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new populisms and a new rural mutualism**

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Agriculture and migration in rural southern Italy in the 2010s: new populisms and a new rural mutualism

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Abstract

In this paper we take up Scoones et al.'s (2018) challenge to analyse this new political momentum characterized by the emergence of various forms of authoritarian populism analysing what features it assumes in Italy. We look at the centre-left Italian governments in the 2010s (2013-2018) and at their attempt to build a new consensus based on a combination of old and new populist and neoliberal traits. In particular, we explore two issues: 1. a struggle for hegemony over the representations of Italian agriculture; 2. the "military-humanitarian" management of the "migration crisis" and its consequences on migrant farm labour. Both of these have emerged as responses to two deep "crises": in the domain of agriculture, the crisis of Italian small and medium farming, due to their incorporation into a neoliberalizing food regime since the 1980s; in the domain of migration, the "migration/refugee crisis" started with the "Arab springs" in 2011. After a description of four "great transformations" which have characterized Italian agriculture and rural areas since the 1980s in the context of the transition towards a new, neoliberalizing regional food regime (second section), in the third section we analyse how: (1) the representation of Italian agriculture is apparently dominated by the rhetoric of the "Made in Italy" food, with its features of "quality", "ties with the territory", "peasantness", "biodiversity", and, interestingly, a growing attention to the defence of (migrant) farm labour; (2) this new discourse concerning the defence of labour rights has been developed in a new phase of migration processes, started in 2011, and managed by the Centre-Left governments through a "military-humanitarian" approach. We argue that the Centre-Left policies in the 2010s failed in tackling the structural reasons of the both small farmers' marginality and the "migrant crisis"; these failures contributed to the defeat of the centre-left coalition in the political elections in 2018, probably paving the way towards a new era of authoritarian populism. In Section 4, we discuss a possible political alternative "from below" to both the centre-left rhetoric and centre-right authoritarian populism: new forms mutualism and peasant agriculture, animated by small-scale farmers, local and migrant precarious workers and activists, emerged in southern Italy since 2011.

1 Introduction

Scoones et al. (2018, 1) put forward since the outset of their paper a strong argument. They maintain that “A new political moment is underway. Although there are significant differences in how this is constituted in different places, one manifestation of the new moment is the rise of distinct forms of authoritarian populism”. The authors borrow the concept by Hall (1980, 1985) – who used this term to describe the rise of Thatcherism in the United Kingdom of the late 1970s-early 1980s, reminding us how Hall deployed this ‘contradictory term’ to describe ‘a movement towards a dominative and “authoritarian” form of democratic class politics – paradoxically, apparently rooted in the “transformism” (Gramsci’s term) of populist discontents’ (Hall 1985, 118). They clarify how they use this term to alert us, as Hall had done in the 1980s, that strategic shifts in the political/ideological conjuncture are underway (Scoones et al. 2018, 2). For Hall (1985, 119), authoritarian populism essentially ‘refers to changes in the “balance of forces”. It refers directly to the modalities of political and ideological relationships between the ruling bloc, the state and the dominated classes’. The main goal of Scoones et al. (2018) is to put forward a powerful call to scholars and activists committed to the promotion of an emancipatory project of rural transformation to re-engage with the politics of rural change and engage in a critical dialogue to deepen of our collective understanding of the rural face of such a new political moment, its agrarian and rural roots, its consequences for both rural working classes and the implications for what an emancipatory rural politics at the heights of the new challenges this moment portend.

As scholars engaged in the study and analysis of the social transformations occurring in Italian agriculture and the Euro-Mediterranean food system and as militants for a radically alternative political project aiming to foster the emancipation of the rural working classes, we take up here this challenge. We are moved by a series of interrelated preliminary questions that the reading of their work provoked in us: if we are living such a new and contradictory political momentum, in what ways is rural Italy experiencing it? In what ways does it relate to the deepening neoliberalization of agriculture and, more broadly, rural society occurred over recent decades? More specifically, what forms is this new moment assuming in the rural areas of southern Italy that have recently been described as globalising ‘enclaves’ of intensive fruit and vegetables production (Corrado et al. 2016a)? What strategic shifts can we detect on the political/ideological terrain of the struggle for hegemony over the visions for the future of southern Italian agriculture in the new conjuncture opened up by the convergence of the economic crisis of the late 2000s with the deepening effects of the social crisis experienced by rural working classes in these areas of southern Italy? Can we see an emergent new populism in this terrain? And, last but not least, how does a new emancipatory rural politics able to counter these trends and promote radical alternatives look like?

In the first section, we describe four “great transformations”, which have been characterizing Italian agriculture since the 1980s, – in the context of the transition towards a new, neoliberalizing regional food regime (Corrado 2016): 1) the “supermarket revolution”, i.e. the growth of retailers’ power in determining food production; 2) the growth of a limited number of larger farms and, on the other hand, the progressive marginalisation and deactivation of a large number of medium- and small-scale farmers; 3) the growth in the number of migrant agricultural labourers, often in harsh living and working conditions; 4) a new wave of emigration from the entire territory of Southern Italy. Then, in the second section, we analyse some elements of an ongoing ideological struggle over the meanings of agriculture and rural areas, occurring in Italy in the 2010s. In our view, if the 1990s can be considered the decade of the growth of neoliberalism in Italy – mainly introduced by the centre-left governments of 1996-2001 – and the 2000s can be seen as the massive deployment of authoritarian populism by the governments led by Silvio Berlusconi in alliance with the regionalist and xenophobic party of Lega Nord and the post-fascist Alleanza Nazionale (2001-2006; 2008-2011), the situation in the 2010s is more puzzling and contradictory. It cannot be fully interpreted as an expression of an authoritarian populism, even though the center-left governments under the leadership of Matteo Renzi (2013-2018) tried to build a new consensus operating an assemblage of old and new populist and neoliberal traits. In this section, we first analyse the ideological struggle over the representation of Italian agriculture, which appears as growingly dominated by the rhetoric of the “Made in Italy” food as both the

Ministries of agriculture and big processing companies and retail chains rediscover and appropriate words as peasant, quality agriculture, organic and traditional farming, biodiversity, multifunctionality (Fonte, Cucco 2015). In this sense, Italian agri-food system seems to have entered the “corporate-environmental food regime” (Friedmann, 2005), with two specificities: on the one hand, the “nationalist” character of some interpretations of the “Made in Italy” quality agriculture; on the other, the ambiguous attention towards the issue of (exploited migrant) labour as a new momentum in the “quality turn” in Italian agriculture.

Second, we analyse how the new rhetoric concerning the defence of labour rights has been developed in a new phase of migration processes, started in 2011, and managed by the Centre-Left governments through a “humanitarian” approach, partially different by centre-right xenophobic populism, which was dominant in the 2000s. Such approach has led to the “refugeeization of the agricultural workforce” (Dines, Rigo, 2015). In the final part of section 3, we argue that the Centre-Left policies in the 2010s failed in tackling the structural roots of both small farmers’ marginality (described in section 2) and the “migrant crisis”. This eventually brought to the defeat of the centre-left coalition in the political elections in 2018. In the last section of our paper, we discuss a possible political alternative “from below” to both the centre-left rhetoric and authoritarian populism focusing on new forms mutualism and peasant agriculture, animated by small-scale farmers, local and migrant precarious workers and activists, emerged in southern Italy since 2011, and since 2017 embedded in a national rural-urban network named “Outside the market” (Fuori Mercato). We outline the main features and we critically address the current difficulties of these experiences with the objective to provide insights which might contribute to a wider critical dialogue on what an emancipatory rural politics look like in the current context.

2 Italian agriculture and rural society in the context of a neoliberalizing regional food regime: four great transformations

Since the late 1980s, in the context of the transition towards a new, neoliberalizing regional food regime (Corrado 2016), Italian agriculture and its rural areas witnessed a wholesale restructuring that deeply transformed its economic and social landscape with profound implications over the composition of agricultural and the rural working classes. In this paragraph we briefly sketch the broad contours of such a process of restructuring outlining four great, and deeply intertwined, transformations that characterised it. The first and overarching transformation occurred in this period was the ‘supermarketization’ (Corrado 2016, 320) of Italian agriculture, occurred in the context of the broader ‘retail revolution’ (Friedmann and McMichael 2007). Albeit started in Italy later than in other countries of the global north, this process was of outmost importance for its agriculture. In the 1980s and 1990s, the intensification of commercial relations with the retail sector was the main channel through which the integration of Italian agriculture within the global food system deepened (Fonte, Cucco 2015, 269). The process advanced rapidly since the mid-1990s profoundly changing the ways in which food is distributed but also, and more importantly, the ways in which it is produced. From 1996 to 2011, the percentage of food distributed in retail chains has grown from 50% to 72%, while the traditional groceries dropped from 41 to 18% (AGCM 2013; see table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of fresh and canned food distributed in Italy (source: AGCM, 2013).

	1996	2011
Modern retailers	50%	72%
Traditional groceries	41%	18%
Other	9%	10%

The second great transformation was a rapid rate of internal social differentiation among Italian farmers. This was a process marked by, on the one hand, the growth of a limited number of larger farms and, on the other hand, the progressive marginalisation of a large number of medium- and small-scale farmers who still predominate the sector. The extent of these processes clearly emerges from the

national agricultural census, conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (see Table 2 below). Between 1982 and 2010, the average dimension of farms grew from 5 to 8.4 hectares. Over the arch of only one decade, in the 2000s, the number of farms with more than 50ha grew by 22%. The other face of the process was the halving of the number of Italian farming units, decreasing from 3 to 1,6 million.

Table 2. Number of Italian farms. Source: ISTAT's censuses of agriculture (www.istat.it/it/censimento-agricoltura/agricoltura-2010)

	1982	1990	2000	2010	2013
Number of Italian farms	3.13 mln	2.85 mln	2.39 mln	1.62 mln	1,4 mln

The disappearance of farms concerned especially small farmers. However, even the medium- and small-scale farmers who remained in business experienced a profound squeeze over their income. Despite the fact that the absolute margins of profit in the sector have grown in the period under consideration, the most powerful actors in the chains have increasingly appropriated a growing share of it to the expenses of farmers (Garrapa 2017). Within the citrus producing sector, for example, the farm gate price of oranges sold as fresh produce declined from 500 lire/kg in 1995 [0.26 euro/kg] to 0.15 euro/kg in 2010 (SOS Rosarno 2013). These data show the profound social crisis of an important part of Italian agriculture and rural areas.

The third process occurred in the period concerns the changing composition of the agricultural workforce. On the one hand, the still dominant medium- and small-scale farming sector underwent a 'defamilisation' marked by an increase in the relative weight of non-family waged labour in the agricultural workforce. On the other hand, the agricultural sector witnessed a rapid process of foreignization of agricultural waged labour. Since the 1980s, the number of non-Italian workers employed in agriculture constantly grew: the National Institute of Agrarian Economy (INEA, various reports) estimated such number in about 23,000 labourers in 1989, and more than 400,000 in 2015; foreign workers now represent more than one third of the total salaried workforce employed in the sector (Idos 2016). This process occurred in parallel with an increase in the rate of exploitation of waged labour, and especially of its migrant component, and the precarisation of the working and living conditions of a large number of migrants employed as seasonal workers in the harvests of fruit and vegetable: informal contracts and very low wages (largely under the levels of a living wage), and in many cases piece-work remunerations; dramatic housing conditions, as often, especially the labourers who move from one region to another following the harvests, find accommodations in abandoned houses in the countryside and/or in huge informal "ghettos" (self-built shantytowns or tent-barrack cities) – a condition that is extremely frequent for labourers of Sub-Saharan African origin¹; in many areas, the difficulty in finding a job without the informal (and illegal) intermediation of brokers known as "caporali", usually of the same nationalities of labourers (Corrado et al. 2016a).

The complex intertwining of these three processes is visible at its most in those "enclaves" in Southern Italian coastal plains that specialised, or deepened their specialisation, in the intensive production of fruit and vegetable during the period under consideration. Within the changing geography of the Euro-Mediterranean food regime (Corrado 2016), these areas progressively deepened their incorporation into transnational retailer-driven chains, often becoming important supplying zones of fresh and processed horticultural products for the consumption centres predominantly located in north-Italian and increasingly European urban centres (ISMEA and SVIMEZ 2016). In many of these

¹ For example, the "ghettos" of seasonal tomato harvesters in the Foggia province in Puglia, and the settlements of seasonal citrus pickers in the Rosarno area in Calabria are well known by the Italian and European public opinion, due to a number of denounces and inquiries by NGOs, militant organizations, mass media, etc. Such ghettos are present in other areas as well, such as in Campobello (Western Sicily).

enclaves, agriculture acquired a major role in the local economy, rather than losing it as in other rural contexts in Italy and in other countries of the global north. Thus, for example, in the Capitanata plain in Northern Puglia and in the neighbouring areas of Basilicata the local economy largely revolves around the processing tomato industry; in the coastal plains of Calabria (i.e. the plains of Rosarno and Sybaris), it revolves around citrus food production and processing; in south-western Sicily, it largely revolves around the production of table olives. In all of these plains, a large number of migrants of different national origins live and work in what are often describe as the harshest conditions in the Italian context, predominantly employed as seasonal labourers in the harvests of the main crops characterising local agricultures (Perrotta, Sacchetto 2014; Lo Cascio 2015; Garrapa 2017).

The fourth process concerns the phenomenon that has been described as the “new” emigration from Southern Italy, partially linked to the exit from agricultural labour market of a large number of members of the agricultural workforce. If the last big wave of emigration (toward Northern Italy and Northern European countries) had ended in the early 1970s, while Italy (and Southern regions as well) was becoming a “receiving country”, in the 1990s Southern regions become again an area of emigration, towards both Northern Italy and – especially since the late 2000s – other European countries. Between 1990 and 2010, about 2,385,000 people left Southern Italy, the 90% of them as internal migrants and the remaining 10% to emigrate abroad (Bubbico et al. 2011). This process shown that a more general crisis affects rural southern Italy and its working classes, one that goes far beyond the agricultural sector.

Arguably, these four great social transformations were linked to a marked neoliberal turn in the governance of agriculture promoted by Italian governments and the EU through a process of de-regulation of the sector that was followed by a private-driven re-regulation implemented through reforms of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy and unbalanced trade liberalization (Corrado et al. 2016b). As in other countries (Burch and Lawrence 2007), in the process of supermarketization of the agri-food system, supply chains became markedly “retailer-driven”. As a result, a handful of powerful actors – transnational corporations in the food processing and, most of all, Italian and foreign retail chains – through their “buyer power” became increasingly able to influence where, how, by whom, and at which price food is produced. Such a process went hand in hand with the integration of farms into increasingly vertical and hierarchized supply chains. Within this change in the productive landscape, as new “food authorities” (Dixon 2007), retailers determine food production standards and, crucially, the ways in which food is produced. Since only relatively bigger companies are able to meet the requests – and the prices – of retail chains, the supermarket revolution was an important factor driving the accelerate rate of social differentiation among farmers and the attendant marginalisation of medium- and small-scale farmers and disappearance of farms. The changing power relations and the intensification of accumulation “from above” within retailer-driven chains drove an ‘intensification of workplace regimes’ (Rogaly 2008) that underlies the changes in the composition of the agricultural workforce. A widespread strategy adopted by farmers to respond to the squeeze they were experiencing was the search for cheap and flexible workforce, in order to both lower the labour costs, and meet the “just-in-time” demands of retail chains and food processing factories. Migrant workers represented such a cheap and flexible workforce. National and local policies towards migrant labourers, which can be considered one of the main features of the “authoritarian populism” in Italy in the 1990s and 2000s, also played a major role in co-determining these conditions. Also in this field, the process was fuelled by a complex intertwinement of the deregulation of labour markets and their regulation through migration policies. First, the national laws on migration rendered migrant labourers vulnerable due to their legal status (either without a residence permit, or with residence permits linked to their labour contracts or asylum application)². Such laws represented an element of regulation of agricultural labour markets in the direction of the “differential inclusion”³ (Mezzadra and Nielson,

²With a noteworthy continuity between the laws issued by center-left and center-right governments.

³It is important to note that labourers employed in agriculture have very diverse legal statuses: EU workers (especially from Romania, Bulgaria and Poland), and their mobility in the EU is free; workers with a regular residence permit for labour reasons; workers with seasonal labour permits; workers with “humanitarian” residence permits (for asylum application, or for humanitarian protection); undocumented migrants. Such

2013) of migrant labourers. Second, the lack of public intervention for the accommodation and transport of migrant (especially seasonal) labourers in rural areas caused a residential segregation of workers, whose access to towns and contacts with local population are very difficult and rare⁴. Third, the lack of public policies aiming at regulating the intermediation between labourers and employers, which have caused the “monopoly” of labour brokers (named “caporali”) in the intermediation activities, thus rendering labourers dependent from brokers.

It is worth-noting how in this phase, in these enclaves, the deepening social crisis experienced by local farmers and rural labour did not produce any major mobilisation against the governments in power or the powerful actors gaining in the ongoing social transformations. Arguably, the availability of a cheap reserve of migrant labour not only represented a ‘survival strategy’ for many farmers. It also contributed to prevent the explosion of open social mobilisations by (small) farmers and the rural working classes. In contrast, in these areas, such processes created a certain number of conflicts and tensions between migrant workers (especially those moving seasonally from one area to another) and local population (e.g. the revolt of Rosarno in 2010, see Corrado 2011), or between migrant workers and their employers (e.g. the strike in Nardò in 2011, in Southern Apulia (Perrotta and Sacchetto 2014).

3 Agriculture and migration in the 2010s: a new moment in Italian populism?

In this section, we aim at detecting elements of an ongoing ideological struggle over the meanings of agriculture and rural areas, occurring in Italy in the 2010s, but whose roots must be traced back in the preceding decades. The two central fields around which we see a struggle for the formation of a hegemonic common sense taking a concrete form are, on the one hand, the different interpretations of the importance of agriculture and of the central features of Italian agriculture, and on the other hand the phenomenon of migration that crosses this sector (but not only this sector).

We argue the situation in the current decade is more puzzled and disordered than in the previous ones, and that it cannot be interpreted as a full expression of an authoritarian populism. It is necessary to look at the ambiguities and the contradictions of the hegemonic struggle between social groups and political parties/leaders, in particular to the attempt of the center-left governments under the leadership of Matteo Renzi (2013-2018) to build a new consensus with a combination of old and new populist traits. After the political elections of March 2018, this attempt appears to have failed, and it probably will leave the field to a renewed form of authoritarian populism.

3.1 – The struggle for the hegemony over “Italian” agriculture

Over the last ten years, the representation of “Italian” agriculture has been at the centre of a cultural and political struggle, which brought to a populist turn in this representation. As shown in the previous section, since at least 30 years Italian agriculture has been characterized by the crisis and pauperization of the small and medium farmers, due to their growing incorporation in vertical and hierarchized global supply chain. Our argument is that a new configuration of the ideological struggle has been emerging since the 2010s: a representation of the Italian agriculture as “healthy”, “quality” and “ethical” agriculture (the “Made in Italy” food products) seems to be hegemonic in the discourses of politicians, representatives of farmers’ organizations, retail chains, mass media, etc. Nonetheless, it seems to meet some resistances in a relevant part of the farmers, who claim that their unique survival strategy is the exploitation of migrant labour.

differences – which constitute a clear example of “differential inclusion” – make the possibility of joint collective action very difficult.

⁴ As we will see in section 3.1, since the “revolt of Rosarno” in Calabria (January 2010) and since 2014 in Puglia and Basilicata as well, the issue of how to accommodate hundreds (or thousands) of seasonal labourers in rural areas has been taken into consideration by local administrations through forms of ‘humanitarian aid’, which have not broken the segregation of seasonal labourers.

To understand how this new configuration emerged, it is necessary to go back to the crisis of the agricultural sector in the 1980s. If, as we argued in the previous section, since the 1980s Italian agriculture deepened its integration in global food chains and markets, and, contemporarily, growingly relied upon cheap and vulnerable migrant labour, over the same years a new post-productivist agricultural paradigm have been developing. While the industrialization and retailization of agriculture transformed its structures, new policies and discourses emphasized new resources such as the “territory”, tradition, and biodiversity. Contemporarily, some scholars developed a new paradigm for rural development that has been resumed by the slogan “the revenge of the bone” (De Benedictis, 2002). The term “the pulp and the bone” had been used by Manlio Rossi-Doria (1958) to define the two sides of (Southern) Italian agriculture – respectively the rich coastal plains with their industrialised and intensive agriculture, and the internal mountainous areas, with their poor and fragile agricultural production. In the “productivist” and “modernist” paradigm, the pulp – rich in capital and technology – was of course the “positive” side of the coin, while the word “peasant” (*contadino*) was removed from the picture. According to De Benedictis (2002), since the late 1980s the “bone” is seen with new eyes and, surprisingly, its backward, poor and extensive cultivations are converted into positive virtues, even in the light of the EU agricultural policy: environmental sustainability, landscape, labour intensive agriculture, “traditional” products, etc.

De Filippis and Henke (2014) have noted that such “qualitative modernization” was not seen in opposition to the productivist model: they were considered as two coexisting development models, both supported by the EU agricultural policy. Since the 1980s, small and family farming, and its “pluriactivity” and multifunctionality, are appreciated and supported for their positive externalities on public goods such as landscape, biodiversity, environment, social cohesion, traditional products, and they are no more seen as a residue of a backward past.

As we have seen in the previous section, this positive representation of small-scale farming has not succeeded in “saving” a great number of small and medium farms from the deactivation process. The model of productivist industrial agriculture has dominated the structural transformations of Italian agriculture over the following decades. Nonetheless, the argument of the positive evaluation and defence of small-scale farming has been growing since then, gaining momentum since the emergence of the economic crisis in the late 2000s.

First, in a context of socio-economic crisis and high rates of unemployment, the Italian governments have claimed that it is necessary to support the agricultural sector, because of its performances in the export and the possibility of creating jobs for young people through their “return to the land”. In such discourses, the rhetoric of the “Made in Italy” food – and the hundreds products with controlled/protected denominations of origin – is a central point, and it is seen as an asset in the competition of Italian agriculture within global markets. Second, words as “peasant”, “quality agriculture”, organic and traditional farming are growingly central in the marketing strategies of big processing companies and retail corporations as well, who have partially abandoned the “productivist” discourse, and have seen in these productions new possibilities for profit. As Fonte and Cucco (2015, p. 264) have argued:

“In the post- modernization era of the 1990s, when in Europe a new paradigm became the benchmark for agricultural and rural development, the gap in the industrialization of agriculture and food was transformed into an asset by many actors in the food system. Intended as a marker for variety in regional agriculture and food, “Made in Italy” was constructed as a quality brand and the basis for the “quality turn consensus” around which many conventional and alternative interests eventually coalesced”.

A number of examples of such a move can be made. The first is the success and a relative “institutionalization” of Slow Food. As it is well known, this organization was born in the mid-1980s in the context of the left-wing newspaper “il manifesto”, and it is now a successful and influent international organization. Its claims for the defence of traditional products and for a “fair, good and clean” agriculture (Pettrini 2005) are now supported by the governments of all orientations, from Luca

Zaia (an important leader of the Lega Nord Party, Minister of Agriculture in the Berlusconi government, 2006-2008, then president of the Veneto Region) to Maurizio Martina (Minister of Agriculture in the centre-left governments in 2014-2018). The latter have used such rhetoric in the management of the “Expo” 2015 in Milan, also representing it as a great opportunity for the “visibility” of Italian agricultural products in the world. The convergence of such a vision of Italian agriculture and the “old” actors of productivist agriculture is still more evident in the case of the “FICO – Fabbrica Italiana Contadini” (Peasants’ Italian Factory): it is the “greatest Italian agri-food park”, inaugurated in November 2017 in Bologna, as a joint-venture between, among else, Eataly (a chain of medium groceries selling Italian “traditional” and very expensive products, connected with Slow Food) and Coop Italia, the greatest Italian retail chain.

At least in part, these transformations in (the representation of) Italian agriculture can be grasped by the concepts and arguments of “green capitalism” and “corporate-environmental food regime” (Friedmann, 2005). Nonetheless, at least two specificities characterize the Italian version of the “corporate-environmental food regime” in the current phase and are relevant for our discussion of authoritarian populism in rural areas: first, the “nationalist” accent of such a discourse; second, the ambiguous attention towards the issue of (exploited migrant) labour as a new momentum in the “quality turn” in Italian agriculture.

As for the first point, it is sufficient to say that the idea of “Made in Italy” food with its distinctive features of “tradition”, “quality”, “biodiversity”, “ties with the territory”, ideas originated mainly within left-wing social movements (for organic agriculture, support to peasant and family agriculture, political consumerism, etc.), has been easily translated into a nationalist right-wing discourse, which emphasizes the word “Italy” in the “Made in Italy” label, for example by the new nationalistic rhetoric of the former-regionalist Lega Nord Party, as well as by smaller neo-fascist organizations such as “Forza Nuova”, which founded its own peasant organization (“Lega della terra”, “League of the land”). Such a nationalist rhetoric is not absent from the discourses of left-wing politicians. It is worth underlining the populist character of these discourses, which usually do not evolve in the direction of a clear policy of “protectionism” of Italian products against “worse” foreign products.

To introduce the second point, let us start with a citation from Friedmann’s (2005) seminal article:

“Led by food retailers, agrofood corporations are selectively appropriating demands of environmental, food safety, animal welfare, fair trade, and other social movements that arose in the interstices of the second food regime” (Friedmann 2005, 229).

Among such “demands”, in Friedmann’s article the claims for better labour conditions of (migrant) farmworkers were absent. We contend that the attention towards farm labour has become very important for the Italian version of “corporate/environmental food regime”. This basically happened because of the great number of NGO denounces, mass media articles, and social movements’ protests concerning the situation of (mainly African) migrant labourers in Southern Italian “ghettos” in the coastal plains, starting from the inquiry by Medici Senza Frontiere (Doctors without borders) in 2004 (MSF 2005). Among the most recent of such denounces – grown in number after the “revolt of Rosarno” (January 2010) and the strike of tomato harvesters in Nardò, Puglia (August 2011) – see ETI (2015). Such denounces have growingly indicated supermarket chains and processing companies as at least partially responsible of the over-exploitation of migrant workers, and directly asked them to “do something” in this domain. Moreover, these denounces have associated the “Made in Italy” label to such over-exploitation; thus, the economic actors involved in the export of Italian food products perceived a great risk in such an association and the consequent necessity to “clean” the Made in Italy food from the blood and sweat of migrant labourers that harvested it.

The “struggle” against the over-exploitation of agricultural labourers has thus become a priority for national Governments and local administrations and the idea that such over-exploitation is not acceptable seems to be largely shared in Italian public opinion. In 2016, the center-left government approved a law “against labour exploitation in agriculture”, which has improved the norms against the

illegal system of labour intermediation known as “caporalato” and has created a “Network for quality farm labour”, an instrument intended to help “fair” farms to compete in the market.

Interestingly, and coherently with the neoliberal privatization of agricultural governance (see Friedmann 2005 again), the most important agri-food companies and retail groups have built private instruments to “control” farm labour, with the aim of reassuring Italian and European consumers on the “fairness” of Italian products. In particular, supermarket chains use and boost private certifications (Caruso, 2018), which are similar to those used since the 1990s on food safety and organic farming (GlobalGap, IFS, BRC). These certifications have been used as marketing campaigns as well: the clearest example is maybe the campaign “Buoni e giusti” (good and fair), launched by Coop Italia on its private label products, in order to guarantee consumers concerning labourers’ rights.

The system of certifications and ethical codes on labour can be interpreted as the convergence point of two processes: the subsumption of social movements’ claims in the corporate-environmental food regime, and the privatization in the food governance.

It is important underlining that our field research in some of the territories characterized by the over-exploitation of migrant workers showed that: 1) such private regulation is considered by retail chains’ suppliers (farmers and processors) as more pervasive than public norms; 2) both private and public new norms have had a limited impact on the concrete situation of migrant agricultural labourers; 3) the impact of these norms on farms has been controversial: only very few farms joined the “network of quality farm labour”, while private certification works as a further instrument of exclusion of (mostly little and medium) farms from some retailer-driven food supply chains, thus showing some fissures in the public “consensus” on these issues.

3.2 The “refugeeization” of migration and the “humanitarian-military complex”

This rhetoric concerning the defence of labour rights has been developed in a new phase in migration processes, started in 2011, with the “Arab springs” and the landing of about 600,000 (forced) migrants on Italian shores between 2014 and 2017.

A short discussion of this issue is interesting here for two reasons. The first is that the management of the “migrant crisis” or “refugee crisis” (New Keywords Collective 2016) in the 2010s has been characterized by a slight but significant change from the “authoritarian populist” management of migration processes, which was dominant in the 2000s, with center-right governments, towards a more “humanitarian” discourse. The second reason concerns the effects of such “migration crisis” on the composition of agricultural labour and the interventions held by local administrations in rural areas.

A number of scholars and activists have analysed the Mediterranean and European “migrant crisis” of the 2010s, noting that it can be rather considered a crisis – and a consequent reconfiguration – of the European border regime (New Keywords Collective 2016; De Genova 2017, Campesi 2018), which has caused a huge amount of tragic death of migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean and other border spaces.

In Italy, this “crisis” was basically managed by centre-left governments (2013-2018), notably with two Ministries of internal affairs, Angelino Alfano and Marco Minniti. We argue that their approach to this crisis was marked by a “humanitarian” accent, which has stressed the Italian role in “rescuing” migrants in the sea and in “receiving” them in the period of their asylum application. Such “humanitarization” of migratory policies has been enormously ambiguous: the rescues at sea have been realized through a “humanitarian-military mode of migration management” (Garelli, Sciarba, Tazzioli 2018) and the “reception” has been deployed through the hypertrophic growth of emergency reception centres (indeed, a new “industry of reception”) all over Italy, frequently denounced by associations and NGOs for the violation of migrants’ rights. Moreover, such military-humanitarian politics has had the effect of controlling, channelling, and differencing migrants’ mobility, as confirmed by the high rate of denials concerning asylum application, and the consequent new process

of “clandestinization” of migrants. Nonetheless, such humanitarian approach must be analysed as a new momentum in Italian migratory policy, stressing differences and continuities with the more explicitly xenophobic policy of centre-right governments in the 2000s.⁵

These events had important consequences on Italian rural areas, and especially on migrant farm labour in the enclaves of intensive agricultural production. Dines and Rigo (2015) proposed to define such processes as the “refugeeization of the agricultural workforce”. Two aspects of their argument are of interest for us. First, since 2011, a growing part of Sub-Saharan African farm workers, seasonally following the harvests from one region (and ghetto) to another, have been holding a residence permit for humanitarian reasons (as asylum applicants, refugees, for “humanitarian” or “international protection”, etc.). Their legal status is thus different from the situation of their colleagues in the 1990s and 2000s, who were more often without any residence permit, and thus considered “illegal” migrants. Nonetheless, these migrants don’t hold a residence permit for labour reasons. Their status depends on the outcome of the asylum application; in the meantime, they are “trapped” in Italy because of the Dublin Regulation.

Secondly, and more interestingly, seasonal labourers have been considered by national governments and local administrations more as “refugees” than as “labourers”. As we noted in section 1, the residential segregation of agricultural labourers in rural ghettos is one of the most important features (and reasons) of their dramatic living and working conditions. In the 2010s, local administrations have not tackled this issue through structural housing policies for seasonal labourers, but with “humanitarian” interventions aimed at “hosting” seasonal workers in tent cities or reception centres, especially in rural enclaves such as the Capitanata and Rosarno plains.

It is precisely here that the two discourses we are trying to analyse in this paper have found an original but precarious articulation in the 2010s: the discourse of Italian “fair” and “good” agriculture, and the discourse of the “humanitarian” approach to migrant (agricultural labour) crisis. On the one hand, the centre-left governments have answered to the crisis of small and medium farming – due to its growing incorporation in vertical and retailer-driven supply chain – through a rhetoric on the “good”, “traditionally sound”, and “tied with the territory” Made in Italy food; and, interestingly, by applying such discourse to the issue of labour, with an accent to the struggle against the over-exploitation of migrant workers. On the other hand, the same governments have answered to the “migrant crisis” with a “humanitarian” approach in the domain of “reception”, even towards agricultural labourers, growingly considered as “refugees”.

3.3 A return to the authoritarian populism?

In both the fields, such policies have been marked by an ambiguous and contradictory differentiation from the policies of the previous decades, which more explicitly aimed rather at strengthening the agri-food corporations on the one hand, and at “clandestinizing” migrants on the other. Moreover, notably, in both the fields such policies have failed in tackling the structural reasons of the two “crises” they claimed to answer: on the one hand, they haven’t stopped the “crisis” of Italian small and medium agriculture (rather, the most powerful actors in this sector have used the same keywords of “peasantness” and “quality” to raise their profits); on the other hand, they haven’t granted an “integration” of migrant labourers in rural areas, rather causing an even deeper stratification and hierarchization of migrant workforce within both ghettos and reception centres.

⁵ One of the last acts of the Ministry of internal affairs Marco Minniti has been the sign of an agreement with Libyan factions with the aim of “blocking” migrants in Libya. This agreement has been denounced by the UNHCR for the violation of migrants’ basic human rights in Libyan detention centres, but, at the same time, it has been presented by Minniti as the unique way to stop migrants’ deaths in the sea, and to reassure “Italians” against migrants’ invasion. Indeed, a very ambiguous and contradictory mix of xenophobic and humanitarian discourses.

We argue that these discourses represent a particular assembly of neoliberalism, populism and humanitarian rhetoric. In the mid-2010s, they probably gained an hegemony in the Italian political arena. Can they be labelled as “authoritarian” as well? If we look at the effects that such policies had on both farmers and migrants, the answer is partially positive. They further accelerated the process of “differential inclusion” not only of migrants in the agricultural labour market, but also of farmers in agri-food supply chains.

In Southern Italian rural enclaves, the new reception centres and tent cities for seasonal labourers, and the normative against the “caporalato” produced a further stratification in farm labour. Only a small part of seasonal labourers were admitted in those centres, while many others (undocumented migrants, workers without a labour contract, etc.) remained in the informal ghettos. Here, labourers’ living conditions worsened because of the absence of the services previously provided by local administrations, and their dependency from labour brokers is strengthened. Moreover, ghettos were even more criminalized by politicians and mass media, and in some cases violently evicted.

From farmers’ point of view, the law against the “caporalato” and the private certifications required for the access to retail chains represented new obstacles in their permanence in the market. They are now asked to “certify” the respect of labourers’ rights and to conform to the new discourse of “fair” Made in Italy agriculture. Most of the small and medium farmers are not able to compete in the market; moreover, they do not conform to the ideal-typical Italian farmer aiming to export his products everywhere in the world that is central to the proposed by the political discourse.

These failures and contradictions in the apparently hegemonic public representation of migration and agriculture exasperated conflicts and tension in rural areas. For example, in Puglia region – which can be considered the laboratory of this new apparatus, and where the “network of farm quality labour” registered the adhesion of a greater number of farms than in other regions – we witnessed to some interesting episodes of protest against these policies. On February 2017, under the slogan “No caporali si agricoltori” (“No caporali yes farmers”) a group of 200 farmers took the street in the city of Bari to reiterate their disagreement on the law against the labour exploitation in agriculture, approved in November 2016. These farmers affirmed that it is impossible for them to respect labour collective agreements, because of the downward pressure on the prices of their products. A similar episode happened in Sicily with “il movimento dei forconi” (“the pitchforks’ movement”), which claimed for a corporate and protectionist view of agriculture, in opposition to the power of global chains and multinationals.

These demonstrations were labelled as “bad” by the mass media, and considered as in opposition to the apparently hegemonic discourse of the struggle against over-exploitation of migrant workers. Marginalized in the retailer-dominated food market, and criminalized because of the exploitation of migrant workforce, the (Southern Italian) small farmer doesn’t feel represented by the hegemonic discourse on Italian agriculture proposed by the centre-left governments. His resentment is often ridden and incentivized by right-wing movements. In our field research we often confronted with the fact that farmers consider the exploitation of “blacks” (and, more in general, of migrant labourers) as a natural and unavoidable phenomenon. This idea appears to us as the basis of a much broader and more silent consensus in the rural areas.

In a similar way, the “humanitarian” rethoric in the domain of forced migrants’ reception has been contested in a great number of episodes of intolerance and overt racism all over Italy, not only by neofascist organizations such as CasaPound and Forza Nuova and by the Lega Nord, but also by other political parties and civil society actors. The electoral campaign for the national elections in the early 2018 was characterized by discourses concerning the necessity to “defend Italy” from the invasion of African migrants.

The defeat of the centre-left coalition in the political elections in 2018 is maybe the signal that Italy is going to live a new phase of authoritarian populism. We argue that the main reasons of this new turning point can be traced back into the failures of the discourses we analysed in this section, in

tackling the structural reasons of the both small farmers' marginality and the "migrant crisis". Yet, as we find ourselves confronted, on the one hand, with the rise of right-wing protests and the prospects of a new phase of authoritarian populism, and, on the other, with the failure of the policies and approaches promoted by the centre-left coalitions, to deal into the question of what alternatives are possible becomes imperative. It is to this aspect that we pay our attention in the following section.

4 "Fuori Mercato": a new rural mutualism contesting the ascent of new populisms:

A different response 'from below' to the multi-faceted social crisis in southern Italian agriculture has emerged over the latest years. Since 2010, some of the most important southern Italian enclaves of intensive agricultural production have witnessed the emergence of grassroots associations and political collectives that launched small-scale experiences of alternative agriculture. Animated by small-scale farmers, local and migrant precarious workers and activists, these groups now represent the local nodes of a national network inspired by principles of mutualism that were dominant in the early Italian labour movement of the nineteenth century (Ferraris 2011). Stretching across the rural-urban and south-north divides, the network – named Fuorimercato (i.e. "Outside the market"), and established in early 2017 as a trade union organisation – aims at building alternative, self-managed food chains operating outside of the supermarket-dominated circuits. In the vision of the network, such chains are seen as 'infrastructures of resistance' (Shantz 2009; 2013) that contribute to rebuild the economic power of a plural and fragmented working class and promote its recomposition around a convergence of material and political interests. In this last paragraph, we turn our attention to the practices that nurture it, and the political proposal they embody, in order to provide some initial elements to deepen our critical dialogue about the ways in which a new emancipatory rural politics might look like in the current context.

The origins of such an alternative political and economic response "from below" lie exactly in the same events that projected the question of the over-exploitation of migrant workers in southern Italian agriculture to the attention of the wider public opinion, in Italy and beyond, igniting the political responses "from above" that we have analysed in the previous section: the 'facts of Rosarno' of January 2010 (Corrado 2011). The dramatic sequence of events occurred in the early days of January 2010 facilitated the encounter amongst a group of the African migrant workers involved in them and a group of local activists of the Italian radical social movements who had been in the frontline of mobilisation in solidarity with them. They set in motion an intense dialogue characterised by a growing awareness that something more than the previous activities of monitoring and denounce of the conditions of migrant workers were needed to adequately respond to the challenges posed by the events occurred. Such an intense dialogue culminated in early 2011 in the launch of a new solidarity economy project, named SOS Rosarno (Oliveri 2015; Iocco and Siegmann 2017), the first of the grassroots projects we are considering.

The project – jointly promoted by a group of local small-scale organic farmers, migrant farm workers and radical activists – centred on an alternative organisation of citrus fruit production aimed at simultaneously meeting *both* migrant workers' need for a just wage and dignifying working conditions *and* small-scale farmers' own need for a just income. The construction of strong links with solidarity purchasing groups based in some of the main towns of central and northern Italy (e.g. Rome, Bologna, Milan) was pivotal for the success of the project. Purchasing citrus fruits directly from the farmers involved in the project, and at a price higher than the one practiced within conventional commercialisation channels, the critical consumers involved in this embryonic form of a self-organised alternative food chain guaranteed a fair remuneration to farmers, enabling them to regularly employ a team of migrant farm workers and pay to them a wage in line with the levels stipulated by the local labour contract.

Since then, SOS Rosarno's economic project has consolidated and expanded to the production of other food products (mainly olive oil, also central in local agriculture). In the process, its promoters also established an homonymous grassroots association, joined by a larger number of small-scale farmers, migrant workers and activists, which became the collective body responsible for a democratic and

collective self-management of the project and the promoter of a wider political activity at a local, national and international level. Importantly, in early 2016, the Italian and African workers employed in SOS Rosarno's agricultural project constituted a social cooperative (a *de facto* workers' cooperative) that has not only become the economic body managing the project. It has also launched an experience of collective farming centred on vegetable and grain production aimed at complementing the agricultural operations of the members of the association and generate employment and income earning opportunities for its members outside the seasons of olive and citrus fruits production.

Crucially, in the process, SOS Rosarno started to practice the principles of mutual support central to their project and the internal relationships between its members also on a wider scale. As the experience of SOS Rosarno inspired other activists to undertake similar initiatives, the association sustained directly and indirectly the emerging projects, sharing the knowledge and networks they had built as well as supporting them financially through a fund of mutual support built through the sale of their products. Between 2014 and 2015, two such projects were promoted in areas of Apulia and Basilicata part of the main enclave of intensive processing tomato production located in southern Italy. The first one – Funky Tomato – was launched in the north of Basilicata by a group of activists who involved, among others, some of the members of an informal group – Fuori dal Ghetto (i.e. 'Out of the ghetto') – which had since 2013 promoted classes of Italian language with the seasonal tomato harvesters of African origin living in a "ghetto" in the municipality of Venosa. The second one, SfruttaZero, has since 2015 been jointly promoted by two associations – Netzanet/Solidaria and Diritti a Sud – based in Apulia (respectively in Bari and Nardò). The membership of both associations is formed by local and migrant young precarious workers and both associations were established jointly by these components after their encounter in previous years over the course of local mobilisations for migrant workers' rights to dignifying working and living conditions. All of these projects mainly revolve around the self-organisation of canned tomato production and have adopted a chain approach – i.e. have tried to self-organise not only the harvest of tomatoes but also their processing and distributions.

Finally, the year 2015 was also marked by the launch of the project ContadinAzioni in the areas of Western Sicily specialised in the production of table olives. Also ContadinAzioni, as the others, emerged out of the encounter between local and migrant workers and a previous political activity by Italian activists to support processes of self-organisation of the migrants employed in their territory as seasonal agricultural labourers. The project developed between the area of Campobello di Mazara (province of Trapani) and Partinico (province of Palermo). Its original economic activity revolved around the self-organisation of table olives' harvest. The promoters of the project then established an agricultural cooperative – Terra Matta ('Mad Land') that collectively rented out a plot of land and engaged in the collective and self-management managed production of sun-dried tomatoes and olive oil.

Each of these projects has its own specific features and peculiarities that cannot be treated in great details here (see Iocco et al. 2017; 2018). At the same time, they also share crucial features. It is on these common features that we focus in the remaining part of this section.

First of all, as mentioned earlier, all of these projects are engaged in rediscovering and reactualising the mutualistic tradition and repertoire of contention – a tradition that despite having characterised the early labour movement had largely gone lost in the current labour movement. More specifically, these projects engage in forms of self-management and mutual support among different classes of agrarian and rural labour, envisioning these practices as tools to respond to the immediate needs of workers. Self-management of production is seen as a tool for precarious workers to self-generating their own income and thus responding to their housing needs and, more generally, to their own social reproduction. The way in which these projects, and the wider network *Fuorimercato*, envisions mutualism is a peculiar one – a 'conflict-oriented' one, to use their own definition. In other words, albeit these projects are involved in what could be described, following Wright (2010), as interstitial forms of social transformation, these groups do not exclude more confrontational ways of achieving social change. On the contrary, they see mutualism and conflict as two complementary strategies.

Within such a perspective, forms of cooperation, mutualism and self-management are understood as tools to rebuild the economic *and* political power on marginalised and extremely weak and precarious workers. And so is seen the construction of economic institutions and infrastructures, such as cooperatives and/or alternative food chains. In this sense, these forms of action are also meant to build the tools for an eventual conflict. More deeply, considering the heightened fragmentation of the rural working classes in the current context, they are seen as social processes facilitating the convergence of interests of workers and facilitating the rebuilding of a common identity. What is more, several of these grassroots groups have also been engaged in supporting conflicts emerged among the migrant workforce in their areas and/or in supporting their claims for a different and decent housing by migrant workers. In Apulia, the promoters of SfruttaZero, in collaboration with other grassroots unions, supported the year-long mobilisation by seasonal tomato pickers that culminated in August 2016 in a strike stalling for 6 hours the activities of the two main processing plants operating in the area of Foggia, including the one belonging to the multinational corporation Princes. Similarly, SOS Rosarno, SfruttaZero and ContadinAzioni have in recent years supported local mobilisations by migrant workers living in the rural ghettos to pressure the institutions to obtain access to houses – something which is often denied to the workers by private landlords – and the immediate recognition of a virtual residence to the many of them without it, a sort of right to have rights in the framework of current migration policies.

The second element to be stressed is that it takes inspiration from, and builds upon the knowledge and repertoires of the emerging post-organic movement of which they are part (Fonte and Cucco 2015). As other groups in the post-organic movement, the promoters of these different projects often claim the ‘peasantness’ of their forms of farming and are clearly engaged in processes of ‘re-peasantisation’ (van der Ploeg 2009) – albeit at different levels and in different ways. What seems relevant to stress is that most of these groups are engaged in forms of ‘collective peasantinism’ spearheaded by landless workers (SOS Rosarno 2016). This is more clearly the case of the cooperatives Mani & Terra and Terra Matta. However, to a certain extent this is also the case of other projects, such as SfruttaZero. This includes the collective acquisition of land and other means of production – generally renting it, rather than buying it – as well as a collective and democratic self-management of farming operations. Similarly, these groups are clearly inspired by the wider transnational peasant movement, and have creatively appropriated its discourse and vision of food sovereignty. However, their own vision has important nuances in at least two directions. First of all, while the ‘subject’ of food sovereignty is in many dominant visions primarily the farmer (e.g. van der Ploeg 2014), Fuorimercato’s vision decidedly centres on ‘labour’. The rural agent of food sovereignty building – mostly via processes of re-peasantisation – is the agricultural labourer, or to use Fuorimercato’s favourite term, the land worker belonging to the collective and/or cooperative promoting the economic projects (Iocco et al. 2018).

Finally, as it will be clear from all of the above, this network has also its own ‘populist’ traits. Indeed, one could argue that it is engaged in reclaiming populism in the ways suggested by Laclau (2005). Indeed, it does in a militant anti-racist way. Thus, even though the network talks of re-building ‘communities’, apparently reviving a common trope in populist discourses, these are clearly seen as ‘communities in struggle’. Moreover, these communities are equally inclusive of both local and migrant workers, and are not invoked or meant as based upon a common racial, ethnic or national belonging. They are rather based upon the recognition of a common belonging to the working class. What is more, in the call to rebuild communities is inscribed into a discourse and practices aiming at making of them the basis of a radical democratic project, one in which the assemblies of workers and its members are at the centre. Thus, it could be argued, recalling Hall’s (1980), and more broadly Gramscian concepts, that it engages in the sphere of ‘popular democratic’ rather than of the ‘authoritarian populist’.

Besides underlining the many points of strength of the network’s political project, it is also important to note that all of them are also to a certain extent points of weakness. Thus, for example, while the network claims to decline mutualism in a conflict-oriented way, whether and how this is doable in a

moment of low social conflict and with limited forces remains an open question. As the experience of several nodes of the network shows, economic self-management of productive activities requires a lot of time and energies. Moreover, coherently with a political philosophy privileging processes of self-organisation, the network wishes to support migrants' own self-organised conflicts and mobilisations. Yet such experiences are quite rare among the migrant workforce employed in southern Italian agriculture due to the high levels of vulnerability, fragmentation and competition existing between its different members.

Similarly, attempts to reclaim the language of 'peasantness' and sovereignty might be an important discursive strategy. However, as we have seen in the previous sections, in so doing they risk to overlap with other, and more powerful, actors that are also engaged in appropriating the words of the peasant movements. What is more, the attempts the network is making to re-invent strategies of repeasantisation and concepts of food sovereignty to elaborate ways on how these projects can respond to the labour question is important. However, this is not an easy challenge to take up. A deeper understanding of the challenges involved in such brave attempt and on the ways to overcome it is certainly necessary. To be sure, the promoters of the experiences we have analysed are quite aware of the risk of being re-absorbed by the promoters of "green capitalist" and corporate-environmental agri-food initiatives. This, however, represent only a partial antidote against processes of conventionalization and institutionalisation that have interested other movements for an alternative agriculture see Fonte and Cucco (2015).

Finally, also the radical democratic and egalitarian aspect needs to be treated carefully. In fact, what the experience of these groups reveals it is one thing to declare that all workers and members of the group are equal. Yet, finding effective ways to mediate between different members that equally belong to the working class but have different social positionings due to their gender, ethnicity, age (and so on) is an entirely different one.

5 Conclusions

After having analysed the main social and economic transformations occurred in the rural areas of southern Italy since the 1980s and the macroprocesses in which they are inserted, we have highlighted the opposing rhetoric and political discourses emerged around the representations of agriculture and migration.

Arguably, the humanitarian approach to migration is supported by actors who support the vision of the need for the promotion of ethical and quality made in Italy in agriculture. In the opposite camp, the *tout court* racist approach to migration is supported by those who have a more explicitly reactionary, nationalist and corporatist view of agriculture.

We have seen how difficult it is to assess exactly the relative strength and spread of these two opposing visions. In fact, however, both produce policies and intervention that end up restricting civil, social and economic rights of farmers and migrants living in rural areas. This said, we should not underestimate the result of the recent Italian parliamentary elections, carried out on last March 5. These results indicates how Italy is witnessing a new 'great moving right show' (Hall 1979), in which mobilization of consent through the diffusion of a discourse against the migrants and for law and order are dominant.

Such a move might indicate that future interventions to regulate social conflicts in the countryside and beyond will assume new authoritarian traits. Such interventions, if carried out, might well lead to a further intensification of these social conflicts. The profound effects of the last decade of crisis can difficultly be solved with such an approach. Austerity politics has dramatically affected the weakest sections of the population. The growing impoverishment and marginalization experienced by these social groups have fuelled their anger and precipitated a war amongst the poor. The winners of the last election made explicit reference to these feelings and reactions.

In the face of this situation, the emergence of a new rural mutualism represents an element of hope. The conflict-oriented mutualism informing the political projects we have analysed in the last section deserves serious attention. Its translations in practice deserve further analysis. It is difficult to know whether the small-scale projects put forward by SOS Rosarno, Funky Tomato, SfruttaZero and ContadinAzioni prefigure an emancipatory politics that can find wider implementation in the marginal rural areas of Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, and Sicily. What is certain is that these projects contrast an authoritarian and populist politics that promote the exclusion, stigmatisation and criminalisation of entire groups of farmers and workers – and incidentally of the weakest among the farmers and the workers – in a fundamental way. Whether explicitly authoritarian and racist, or dressed in rhetorical reference to a pro- “quality”, pro-peasant and humanitarian discourse, dominant policies and political approaches are in the last instance characterized by an absence of attention to the claims of, and a silencing of the voices of, peasants and workers, migrants or not, of the land. In contrast, the political project put forward by *Fuorimercato* aims to rebuild food and social sovereignty in terms that invoke a right to self-determination. It promotes a focus on the need to regain access to and control over resources and to reclaim the power of the subaltern classes to choose how to achieve the satisfaction of their material and immaterial needs. The different political, economic and social projects we have briefly described are all different expressions of a vision that is rooted upon the agency and self-organisation of those very subjects more adversely affected by the crises in agriculture and migration, on the reinvention of means and tools for participation in politics and decision-making, and on principles of solidarity and mutual aid and support between small-farmers and workers – beyond their national origins. Starting from the material needs for their own components, these organizations have tried to relate the different social tensions resulted from the multi-faceted crisis experienced in rural areas of southern Italy and to do it by countering the authoritarian turn taking place. The joint construction of infrastructures of resistance is proposed as the only possible way for the equitable re-appropriation of resources for those who do not have sufficient individual means and find themselves marginalized or even crushed. In this proposal, the centrality of agriculture as a starting point for the emergence of a counter-power is not a coincidence.

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The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI) is a new initiative focused on understanding the contemporary moment and building alternatives. New exclusionary politics are generating deepening inequalities, jobless 'growth', climate chaos, and social division. The ERPI is focused on the social and political processes in rural spaces that are generating alternatives to regressive, authoritarian politics. We aim to provoke debate and action among scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers from across the world that are concerned about the current situation, and hopeful about alternatives.

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