaking includes: a) the *“notion of properties as an (interpretivist) heuristic for keeping the idea of agency as socio-psychological processes to the fore”* (Aromaa et al., 2018, p. 358); b) the conception of formative context to address the macro-level pressures on the processes of sensemaking; c) the concept of organizational rules to consider the meso-level influences; d) discourse theory to conceptualize how the three levels of influence are mediated (Aromaa et al., 2018, p. 358). Also, sensemaking is triggered by *“organizational shocks”* (Weick, 1995). In the case of labour, may be work-related violations. Adopting a political attitude towards organizations, I conceive labour abuses as *“daily organizational shocks”* triggering a sensemaking shaped by dominant discourses, formative contexts and organizational rules. All that boost contextualized agency.

In this research, I conceive dominant discourses, formative contexts, and organizational rules in the same conceptual category, to describe the dimensions in which meanings are enacted. Thus, in dialogue with critical sensemaking literature, I draw on critical sensemaking research labelled *“contextualized sensemaking”* by Aromaa et al. (2018, p. 363). This label is part of a subdivision of critical sensemaking literature in four directions of research in response to two questions: *“Whose critical sensemaking?”* (the focus of the research is about the sensemaking of participants or researchers?) and *“What is the purpose of CSM?”* (on critical sensemaking as a theory or rather as a critical lense) (Aromaa et al., 2018, p. 359). The result of this review offered by Aromaa et al. is the subdivision of critical sensemaking research in four directions.

The four research directions are: a) agency (“How CSM contributes to the study of agency?”); b) contextual sensemaking (“How the critical dimensions of CMS affect sensemaking?”); c) theory (“How to conceptualize CSM?”); d) fusion (“How to enrich other theories with CSM?”) (Aromaa et al., 2018, p. 359). As I already mentioned, I focus on contextual sensemaking and therefore on the impacts of contexts on how individuals make sense. In this research, I focus on the effects of context on sensemaking of exploitation and labour violations in agriculture, and that I conceive as the organizational shocks that daily trigger sensemaking, processes of sensemaking that can be analysed through the discourses used to describe and label the main problems in agriculture and that can be regrouped in different levels of influence and power. To this end, I theoretically integrate critical sensemaking and the concept of sensegiving with critical pedagogy theory, as debated in the book “*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*” (Freire, 2017), and drawing on ideas about the importance of critical reflection, action and hence true praxis. In more detail, in this research, I focus on dialogue as a human phenomenon, and the essence of dialogue that, according to Freire is *the word*. In the mentioned book, Freire discusses how *the word* is formed by two dimensions, reflection and action, rooted in a radical interaction, where, if one dimension is sacrificed, the other suffers, and vice versa (Freire, 2017, p. 60). Therefore, I propose a parallelism between sensemaking/reflection and sensegiving/action to describe and analyze how farm workers’ activism unfolds in the realm of agricultural labour, and by assuming the co-dependence of reflection and activism in the construction of reality, a reality that is enacted in a context that shapes how we construct meanings. Context may be multiform in its arenas of influence, power and privilege. These contexts are created through discourses that, in making sense, are counter-narrative in being aware of the power exercised by these contexts towards the construction of identity, plausible stories and reflexive activism and that cannot exist without a critical reflection on contexts of influence and our activism.

*“When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating “blah.” It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action. On the other hand, if action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into activism. The latter – action for action’s sake – negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible. Either dichotomy, by creating unauthentic forms of existence, creates also unauthentic forms of thought, which reinforce the original dichotomy”* (Freire, 2017, pp. 60–61).

The choice of Paulo Freire is motivated by the adoption of popular education methodologies by many worker organizations (Fine, 2006) but also by the desire to propose an organizational framework that starting from Freire's reflection on oppression is a critical deconstruction of organizational action in agriculture as the result of sensemaking and sensegiving processes.

*"In both stages, it is always through action in depth that the culture of domination is culturally confronted. In the first stage this confrontation occurs through the change in the way the oppressed perceive the world of oppression; in the second stage, through the expulsion of the myths created and developed in the old order, which like specters haunt the new structure emerging from the revolutionary transformation"* (Freire, 2017, pp. 28–29).

In this work, the theoretical combination of critical sensemaking and critical pedagogy theory is the result of a reflection on the data collected before, during and after the coding, and after I questioned the value of Weick's sensemaking theory, critical sensemaking theory, and how to integrate critical pedagogy theory in different moments of my doctoral research. The result of this process of analysis is the conceptualization of oppression, context, power and agency in the labour realm into three levels of analysis, which will be discussed later in this document.

I believe that the incorporation of the concept of oppression into critical sensemaking theory can be tackled in the political attitude towards the findings of this research to reconstruct the sensemaking processes of labour in agriculture, and together with the sensegiving processes aimed to reshape the agricultural context. In greater detail, this theoretical framework that derives from a review of the literature and empirical experience can be conceived as the result of different stages of thought on the findings and concepts at the basis of critical sensemaking and critical pedagogy, through an abductive method of scientific inquiry, that included also a moment where the adoption of critical sensemaking and critical pedagogy theory have been used just as a way to label and categorize all the work done through a critical lens, but without a real critical reflection about critical sensemaking, critical pedagogy, as well as collected data, an incorporation of Freire's theory and critical sensemaking that have been implemented only in the final stage of this research, during a discussion on the value of sensemaking theory.

*"The insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their concrete situation is not a call to armchair revolution. On the contrary, reflection – true reflection – leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection"* (Freire, 2017, p. 40).

### 3.3. Methodology

As regards the methodology at the basis of this research, the case studies are Italy and the US. In detail, Italy is the country where I was born and I spent all my formative years, and I had intercultural exchanges with the African community of Brindisi, namely the southern Italian province where I grew up. This personal experience together with my enrollment in a Ph.D. program at the University of Genoa, in Italy, made the collection of data more cost-effective, also thanks to the possibility to leverage on a previous network of contacts. My awareness of abuses in agriculture and my motivation for this doctoral research have origins in this context. On the other hand, the choice of the US is motivated by the literature review on community unionism, worker centers and alternative forms of labour organizing and the centrality of the American context in the discussion on community unionism. In addition, my interest towards non-union labour organizations made the US relevant. A context featured by the absence of federal laws protecting farmworkers is an important driver for creativity in the labour context.

As regards the case studies, for the Italian context, I selected *“Comunità Africana di Brindisi”*, *“Casa Sankara”*, *“NoCap”* and *“Fuorimercato”*. Instead, for the US, I selected the coalition *“Trabajadores Agrícolas Unidos”* (New York), *“Pineros y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste”* (Oregon), *“WeCount!”* (Florida), the *“Farm Labor Organizing Committee”* (Ohio) and finally the *“Coalition of Immokalee Workers”* (Florida). As concern the Italian cases, I selected these cases starting with previous knowledge of their existence (*“Comunità Africana di Brindisi”* and *“NoCap”*), online research (*“Casa Sankara”*) and word-of-mouth (*“Fuorimercato”*). As regards the US, I chose *“Trabajadores Agrícolas Unidos”*, *“Pineros y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste”*, *“WeCount!”* and the *“Coalition of Immokalee Workers”* through the help of my supervisor during my visiting as a doctoral student in the US and the *“Farm Labor Organizing Committee”* through word-of-mouth. Overall, from October 2021 to April 2023, I collected 68 interviews. In detail, I collected 21 semi-structured interviews in Italy and 47 in the US. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and online (Zoom, Teams). I include in one interview diverse interview moments with a single interviewee, but I divided the interview with one respondent into two different interviews, because one interview regarded their job while the other regarded the organization more generally, and one specific activity. The different number of interviews is justified by the achievement of saturation in the collection of information I wanted to obtain.

In more detail, the data collection phase consisted of semi-structured interviews. Specifically, I started to collect data in Italy in October 2021 with a set of themes that I wanted to address, such as the main issues in agriculture and the practices sustaining the issues, the main actions adopted by these organizations to address all these issues, as well as the language adopted. Successively, considering the overlapping of data collection and analysis, I changed the nature of questions asked based on the insights that emerged from the previous interviews. Indeed, in subsequent interviews, I focused always on the issues, but less on the practices, and more on the main drivers of exploitation and then on the tools and instruments used to identify the issues, always in response to the analysis of the interviews. As concerns the language of the interviews, all the interviews conducted in Italy were conducted in Italian. With regards to the US context, interviews were semi-structured, but a bit further structured, from a formal point of view, considering that interviews were not conducted in my native language (Italian) but in English and Spanish. Therefore, with the help of the Professor who supervised my research during my visit to the US, I prepared and wrote a set of questions for the interviews conducted in the US. In detail, this group of questions was more focused on the individual background and motivations, the main problems in agriculture, but also the main strategies adopted and what they learned through their work. However, both in Italy and the US, I used to adapt the questions based on the interviews, adding and removing questions according to my interests (e.g., specific activities, and projects) or the nature/development of the interviews conducted. With regards to the transcription of the interviews, I transcribed all the interviews conducted in Italy (in Italian) manually on different Word files. As concerns the interviews conducted in the US, I decided to transcribe all the interviews through the help of *“Trint”*, a software for transcription powered by artificial intelligence that I used considering that I conducted all the interviews in the US not in my native language (Italian) but in English and Spanish. Therefore, for greater accuracy, I decided to utilize *“Trint”*. Finally, as concerns the analysis, as previously mentioned for the interviews, I started the analysis of the first interviews with an approach that was informed by the first conceptual model that I created during my doctoral research (sensemaking: issues and practices; sensegiving: actions and language). Then, I removed as a category *“practices”* and focused on *“drivers”* and then on the *“noticing acts”* of exploitation. Later, I divided sensemaking into retrospective (issues; noticing) and prospective processes; while sensegiving as a set of actions. Finally, I decided to use a lighter approach to the analysis without a priori binding variables and with Facebook/websites’ triangulation for ulterior data.

My approach to comparative research is informed by the goal of highlighting the similarities and general themes that emerged during my field research. Indeed, the main goal is to offer general insights about alternative labour organizing and community unionism in agriculture in these two different contexts, the US, and Italy. I believe that the main differences are often the result of institutional differences, in the industrial relations system in these two countries. I believe that the practices I will present later can be applied to different contexts, and that the institutional context can be viewed as a contextual factor, as a positive driver, or also as an obstacle to be overcome creatively. From a theoretical point of view and in terms of critical sensemaking, the result of the analysis is the subdivision of the agricultural issues into three **contexts of oppression/power** that influence the sensemaking of exploitation in agriculture: a) community; b) supply chains; c) the State. These three concepts come from the literature cited in the second chapter. In each context of influence, **agricultural problems are enacted** by the sensemakers, **through discourses**. To define community, I draw on the definitions of community cited at the beginning of the second chapter: (community) organization; a group with common interests or identities; and place, such as local neighborhoods (Tattersall, 2008). In detail, I define community as a group with common interests and identity, and therefore in this case as a group of individuals with an interest in agriculture, not only within the workplace but also outside, in different dimensions of life, from work to family, from schools to churches. A community is a group of individuals or organizations with an interest in farmworkers issues. On the other hand, for the supply chain level, I draw on the definition of product supply chain: *“product supply chain describes the discrete stages that a product goes through to transform it from raw materials to a finished product”* (Allain et al., 2013, p.39). As far as the state level, I define the state, as a set of relations among institutions at the federal, state, and local level that shape the nature of agriculture from a legal and normative perspective. Finally, I present a conceptual framework in which community unionism is considered as a toolkit of organizing practices, along three dimensions of organizational intersections: community, supply chains, and state. This framework categorizes the different organizing practices used by the explored organizations along three levels, and it is not a classification of the cases. In the next sections, I present the main findings. The first section concerns the sensemaking of agricultural issues. The question is: *How do alternative workers' organisations make sense of agricultural issues?* On the other hand, the second section concerns the sensegiving and the proposed solutions. The second question is: *How do they give sense and tackle agricultural issues?*



### 3.4. Collective Individualism and Power in Agriculture

Before getting into the discussion, it is important to note a common understanding of labour in agriculture among these organizations. Labour in agriculture is enacted at the intersection of different problems and social systems: community, supply chains, and state, but also in the same community among diverse areas: labour, production, family, education, and citizenship.

*“So, in order to understand the problems that they have, we also have to understand where they come from. These agricultural workers are migrants. And the migration problem is a much broader problem because it has to do not only with politics, but it has to do with climate issues, like the issue that we are addressing here at WeCount!. It has to do with economic issues. It has to do with social discrepancies and strata. And so, when we think about what agricultural workers face, we need to not categorize their issues but understand it as a holistic issue”* (Interview 39 - WeCount!).

*“The environmental and climate crisis other is not telling us that you must immediately make radical changes to your lifestyles, your demands, your exuberances because nature can no longer afford the misfortune of intensive exploitation. Therefore, it would be necessary to find more and more new forms and new practices to loosen or to annihilate what is the exploitation of both nature and the nature of man, and therefore of the man himself, so the exploitation of the man over man. All the practices that derive from exploitation today are made to determine the low prices of products that are sold especially within the supermarkets, and so we should go a bit to the top of these logics and understand why, for example, the bodies, the State, the supranational bodies do not support instead in a considerable way those who are approaching these dynamics trying to build enterprise, build self-income from practices that do not exploit neither the nature, nor the soil, nor the environment, nor the workers themselves. Unfortunately, however, the greater subsidies, the greater support are always given to those large companies that instead do nothing but use all these methods of which nature is saying enough, stop. And unfortunately, the indifference and acceptance of these practices has now become a custom”* (Interview 17 – Fuorimercato).

Labour exploitation in agriculture is enacted together with abuses in the realm of production against growers and the environment, and in the communities among the families of workers and cumulatively among the entire community. I will present the issues identified by the case studies according to three spheres of oppression: community, supply chains, and the state. Finally, in presenting the findings, I will use many quotes directly derived from the interviews. The aim is to tell a story as if it were a dialogue between the organizations that I investigated.

# 1. Community: Being Second Class in the US and Italy

I start from the community to discuss the intersection of issues in the agricultural field, given the proximity to the more intimate nature of the different audiences of this research, in which I include the human relations that are at the basis of our daily lives. In more detail, I highlight how we construct oppression in agriculture, beginning with our communities, to build a path of understanding of the issues in supply chains and at the state level that is informed by our daily lives. As already shown at the start of this section, immigration plays a crucial role in the enactment of exploitation at the community level, from the workplaces to community life. Hence, to describe how exploitation unfolds in all three spheres of oppression, I try to create a dialogue between the two case studies, Italy, and the US, to show how geography loses its explaining power in front of the vulnerability and need for well-being by both the oppressed and oppressors, along with the social, legal and economic exploitation that often derives from the economic and social vulnerability of a group of people who represents a minority:

*“there's a really foundational issue ... it's the reality of second class in the United States because of the way that we're brought here, right? It's economic, global economic forces. And, today, just in terms of the structure and the numbers, in Oregon we have an estimated 87,000 farmworkers today, hand harvest workers that are working seasonally”* (Interview 23 – Pineros y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste).

This reality of “second class” is lived in the US and Italy by many migrants, Latinx workers in the US, and African workers in Italy. This is visible in different dimensions of the community, such as in the housing issue. Some examples are the difficulty of renting a house in Apulia, in Southern Italy, as shown by “Comunità Africana di Brindisi” due to explicit racism on behalf of homeowners, or the skyrocketing rents in Florida, in the US, as highlighted by “WeCount”.

*“They are also looking for houses, but in Brindisi we have seen that it is a little difficult unfortunately to rent houses for non-EU people, but it has become a general thing, even for Brindisi's residents, because we tried and attempted with agencies and private individuals. We received reprimands by phone, insults to our race ... So, we have these difficulties now to find the houses for the guys, like the ones that come from outside Italy now or Bologna, Turin, Milan, Rome that come here for work and need housing. Three, four show up, they want to take the house together, but they can't make it. Some of them go back again, they can't make the contract, because until you do not have a place where to sleep, you can't work* (Interview 3 – Comunità Africana di Brindisi).

*“some people complain now, they can’t make it, “I have to move, I have to go somewhere else, I’m not finding a home to get a stay permit to get a good job. Maybe I have to get my driver’s license, but I have to get my ID. But if I don’t have the residence, I can’t get the ID”. So, it’s a bit difficult, it’s a bit complicated because if you don’t have a stay permit or you have a stay permit that has already expired, the employer asks you “ok you have to renew your stay permit, so I’ll renew your contract”. Okay, I go to the police station, I say “I want to renew the stay permit because I have to work to renew the employment contract”. And they’ll ask you for the house contract, where you live, maybe, hospitality, everything” (Interview 3 – Comunità Africana di Brindisi).*

*“But for the most part, you see poverty wages, workers who are either earning the minimum wage or below the minimum wage, which currently in Florida, is \$11 an hour. Workers who can’t afford skyrocketing rents as more and more private equity and hedge funds buy up properties, as it becomes harder and harder to sort of own a home in Miami-Dade County and across the country. More people are forced to be renters. But in the state of Florida, there aren’t many renter protections, including, say, rent control. And so, rents are skyrocketing. And workers whose wages are at the poverty line simply cannot afford to stay where they’re living. And so many of them are actually being priced out of their homes and the neighborhoods that they’ve lived in for years” (Interview 42 – WeCount!).*

On the job and workplace, this reality of “second class” is visible in the wage theft, the lack of transportation, retaliation, the fear of immigration status, as well as its exploitation, episodes of sexual violence, no access to clean water, unsanitary or no bathrooms for the workers, but also no rest and no shade during working hours, pesticides exposure, gender-based violence, forced labour, extreme heat, and health and safety problems, but also labour contracting (or illegal gangmastering) with its related abusive practices concerning transport and housing.

*“it’s really hot in Florida. And there is a normalization when it comes to the experience of heat, even though we know, as the years progressed, the days that we are experiencing extreme heat are increasing. And so, there’s health and safety when it comes to outdoor workers and farmworkers in that area. I think there are also health and safety issues when it comes to training properly workers on how to use specific tools on pesticide use. And so, we’ve also seen a lot of workplace injury issues and a lot of pesticide exposure issues. Part of those come by way of the unequal status of immigrant workers not being able to properly speak languages that maybe their supervisors speak, whether that be English or Spanish. And yet the general lack of preparation for workers day one on the job” (Interview 48 – WeCount!).*

*“Grey labour is the most widespread form of exploitation in our country and throughout Europe. After grey labour, we have black labour, and then we have illegal gangmastering. If we go inside grey labour to understand what grey labour is, it is that whole area of exploitation that is between lawlessness and legality, it is in the middle, it is the grey part, which is far more difficult to intercept, to fight and contrast compared to illegal gangmastering and undeclared work, because grey labour is much more subtle, it is much more invisible as a phenomenon” (Interviewee 11- NoCap).*

*“the employer basically contacts the illegal gangmaster, the black boss as the workers call them, who is a person who instead lives together with the workers inside the ghetto, lives in the ghetto, maybe takes care of transportation, chooses and enlists the workers, takes their income and then keeps them in a situation of control, mafia and slavery” (Interviewee 10 – NoCap).*

*“this situation of enslavement is unfortunately linked precisely to the situation that these guys are experiencing, they live in barracks because do not have houses, they live under illegal gangmastering because they either do not have the document, or have a document, but do not have a permanent job, or unfortunately do not have a job, and yet the illegal gangmaster offers the job. You will see a person who has the document and who works off-the-books, as there is also for Italians someone who works off-the-books. There are a lot of guys who are regular, who have all the documents, but they work off the books with the illegal gangmasters because the illegal gangmaster was able to organize their teams” (Interviewee 5 – Casa Sankara).*

Besides, what it is important in this discussion about the relationship between agriculture and immigration, is the instability of farmwork, as well as the mobility of migrant workers between different regions and states, but also across different industries, and moving to different jobs. From this understanding, it can derive the need to organize not only in other regions, but also across diverse crops, industries or economic sectors (e.g., landscaping). Crucial is the example of *“NoCap”* which operates in different regions of Italy and different crops, by following the internal migratory flows of seasonal farmworkers or the settlement of the migrant workforce. Another important illustration of this understanding is the *“Coalition of Immokalee Workers”* and their *“Fair Food Program”*, with partners in different states and crops. Another example is the *“Farm Labor Organizing Committee”*, with the conjunction and integration among their associate membership (not farmworkers), and *“H2-A”* workers (a typology of visa and workers discussed in the second chapter). It shows how the overlapping of issues (immigration) among different communities can build a base of support. An instance of organizing across industries is the work of *“WeCount!”* in Florida across agriculture, domestic work, and construction.

*"I think that as they are bringing in quite a lot of contracted people [H-2A], then many of those who were local tell us, they are losing their job and they feel like they need that job. They've been in those companies for years ... Many are going to construction, gardening, cabbage fields, but to go to those places, they are outside Immokalee, they need a car, a way of how to move, then they are always struggling" (Interview 62 – Coalition of Immokalee Workers).*

*"There's not as much manual labor done on the farms. So that is a reason why FLOC has decided to organize in North Carolina because that's where the work is. But over the years, because they've focused more on organizing farm workers in North Carolina, the membership here in Ohio has not been, there's not been a lot of attention to it. So, our goal is to strengthen our membership here in Ohio so that we have a solid base of support" (Interview 51 - Farm Labor Organizing Committee).*

*"You have undocumented people working in the fields. You have undocumented people working in Mexican restaurants here. It's illegal. And their common concern is their immigration status. So how are you going to protect them from traffic stops, traffic violations? When you get stopped and then the cop when you don't have a driver's license, and they see that you're Latino, they said, well, this guy may be one of those illegal immigrants. ... So that's why community union is so important as a base for the actual trade union of farm workers" (Interview 53 - Farm Labor Organizing Committee).*

*"we're focused on a sector because we have to be very clear on a sector. But at the same time, we understand that organizing the sector alone won't be enough, because as sectoral conditions change, as, say, for example, H-2A visas, displaced workers, how we also anticipate those shifts? So, we're organizing in all of the sectors where workers either are or might end up be coming, or understanding how these industries connect to each other. Like in South Florida, for example, there's this big question happening as it is I imagine across the entire world, which is, as cities become more populated, as more people go to the cities, and eventually they have to expand and create suburbs, and areas that had been sort of underdeveloped or used mostly for agriculture become plots of land, for development, to build housing, build communities, build new suburbs, there is a question of the tension behind preserving agriculture and new construction and new development on that land. So, we believe that we should be organizing at all of these different points of the economy. And then, two, I think the reason why we organize immigrant workers at large, although we focus on certain sectors, is because we're trying to test to see, in a majority immigrant county of 2.7 million residents, where the majority are immigrants from Latin America, who don't have a political organization or a political movement, how do we become that political movement? So, we're not looking to just be, say, a worker organization. We're trying to be a worker organization and a political movement" (Interview 42 – WeCount!).*

## 2. Supply Chains: From Bargaining Power to Globalization

Community and workplace problems above-mentioned can be considered as the immediate effect of how supply chains work in the contemporary economy. Several elements make the market problematic and exploitative in its supply chain's manifestations. Firstly, the extreme bargaining power of the big buyers and corporations, a power that is visible in how producers can be influenced by buyers in terms of the size, quality, and flavor of the product, in addition to the low prices required by buyers. Second, as a result of this bargaining power, now a few companies control the production, also because they expanded to fit the demands of these major corporations. Third, this creates a situation where in addition to workers, also growers and producers are exploited by these big corporations. Growers receive pressure from above (from the buyers), but also from below to cope with production costs, for instance, the high prices for gas. From that derives the necessity to cut the production costs, especially wages. Fourth, this chain of exploitation also includes the complicity of consumers who buy products. In addition to community and labour problems, supply chains' dynamics also appear abusive.

*"the large retailers, when I told you that it is the absolute evil, namely the cause, they have a method now that is the law, that is that of the price, that is to impose the prices of products, and the prices are always lower. Therefore, the farmer who is being charged a price for the product, without them being able to argue. If the price is low, it's not convenient for them, they have no choice but to exploit labour, so they pours on labour. The pricing mechanism does not take into account the sustainability of anything. Let me give you an example: if tomatoes cost nine cents to the farmer in Foggia, or if oranges in Rosarno cost seven cents a kilo, the orange producer tells you "But with seven cents, how can I? If I have to pay the petrol, the bills, the labour, the transport, I have to bear a series of costs, with these seven cents that are imposed on me by the actors of the distribution, I will never make it". So farmers in this case have two options, either they leave the field because it is not convenient for them to do this work because prices are too low, or they try to somehow save on production costs and where it is easier for them, unfortunately, and I use the term unfortunately, is the cost of labour, because when you get the bill, it is not that you go to argue with the state ... Therefore, it is the worker who sees themselves exploited, instead of paying them nine euros per hour as the law says, they will pay them three euros, they will use the illegal gangmaster. So, as I said, it is the cause, it is a chain system, that is, where large retailers impose low prices, the farmer does not make it, and in turn recharges on the worker. It's a chain system. So not taking into account this chain system will never allow us with all the good will to solve the problem" (Interview 11 – NoCap).*

*“So, the growth of these companies made them select the fewer contracts possible with growers that could produce at that level ... the entire force of the market coming from different brands, growing at that speed, require a consolidation of the industry where now a few companies control more production because that was the way they expanded the production to fit the needs of those extremely big industries at this point. And they needed to cut costs of production so they supplemented the profits by producing massive amounts, less profit, but massive amounts”* (Interview 66 - Coalition of Immokalee Workers).

*“Campobello di Mazara, in the province of Trapani, about ten/eleven thousand people, the economy revolves all around the production of olives and specifically the Cultivar and the Nocellara del Belice ... The volume of business of sixty/seventy million euros. A small town and of course this wealth mostly obviously goes into the pockets or funds of large producers and even better to say the large-scale distribution. It is no coincidence that this obviously leads to the exploitation of the majority of producers who are small or very small. Keep in mind that on average more than 90% of producers hold no more than 2 hectares of land planted with olive trees and therefore olive groves. Obviously, forced by a supply chain now mostly industrialized, and then managed in fact by the market and large-scale distribution, are forced to undersell their product at a price obviously that they do not decide”* (Interviewee 14 - Fuorimercato).

In the discussion on supply chains, it is important to address how globalization, delocalization, and climate change shape supply chain dynamics and power relations, by putting at the center of the analysis the theme of political economy. In fact, large growers can have production sites in different countries, as with one of the growers that participate to the *“Fair Food Program”* of the *“Coalition of Immokalee Workers”*. In addition, another example is the activity of the *“Farm Labor Organizing Committee”* together with the international reach that is part of their *“Reynolds Campaign”* within the tobacco industry. An important insight that arises from this campaign, is the importance to improve conditions in other countries, also as a way to protect similar jobs elsewhere. As concerns working conditions in diverse countries, support to other countries in the fight for better working conditions is also a way to save jobs in other countries that otherwise would lose jobs for unfair competition. Besides, an additional problem is the recruitment of workers in different countries (H-2A workers), and with recruitment violations. The instability of climate change is also an issue that can affect production and recruitment. Indeed, migrant farmworkers usually follow the crops, and the climate change appears to be a problem given it affects the changing of seasons and therefore the harvesting of products.

*"I think the changes in the harvest, for instance, the cucumber harvest in Ohio used to start the first week of July. It is now starts at the end of July. It's moving the month back, which means in a very fast growing, perishable crop, it shortens the ability to plant, cultivate and harvest ... So much of that cucumber production is moved to Canada and to North Carolina. And so, the crops are going to change along with the climate. Like I said, last year, the tobacco crop was one month behind and it slowed down the recruitment. Many, many workers did not get in that would normally come in a certain part of the year. When you shorten the season, it shortens the availability of jobs and it creates a problem for the farmers whose window shrinks in terms of being able to grow a crop in a certain climate. And so that's the immediate thing, the changes that we've seen, but we don't know how it's going to evolve. But I suspect or assume that these manufacturers, retailers, if they can't get the vegetable or fruits or tobacco within a certain time window, they're going to find another place to get it. It might be another. And then, of course, you're looking at other countries"* (Interview 53 - Farm Labor Organizing Committee).

*"for instance, if they move more tobacco production to Africa and downsize the acreage that they are planning, then we lose jobs. And so, we lose a livelihood for many hundreds and maybe even thousands of workers ... if our counterpart workers in other countries elevated their wages, we wouldn't have such a lopsided competition. So, we did this example back in the late eighties with the Campbell Soup tomato production in Sinaloa, Mexico, because they threatened us that, if we asked for too much money for the tomato workers in Ohio, they would stop growing tomatoes there and buy more tomatoes to make paste from Mexico from the state of Sinaloa. So, we went to Mexico and helped that union get the largest wage increase they've gotten in the history of their union. And that created a more, we call it, a level playing field, because manufacturers, you know, if they have a problem in one area, they just move the production to somewhere else in the world"* (Interview 53 - Farm Labor Organizing Committee).

(about corruption in Mexico) *"Yeah, I mean that was the original fight that we had down there to stop the extortion of money, because in those days, the system, the process was that the workers had to pay the upfront fees for the visa and the interview at the American consulate. And then they had to pay their incoming transportation costs. Back in 2006, 2005 the legitimate charges from the consulate and the transportation were about \$350. Now, the workers had to pay that. And in a precedent lawsuit that we did, that money that the worker paid had to be reimbursed on arrival in the United States .... They show up on time and then have that money reimbursed on arrival. Now, the problem is that very few employers reimburse those workers for that, even though the American law requires it in the guest worker program, they call it the H-2A program, and there's still a lot of stolen money in that regard"* (Interview 53 - Farm Labor Organizing Committee).



### 3. State: From a Legacy of Racism to Workers' Segregation

To explain the different causes behind this reality of “*second class*” it is useful to problematize the way the state at its different levels shapes how migrants see themselves, and are viewed. First, in the US, farmworkers are excluded from federal labor protections, like those included in the “*National Labor Relations Act*” of 1935, or the “*Fair Labor Standards Act*” of 1938 and the related exclusions regarding overtime for certain categories of farmworkers, for instance: “*this exclusion is part of the shameful legacy of racism, as Southern legislators explicitly pointed out that they would not be in support of the FLSA if domestic workers and farm workers were included*” (Interview 36 – Pineros y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste).

*“when you think about, like the immigration system in the United States, it's really hard not to think that there's a reason for that, right? ... It was built so that people could be treated a certain way, excluded from basic labor protections, living in fear so that they do this work and they ask no questions and they are afraid to organize or stand up for their rights. So, I would say that our number one issue right now is that we need immigration status as soon as possible. We need legalization. We don't want a temporary visa. We don't want to be indentured servants. We want a green card and we want to be able to go back and see our families, which is not something that we're able to do. I would say that that's the top issue”* (Interview 23 – Pineros y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste).

*“And what we have here is a contradiction in the United States in which both political parties see immigrant workers either as an enemy, which is what the Republican Party sees them as enemies and villains, or Democrats see them as people to be pity, victims. And our frame is that immigrant workers are actually protagonists, that they're the ones producing the majority of value in this country”* (Interview 42 – WeCount!).

However, even though there are no federal labour protections for unionization in agriculture, there have been some laws passed and approved at the state level to protect the organizing and collective bargaining rights of farmworkers, including in the State of New York with the “*Farm Labor Practices Act*” (that protect farmworkers' rights, established in 2019). On that, what is interesting about the New York law is that the legislature gave the authority to “*PERB*” (the Public Employment Relations Board) to administer the union certification process in the State of New York. Nevertheless, PERB had many limitations: a) lack of experience with private sector organizing, and migrant and undocumented workers, b) lack of ability to communicate bilingually; c) no time limits for the union certification process; d) as well as lack of resources.

These are limits that show how agriculture was and still is a marginal sector. However, another limit that can be highlighted at the state level, and that emerges from the case of New York, and the “*Farm Labor Practices Act*”, is the lack of awareness and knowledge of the new law, along with workers’ rights granted through the new law, an important issue for farmworkers.

*“I think that the number one challenge facing farm workers is that most farm workers really do not have an understanding of the new law, the Farm Labor Practices Act. They don't know about their rights to join together. They don't know about their rights to a safe workplace. They don't know about their rights to decent housing. And that has been a major challenge for farm workers and for our campaign. And we work a lot on outreach to farmworkers. Unlike industrial workers the farmworkers are scattered throughout the state in small rural communities. Oftentimes on a farm housing. So, they don't have the same interaction that workers in a large industrial plant would have with each other. So, it's very difficult to get word out about what these rights are. And if workers don't understand their rights, they're not going to try to exercise them. The other challenge that farmworkers face certainly is their immigration status. Many may be undocumented. And so that increases the fear that they have to come forward to learn about their new rights or to exercise their new rights ... The other problem is that immigrant workers who are working as farmworkers either do not have any history of joining together in unions or have some bad history in their native countries or unfortunately, in this country. So, the whole idea of being able to have the right to join together and to have legal protections while they fight to improve work on their farms is very, very strange to them”* (Interview 22 -Trabajadores Agrícolas Unidos).

However, the state can also have a role in feeding the oppression of farmworkers also through functional immigration laws or an emergency-based management of the seasonal immigrant workforce during the harvesting seasons, such as in Italy, a country where labor protections for farmworkers exists, also through collective agreement (as written in the second chapter).

*“if there's no listening, these guys always go back to the ghetto in the hands of the illegal gangmasters. Because it is there that the state has failed, in welcoming, it was unfortunately not adequate to respond to all those situations. The illegal gangmaster instead comes in, they welcome, this because inside the ghetto the illegal gangmaster has their shack, has their mattresses, has their job that can give you”* (Interviewee 5 – Casa Sankara).

*“policies have focused mainly on the question of reception, on ghettos and therefore on how to intervene on this, but always with a very emergency approach, there has never been a plan for housing inclusion. Then you pass from one tent town to another”* (Interviewee 15 - Fuorimercato).

*“We reject instead the segregationist idea of the state and the capitalist system of these structures here, for basic considerations, we do not accept the fact that the urban social fabric is mutilated by the possibility of meeting with foreign people who arrive in a territory, and not once every twenty years, but every year for at least thirty years to contribute to the economic production, and also to the social and cultural reproduction in that territory” (Interviewee 17 - Fuorimercato).*

However, the role of the state is visible in diverse spaces of the Italian normative framework, from the lack of enforcement and the weakness of the labor inspectorate to the inefficiency of employment centres to legally connect labour supply and demand. Illegal gangmastering can be viewed as an alternative in a context with a weak system of legal intermediation.

*“We must work on prevention. We continue to call on the state, for example, to promote two labour market reforms, important to us, to reform the labour market seriously promoting two instruments, very important to us. The first tool that they must immediately approve is a reform of the labour inspectorate. Why is there so much exploitation in Italy compared to France, compared to Germany, compared to certain countries? Why is lawlessness so widespread? Because on the other hand there is no state in its forms of verification and inspection. That is, we have a culture of widespread lawlessness because there is a certain culture of impunity, because there is a culture of impunity, a culture of impunity unfortunately fed by the Italian State. Let me take an example, when I was a farmworker, I worked off-the-books, I never saw a labour inspector come into our camp and ask me X or my friends, “Do you have a contract?” That is, there is no inspector who comes to the workplace and to the company, to ask and verify. Therefore, we need a reform of the labour inspectorate in our country, that they go to check and monitor the regular work and therefore it must be done immediately ... Then the second reform that we are asking for is a reform of employment centres, why a reform of employment centres? Because if you go and analyze the illegal gangmastering, we find out on the other side that the illegal gangmastering is what? It is a form of work mediation, it is a form of employment centre. How does it work? Who are the illegal gangmasters? It is these people like me, like you, who are there among the farmers and the workers, who are in the middle” (Interview 11 – NoCap).*

To conclude this section concerning the main problems in agriculture according to the cases and organizations investigated, some considerations appear to be relevant. This first section shows how labour-related issues in agriculture are strictly connected to issues in other realms: community (e.g., housing, mobility across sectors and crops), supply chains (e.g., exploitation of growers, climate change) and the state (e.g., immigration laws, weak employment centers).

### **3.5. Organizational Intersections and New Collectivism**

In this section on the proposed solutions, as well as the activities carried out by these groups, and organizations studied, I describe such solutions and practices along the three mentioned dimensions of oppression (community, supply chains, state), but in relational terms, that is in terms of **inter-organizational intersections** between different organizations and groups with an interest or a stake in farmworkers justice. At the community level, such collaborations are deployed by diverse types of grassroots organizations (e.g., unions, community organizations). At the supply chain level, partnerships concern relations between workers' organizations and market actors (e.g. growers, buyers). At the state level, partnerships regard relations between workers' organizations and state actors (e.g., agencies, sub-administrative bodies)

#### **1. Community: Workers' Solidarity in the Agricultural Field**

As already mentioned in the methodological section, I conceive "*community*" as a group with common interests or identities (Tattersall, 2008), particularly interests in farmworkers justice. In greater detail, in this section, "*community*" refers to the ensemble of unions, community organizations, activists, researchers, students, faith groups, with an interest in agriculture for direct involvement or for ideological attitudes towards social justice and rights in agriculture. In detail, I subdivide solutions at the community level into: unions/community organizations; coalition unionism; structural integration; and alliance between workers' supporters.

##### **a) Unions/Community Organizations**

In this section, I describe all the practices, proposed at the organizational level, by unions and community organizations with a focus on workplace justice, among the many activities that a community organization can conduct for its community. In terms of community organizations, I include the practices and activities performed by "*Comunità Africana di Brindisi e Provincia*" which operates in Southern Italy. In more detail, with reference to the structure and activities carried out by this community organization, I label the organizational model adopted by them as "*Multi-identity organization*". I label this group "*Multi-identity*" because is a wider African community organization, composed of different national associations (e.g., Nigeria and Mali) that sustains not only people from the African continent but also other regions (e.g. natives).

They mediate between their communities and employers (e.g., linguistic misunderstandings), hospitals, police stations, and revenue agency. Therefore, *“the fact that there is the African Community, that however there are these associations, in recent years has made everything much easier for these young people, who however now have references. They used to be left to themselves”* (Interviewee 4 – Comunità Africana di Brindisi). As far as immigration-related issues, they help immigrants with stay permits or their renewal, and related problems (e.g., numerical fiscal code), especially within their informative desk. Among the actions carried out by this community organization, they try to have a constant presence inside the dormitory for immigrants of the Municipality of Brindisi, to look at the situation inside; and they distribute clothes to those who live in the abandoned houses. As discussed in the sensemaking section, a critical activity is their help to find houses, an activity that is extremely challenging:

*“they turn to us because they want to be helped, for example, to find a house, which is extremely difficult because we contact, we identify the houses available, then we contact the owners, we talk on behalf of these guys, we introduce ourselves, we say that we are looking for houses for African or Pakistani guys, in short, non-EU, and systematically we are told that they do not rent to foreigners”* (Interviewee 4 – Comunità Africana di Brindisi).

Among health-related actions, there is the translation in hospital, for those who do not speak Italian; in the event of death, they take care to find the families, and return the bodies to their countries; and they help persons of the community with psychological illness or dependence:

*“There are also people with psychological discomfort who have been in this situation for about ten years and whom the CSM (Center for Mental Health) never takes care of... It is serious because these people do not have families, they have no friends, they are abandoned to themselves, and no one takes care of them. If we take them to CSM, they tell us there is no seats. When diseases become serious and we send them to psychiatry, after a week or ten days they tell us ‘No, they can no longer stay because we don’t have enough places’”* (Interviewee 1 – Comunità Africana di Brindisi).

On the subject of substance addiction, such situations of dependence are extremely difficult:

*“the only way is maybe to make sure that these people through work, through a position of regularity, they can get out because so many times they are in this situation of despair and this leads them to use substances, etcetera. So, if maybe the cause is this social discomfort, maybe through some help to get a stay permit, to have a situation of regularity, both work and housing, maybe they can overcome these problems”* (Interviewee 4 – Comunità Africana di Brindisi).

Another typology of community organization that empowers workers, already mentioned in the literature review, is the “worker center”. In this respect, “WeCount!” in Southern Florida, identifies itself as a worker center that organizes low-wage workers and their families, Latinx and indigenous immigrant workers, in nurseries, domestic work, and day labour, as industries. Campaigns are crucial for them: *“I think right now we're using campaigns as vehicles for policy advocacy, leadership development, outreach, and education”* (Interview 48 – WeCount!).

*“for us, it's organizing and base building, it's getting people who are not involved in political organizations to get involved, the farmworkers who work a full day of work, persuading, motivating them to use their spare time, which is limited, to be part of an organization, to receive popular and political education, to develop their leadership skills, to organize their coworkers and their neighbors and their family members to join a movement, and then eventually to take collective action”* (Interview 42 – WeCount!).

A campaign launched by “WeCount!” is the “Que Calor” campaign, a worker-led campaign to secure heat stress and labour protections for outdoor workers, that is construction workers, farmworkers, and workers in plant nurseries, in all the Miami-Dade County, also considering the nature of politics in the State of Florida and the difficulties to pass labour protections and pro-labor policies statewide. The demands are water, shade, and rest for outdoors workers, and through the deployment of different ways and means to empower the community and workers affected by the problem of extreme heat, and through different typologies of actions:

*“Radio Poder has been an important asset with the Que Calor campaign. ‘La Hora de Calor’ is a series that started with the workers ... they conduct interviews and they discuss what are the working conditions, especially with the heat problem. And they have interviewed different members from the community, climatologists, workers, or different people who can actually provide information and help the community understand how difficult it is to bear the heat here in Florida and what needs to be done in order to better the workers lives ... we conduct workshops with the help of OSHA. OSHA has been a very important partner with We Count. We have also visited the work inside before nurseries ... I think that one of the most important spaces that we create in the organization are the meetings with the workers ... these are strategic meetings where the workers, they lead the meetings and they provide solutions. They develop strategies. They talk about direct actions and they are the ones who decide how the campaign is going to keep on moving ... We also have another way of developing conversations with them. And these are called “Sesión Escucha”. “Sesión Escucha” it's a different type of conversation because in this case, our role is to only listen”* (Interview 39 – WeCount!).

*“We conduct actions that are, like I said before, direct actions which include mobilization. And so, we do march. We also have social media accounts, which require campaign workers to send videos and with their videos we can strategize how we decide how we are going to target the community through social media. And then we see what is going to be our focus. But for example, with the Que Calor campaign, we have members who have to send their videos, explaining to their communities how they are working, and why it is so important for them to have water, shade and rest ... they have organized delegations and they have explained the problems to commissioners, political representatives and other members from their community. So, they have gone to their community to express their problems and also to the City Hall ... we managed to have a thousand pledge cards signed from different community members. And these include workers, people who do not work in nurseries, people from other organizations who decided to sign a pledge card because they understand how important this bill is” (Interview 39 – WeCount!).*

As shown with the “Que Calor” campaign, from a practical point of view, very informative is how “WeCount!” identifies the main issues. Freire’s popular education is a central element.

*“we do problem identification through a lot of ways. Doing direct outreach to where workers are at ... We also have things called listening sessions where we bring, invite workers into our meetings, small groups of workers, and ask them targeted questions about what's happening, what are the biggest problems that they're seeing and in those spaces workers share. ... And through that, you begin to map out what some of the issues are. You also have larger meeting spaces. So, we have ongoing membership meetings and campaign meetings where workers come together around certain issues and we discuss them. We also have educational workshops, so workshops where we teach people about their rights” (Interview 42 – WeCount!).*

Another important model is the “Hybrid Union”. This label has been used during an interview with a member of the staff of “*Pineros y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste*” (PCUN) which work in Oregon. This typology of model has a structural component within PCUN. Indeed, the PCUN brand is formed of the 501 (c)5 organization, the farmworker union; the 501(c) 4 organization with a focus on policy advocacy and the related “*Political Action Committee*” focused on the direct support of candidates; as well as the 501(c)3 organization, the Foundation, focused on all year around organizing within their community. However, this hybrid organizational model can be understood also in all the different programs provided by this organization in Oregon: workers’ rights, policy advocacy and system change, but also their political power-building program (Political Action Committee) and the healthy workplaces program.

*“We have our workers’ rights program, which we still do a lot of the bread and butter work of going out to the worksites, to the labor camps, talking to workers about their rights, sharing resources and trying to get people that come to our membership meetings so that there they can start building a political consciousness and awareness about how to organize as a community, how we build power as a community to change systems of oppression from the workplace to the communities we live in ... We also have our policy advocacy and system change work. So, every year all of our members come together and they tell us what it is they want us to work on and what are the legislative issues that we need to go to the Capitol with and say, Hey, y’all need a change to these laws. For example, in 2019, all of our members came together and they said, We want to get paid overtime. We want to be paid overtime for our work over 40 hours ... We also have a political power-building program called Action Politica Pecunista. And in that department, what we do is we have a committee of our community, volunteers mostly that decide what candidates we support ... The other tactic and strategy that we use is all-year-round community organizing work through the Healthy Workplaces program, and that is mostly talking about issues that are very specific to the workplace, like collecting testimonies of what’s actually happening out there, once we talk to people, making sure that they get a referral to the worker center over here to get support from an attorney to help them get justice for labor rights issues that are happening and all the issues that we talk to people around that include pesticides, cases of abuse that are happening in the fields, housing issues, retaliation, discrimination” (Interview 23 - Pineros y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste).*

Another typology of organizing is the approach adopted by “*Fuorimercato*” in Italy, through a “*multi-settlement union*”. In more detail, “*Fuorimercato*” is a national network that combines labour dispute with production. As regards disputes, “*Fuorimercato*” sustains labour disputes, like the one of the farmworkers in Campobello di Mazara, Sicily, firstly through the campaign “*We bring water to the ghetto*”. Some of the results obtained in 2020 through the campaign are: supply of water inside the ghetto from the end of August to the end of December 2020; the support for the Magal Feast of 2020; the distribution of masks to the ghetto population; the assumption of responsibility by the local administrations for the distribution of water; provision of public water tap by the Municipality of Castelvetrano; open discussion on virtual residency with the municipality” (*Portiamo l’acqua al Ghetto Di Campobello Di Mazara*, 2021).

*“there are no associations organized directly by the labourers; therefore, what we are trying to do is to understand how to be a tool available to their speech, but it is not a detail, that is, the whole approach of political intervention in agriculture and the reception deprives them of any autonomy” (Interviewee 15 - Fuorimercato).*



*“the campaign ‘We bring water to the ghetto’ for me it is the first rudiment of the union approach that we put in place because it was a collective resource .. we talked to some of them, we made assemblies when we could do it ... But from there a world opened up because we proposed the method of the assembly for the management of the campaign and this opened up a world because it then created the group slowly ... the fact of proposing and pretending that water was free because it was the fruit of solidarity and not something to resell, not in the hands of merchants, a whole series of things that really made you enter, that is after years that we were there anyway, also a subsequent level of trust and confidence, which then precisely when we relaunch it, we relaunch it already with the goal in that case to create a group, support the group of workers who had been created around this ... then when the fire happens, we then made a constant presence there, with this approach always, respond to immediate needs, which was water or even legal advice and try to always talk about collective issues” (Interview 15 – Fuorimercato).*

This is the experience of one of the local nodes of “Fuorimercato”, a national network with several organizations and that support each other. An example of this support is the campaign “We bring water to the ghetto” or the support during the ghetto’s fire that occurred in Sicily.

*“It’s a very shocking event, because they saw the house burn down, they couldn’t do anything for hours, either because the help didn’t come, or because it was full of garbage, or because there was very little water ... we brought the water for a season, then we asked the institutions immediately after ‘you must bring the water’ because we are in a pandemic, because people exist regardless of the illegal or illegitimate place ... And so, the ghetto fire was a tragedy for this reason, in addition to the fact that Omar Balde died which is the main tragedy, who he was a person who was there to work, that is basically died at work or for work ... The next day, some of them decide to make a procession to return to the old place from where they had been expelled ... And in that case the images that we now use a little more often are these with Fuorimercato banners because it was so natural, because there was a path, because there was a past ... The fact that they were less this year also affected the cost of labour this year, because they were actually less ... and so they could also make wage claims and so they took this empty place where there is water anyway, light and a concrete plane, so then precisely paradoxes, and have started to self-organize there basically. So, in that case, the expulsion of the Red Cross was possible precisely because there was support out-market. Basically, they came into this place ‘we want to manage ourselves’ but these people rightly offered tents, food. The possibility of being able to choose and be able to do it yourself was given by the fact that there was a solidarity fund, always of ‘We bring water to the ghetto’ that made possible the freedom of choice, so the initial self-management of this place” (Interview 15 – Fuorimercato).*

## **b) Coalition Unionism**

Coalition building is an important strategy for different organizations, for instance in the case of *“Pineros y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste”* (PCUN) and the inclusion in diverse coalitions, such as the *“Alianza Poder”*, a network of sister organizations specialized in different areas. Among these sister organizations, it is useful to mention *“Mujeres Luchadoras Progresistas”*, specialized in women’s empowerment and economic development through their Christmas wreath project; *“CAPACES Leadership Institute”* with a focus on leadership development and education on indigenous traditions and cultures with their program *“Anahuac”*; *“Radio Poder”* with a focus on community communication; *“Farmworker Housing Development Corporation”* with a focus on farmworkers housing; *“We're an ecosystem of sister organizations that reach, you know, people in different places of their life, holistically integrated and driven for positive social change and justice”* (Interview 24 - Pineros y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste).

*“we each kind of specialize in a different area. For example, PCUN does a lot of advocacy and also education of rights. And here we house residents, we help them seek some resources that they may need. For example, when work is low during the winter months, help for paying bills or rent. And at the same time, we work with PCUN so they can come on site, educate and also get stories from farmworkers. And if they want to testify. And then CAPACES does a lot of leadership development and so we will send youth, if it's youth programs ... we have a program, PROMOTORAS, and again we collaborate so that they can get the skills or the training that they may need so that they can also step up another level”* (Interview 33 - Farmworker Housing Development Corporation).

*“what's been great about ANAHUAC is that many of the families come from Mexico, from small rural areas, and they already farmed. They come over here and yes, they continue working with the land, but they're never the owners of them ... also the techniques and what is used from planting to harvest or from germination to harvest, it's been different also because it's mechanized in a way where it's just for profit. And what they've done is take pride in this, this is your background, this is your ancestors, reconnect not only with Earth, the stories, also the food ... they had a traditional kitchen that was just outside of CAPACES and they made Mole, completely from scratch, completely without electricity. And you had some of the mothers and grandparents sharing like ‘I remember getting up at seven in the morning and having to help my mom do this’ and their kids getting now the experience of doing that. And so, while they're doing all these events and activities, they're sharing not only their knowledge, their experience, their children are connecting and reconnecting with their culture”* (Interview 33 - Farmworker Housing Development Corporation).

Another coalition is “*Trabajadores Agrícolas Unidos*”. This coalition that operates in the State of New York aims to empower farmworkers to enhance their lives by organizing a statewide union. In greater detail, it is composed of UFCW Local 888, Local 338 RWDSU/UFCW, UFCW District Union Local One, RWDSU, UFCW, researchers, and also seven partners (RMM, WJCN, Mid-State COSH, NYCOSH, NYCLU, LIJWJ, For the many). The two principles are: a) organizing, by empowering workers to build organizing committees and to develop leaders, to win union recognition at farms, and negotiate union contracts; b) partnership, by building partnerships with allies to increase awareness among farmworkers around the “*Farm Labor Practices Act*” by outreach, training, and messaging. Overall, from this experience, being part of a coalition can have many benefits, especially the sharing of knowledge, resources, and physical spaces for all the trade unions, community organizations and researchers involved.

*“Well, when we first came together, this is a unique campaign of three local unions and we sat down with the three local unions and we said, okay, there are thousands of farm workers and New York is a big state. Where all we start? So, we asked each local union to identify geographic areas and sectors of the industry that they would commit resources to organizing. Local 338 committed that they would organize in vineyards on Long Island. Local 888 committed that they would organize in nurseries on Long Island and also would organize generally in the Hudson Valley and Mid-New York. And Local 1 committed that they would organize in Western New York. So those are the areas that that we've been working in. On Long Island we have been working the longest, that's where the campaign really started. So, we are strongest on Long Island. That's where our petitions have been filed. That's where our partnership with the Rural & Migrant Ministry has worked the best in reaching out to workers about their rights and doing rights' trainings and building a structure to support union organizing there”* (Interview 22 - *Trabajadores Agrícolas Unidos*).

*“I think one of the main benefits to the non-union partner organization is they get to learn and gather insights about the population that they serve. And then they can better cater their services to the population and also collaborate with union organizers ... I think that the union gained because there's a lot of good practical knowledge about farm workers at the level of the nonprofit that can be super helpful. Because, as you know, farm workers are a rather unique population. So, a lot of the organizing skills that organizers might have often don't apply to this population. And I also think the unions gain credibility when they engage in partnership ... And so, I think when you can bring different groups of people together who are all interested in social justice for a particular population, the knowledge, the experiences, the sharing of time and resources can really enhance the way the problems of that population get addressed”* (Interview 58 - *Trabajadores Agrícolas Unidos*).

### c) Structural Integration

With “*structural integration*”, I refer to a partnership between a community organization and unions with the embedding of unions’ activities in the spaces of the community organization. This is the case with “*Ghetto Out - Casa Sankara*”, a civil society organization that operates in Apulia, Southern Italy. First, they are a house (casa in Italian). Indeed, to subtract immigrants from ghettos, it provides sleeping accommodation in their guesthouse to those who need it. Second, they provide different services regarding immigration issues, housing, and residency, and through the socio-legal desk. They also help with health problems: “*There are some young people who have important physical problems that we are trying to support with the disability pension and accompaniment*” (Interviewee 7 – Casa Sankara). They also help their guests with their inclusion in society, through the registration of the children at school and finding houses.

*“Families arrived with newborns after this eviction of the ghetto, and they lived in Casa Sankara. Pregnant women also gave birth here at Casa Sankara; thus, children were born here. With the city of San Severo, we are arranged for transportation and registration at the school of the city. Therefore, the municipal bus picks up the kids and takes them to school. Now, some of those families ended their journey, their ability to integrate, and we helped them to rent a house in the city. Now, they live with their children in the city, they left Casa Sankara. Because this is also an objective. Casa Sankara is not the house where one comes in and says: ‘I’ve arrived, all right’. Instead, it must be a point where the individual begins to build their future”* (Interviewee 5 – Casa Sankara).

This integration is visible in the presence of union help centers in the Casa Sankara’s facility. These unions are the following: “*SALA*” (Autonomous Union of African Workers in the World), “*COLDIRETTI*” (main organization of agricultural entrepreneurs in Italy) and “*FLAI CGIL*” (union of workers in the agroindustry). The collaboration with “*SALA*” (Autonomous Union of African Workers in the World) is an important example of this partnership, given the work concerning the education, orientation, accompaniment, and job placement of migrant workers, and the creation of an internal radio to spread useful information, especially against fake news, when circulated in the community. The partnerships with “*CGIL*” and “*Coldiretti*” are also significant.

*“there is the Coldiretti who comes once a week to listen to the guys regarding the work practices, there is a union called SALA, it is a union of Milan and its director is here in Casa Sankara now stably and deals with all the management of mediation with companies, the integration of the guys, allows the guys to effectively understand the right salary”* (Interviewee 7 – Casa Sankara).

*“The link with Coldiretti and the CGIL is there why? Because we thought that having a position inside Casa Sankara could be, yet for the guys who need to interface with the union rather than for issues related to payroll, to work activities, but also to give a signal of legality, to give a signal outside that Casa Sankara works in synergy with a whole series of public and private bodies. Everything must be done in a transparent and legal way, so the more subjects come together, the more we also feel more protected, stronger. Even users themselves must understand that Casa Sankara is not a free zone, that is, inside Casa Sankara there is legality” (Interviewee 7 – Casa Sankara).*

*“We take care of payroll control, acquire general information about the companies where the workers work. We intervene if there are problems of contractual nature, we help in training activities, we try to build relationships with the companies in which the guys work because many companies have tools that do not use, such as training, such as contractual flexibility, the organization of work, etc., so as to make it less scary, pass me this term, the use of migrant workers because many companies are frightened by the use of migrant workers. On the other hand, we do purely trade union training” (Interview 9 – CGIL).*

*“two/three years ago when I met the reality of Casa Sankara through the managers, I saw all that idea we had about Milan that really cannot miss here, this mediation, and I proposed to collaborate with Casa Sankara and open a union headquarter. We must understand that in Casa Sankara there are about 500 African guys, but in the Capitanata, in the Foggia area, there are at least 5000 African guys. They are in the ghettos, I do not know if you have heard of the ghettos, Borgo Mezzanone, Rignano. They are almost all asylum seekers, who arrived in Italy through Libya and Lampedusa, living a very intense and strong phenomenon of illegal gangmastering in the area. When I arrived, I said that there is illegal gangmastering because there are no facilities, no accommodation, no transport, no mediation ... Casa Sankara is a structure of accommodation, for this reason it has almost eliminated the illegal gangmasters, the illegal gangmasters are not there, because there is accommodation ... I put myself in this sector of awareness, orientation and we created an internal radio in Casa Sankara, indeed today I have to make two programs. It goes on YouTube and then we distribute them on the guys' WhatsApp where we explain them how to do this ... in 2021, where in 2020 there was the Covid, and it was the beginning of my collaboration and the settlement of our union, we had contacts with Trento, in the region of Trentino-Alto Adige ... we took thirty guys of Casa Sankara to work in Trentino for a month and a half, but when they arrived there, they had big eyes, because you find the accommodation done well, the work contract on the bed only to be signed, the kitchen where you can prepare food, lunches, and then in the morning the employer with their van that respects the transport rules, and takes you on the field” (Interview 8 – SALA).*

## d) Alliance Between Workers' Supporters

The last model of community unionism at the community level presented in this paper is the *"Alliance between workers' supporters"*. The inspiring is the *"Coalition of Immokalee Workers"* (CIW) and the correlated *"Alliance for Fair Food"*, born with the Coalition of Immokalee's need for allies/supporters for the national *"Campaign for Fair Food"* and that demanded justice for farmworkers from the largest retailers. However, to understand how the campaign unfolded and how the *"CIW"* still operates in their community, and in relation to the market, it is very important to understand their organic growth and their mathematical equation for animating the community and their campaigns. In more detail, after a decade of fighting against Florida's growers in the 90s, they understood that the origin of exploitation was the consolidation of the retail food industry. Thus, the CIW shifted their focus and their first target was *"Taco Bell"* (and *"Yum! Brands"* the parent company) and by replicating with the public the mathematical equation that they applied to Immokalee, *"C+C=C (Consciousness + Commitment = Change)"*.

As can be seen on the website of *"Alliance For Fair Food"*, three groups were formed during those years: the *"Interfaith Action of Southwest Florida"* (founded in 1998) by bringing faith groups and religious support to the campaign; the *"Student/Farmworker Alliance"* (founded in 2000), namely a network of students and young people who supported the campaign; and *"Just Harvest USA"* (founded in 2007), a food justice organization, interested in a sustainable agriculture. However, an important year was 2015, when these three different groups joined formally as the *"Alliance for Fair Food"* to sustain the CIW's movement for farmworker justice, (CIW's campaign that will be described in the next section). Here, I would like to highlight the importance of allies, and particularly the important role of the *"Student/Farmworker Alliance"* in sustaining the *"Campaign for Fair Food"*. A significant example was the role and activism of the students during the first phase of the mentioned campaign, namely during the four-year boycott against Taco Bell. In detail, this four-year boycott was characterized by the so-called *"Boot the Bell"* victories in 27 universities and high schools, the kicking out of Taco Bell from the campuses, or also the cutting of the sponsorships. Subsequently, an important moment, in 2005 the *"Coalition of Immokalee Workers"* signed the first agreement with *"Yum! Brands"*, followed by other agreements that I will address and describe in the next section about supply chains-based solutions with the description of the *"Fair Food Program"* in more detail.

*“So, they launched the Taco Bell boycott. And that was a really big opportunity for students to get involved because Taco Bell had many studies done on the 18 to 24-year-old demographic, which they saw as very important for their market strategy. There was one study that came out that said that young consumers were mindless, that they didn't think, they just consumed blindly as long as you were throwing constant advertising at them and deals. And so, the Student Farmworker Alliance used that as part of their messaging for a long time, saying, no, we're not mindless consumers, we care about farmworkers, we care about where our food comes from. We see the intersections between, you know, capitalism and exploitation and the food system and how we're all connected and not objectified as part of it. So those were the connections that the Student/Farmworker Alliance early on was drawing, how these structures were working against farmworkers, how these big corporations had a huge role to play in fabricating this narrative that farmworkers were invisible, that consumers didn't care about, that all they wanted was fast food. And so that was what the Student/Farmworker Alliance kind of did. They did a lot of consciousness-raising about Taco Bell boycott. They helped to mobilize” (Interview 67 – Coalition of Immokalee Workers).*

## **2. Supply Chains: From Market Integration to Creation**

In the previous section, I discussed some practices and activities that have been developed at the community level at the intersection of different groups and organizations with a stake or interest in agricultural justice and farmworkers' rights. These organizations are trade unions, community organizations, such as worker centers, but also groups of allies and supporters, such as groups of students and faith organizations. As concerns the practices and activities adopted, such activities can be independent activities, such as in the case of worker centers, the multi-identity organization, or the hybrid union, or actions can be deployed in conjunction between unions and community organizations, through the means of the coalition, as well as through structural integration among these organizations through physical integration of the unions within the physical spaces of the community organization, as a response to the needs of the workers, but also as an instrument of legitimization. Still, in addition to these responses, support and activism for agricultural justice and farmworkers' rights can also assume the form of solidarity by student and faith groups towards the struggles and campaigns of farmworkers. Still, solutions and responses can be deployed beyond this niche that share similar interests. Therefore, in this section, I will highlight four practices/solutions proposed in the agricultural sector, in integration or in alternative to capitalism and mainstream supply chains, and along a continuum that goes from an integration with the market, to full alternativity to the market.

## a) Multi-Party Agreement

The first experience of market integration on behalf of workers' organizations is linked to the history and still-ongoing story of the *"Farm Labor Organizing Committee"* (FLOC), a union with members in Ohio, North Carolina, South Carolina and Mexico, and together with their model of tri-party contract. Thus, founded in 1967, the *"Farm Labor Organizing Committee"* (FLOC) constitutes the first union to negotiate multi-party agreements between buyers, growers, and farmworkers and to represent H2-A workers with a labour agreement. An important moment in FLOC's history is the year 1978 when 2000 FLOC members went on strike in Ohio to demand union recognition and a multi-party bargaining agreement. In 1979 they had their first union convention and voted to boycott *"Campbell Soup"* (namely, a large buyer) and that led in 1983 to a 560-mile march with 100 members of FLOC, from Toledo, Ohio, to Camden, New Jersey, where Campbell Soup had its headquarters. After eight years of struggle, they won and signed the first multi-party agreement with Campbell Soup (buyer) and growers by covering 28 pickle and tomato farms in Ohio and Michigan, with union recognition, wage increases and benefits to 800 workers. In 1987 they signed a contract with *"Heinz"* covering 700 workers on 27 farms. In 1991-92 they signed contracts with *"Aunt Jane's"* and *"Green Bay"*. In 1998, they started to organize farmworkers in North Carolina. Then, in 1999, they launched the national boycott of *"Mt. Olive Pickles Co."* products. After five years of boycott, *"Mt. Olive Pickles Co."* helped to broker a union contract with the *"North Carolina Growers Association"* covering thousands of farmworkers with the H2-A Visa. Moreover, in addition to this important struggles, in 2006, they voted for a tobacco campaign targeting *"Reynolds American Inc."* (that is still ongoing at the moment of writing) and featured by an international reach to duplicate their framework, but also to improve conditions abroad to save jobs in the US by avoiding lopsided competition. What is important to highlight in this model is the importance of the collective agreement.

*"it articulates employer rights and employee rights, recruitment and everything that has to do with the worker being recruited in Mexico ... his performance in the workplace and his return to Mexico and all the required application of laws in terms of the reimbursements for the visa interviews in Mexico ... When the workers arrive in North Carolina, they arrive at a central facility. All 9, 10.000 of them. And it's from there they get their paperwork to the farms they are assigned to ... when they come to that site to get their paperwork, the union is always there ... they line them up in all these windows to get them their reimbursement back"* (Interview 53 - Farm Labor Organizing Committee).



*“what rights does an undocumented worker have? With the union agreement they can get seniority, they can get protection. How do you deal with unjust firings? And we have many, many cases over recruiting violations in Mexico. And under our agreement, and I was consulting the Department of Agriculture ... I said, unless you have a union agreement, you're not going to be able to do anything over recruiting violations in the sending countries. We do. Our workers have a right to file grievances in Mexico over recruiting violations. You're never going to pass a law in the U.S. that gives you that right because Mexico is another country”* (Interview 53 - Farm Labor Organizing Committee).

*“we have a democratic participatory process in our organization where the leadership has to be elected, the workers debate and process issues that need to be addressed. And every four years at a convention offer what they want the union to do for the next four years ... the reason you need collective bargaining is because you have an institution. That's the framework, is the constitution that allows the workers to input the direction of the union more directly. And we come together once every four years”* (Interview 53 - Farm Labor Organizing Committee).

An important aspect of these collective agreements is that they recognize the authority of the “Dunlop Commission”. This Commission is essentially a National Labor Relation Board through private agreement. It sets rules for representation procedures and collective bargaining, and it has the authority to issue fines through a grievance and dispute resolution mechanism.

*“It works as the tribunal, which hears grievances on the third step. First step, you try to resolve it with the employer on the farm. If we don't come to an agreement, we kick it up to the management of both the union and the Growers Association. If we can't resolve the dispute, then we put it in writing and submit it to the Commission for arbitration. Now, the Commission may choose to try to mediate before they make a decision. Normally that's a formal step. They try to mediate it, see if they can engage the parties to come together and resolve it voluntarily. If not, then they'll make a decision”* (Interview 53 - Farm Labor Organizing Committee).

Nevertheless, in addition to the labour union, their model of supply chain's negotiations, and collective agreements, an important component of their organizing is the non-profit partner, the “Campaign for Migrant Worker Justice” (CMWJ), which as can be read on their website, it was formed to engage and educate students, labour and faith organizations, as well as other non-profit organizations during organizing campaigns, and to assist with advocacy, research, and fundraising. The focus of the CMWJ is: 1) supporting farmworkers organizing campaigns by educating, mobilizing and fundraising; 2) addressing workplace problems; 3) fighting police discrimination and immigration raids; 4) training/organizing youth (FLOC Homies Program).

*“it all stems from advocating for people and trying to help other people and bringing the community together and connecting resources for people that don't have access to resources because there's resources, there's places that will give you a hot meal, there's a place right down the street that has a laundry facility and a shower for homeless people and a lot of these people, because they're so disconnected from technology and being able to move around easily, like they have no transportation, so they don't know what's where. And so, trying to connect people to those resources is a big part of that. And as far as how it all ties in, when you get a community motivated and empowered, then you can motivate them to help with other people that are even worse than they do, which in a lot of instances are the farmworkers. So then, we connect them to FLOC and how FLOC advocates for farmworkers and the whole FLOC movement and it's all about empowering people to stand up for themselves ... Now, when you get a community behind that, then it becomes a movement where the community steps in to be on the picket lines and to do that, that sort of work when the farmworkers are just there working, they don't have time to go on the picket lines, they don't have time to go to R.J. Reynolds and march around the building. But the community people, they might have some time. So that's how we kind of connect everybody together to help each other and to empower one another” (Interview 57 - Farm Labor Organizing Committee).*

In this discussion concerning associate membership and community support to farmworkers organizing, the “FLOC Homies Program” is important. In more detail, the “Homies Program” is a program designed for the youth of the community, and it is aimed to youth employment, readiness, and empowerment. Particularly, it is a learn and earn program, because they learn life skills, but they get paid. Drawing on the syllabus of the program, some central elements of training are: build job skills and prepare the “Homies” for employment; introduction to the institutional structures of power, incentivizing critical thinking; develop skills and strategies to address community issues and learn the characteristics of successful organizing campaigns; introduction to house meeting campaign, and learn how to become community organizers; development of coordinated actions; enhance “Homies” personal skills to make them more effective organizers; and build alliances in the community. These are some snapshots.

*“The program itself is considered a youth empowerment program. So, the word empowerment is kind of open to interpretation. A lot of our focus is trying to encourage them to look for a job so that they don't fall into the cycle of using government assistance for the rest of their lives. But we tap into a lot of different things ... And the reason I believe that people are stuck in their poverty cycle is the lack of emotional and mental help. And so, we tap into some of that, but we also work on money management” (Interview 57 - Farm Labor Organizing Committee).*

## **b) Worker-Driven Social Responsibility**

The second model of market integration by a workers' organization is the "*Fair Food Program*" launched by the "*Coalition of Immokalee Workers*" (CIW) in Florida and its replication across the US and abroad, and the underlying "*Worker-Driven Social Responsibility*" (WSR) paradigm. As regards this paradigm, the label "*worker-driven social responsibility*" was developed by the "*Coalition of Immokalee Workers*" to describe this distinctive model of human rights program (Asbed, 2014; Asbed et al., 2018, p. 328). The "*Coalition of Immokalee Workers*" (CIW) in their history of fighting exploitation, human trafficking, and gender-based violence is an example of experiential learning. This experiential learning is evident in their long journey of struggle, from the original focus (as targets) on growers and labour contractors (or gangmasters) to the understanding of the dynamics of supply chains and consolidation of the retail food industry.

*"And basically, over time our work has evolved and as I have always said, the work of the coalition has grown organically. Because at first we thought the problem was our immediate employers, the contractors we worked for, who picked us up here in the park ... Then we saw that there was that with the grower, which was also a problem. And we made the strikes against them, the marches, the hunger strike against the growers. And after several years of basically fighting with the industry with the growers, the next step is to see that there was the other force that was the market, the big buyers. Then we saw that the big brands have the power really and they are the ones that are pulling the strings behind the scenes, that nobody sees them, but they are the ones that are dictating the standards today"* (Interview 64 – Coalition of Immokalee Workers).

This understanding shaped the "*Campaign for Fair Food*" and the fight against "*Taco Bell*" and its parent company "*Yum! Brands*", with a four-year boycott, and the "*Boot the Bell*" victories mentioned and that led to the first agreement with "*Yum! Brands*" in 2005, followed by other binding agreements in 2007 with "*McDonald's*" and in 2008 with "*Burger King*". Additionally, a significant year in their history was the 2010, when the "*Florida Tomato Growers Exchange*", which represented 90% of Florida's \$650 million tomato industry, signed the agreement. And, after that ulterior nine corporate retailers signed an agreement with the CIW. All this struggle, in 2011, led to the creation of the "*Fair Food Program*", an innovative collaboration between farmworkers, growers, and participating buyers. Subsequently, another relevant year is 2015 when the "*Fair Food Program*" expanded in Florida outside tomatoes, including strawberries and peppers, but also outside Florida into other farms and tomato plantations.

These states are Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, New Jersey, Maryland, and Tennessee. In detail, as can be read on the Fair Food Program Website, the main components of the “Fair Food Program” are: a) **Fair Food Agreements**: participating buyers and growers agree to implement the worker-informed “Code of Conduct” that contains all the protections and the “Fair Food Premium”; b) **Fair Food Premium**: participating buyers commit to paying a premium besides the price paid for the produce, dispensed as a line-item bonus on worker paychecks; c) **Fair Food Code of Conduct**: that contains all the protections for farmworkers, including wages, hours, freedom from retaliation, health, safety, and heat stress protection; d) **Worker-to-Worker Education**: the CIW staff conducts education sessions at growers’ farms (most of the staff were farmworkers, and that is why it is called worker-to-worker education) e) **24/7 Complaint Resolution**: in case of violations of the code of conduct above mentioned, there is a complaint process for workers, a complaint line answered by a bilingual investigator of the “Fair Food Standards Council” (FFSC), complaints investigated and resolved by the FFSC, usually by collaborating with growers; f) **Rigorous Auditing**: the “Fair Food Standards Council” is a third-party monitoring organization charged with the monitoring and enforcement of the agreements and code of conduct. At the basis of its role, there are the audits on the farms of the participating growers, including: 1) interviews with the upper management (CEO or HR) about compliant systems (at the beginning), and then about how systems improved after the corrective action plans on compliance and potential risks, 2) interviews with the intermediate level management (field level supervisors or crew leaders), charged with the on the ground enforcement, and 3) interviews with 50% of the workforce; g) **Market-Based Enforcement**: the code of conduct is sustained by binding agreements through which buyers are required to suspend their purchases from their growers that don’t comply with the code of conduct.

Their “CIW’s Anti-Slavery Program” is also essential with its support to the investigation and uncovering of several multi-worker and multi-state slavery operations across the Southeast of the US, and by helping the liberation of over 1,200 workers, as can be read on their website. Education plays an important role in the investigation and discovery of these cases. Indeed, the “Fair Food Program” plays a crucial role in the prevention of abuses and exploitation both inside and outside the program. Inside the “Fair Food Program”, prevention is the norm, and if cases emerge are immediately identified and addressed. While, outside the program, they assist with prosecutions and conduct investigations on forced labour. Education is central:

*“The idea of the coalition 30 years ago was to look for a solution and for there to be a consequence, prevention and consequences for the bosses. But through that the coalition was organizing in the community that the workers were realizing that it was an organization that helped and that it was an organization where they could come and make their complaints was that came out the first case where they call the office ... here at Immokalee the workers arrive for the first time, but after being in the talks or when they are in a program’s education, they go to other states, but they take the information, they take the phone to the coalition or they take the knowledge with them because of the talks they have received at the farms. They already know or understand that this is what slavery is, because we touched on that issue in the talks in the education session, we explained the right to work free of slavery and we say that it is slavery, if your employer threatens you, they doesn’t pay you, they keeps you against your will or locked up, they won’t let you out, and we explain that, that’s slavery. So, the idea of the coalition was that there was good prevention through education, that the worker knew it was slavery.” (Interview 68 – Coalition of Immokalee Workers).*

Once discussed the main elements of the *“Fair Food Program”*, in addition to the expansion in the US and to different crops, an important development for them is the expansion of the *“Worker-driven Social Responsibility”* paradigm to different countries, but also other sectors, beyond agriculture, including to the fishing industry in the UK. Nevertheless, on this subject, an essential component of CIW’s work is the awareness of the flexibility of the WSR model. On that, important is this excerpt of interview about an attempt in Tennessee to apply this model in the construction industry (almost all interviews were conducted together with other two researchers, this brought out themes that I would not otherwise have discussed).

*“our model is not a union model. It's a model that makes sense in our context ... the laws are different in some states, for example, like with agriculture, the expansion of the Fair Food Program can be different in terms of wages because there are different things happening in different states. There are some states that have the right to form unions, for example, and that's another consideration. So, yeah, it all depends on the where, but I think that it just needs to be in line with what a worker driven model is, which is workers have to be in power, they are not to be the subject matter ... on the other end, they need the power of corporations. And that can mean in the construction industry the power of big companies to say, we are going to participate in this, we're going to let the two collaborate, letting the investigations go on. It has to be collaborative. And then, that can take a different form depending on who has some more power at the end of that supply chain ... it's all about finding where the power is that can be used to guarantee that workers are safe and free to speak” (Interview 66 – Coalition of Immokalee Workers).*

## c) Ethical Supply Chain

The third model of market integration presented in this research is the “*Ethical Supply Chain*” constructed in Italy by “*NoCap*”. NoCap stands for “*No to Caporalato*” with reference to the illegal labour intermediation, that in Italy is labelled “*Caporalato*”. The story of “*NoCap*” starts in 2011 with an important strike of farmworkers in Nardò, in Apulia, in Southern Italy and that changed the political and social debate around exploitation and illegal intermediation in Italy.

*“NoCap was born after the Nardò strike ... It was an uprising of about a thousand workers who were guests at the Masseria Boncuri, this reception center, and where every season, numerous workers from all parts of Italy arrived there for about 15 years, it's 2011 ... from that strike was born all in Italy on the fight against illegal gangmastering, because before that strike, there was no more talk of illegal gangmastering, they pretended not to see. Thanks to that mass uprising of the workers, the issue has resurfaced. This event, the strike, has provoked a political, cultural, and social dynamic in our country that has led to important results. The first of these important results was the approval of the crime of illegal gangmastering, the article 603-bis of the penal code, which was introduced into our penal code a week after the strike in Nardò. Then the first investigation against slavery in Europe started, the Sabr trial, because the Sabr trial was the first trial against illegal gangmastering, against slavery” (Interviewee 11 - NoCap).*

However, after these important results obtained at the normative level, from the approval of the crime of illegal labour intermediation (gangmastering or caporalato), to the investigation against slavery, an important and essential moment in the organizational history of “*NoCap*” was the creation of their ethical supply chain, a big alliance between farmworkers, growers, supermarkets/buyers, and consumers. There are several elements at the basis of this alliance. First, “*NoCap*” identifies distribution companies/buyers willing to collaborate with them and in a path that values farmworkers and growers. Second, the price of the product is set by the growers in agreement with the distribution of the produce, in compliance with the national collective agreements signed by trade unions and thus that it is sustainable for the consumers. Thirdly, “*NoCap*” assigns to the growers a network certificate, as well as a NoCap ethical label. On this point, to evaluate and select the companies to which to assign the label, they adopt a multi-criteria matrix. It is important to realize that the label certifies the produce and not the company. So, these criteria are work ethics, short chain, waste, energy, added value produce, and animal welfare (NoCap, People Before Profit. From Protest to Proposal. Brochure: p.32).

They evaluate that there are workers hired with regular contracts, hours in accordance with national legislation, registration with “INPS” (the Italian National Institute for Social Security), workplace safety, access to first aid and adequate health care, but also with use of renewable energy in productive processes, biodegradable or recyclable packaging, the capacity to create value within sustainable supply chains, and then also the animal welfare, if necessary. Besides, the label is issued by “CREI-NoCap Verification Team”, whose evaluation systems are certified by “DQA Food Quality Department”, agency accredited by the Italian “Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry” (NoCap, People Before Profit. From Protest to Proposal. Brochure: p.30).

*“We then carry out inspections of companies, both of existing contracts and of company procedures, to check that they are respected ... since collaborating with NoCap, a number of standards must be respected. These standards are also reproduced in the logo of NoCap, which includes the hands that represent the votes that are given on various aspects of the food chain” (Interviewee 10 - NoCap).*

*“The NoCap chain is a certified chain because it starts from an ethicality of the distribution group itself that through the NoCap chain must not apply the unfair commercial practices that normally apply in the agri-food sector ... the price must not be made by the distribution, namely the demand, but by the producer, therefore the farm. Distribution must respect this price because it is the price necessary for sustainability, to pay for collective agreements, to pay for workers' work tools and all the other things necessary to ensure regularity. Then, are prohibited all other practices that are prohibited, that usually large retailers apply in the agri-food industry, such as the auction at double discount, but also the discount that is always charged to companies, and so on. With NoCap you start from a different assumption. What is the right price is realized and from there everyone has to adapt. The farm gets not only the right price, but even the possibility to know how much of its product will have to sell to distribution in advance, which is not normally there. Normally you only know at the last minute how much the distributor buys you. Instead, through the NoCap supply chain there is a contract, already planned a priori. Once this is established, the company is able to respect all its other duties, the national collective agreements in the first place, that is the fact that all workers are regularized, that contracts are respected, because it is not just a matter of undeclared labour, but also mostly gray labour in companies. Maybe workers have the contract, but they work many more hours. Instead, with NoCap there is a guarantee that workers must work six and a half hours, plus half an hour break ...The fact of giving the workers the medical examination, paying for transportation, the suit, the gloves, the work shoes, the chemical bath in the field. These are all things that are quite utopian in the dirty fields of dirty supply chains” (Interview 10 – NoCap).*

Nevertheless, “NoCap” in this alliance and ethical supply chain also introduces workers within those businesses involved, through recruitment within ghettos, or by using connections, and they organize labour relations before the conclusion of the contract, and throughout. Hence, they take care of the abandonment of ghettos, they provide administrative support, housing, transportation, medical check-up, work clothes, chemical toilets, and decent working hours.

*“NoCap has over time discovered that it cannot limit itself to certifying the company as it is. ... NoCap asks for something more from the companies of their network and inserts workers selected by NoCap itself, mostly taken from situations of particular distress, from ghettos, homeless people, from various situations of fragility that there are in our province. I’m talking about Foggia, actually all over Southern Italy. So, what’s this thing for? Not just putting in workers. That is, NoCap does these operations to bring in workers, to give job opportunities to people who are completely marginalized. But also, to ensure that there is an eye, from this point of view, yes unionized, as you say, of workers who answer to NoCap, not so much to the company, and is able to check that certain principles are respected in everyday life” (Interview 10 – NoCap).*

*“As there is the flow of migrants from Libya to Italy, if you know the migratory flow, they go from Sub-Saharan Africa, Niger, Chad, Libya, Lampedusa and arrive in Italy. Same thing in agriculture ... They make Foggia, sometimes Brindisi and Lecce, Foggia, then they go down to Basilicata, then we follow the flows ... I’ve been inside the working world, so I don’t tell it because I saw it on television. I’ve worked, I have so many friends who have moved. My strength is that I lived there, I lived in the ghettos, I made the revolution, I know the workers, we talk on the phone, they say ‘I now go to pick tomatoes in Foggia or I go to Palazzo, Potenza, in Basilicata’. So, from this information, then we followed them, we go to the ghetto, then they tell us ‘I will go to Salerno to pick salads’. So, we did the mapping of exploitation and the places of exploitation simply following the internal migratory flows of seasonal workers and on the other hand seeing the settleability of the workers, such as in Lazio where there are Indian Sikhs who are there all year round” (Interview 11 – NoCap).*

*“it’s not like the company takes the cops in to get nothing in return. In return, it obtains that we offer them a commercial outlet that does not have, that is, the possibility of selling their products at an agreed price, at a fair price, at our distribution, at our distribution groups, as well as other supermarkets and shops that sell NoCap products, which are also other fair-trade shops that are located in other areas of Italy and abroad, especially in Germany. Therefore, you offer a commercial outlet, you certainly offer a marketing and development project in areas that maybe they did not foresee, those of the ethical, aware, and critical consumption and therefore can also open up to these markets here because NoCap is very exposed in the media” (Interviewee 10 - NoCap).*



## d) Alternative Supply Chain

The last model is the creation of an alternative supply chain to the mainstream and capitalistic supply chains. This is the case of “*Fuorimercato*”, a national network, as well as a trade union composed of several local nodes operating throughout Italy. In greater detail, “*Fuorimercato*” means in Italian “*Out-Market*” and represents an anticapitalistic social and political approach to society and therefore to the market. However, although these local nodes share a common attitude towards the market and agriculture, they experience different struggles and different existences in different social and economic contexts, from Southern to Northern Italy, from Milano, in Lombardia, to Bari and Nardò in Apulia, to Partinico and Campobello di Mazara, in Sicily, to mention some of these nodes. Despite differences, these nodes share a common and reciprocal activity of economic exchange, concrete solidarity, and “*Conflictual Mutualism*”. “*Conflictual Mutualism*” perfectly describes this alternative model of market integration and creation of a supply chain that is alternative to mainstream and capitalist productions.

*“we have a mutualism of construction, namely, in the society where we live, we build practices of alternative economy, to allude to a better society; and mutualism against, that is we recognize inequalities, oppressions, we recognize them, and then when the subjects want to speak, those who remain in silence want to speak, we try to support their voice” (Interviewee 19 - Fuorimercato).*

*“The practices are those of work self-management, the construction of supply chains, then all production phases with a non-hierarchical work organization and production, but based on the management and decision-making processes of all phases in such a way that you do not have a passive entity receiving commands and an active one managing, but all together they manage the production phases and the organization of work and there you also go to practice economic democracy. Democracy in the noble sense of the word because everyone participates, everyone knows what the other person does with an assignment of tasks, but everyone can give a hand to the other and vice versa and this is the side of work and production. Then there is the whole side of reproduction, there is the whole question of welfare and that you must demand it from the institutions that must always guarantee public transport in the agricultural world if you really want to fight illegal gangmastering; you must guarantee housing, the home; you have to ensure education, then school; health; you have to ensure things that we take for granted, electricity and drinking water for everyone. This is how everything is intertwined and we try with our practices to bring out both solidarity against this system, and solidarity to build an alternative” (Interview 18 – Fuorimercato).*

*“The FUORIMERCATO network was born as the first experimentation in 2013 on the basis of a relationship between the recovered factory ‘Rimaflow’ of Trezzano sul Naviglio, where we are now, and the association of producers of the Piana di Gioia Tauro ‘SOS Rosarno’ born from the revolt of immigrants, especially Africans, who claimed to be paid ... We came into contact, the factory and this reality, even a little coincidentally because one of the workers of Rimaflow came from that area ... We called this thing FUORIMERCATO because both, we as a recovered factory and them, we went out of the strictly market logic, valuing above all the use value of the products, rather than the value of commercial exchange, so, aiming to build an economic network alternative to the dominated one, which is that of the market. There was the idea of FUORIMERCATO. We felt outside the normal rules of the market. After that this network was developed, because both we as a recovered factory, so urban industrial/artisan sector, and the other reality, we were in relationship with other similar realities that have been progressively networked, both on the basis of a common political and social discourse, therefore protection of the environment, defense of agro-ecological production, social rights, rights of those who work, and for a concrete interest to get their products to a number of recipients, trying to involve these recipients ... a greater awareness of the whole path. That is, the idea is to build complete alternative supply chains to the market” (Interview 12 - Fuorimercato).*

This conflictual mutualism is constructed along two dimensions. Firstly, in the construction of an alternative economy based on mutualism, self-management, and participatory guarantee. Two, in the building of a multi-settlement union that sustains the self-organization of workers. An example is the campaign *“We bring water to the ghetto”*, already mentioned above. Still, in this section, it is important to describe their alternative economy, and the relevance of self-management and participatory guarantee. On that, it is useful to describe two experiences. Firstly, *“Sfruttazero” (Zero Exploitation)* is a project that combines the local nodes of Bari and Nardò, in Apulia, in the production of tomato sauce. What is important to highlight about this project of alternative and independent agriculture is the self-management of work and the composition of work groups that are formed by natives and migrant workers.

*“The peculiarity of this project is that it allows those who participate in it, those who work there, to self-manage their working hours according to their skills and resources and what are then the agricultural and production needs. We are organized in an autonomous way. We define the amount of work needed and we pay ourselves from what seasonal production allows to redistribute ... Our productions then end up in distributions beyond the large-organized distribution, that is, in solidarity buying groups, in social cooperatives, in auto-production markets like this adhering to the national network Fuorimercato” (Interview 20-Fuorimercato).*

*“We deal with the supply chain in agricultural self-management, the 'SfruttaZero' sauce production, and we also work to build the national network of 'Fuorimercato' trying to give strength even in the historical evolution that this type of network can have because it has its own uniqueness from our point of view as regards the will to build a new economic circuit, detached from the market economy and therefore from the search for a maximization of profits, from the forms of enterprise that are made and on the other hand because it has a huge push in terms of the possibility of building through solidarity a new form of union membership that can then be a counterpart to the institutional and employers' galaxy. It's not easy to understand. With a few words we would like to be a different union, new, which deals with economic practices and therefore also income building” (Interview 17 - Fuorimercato).*

The *“Network of Rural Agriculture and Work in Self-management, Fuorimercato Sicilia”* is an additional important example of self-management and participatory guarantee, with the idea to mutually support small agricultural producers in Sicily. In detail, at the basis of this network, there is a biologic agriculture and peasant agriculture, and hence agroecological experiences, and along with a focus on the social impact of individual experiences and stories of producers. Among the producers who are part of it, symbolic is *“I Raccolti di Tobia”* (The Crops of Tobia), a local producer of ancient Sicilian grains and with the purpose to safeguard these seeds: *“are examples of market dynamics and how of course certain products must disappear completely from the market”* (Interview 14 – Fuorimercato). Another business is *“Cuoche Combattenti”* (Cooks Fighters) that is a processing laboratory of jams, pesti, salted and sweet preserves and bakery products, *“a path of economic autonomy against the patriarchal violence system, and therefore it is a path of exit, of escape from male violence”* (Interview 14 – Fuorimercato).

*“producers have signed an agreement of mutual aid that has at its core what we call participatory guarantee. Participatory guarantee that obviously, unlike the various labels, doc, dop and ethical productions, is not based on a stamp that it is an external firm that certifies on your work but is based on relations of trust, and not only, that are established between producers and co-producers, because we call consumers co-producers”* (Interviewee 14 - Fuorimercato).

*“Fuorimercato is grafted right into the space related to distribution, this self-managed distribution in which we flip the pyramid ... In the large-scale distribution, it tends to be a regular pyramid with a sharp upward trend in which basically 80% goes to the large-scale distribution, 20% goes to producers. What we say is: we flip this pyramid, 80% must go to the producers, 20% must go to the distribution”* (Interviewee 14 - Fuorimercato).

### **3. State: From Integration to Institutional Conversations**

In this section, I will highlight some examples of institutional collaborations, by which I intend structural, formal, or informal cooperative relations between workers' organizations and the state at its different levels (national, federal, or regional) and forms (agencies and ministries). I do not include advocacy activities based on occasional actions and based on a campaign with the state as a target rather than as a party with whom to establish a social dialogue. In detail, I describe four forms of collaboration: partnership based on reception and joint production; management of common goods; safety alliance agreement; and institutional conversations.

#### **a) Partnership Based on Reception and Joint Production**

This form of institutional collaboration is inspired by the model of “*Casa Sankara*”, in Apulia, in Southern Italy. In detail, “*Casa Sankara*” is a voluntary organization that was born in 2016 to continue the work already started in 2012 with a group of African migrants, but informally, and with the aim to create an alternative to ghettos (informal settlements in the countryside where usually migrants go to reside). Hence, in the beginning, “*Casa Sankara*” aimed to create an alternative to the ghetto to design a legal path of social and economic inclusion of migrants in a territory of Apulia with a long history of exploitation and exclusion. Now, “*Casa Sankara*” is in charge of the abandoned farm “*Fortore*”, a farm and land owned by the “*Apulia Region*” (the “*Region*” is a sub-administrative unit in Italy), through a series of regional agreements for the reception and social integration of migrants. Hence, “*Casa Sankara*” is a reception model, through the provision of housing (for more than 400 persons). Nevertheless, “*Casa Sankara*” in its reception activities and provision of housing, is not a reception centre such as others in the Italian context, it is also the beginning of a path of social and economic integration.

*“things do not have to function as a reception center. You have to create a spirit of social inclusion ... But we have to try to change just as they see social inclusion, because if you’ve been welcomed into a place, you’ve earned money, what you have to think about is both helping your family, and trying to carry out this project of social inclusion, but you have to cut the ghetto because the people who make money and go back to the ghetto, they definitely go back because there are all the vices, there is prostitution, there is drug use ... But if there is a system that helps to understand that the ghetto is not a livable place and tries to insert you in the lives of Italians, in the lives of all, there you will really have taken the right path”* (Interview 5 – Casa Sankara).

*“Casa Sankara is not the house where one comes in and says, “I’ve arrived, all right”, but it must be a point where the person begins to build their future. We accompany you, you have recovered your documents, you are regular, you have a job, now you have a salary, you have a paycheck, now there is another step, now that you are self-sufficient, you can go on alone ... We have several groups of guys who before lived in Casa Sankara for two/three years, now they have the apartment in San Severo and are doing their lives” (Interviewee 5 – Casa Sankara).*

*“we have an office, a front office, so when the person arrives, immediately knows who to turn to, welcomes, collects everything, asks questions ‘how did you know about Casa Sankara? What do you expect from Casa Sankara? If you know someone at Casa Sankara’ ... To welcome the person, we must make this interview, have the regulation signed and also a reception contract, which lasts two years. Every two years we have to renew this contract and this is the reception service. In the same reception service, there is legal assistance. After this step of receiving the person through these precise questions, the person must speak with legal assistance that verifies the possession of the stay permit, documents in possession, missing documents, the reason for not renewing the stay permit ... Then, we also have a psychologist. If a guy, who has already been accepted or not, has mental health problems, there they also take over to create a path with this guy. So, if the guy has the paperwork, they have everything, but it’s the job that’s missing, we check right away the listings to see what we have, because companies contact us” (Interview 5 – Casa Sankara).*

In this public partnership, the agricultural project *“Riaccolto”* for the production of tomatoes and processing into 400 g peeled packaging is also important, given it combines a public body (*“Apulia Region”*), private actors (*“Coop Alleanza 3.0”* and *“Legacoop Puglia”* for distribution, and a different firm for the transformation), and a civil society organization (*“Casa Sankara”*).

*“We have always thought since 2012 when we started and then from 2016/2017 when we signed the agreements with the Apulia Region, to take advantage of this space inside the company. The company comprises a total of twenty hectares of land, of which thirteen hectares are workable ... So, we asked the Apulia Region to make these spaces available, because for us it is not just a matter of taking the guys out of the ghettos, to give them a bed, but also to create activities that can help them to work or to integrate socially. And from there came the idea of doing an agricultural project on the land. Considered that the violence, the suffering that these people have experienced in agriculture has always started from the harvest of the tomato, from that red blood, therefore, we considered it symbolic to start this project with the cultivation of tomatoes. It is like a revenge on who was exploiting me, making sure that this product that has always seen my suffering can also see my success” (Interviewee 5 – Casa Sankara).*

## b) Management of Common Goods

The inspiration is *“Fuorimercato”* and the experience of conflictual mutualism. Here, I expand the discussion about conflictual mutualism, by discussing the management of common goods, social/mutual aid spaces based on principles of solidarity, self-management, and mutualism. Some examples of these collective experiences of self-management are *“Rimake”* in Milano, Lombardia, *“Terranostra Occupata”* in Casoria, Campania, but also the *“Bread & Roses”* and *“Villa Roth”* in Bari, Apulia. The *“Bread & Roses”* and *“Villa Roth”* are the only common goods with institutional recognition. The *“Bread & Roses”* is a mutual aid space hosting mutualistic activities, such as the *“Bancarelle Selvagge”* (Wild Booths) to connect the city and countryside with a market of agricultural productions belonging to that peasant world, outside the large-scale distribution. Here, another activity is the *“Osteria Popolare”* (Popular Tavern). Formally, they are recognized by the City of Bari through the municipal *“Regulation for the collaboration between citizens and the administration for the care and regeneration of urban common goods”* and a collaboration agreement, first among the City of Bari and the cultural association *“Bread & Roses”*, while later with **the self-management community** of the *“Bread & Roses”*. Urban common goods are *“the assets, material, intangible and digital, that citizens and the Municipal Administration, also through participatory and deliberative procedures, recognize that they are functional to the exercise of the fundamental rights of the person, the individual and collective well-being and the interest of future generations”* (Comune di Bari, 2015).

*“March 2016, in the wake of a campaign for the re-appropriation of public spaces abandoned in the city of Bari, a series of people, collectives, associations, those who left the university, those who made Solidaria, those who made Sfruttazero, homosexual people who wanted spaces not patriarchal, not macho, not homophobic, and other associations, decide to launch this campaign and one morning we enter this space, without asking permission, then an occupation ... In July 2018, then after two years, we sign the first collaboration agreement with the municipality where we insert the activities already being and to carry out in the Bread & Roses, mutualistic activities ... from a single association that we had to form to sign the first agreement, today in 2022 we arrive at the recognition by the Municipality of Bari of the community, which would be the self-management assembly of the Bread & Roses. The assembly, the community is composed of all those formal and informal realities, individuals, and even formal and informal associations, which sign a pact of mutual aid, are all those realities that cross and live the space, taking care of it”* (Interview 18 – Fuorimercato).

“Villa Roth”, a residence of the late nineteenth century, can be conceived as a common good assigned by the City of Bari to a group of migrants and natives where to live and also obtain residency, but outside the common goods regulation. The assignment of this place happened after a long dispute that started with a group of migrants who arrived there during the Libya emergency at the beginning of 2011 and their fight to get their documents. After that, those who remained in Bari started another dispute, with manifestations and negotiations with the City of Bari to find a house and that led to the assignment of “Villa Roth” through which they can have residency and therefore they have the possibility to renew their stay permits. Also, in this space, they also built a trade union self-defence desk, and with the aim that a criticality and an individual need can become a collective struggle. In addition, the reality of “Villa Roth” is strictly connected to the creation of the agricultural project “SfruttaZero” discussed above.

*“along the path of the dispute of the people who now live in Villa Roth, born in 2011 when they arrived ... have claimed a document for a year as refugees, then we supported them, for those who remained in Bari, in claiming the house and after a series of struggles, occupations, demonstrations, negotiations with the Municipality, they have obtained in assignment Villa Roth, publicly owned, from the Municipality of Bari. While they made this dispute, many of them who went to the countryside of Foggia, said ‘we cannot work there’. So, from there was born the idea of SfruttaZero ... the inhabitants of Villa Roth work seasonally, but for SfruttaZero. There are those who are from the first year, who in rotation, and they have a contract, from May to August, according to the hours of work they do. But for them if you have to put Villa Roth and Sfruttazero, for them comes first Villa Roth, because Villa Roth allows them to have the residence and therefore renew the stay permit ... due to the Bossi-Fini law in Italy, you must have a contract of employment to obtain a stay permit. But contracts are occasional, precarious, so you cannot have the stay permit in a precarious and occasional manner, you are a person every day of the year, not a person only if you have the employment contract. So, Villa Roth and SfruttaZero are together, mutual aid, but Villa Roth is crucial because it gives continuity to people’s lives, which SfruttaZero would only give continuity under the employment contract, but it comes before people’s lives than the employment contract”* (Interview 18 – Fuorimercato).

*“Here there is a list of people who have been assigned the room. There are 40 people ... there is a rotation. For example, some migrants have left, others have arrived who have had residence ... This is a supportive, self-managed, supportive home. Self-managed by the people to whom the house has been assigned, but in solidarity when there are people who know each other and do not know where to lean, there is always a bed, a bed must be for everyone”* (Interview 18 – Fuorimercato):

## c) Safety Alliance Agreement

An additional public collaboration is the “*Safety Alliance Agreement*”. This model is based on the agreement between “*WeCount!*” in Florida and the “*Fort Lauderdale Area Office of OSHA*” (The Occupational Safety and Health Administration) to foster safety and health and to offer information and access to training resources to “*WeCount!*” members in agriculture, but also construction, and domestic work (even if not enforceable). By the agreement, the goals are:

- 1. Raising Awareness: Outreach and Communication:** the parties plan to work to share information about occupational safety and health laws; to develop and communicate information on how to recognize and prevent workplace hazards (e.g., through OSHA and WeCount! Websites); to speak or appear at OSHA and WeCount! local meetings, conferences or other WeCount! events; to participate or to convene in forums, as well as roundtable discussions or stakeholder meeting on hazards in construction industry and agriculture to help to create innovative solutions or to provide inputs about health and safety issues; to share information, among the staff of OSHA and safety and health professionals, about WeCount! best practices through workshops, seminars, lectures and training programs; and to encourage workers participation in safety and health by soliciting feedback on OSHA materials; to encourage other partners in South Florida (community and labour partners) to engage with OSHA as far as health and safety.
- 2. Training and Education:** the parties plan to work together to develop education and training programs on the prevailing industry hazards in agriculture and construction; to deliver or still arrange for WeCount! courses; to develop education for WeCount!, to foster the understanding of workers’ rights, the use of the OSHA complaint process, employers’ responsibilities and to communicate such information to those interested.

At the time of writing, this partnership focused on outreach to agricultural and construction workers during thematic weeks, for instance the “*National Farmworker Awareness Week*”, and the “*Workers Memorial Week*”, to distribute OSHA materials on accidents, injuries, and extreme heat. Another activity is education through workshops, where they educate workers on safety and health issues, their rights under OSHA, how to prevent workplace hazards and how to file complaints. One of the benefits for OSHA is the chance to go beyond the dominant government’s complaint-based enforcement, where workers go to them to file a complaint.



The problem with the government's complaint-based enforcement model is that the majority of workers, especially migrants, low-wage and undocumented workers, either do not know OSHA, or do not know where to file a complaint, or do not speak the language, or cannot go to the office during business hours. In this context, a community organization like "WeCount!" can bridge this problem, being often the first point of contact for migrant and undocumented workers in the community. Therefore, a partnership between a community organization, like "WeCount!" and the state through a government agency, such as OSHA, appears to be crucial.

*"currently the way that government enforcement works, it's called complaint based enforcement. And so, they wait for workers to come to them to file a complaint. That's the dominant model. And the challenge with that model is that the majority of workers, especially vulnerable workers, low wage workers, workers of color, immigrant and undocumented workers, workers experiencing child labor, migrant workers don't either don't know that they exist or don't know where to go to file a complaint, don't know what their rights are, don't speak the language or can't go to their offices during government business hours. And so, there's all these challenges for why they can't reach all of the workers who are suffering labor abuse and exploitation. Organizations like ours we operate on weekends, on evenings. We speak different languages. We do direct outreach to the fields in the worksites, and we have trust in the community ... If a worker suffers wage theft or an accident on the job or discrimination, the first place they're going to go to likely is their community organization. And so, they go to their community organization, we're often the first point of contact for workers who want to know if some of their rights were violated and what they can do about it. We also do these workshops, and so we're constantly trying to have activities where we reach even more workers, newer workers. And so, OSHA's interest is, we know we can't reach all of the workers. We know we have challenges with workers coming to us, filing complaints, knowing what their rights are. Groups like WeCount! can help bridge that problem"* (Interview 42 – WeCount!).

*"because of our workshops, we're able to educate more workers on what OSHA is. So, for example, we had a workshop, it was about 40 workers, and we asked them, raise your hands if you ever heard of OSHA. And only two people raised their hands. And so, because of our workshop, 38 more workers now know about OSHA. That's 38 workers who can share about OSHA to their family members, their friends, their coworkers. And so, it creates a network effect, and that happens every single workshop. It also happens every single time our organizers go out and do outreach where workers don't know about OSHA. And we're able to educate them on what OSHA is. As for complaints, we've already filed and we've been filing labor complaints to OSHA. Every single time that a worker comes to us and we identify that there is an abuse"* (Interview 42 – WeCount!).

## d) Institutional Conversations

The last model of institutional collaboration regards the institutional conversations between workers' organizations and the state to influence the rulemaking at the institutional level, by including relations that are based on shared platforms, rather than on conflictual campaigns. Illustrative are the conversations between the coalition "Trabajadores Agrícolas Unidos" and "PERB" (Public Employment Relations Board), the administrative agency with the authority to administer the union certification process in New York and considering all the problems cited in the section on state issues: a) lack of experience with private sector organizing and migrant and undocumented workers; b) lack of ability to communicate bilingually; c) no time limits for the certification process; d) lack of resources. These conversations are not formal relations that the coalition has and the "Farm Bureau" do not have. When PERB issue rules, both parties can make comments. I believe it is more about organizational capability to value the platform.

*"So, we engaged with them and we sent them rules that we thought would move the process quicker. They pretty much adopted nearly all of our changes ... that went on for a year, those conversations and getting the governor's office to approve the changes ... The second thing we did was during the New York state budget process. We went after money and got two and a half million dollars added to PERB's annual budget. That doubled their budget from two and a half million dollars to \$5 million. That money was to be used for a number of things. Number one to hire a private sector director. Someone who had experience with private sector unions ... The other thing they agreed to do was to hire a couple of individuals who, like the National Labor Relations Board, would investigate unfair labor practices. Up until then, if workers' rights were violated, it was the responsibility of the worker or the union and the worker to prosecute the case. Whereas under the National Labor Relations Board, the board assigns a board agent who investigates the merit. If they find merit, then the board prosecutes the case. So, we've been able to create a somewhat similar system to the board. Those are both very important things. Speeding up the petitions by adding time limits and protecting workers' rights. The other thing that we went after budget money for were to assist PERB to be able to translate all of their materials into Spanish and be able to communicate with Latino workers ... So, there's been a lot of work done with PERB, politically, through our political contacts within the unions and the governor's office and the legislature to improve the rules and to get more money for PERB ... So, although it took a long time and a lot of effort politically on our part, the rules that have been changed and the extra budget money, we're seeing petitions move more quickly"*  
(Interview 22 - Trabajadores Agrícolas Unidos)

The *“Interinstitutional Help Desk Anti-Labor Contracting”* is a further platform created in Italy, within the *“P.I.U.Su.Pr.Eme.”* project co-funded by the *“Ministry of Labor and Social Policies”*, the *“Directorate General of Immigration and Integration Policies”*, and the *“European Union”*, with the *“NOP for Social Inclusion – European Social Fund 2014-2020”*. This *“Help Desk”* is a trigger of synergies between different private and public actors against exploitation with the goals to foster the emergence from exploitation, and facilitate the access to information and services in five southern regions (Apulia, Campania, Calabria, Sicily, Basilicata) and to inform migrants and institutions on the activities activated within the project. This helpdesk can be accessed through a toll-free phone line, a multi-language website, but also social media, and in collaboration with different organizations, such as *“Comunità Africana di Brindisi”* in Apulia. Besides, in the context of the program *“Su.Pr.Eme. Italia”*, funded under the funds *“AMIF” – “Emergency Funds”* (AP2019) of the *“European Commission - DG Migration and Home Affairs”* and the mentioned *“P.I.U.Su.Pr.Eme.”*, important is a project realized at *“Casa Sankara”* with several partners and different actions, from a social pole (a multidisciplinary team composed of figures with different expertise), workshops, and training to the realization of internships.

Another example of shared platform is the *“EMPLEO”* alliance in Florida, US. *“EMPLEO”* stands for *“Employment, Education and Outreach”*. *“EMPLEO”* is an educational program that aims to educate the Latino and Hispanic community in the Miami area on their rights. This alliance is composed of community organizations (namely, *“WeCount!”* and *“Miami Workers Center”*), together with state-wide organizations (namely, *“Farmworker Association of Florida”*, and the *“Coalition of Florida Farmworker Organization”*), and institutional actors, including *“OSHA”* (Occupational Safety and Health Administration; *“WHD”* (Wage and Hour Division), *“NLRB”* (National Labor Relations Board), *“EEOC”* (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission), and the Consulates of Mexico (Miami and Orlando), Guatemala (Miami), El Salvador (Miami) and Colombia (Miami). Nevertheless, what appears important to highlight about this inter-agency cooperation is the EMPLEO toll-free hotline and the platform/meeting where to discuss data and challenges, together with the possibility to collaborate with other organizational actors. The centrality of consulates in workers’ education is an interesting element and component in this discussion concerning alternative ways to protect farmworkers at the intersection of state and community. The consulate appears to be an institutional actor often overlooked in research and union/community practice concerning agriculture and workers’ rights.

### 3.6. Discussion

As demonstrated by this research, innovation in the practices of exploitation and intersection of power, at the cumulative level, between the various actors in the agricultural supply chain, seem to be important features of the agricultural industry and food systems. The innovation and intersection of power in the agricultural supply chains are manifested in the varied forms of exploitation put in place by employers, gangmasters (contractors or caporali), large-scale organized distribution, buyers, and the state in its various forms of regulation and verification. In greater detail, at the conceptual level, I have divided exploitation in the agricultural sector into three levels of oppression and expression of power: community, supply chains, and the state/government. By community, I mean the environment of farmworkers in the broad sense beyond the workplace. As shown in Figure 2, at the community level, some illustrative areas of exploitation are: housing, transportation, grey labour (e.g., wage theft), retaliation, health and safety (e.g., extreme heat), gender-based violence, forced labour, labour mobility across areas or industries. On the other hand, at the supply chain level, some issues are the pressures experienced by growers from above (with buyers' bargaining power), and from below (with production costs), the fact that a few businesses/growers control production, the complicity of consumers, delocalization and lopsided competition, the recruitment in diverse countries, and climate change and its impact on harvesting and seasonal employment. At the state level, some issues are, for the US, the lack of federal labour protections for farmworkers, the H-2A visa program and issues in terms of resources and competences regarding agriculture. In Italy, issues are the emergency-based management of seasonal work, the lack of enforcement and the inefficiency of employment centers. However, this research also demonstrates that there is a transformative potential in the agricultural sector. Indeed, the innovation and intersection of power observed in terms of exploitation, was also observed at the level of labour organizing and activism regarding farmworkers' rights, as shown in Figure 3. In detail, I conceptualized the observed organizing in terms of organizational intersections, along the three levels cited. At the community level, the organizational intersections observed are 1) unions/community organizations (autonomous organizations); 2) coalition unionism (relations among unions and community organizations); 3) structural integration (physical integration of unions within the facility of a community organization); and 4) alliance between workers' supporters (between groups of advocates, namely students and faith groups, to support farmworkers' organizing).

At the supply chains' level, these organizational intersections are: 1) multi-party agreement (among union, growers' associations, and corporations); 2) worker-driven social responsibility (partnership between workers, farmers and retail food companies, beyond the union model); 3) ethical supply chain (alliance between workers, growers, buyers and consumers based on ethical production and consumption, and job placement); 4) alternative supply chain (namely, the building of a supply chain that is alternative to the market and mainstream supply chains, from production to consumption). Finally, at the state level, organizational intersections are: 1) partnership based on reception and joint production (reception of migrant workers through the provision of housing, and production through an agricultural project, all on a land owned by the state, and managed by a community organization); 2) management of common goods (management of land by communities, and collaboration among citizens and the municipality for the care and regeneration of urban common goods); 3) safety alliance agreement (among a community organization and a regulatory agency on health and safety); 4) and institutional conversations (social dialogue between workers' organizations and the state/government). From a comparative perspective, this research shows that in agriculture there are no relevant differences among the studied countries from a social and market viewpoint. The differences concern the institutional level and system of industrial relations. Consequently, the solutions proposed by civil society are partly shaped by the institutional framework. However, I believe that the organizing practices presented have elements of trans-national interest, especially in terms of public-private intersection and cooperation between the market and civil society.

**Figure 1**  
**Case Studies**



**Figure 2:  
Illustrative Agricultural Issues Along Three Contexts of Oppression**

<b>Community</b>	Housing (e.g., discrimination; skyrocketing rent)
	Transportation (e.g., gangmasters; no public transit)
	Grey Labour (e.g., wage theft; job misclassification)
	Retaliation
	Health (e.g., no shade, rest, water; extreme heat; pesticides exposure)
	Gender-based violence
	Forced labour
	Labour mobility (e.g., across areas and industries)
<b>Supply Chains</b>	Growers and pressure from above (buyers' bargaining power)
	Growers and pressure from below (production costs)
	A few businesses control production
	Complicity of consumers
	Delocalization and lopsided competition
	Recruitment in different countries
	Climate change and impact on harvesting
<b>State</b>	<b>USA</b>
	Exclusion from federal labour protections (NLRB)
	Immigration status, H-2A visas (e.g., recruitment violations)
	State and lack of resources and competences
	<b>ITALY</b>
	Immigration laws and emergency-based management of seasonal work
	Lack of enforcement and lack of inspections
	Inefficiency of employment centers to connect labour supply and demand

**Figure 3:  
Three-level Community Unionism: Organizational Intersections WITHIN the Community & WITH the Community**

<b>Community</b>	Unions/Community Organizations
	Coalition Unionism
	Structural Integration
	Alliance Between Workers' Supporters
<b>Supply Chains</b>	Multi-Party Agreement
	Worker-Driven Social Responsibility
	Ethical Supply Chain
	Alternative Supply Chain
<b>State</b>	Partnership based on Reception and Joint Production
	Management of Common Goods
	Safety Alliance Agreement
	Institutional Conversations

## Conclusion

This doctoral research in its various stages of development and analysis has been a continuous discovery, first at a personal level, then at an academic level, in terms of contributions to the literature about alternative organizing, community unionism, and exploitation in agriculture. In detail, the first discovery has to do with the innovation present in the agricultural industry, innovation and creativity in the forms and practices of exploitation. This observation emerged through the study of reports and literature on work in agriculture and was confirmed through empirical research carried out in Italy and the US. Agriculture appears to be an organizational field characterized by high innovation in the field of power abuse and exploitation at different levels of governance, from the workplaces to the community, from supply chains to the state. Secondly, the empirical research at the basis of this doctoral research, through a comparative research about alternative forms of organizing in two countries, Italy and the US, helped me understand how innovation can be found also in workers' organizing. Therefore, this research makes a theoretical contribution to the literature on union renewal and community unionism, regarded as a stream of research with an important descriptive and explanatory power in the discussion on alternative forms of labour organizing. All these alternative forms of organizing have in common a focus on community organizing as a source of union renewal. This research, drawing on critical sensemaking, the concept of sensegiving, and the critical pedagogy theory, shows how it is possible to subdivide agricultural exploitation along three levels of oppression: community, supply chains, and state. However, this research also shows how positive change is possible along the same three areas of governance, and through a transformative activism. In conclusion, on the basis of what has been done in these three years of research, agriculture appears to be a very large organizational field and characterized by different contributions in the field of exploitation and activism. This appears to be a narrative about agriculture that is different from the dominant narrative that tends to blame only certain actors, behaviour and attitude towards agriculture that is often motivated by economic interests or political values. What emerges from this research is that agriculture can be defined as an ethical desert from different points of view (community, market, and institutional), not disconnected from each other, but closely interconnected. However, this research also shows how this ethical desert can become an alternative and novel environment, through the construction of a reality that overcomes or coexists with ethical deserts, beyond abuses and exploitation.

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