

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Veronica Marconi for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Anthropology presented on June 4, 2020.

Title: Demystifying the Sensationalism of Human Trafficking: an Anthropological Study on the Systemic Exploitation of Migrant Labor in Tuscany, Italy

Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
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In the last twenty years, human trafficking has gained attention in government agendas and media coverage, while anti-trafficking projects have burgeoned worldwide. Anti-trafficking efforts, however, have almost exclusively addressed the issue of sex trafficking with a focus on rescuing women, while overlooking other types of exploitation. This is noteworthy, given that international policies on anti-trafficking specifically include diverse forms of exploitation, and migrants are known to be exploited in sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and construction. Focusing on the ongoing neglect of non-sexual labor exploitation by anti-trafficking operations in Tuscany (Italy), this research examines a) what determines migrants' deservingness of anti-trafficking assistance by the anti-trafficking system; b) what kind of labor exploitation is experienced by migrant workers, and how that resembles or contradicts the notion of trafficking; and c) how migration measures implemented during the "migrant crisis" in Italy and Europe are affecting migrants' vulnerability to labor exploitation.. Situated at the crossroads of European and Italian legislations, humanitarian and institutional practices, and migrant workers' experiences, the study took place across the Tuscan anti-trafficking apparatus and organizations addressing migrants. Italy is a pivotal site for such research being a lead country on both the early adoption of international policy against trafficking and the making of national laws supporting victims. Italy was also the 2017 leading European country in immigrant reception, hosting 80% of the continuous arrivals of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe. Adopting an ethnographic approach, this research investigates the barriers to extending anti-trafficking support to migrants subjected to non-sexual labor exploitation. In doing so, it reveals the

interconnections between the emergence of anti-trafficking in the particular contexts of neoliberal, unprotected labor regimes and stringent migration measures. Data collection was undertaken in 2018, utilizing semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and archival research. The use of the ethnographic extended case method (ECM) highlighted the discrepancies between normative prescriptions and everyday practices, while shining light on internal contradictions and structural forces.

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Demystifying the Sensationalism of Human Trafficking: an Anthropological Study on the  
Systemic Exploitation of Migrant Labor in Tuscany, Italy

by  
Veronica Marconi

A DISSERTATION  
Submitted to  
Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Presented June 4, 2020  
Commencement June 2021

Doctor of Philosophy dissertation of Veronica Marconi presented on June 4, 2020.

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Veronica Marconi, Author

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During the course of my doctoral studies I have benefitted from more people that I can mention who have provided support, encouragement, time, and energy leading to the successful completion of this dissertation. In particular, I am very thankful to my parents Andrea and Antonella for loving me in every way they could and watching me going after my PhD with compassion and space. I am giving thanks to my advisor Lisa Price for believing in me throughout the process even when I had lost trust in myself and to Oregon State University for this PhD opportunity. I am grateful for all my research participants, without whom I wouldn't have anything to dissert about. I am very thankful to my committee members Kenny Maes, Bryan Tilt, David Bernell, Fina Carpena-Mendez, and Dwaine Plaza, as I have learnt valuable lessons from each one and received generous support through the years. I am thankful to the SYLFF fellowship program that funded my fieldwork research. I am thankful to my friend and fellow scholar Rising Daye for illuminating some of the steps of the way, having walked through a similar jungle before me. I want to thank Adam Haley for being a great sounding board and editing my Italian-style writing. I am giving thanks to this land, home of the Kalapuaia-Chinook people and other native tribes who were forcibly removed or massacred. And finally, I am giving thanks to my spiritual guides that escorted me through this journey and reminded me that apparent obstacles are opportunities for growth.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### *Topic and background of study*

This study focuses on the neglect of non-sexual labor exploitation by the anti-trafficking system in Tuscany, Italy. In the last twenty-five years, anti-trafficking policies, organizations, and multilateral interventions have proliferated worldwide to address the phenomenon of trafficking in persons. Critical interdisciplinary scholars have pointed out, however, that the majority of those efforts have been directed to rescue migrants engaging in sex work, problematically neglecting other forms of labor exploitation (Bernstein 2010; Brennan 2008; Godziak and Bump 2008; Hoang 2016; Kelly 2005; McCarthy 2014; Molland 2013; Peters 2014; Wylie 2016; Zhang 2012). This is of central importance given the growing presence of transnational migrants in Italy and worldwide.

In data comparison, statistics report the overwhelming presence of sex trafficking, since the majority of studies are primarily concerned with issues of sex and not labor (Godziak and Bump 2008). This reinforces a sense that human trafficking is about sex, with a primary focus on women and girls, and while there are isolated estimates of the magnitude of labor trafficking and the existence of trafficked men, the literature “suffers from an acute case of empirical anemia” (Zhang 2012, 471). Despite this gross omission, there is still almost no academic work on non-sexual labor trafficking (McCarthy 2014). This is noteworthy, given that international policies on human trafficking specifically include diverse forms of exploitation, including “*forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs*” (Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons adopted by the United Nation General Assembly in 2000, 42).

Migrants are known to be exploited to different degrees in sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and construction, yet comparatively very little attention has been paid to them by anti-trafficking NGOs (Castelli 2014; Cole 2007; Amnesty International 2012). On the other hand, while migrant women are imagined as necessarily forced to work in the sex industry, qualitative studies have shown that this is a media, government, or NGO construction, contradicting the views of women who experienced sex exploitation first-handedly and reported otherwise (Kelly 2005; Peters 2014; Hoang 2016; Vance 2012).

To date, the literature on human trafficking is expansive, yet anthropological scholarship in this emerging field is rather meager. The interdisciplinary critical literature on anti-trafficking is largely focused on anti-prostitution policy (Bernstein 2007; Chapkis 2003; Deozema 2002) and on constructed notions of women's vulnerability and victimhood by anti-trafficking campaigns (Fukushima 2016; Hoang 2016; Peters 2014). Important scholarship on anti-trafficking initiatives does exist among anthropologists (Augustin 2007; Giordano 2008; Molland 2012) and sociologists (Bernstein 2010; Kempadoo 2015; Hoang 2016; Blanchette and Silva 2016), yet it focuses specifically and exclusively on sex trafficking and the trafficking of women. This empirical anemia noted by Zhang (2012) is eased by rare anthropological studies that address the impact of anti-trafficking policies on exploited migrant workers, without a narrow focus on women and trafficking for sex (Mahdavi 2011; Anker and Liempt 2012). Building on these efforts, my research investigates the barriers to extending anti-trafficking support to migrants subjected to non-sexual labor exploitation. In doing so, it reveals the interconnections between the emergence of anti-trafficking in the particular contexts of neoliberal, unprotected labor regimes and stringent migration measures.

This study requires and builds on insights from three bodies of literature: the anthropology of humanitarianism and development, the anthropology of migration, and the cross-disciplinary literature on human trafficking (sociology, political sciences, anthropology, law, gender studies). Both anthropologists of humanitarianism and anthropologists of migration offer critical insights on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that diverge from the celebratory narratives of governments and agencies involved in humanitarian practices (Fisher 1997). Specifically, emerging scholarship has defined humanitarianism as a policy of nation-states (Fassin 2007), examining state agendas behind humanitarian projects that address migrants (Ticktin 2005; Fassin 2005). Despite the highly politicized contexts in which humanitarian NGOs operate, scholars have revealed how NGOs are presented as politically neutral through myths of god's kingdom and discourses of the market (Bornstein 2005). Despite this façade, however, NGOs are not at all post-national as they are sub-contracted by states and can function as governing entities (Ong 2006). The neutrality that humanitarian actions portray is instead seen as hiding economic or political interests, more of an attempt to manipulate the terms of engagement than an expression of humanitarian justice (Redfield 2011). To uncover such interests, anthropologists called for a critical examination of policy, intended as an instrumental tool in the governing practices of modern nation-states (Shore and Wright 1997), and particularly anti-policies intended as mandates and programs whose stated objective is to combat or negate bad things while "governing in the name of anti" (Walters 2008, 267). Responding to this call, this study inscribes the anti-trafficking apparatus within the broader arena of governance in the name of anti, thereby mapping out the different configurations of governmentality emerging from the international, national, and regional anti-trafficking mandates guiding the anti-trafficking operations in Tuscany.

While anti-trafficking mandates provide a concrete operationalization of humanitarian actions, they cannot be understood as holding hegemonic power over the anti-trafficking workers who adopt them. Despite its heuristic contributions, post-development theory (Ferguson 1994; Escobar 1995) has been criticized for providing monolithic and hegemonic representations of development and of its participants, causing the stagnation of the study of development in anthropology (Friedman 2006). Such a perspective does not shed light on the much more complex relationship between policy and actual practice or on the multifaceted results that such a relationship generates (Mosse 2005). Adapting this methodological framework, the research investigates how humanitarian providers adhere to, oppose, and struggle with existing anti-trafficking policy, and how that influences the current exclusion of non-sexual exploitation from anti-trafficking support.

The extension of social and citizenship rights to migrants crossing national borders can be directly linked with whether they are depicted and viewed as deserving of such support. In turn, this can be based on the construction of migrant illegality by the state (Willen 2007; DeGenova 2005), on discursive framing of border-crossers' motives for migrating (Yarris and Castañeda 2015), and on conceptualizations of bodily suffering (Fassin 2005; Ticktin 2011). Anthropologists interested in migrant populations—mostly refugees and asylum seekers—and their access to socio-political rights have demonstrated how conceptualizations of bodily suffering have become critical in determining eligibility to assistance. Migrants need to be in exceptional states of distress and preferably a measurable state of suffering that takes place in the body, instead of the narratives of threats typical of political asylum seekers (Fassin 2011). The migrants' "suffering body" thus gains priority over the politically threatened body, where political recognition and assistance are provided on the grounds of illness (Ticktin 2005; Fassin

2005). Humanitarianism does not operate as an equal, systematic tool but “enacts as a form of justice based on the exceptionality of an individual” (Ticktin 2011, 259). Exceptionality, it is argued, is generally more typical of cases involving female individuals, making gender and sexual violence the unprecedented focus of humanitarian efforts (Ticktin 2011). While these findings are contextually specific to the assistance of asylum seekers in France, they provide a useful ground to conceptualize a broader trend in receiving migrants elsewhere in Europe, and specifically the support or neglect of migrants experiencing non-sexual labor exploitation.

### ***Research question and sub-questions***

The aim of this project is to investigate the factors contributing to the exclusion of potential victims of trafficking by the anti-trafficking apparatus in Tuscany (Italy). Situated at the crossroads of European and Italian legislations, humanitarian and institutional practices, and migrant workers’ experiences, the overarching question guiding this study asks:

*Why is migrant labor exploitation neglected by the anti-trafficking system of Tuscany, Italy?*

The sub-questions guiding this study ask:

- a. What determines migrants’ deservingness of anti-trafficking assistance, according to members of the anti-trafficking system in Tuscany, Italy?
- b. What types of labor exploitation are experienced by migrant workers, and how do they resemble or contradict the notion of trafficking?
  - b.2 How does the State contribute to creating migrant workers’ vulnerability?
- c. How are migration measures implemented during the “migrant crisis” in Italy and Europe affecting migrants’ vulnerability to labor exploitation?

c.2 How has the anti-trafficking system adapted to and integrated with the asylum system that has emerged during the “migrant crisis”?

I address these questions in three separate manuscript chapters. The first manuscript reveals and unpacks the discursive narratives brought forth by anti-trafficking stakeholders to explain and justify the widespread neglect of migrants exploited for non-sexual labor. The second manuscript examines the relationship between labor exploitation and human trafficking by detailing key features of the labor context in Italy and then analyzing the perspectives of a sample of migrant workers experiencing difficulties in Tuscany. The third manuscript investigates how the anti-trafficking apparatus has recently integrated with state responses to the European “migration crisis.” In the final chapter of the dissertation, I draw together the findings and their greater implication for the study of migration.

### ***Methodology***

This dissertation presents the results of an ethnographic study conducted on anti-human trafficking in relation to the neglect of non-sexual labor exploitation in Tuscany, Italy. The methodological approach I utilized took inspiration from Michael Burawoy’s expansion of the extended case method (ECM), originally spearheaded by the Manchester School of anthropology (Tavory and Timmermans 2009). According to Burawoy, the ECM “applies reflexive science to ethnography in order to extract the general from the unique, to move from the ‘micro’ to the macro,’ and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory” (1998, 5).

In line with this method, my research is rooted in ethnography, in that it utilized standard ethnographic techniques such as observation, participant observation, and qualitative interviews.

In the ECM, ethnographic techniques are employed to bring up discrepancies between normative prescriptions and everyday practices, while shining light on internal contradictions *and* macro and structural forces. The specific emphasis on macro forces, namely the organization of labor and migration in Italy, and their key incorporation in the analysis differentiate this methodology from standard ethnographic methods. Another central component of this approach is the inclusion of reflexivity as an integral part of the research process (Salazar 2019; Davies 2008). Here, my unique perceptions as the researcher are “raised to the level of explicit consciousness” (Burawoy 1998, 6) instead of being concealed, as they guided and informed the research process itself. This is evident in chapter three, where my own frustrations with not finding human trafficking by the book highlight the discrepancies between how trafficking is described by policies and migrants’ experiences on the ground. Reflexivity is also central in chapter two, where I engage with what I call the *ethnoinquisitive* approach, an interview technique that questions participants’ responses and openly displays the researcher’s critical and often differing viewpoint.

These methodological stances express and are the essence of the “ethnographicness” of this research, where knowledge is created “through retrospective conversion of the learning, remembering and note-taking” (Ingold 2014, 386). This process consisted of comparing and contrasting the information that emerged from interviews with institutional personnel, migrants’ perspectives and insights, academic publications, news articles, data from participant observation, public events I witnessed, and consistent reflection on all of the above.

### *Studying up and down*

During my Master's research experience among street-cart food vendors in Indonesia, I largely adopted the paradigmatic anthropological hat of the participant observer. This meant helping my informants close down their carts, looking after their children when they were busy, hanging out at their shelters drinking *copi-susu* and preparing state skewers to be sold at night in the streets. Issues related to "researching up," widely discussed among social scientists (Nader 1972; Davies 2008; Padgett 2016), arose only when I interviewed state officials in an effort to understand the informal sector. By contrast, conducting fieldwork within the anti-trafficking apparatus implied a constant engagement with institutional actors, which required me to adopt what Goffman labelled defensive and protective practices, in order to assert my position as a researcher while also asking to disclose critical information (Goffman 1956). Perhaps given the critical nature of my investigation, focused on the factors behind the lack of something that presumably ought to be present, I was often met with a palpable diffidence, sometimes resistance, or nervousness. This led me to "spend a lot of energy on trying to maintain some control over the interview, as the management of the whole interview can become quite slippery and problematic" (Puwar 1997).

Difficulties in "studying up" (Nader 1972) started as soon as I arrived in the field. The volunteer position within the anti-trafficking system, secured during the preliminary reconnaissance survey and maintained through email communication from Oregon, was no longer available. The value of inconspicuously observing interactions without my participants being overtly affected by my presence, and of being exposed to emerging information, was now gone. That meant that instead of the insider position I was expecting to hold and conduct research from, I now had to schedule interviews and see my participants only on those arranged

and somewhat unnatural occasions. The process itself of securing interviews was challenging: some participants canceled our meetings with only vague promises of rescheduling, others kept promising to find time and never did, while others warned me they knew nothing about non-sexual labor trafficking—despite working in the sector. By the end of fieldwork, I managed to single-handedly interview 40 institutional actors, who gifted me with their time, patience, and reflections, for which I am truly grateful. As other scholars have complained, the study of state bureaucracies and social elites—such as asylum officials or immigration lawyers—who represent the state’s sovereignties and core national and local interests entails the difficulty of crossing formal and informal institutional barriers (Mosse 2006; Sorgoni 2011).

#### *Field site*

Italy has been internationally recognized for being one of the countries on the forefront on both the early adoption of international policy against trafficking *and* the making of national laws supporting trafficked victims (Giordano 2008; Castelli 2014). Italy was also the 2017 leading European country in immigrant reception, hosting 80% of the continuous arrivals of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe. These factors made it a key location to examine migration-related questions and human trafficking in particular. Within the Italian context, given that most scholarship on migration management has concentrated on the borders, the central region of Tuscany represented an uncharted research site where anti-trafficking practices responded to, and contributed to shape, European migration regimes.

The emergence of anti-trafficking efforts in Tuscany started in 1999, when the Italian state, through the Department of Equal Opportunities, began financing anti-trafficking interventions. In 2000, it required the participating entities to become members of the register for interventions in favor of victims of human trafficking, alongside the collaboration between

private and public entities. After a decade of disjointed activities and programs, in 2010, the state financed the implementation of a national toll-free number that in thirteen languages would support people subjected to all types of exploitation<sup>1</sup>. It also institutionalized fourteen regional postings, one of which was created in Tuscany, where a collaborative team got together to plan regional strategies to implement anti-trafficking projects. As a result of these meetings, in 2011, the region of Tuscany—the project leader—requested that the various public and private entities such as municipalities and NGOs join efforts under one system, called Con-Trat-To<sup>2</sup>. In the same year, the EU directive 36/2011 reviewed the European guidelines regarding anti-trafficking, which were to be officially acknowledged in Italy only in 2013 with the publication of the National Anti-Trafficking Plan (*Piano Nazionale Anti-tratta*). In Tuscany this translated into the emergence of a new regional anti-trafficking network, the SATIS project—the Anti-Trafficking System for Social Interventions<sup>3</sup>. The project responded to the required innovations, including the establishment of one lead institution and the implementation of an umbrella of activities and interventions: mobile street-units, listening and orientation desks, and reception facilities. Through the toll-free number and its linguistic and cultural mediation, a potential victim of trafficking is connected to an emergency refuge where they can reside a maximum of three months, before being placed in a longer term shelter where they will start their “social protection path” (*percorso di protezione sociale*). The path includes mentoring for integration into Italian economy and society, training courses, language lessons, and legal advice.

The SATIS project, named SATIS2 in 2018, is a network of participating anti-trafficking entities scattered throughout the region of Tuscany. Funded by the Ministry of Interior for one

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.numeroverdeantitratta.org/> for more details.

<sup>2</sup> The name of the project plays on the Italian words *Contro* (against) *la Tratta* (trafficking) *in Toscana* (in Tuscany).

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.satistoscana.org/satis/> for further details.

million euro a year, it comprises 41 public and private entities, including faith-based and secular charities, cooperatives to empower vulnerable populations, health and welfare associations, women and youth centers, and multiple local government appendixes. Its headquarters is in the city of Florence (*Firenze*), where I was based for the entirety of fieldwork. I travelled to the cities of Prato, Siena, Livorno, Lucca, and Pisa for interviews with anti-trafficking workers and other institutional personnel working with migrants across the region. I used public transport such as high-speed trains and local buses to travel to different cities and I moved by bicycle within the city of Florence.



Figure 1.1: Tuscan provinces



Figure 1.2: Tuscany in map of Italy

## ***Data collection***

### *Preliminary fieldwork research*

During summer of 2016 and 2017, I conducted preliminary reconnaissance surveys to identify anti-trafficking projects and key actors to work with during fieldwork research. Through an internet data search, I discovered the regional anti-trafficking program Con-Trat-To (which was

later renamed SATIS, and then SATIS2 in 2018), which I visited in July 2016 and again in June 2017. During this preliminary research, I found enthusiasm for the project among potential participants, including one of the directors of the project and two staff members, with whom I conducted explorative interviews. During the interviews, I learned that while there were policies and intentions in place to address different types of trafficking, the project was almost exclusively involved in tackling sex trafficking. This aligned with what I found in the literature on anti-trafficking and inspired me to formulate the research questions.

### *Structured and semi-structured interviews*

Fieldwork research was conducted for nine months, from March 2018 to December 2018, across the central Italian region of Tuscany. Through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling (Bernard 2011), I conducted a total of 50 in-depth interviews (4 preliminary, 46 new) with institutional personnel working with migrants in various capacities. Initially the parameters for research participants were defined as those who were active members of the SATIS2 project, but they expanded to include institutional personnel working in the protection, information, or evaluation of migrants. Participants included anti-trafficking workers (20), union workers (6), labor inspection officers (2), immigration lawyers (3), migrant organization representatives (1), migration and trafficking experts (5), asylum officers (8), and asylum reception center workers (1), as detailed in Table 1.1. The type of services provided included information on anti-trafficking support, anti-trafficking shelter and support, anti-trafficking street units, legal assistance, information on labor rights, labor inspection, evaluation of asylum claims, asylum shelters, and delivery of information on migration and/or trafficking to the public and academia. Interviews were conducted after receiving informed consent, and they were all recorded and transcribed. They lasted between 45 and 100 minutes. I used NVivo qualitative data analysis

software to code, classify, and analyze the interview data in order to identify key themes and categories.

Table 1.1 Interviewed agencies

| <b>AGENCY</b>                   | <b>TYPE of service</b>                             | <b>Interviewees</b> | <b>USERS</b>                                    |
|---------------------------------|--|---------------------|---|
| Arci Siena                      | Anti-Trafficking Information desk                  | 2                   | Sexually exploited women                        |
| Ester                           | Anti-trafficking Reception shelter + support       | 2                   | Sexually exploited mothers                      |
| CAT                             | Anti-Trafficking Street units                      | 5                   | Anyone sexually exploited                       |
| Papa Gio XXIII                  | Anti-Trafficking Reception shelter + street units  | 2                   | Sexually exploited women                        |
| Arnera                          | Anti-Trafficking Reception shelter + support       | 3                   | Exploited men                                   |
| ASGI                            | Migrant legal assistance                           | 3                   | Anyone trafficked                               |
| Union (construction)            | Labor information service                          | 2                   | Any worker                                      |
| Union (agriculture)             | Labor rights information service                   | 2                   | Any worker                                      |
| Union (other)                   | Labor rights information service                   | 2                   | Any worker                                      |
| Migrant organization            | Labor rights information service                   | 1                   | Senegalese migrants                             |
| Labor inspectorate              | Investigations                                     | 2                   | N/A   |
| Asylum committee (Firenze)      | Administrative body that evaluates asylum requests | 5                   | Asylum seekers                                  |
| Migration & trafficking experts | Academic and public information                    | 5                   | N/A   |
| Asylum committee (Livorno)      | Administrative body that evaluates asylum requests | 3                   | Asylum seekers                                  |
| Ce.I.S.                         | Emergency anti-trafficking shelter                 | 1                   | Women exploited for sexual and non-sexual labor |
| Zoè                             | Anti-Trafficking shelter + support                 | 1                   | Women exploited for sexual labor                |
| DIM                             | Anti-Trafficking shelter + support                 | 2                   | Women exploited for sexual and non-sexual labor |
| Arcobaleno                      | Anti-Trafficking information desk                  | 2                   | Women exploited for sexual labor                |
| Fondazione Opera Santa Rita     | Emergency migrant reception center (CAS)           | 1                   | Asylum seekers                                  |

I conducted eleven interviews with migrant workers to gather information on the lived experiences and perspectives of those encountering work-related difficulties in Tuscany. Three

participants migrated from Senegal, one from Pakistan, one from Romania, one from Gabon, one from Bangladesh, one from Mali, one from Cameroon, one from Guinea- Bissau, and one from the Ivory Coast. These interviews were made possible thanks to personal contacts who had become their coworkers or friends, and through trade union officials who arranged our meetings. Since I had not established rapport with my participants in the anthropological sense, most were intimidated and not fully trusting the motives behind my research, with limited exceptions. The interviews took place in public spaces, such as coffee shops and restaurants. They lasted between twenty minutes and two hours, and some of them ended before getting to any details of labor experiences. The language of these interviews was Italian in two cases and English for most others, depending on participants' preference. A combination of English and Italian was used when informants chose to express themselves in both languages. I used NVivo to code and analyze the interview data.

### *Data protection*

I recorded direct participants' identifiers (names, telephone numbers, email addresses) in the recruiting phase, as these were necessary to keep track of informants in a discernable fashion throughout fieldwork and during the post-research analysis period. Chances of a breach of confidentiality were minimized through the installation of a firewall on the student researcher's laptop. Such a measure required login passwords to access the material, in line with the OSU Information Security Office's guidance on the best means to ensure that data is only retrieved by authorized persons. This ensured the protection of data collected and saved on the device (recordings, notes). Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and/or saved on the encrypted laptop, and they were destroyed after transcription/transfer. During fieldwork, handwritten notes

were stored in a locked room that was only accessible to me, or in a locked drawer within a secured space in case other people share the same space. Data samples were not shared with individuals external to OSU. These measures protected both institutional personnel and migrant workers' identities.

### *Participant observation*

My presence as a cultural anthropologist researching the anti-trafficking apparatus in Tuscany was met with alternating degrees of unease, support, suspicion, and curiosity. During preliminary fieldwork I had secured a volunteer position as an administrator within the SATIS2 project, which would have allowed me to occupy an insider position and thus to have greater access to participants and activities. The position was no longer available, however, once I arrived on site. I nonetheless conducted participant observation, accompanying participants on three separate road patrols that provided health assistance to migrant sex workers. The patrols took place weekly and were composed of one anti-trafficking worker and a cultural and linguistic mediator. Before dusk, we "patrolled" by car the streets known to be sites of prostitution in Florence, and we stopped whenever we noticed a woman standing in what participants called "obvious ways." These observations provided insights into the challenges of addressing alleged sex-trafficking issues and the efforts that were made regardless of such difficulties. I used this data as a primary source for chapter two of this dissertation. During fieldwork I also participated in nine events related to trafficking, anti-trafficking, and/or migration issues, organized by the local government and non-governmental entities. These events provided rich insights into local measures regarding migration and trafficking. I utilized the data gathered during the events to gain a better understanding of these issues; I also used key speakers' presentations as a primary source for

chapter three of the dissertation.

Table 1.2. Public events observed and participated in on migration and/or trafficking and exploitation

| Event & Location   | Type   | Keynotes  | Date              |
|--|--|---|-------------------|
| Accoglienza: dall'emergenza all'Integrazione, Siena                      | Public seminar                               | Prefect of Siena, SdS, Mayor of Siena, SPRAR representatives                | 03/20/18          |
| L'Europa come rifugio, Siena   | Conference                                   | Dr. Mugnaini, Dr. Hartwig, Siena U  | 03/20/18          |
| RIF festival: Migrazioni, Bologna  | Anthropology conference weekend on migration | Dr. Favole, Dr. Severi, Dr. Sciortino, Dr. Tarabusi, Dr. LiCausi, Dr. Staid | 04/20/18-04/22/18 |
| Mediterraneo Downtown, Prato   | Presentations                                | Mordini, Cagioni, Dr. Olivieri, Gerali                                      | 05/04/18          |
| Mediterraneo Siamo Noi, Empoli   | Public conference                            | Dr. Bugli, Major of Empoli, Oxfam   | 05/11/18          |
| Procedura per il riconoscimento della protezione internazionale, Firenze | Jurist convention                            | ASGI, Prefect of Firenze  | 05/16/18          |
| Tavola Rotonda su progetti anti-tratta sul territorio                    | Round table                                  | Oxfam, CAS and Sprar representatives, SdS, CAT                              | 09/20/18          |
| Sfruttamento Lavorativo, Prato   | Public convention                            | PM Gestri, Dr. Nicolosi, journalist Magano                                  | 10/18/18          |
| Cambia-menti, Prato  | Public conference                            | Unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL) Dr. Nicolosi, Major of Prato, Dr. Beffoni,         | 12/01/18          |

### *Archival research*

Archival research included the examination of European and Italian legislations on anti-trafficking, migration, and labor regulations over the last twenty years. While I had collected substantial anti-trafficking policies in preparation for fieldwork research, the relevance of labor and migration legislations became more apparent while in the field. I also examined STATIS2 promotional materials, newspaper articles related to investigations of exploited migrant labor,

and online information on the entities offering anti-trafficking support in Tuscany. To gain an understanding of the decisional power behind the allocation and management of anti-trafficking resources from central government to local entities, I collected state grants for anti-trafficking programs in Tuscany over the last five years.

Table 1.3. Timeline of research activities

| Activity                                 | March-May         |   |   | June-August |   |   | Sept-Dec |   |   |
|--|-------------------|---|---|-------------|---|---|----------|---|---|
|  | Archival research | ■ | ■ |             |   |   | ■        | ■ |   |
| Interviews with anti-trafficking workers |                   |   | ■ | ■           | ■ |   | ■        | ■ | ■ |
| Interviews with immigration lawyers      |                   |   | ■ |             |   |   | ■        |   | ■ |
| Interviews with asylum officers          |                   |   |   |             |   |   | ■        | ■ |   |
| Interviews with union workers            |                   |   |   |             |   | ■ | ■        | ■ |   |
| Interviews with migrants                 |                   |   |   |             | ■ |   | ■        | ■ |   |
| Interviews with other participants       |                   |   |   | ■           |   |   |          |   | ■ |
| Events attendance                        | ■                 | ■ | ■ |             |   |   | ■        | ■ | ■ |
| Preliminary data analysis                |                   |   |   | ■           |   | ■ |          | ■ |   |
| P.O with SATIS2 mobile street units      |                   |   |   |             | ■ |   |          |   |   |

This study was carried out with an Oregon SYLFF Fellowship for International Research, awarded in 2018. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Office of Research Integrity, Human Research Protection Program and Institutional Review Board at Oregon State University (2018). All informants who participated in the study did so freely and with consent.

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## **Overall Undeserving: Discursive Renderings of Migrants' Deservingness of Anti-Trafficking Assistance in Tuscany, Italy**

**Keywords:** anti-trafficking, deservingness, migrants, labor exploitation, Italy

*Abstract:* This article reveals and unpacks the discursive narratives brought forth by anti-trafficking stakeholders to justify the widespread neglect of migrants exploited for non-sexual labor. Critically analyzing these discursive frameworks vis-à-vis anti-trafficking legislations, humanitarian actions, and news articles, I argue that in contemporary Tuscany the anti-trafficking apparatus is entangled within a complex web of cultural conditionings, historical legacies, and simplifying assumptions, which precludes the extension of support services to migrants subjected to exploitation in sectors other than sex work. The peculiarities of how such narratives are *de facto* re-enacted and reified every day on the ground are central to understanding the lack of anti-trafficking assistance available.

*Trafficking is relegated to the shadows of the law, widely discussed  
but rarely observed directly, and victims are characterized as silent,  
ashamed, or afraid to speak the truth.*

Heath Cabot, *The Social Aesthetics of Eligibility*

### **Introduction**

By accident of geography, Italy has been one of the countries most involved in the management of migrants arriving recently into Europe, as it was the point of entry for 181,436 migrants in 2016 and for 119,369 migrants in 2017 ([www.interno.gov.it](http://www.interno.gov.it)). These flows of human mobility

have been misleadingly referred to as the “migration crisis,” with the effect of increasing the proliferation of emergency immigration measures, including anti-trafficking efforts. It has been widely lamented, however, that such efforts have been almost exclusively directed to “rescue” migrants engaging in sex work, problematically neglecting other forms of labor exploitation (Bernstein 2010; Brennan 2008; Godziak and Bump 2008; Hoang 2016; Kelly 2005; McCarthy 2014; Molland 2013; Peters 2014; Wylie 2016; Zhang 2012). This is noteworthy, given the significant presence of migrants exploited in the agricultural, manufacturing, and construction sectors (Amnesty International 2012; Castelli 2014), yet very little attention has been paid to them by anti-trafficking NGOs and the Italian State. While many studies acknowledge the absence of research on labor trafficking<sup>4</sup>, it is particularly challenging to undertake such research, given that labor trafficking is seldom recognized or addressed on the ground by states and anti-trafficking agencies. Investigating the factors behind the neglect of trafficking for labor exploitation, however, is of central importance to initiate meaningful conversations about labor trafficking and anti-trafficking. While multidisciplinary scholars have lamented the negligence and kept on more or less critically working on sex trafficking and on the existing measures to combat it, no work has addressed the negligence as a pivotal issue in itself, with one isolated exception (Wylie 2016). The importance of such work is paramount to reveal the root causes of the negligence and to create momentum to shift the focus from labor trafficking as a problem that is not addressed to unveiling the causes of, and solutions to, such neglect. Why, I am asking, is it the case that those not supported are neglected?

Wylie, outstandingly, shines a light on the factors behind the neglect of labor trafficking, which she refers to as “the neglected norm” (Wylie 2016). Yet while her work explores some of those reasons at a global level through the lens of political sciences, the peculiarities of how such

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this paper, I use the term labor trafficking to refer to the notion of trafficking for non-sexual labor exploitation.

factors are *de facto* re-created every day on the ground are overlooked. An understanding of such neglect requires an analysis of the discourses present within the anti-trafficking apparatus regarding labor trafficking. In line with critical works on the anthropology of migration and humanitarianism (Fassin 2007; Ticktin 2011), my research adopted a largely ethnographic approach to bring forth this important process. This study synthesizes the richness of the ethnographic encounter, the specificity of the regional context, and the limitations that come with restricting the analysis to a delimited socio-geographical area. Fruitful steps forward would include ethnographic comparisons between studies investigating the negligence in other regions of the world. In this article, part of the trilogy making up my dissertation project, I collect and unpack the discursive narratives brought forth by anti-trafficking stakeholders to justify the neglect of migrants exploited for non-sexual labor in Tuscany. Building and expanding on the notion of migrant deservingness as utilized by medical anthropologists and other scholars of migration, I theorize these narratives as discursive renderings of undeservingness.

### **Conceptual Framework**

While migrant deservingness of welfare (Applebaum 2001; Gilens 1999; Horton 2004; Ong 2003; Scott 2008; van Oorschot 2006; Yoo 2008) and of health (Willen 2012; Yarris and Castaneda 2015) have acquired increasing scholarly attention, little is known about their application to the anti-trafficking domain. This is an issue of critical significance, specifically since the rise of neoliberal regimes, which saw the notion of human trafficking emerge as a central concern on government agendas, while a plethora of non-governmental entities flourished to tackle the phenomenon. Here I borrow the notion of deservingness, as offered by medical anthropologist Sarah Willen, to look at how the anti-trafficking stakeholders mentioned above made sense of the negligence of labor trafficking, i.e., the lack of anti-trafficking services

provided to migrants exploited for non-sexual labor. Willen defines deservingness as “the flip side of rights,” where rights in their juridical form are universal while deservingness is “situationally specific and often context-dependent” as well as “conditional to presumed or actual characteristics—intrinsic or extrinsic, mutable or immutable” (Willen 2012, 813). This has proved a useful lens to explain which types of migrants are deemed worthy of health aid and services (Willen 2012; Yarris and Castaneda 2015).

In my investigation on the lack of anti-trafficking support to migrants subjected to labor exploitation, however, a more fitting notion is that of *undeservingness*, since what is at stake is a non-presence and the discursive motives adducted to justify such absence. Hence, I focus not on whom anti-trafficking stakeholders consider worthy of attention, investment, and support, as the deservingness framework would prescribe, but why potential victims of non-sexual labor trafficking are neglected. Conceptions of undeservingness, as much as conceptions of deservingness (Willen 2012), do not emerge in a vacuum but rather are shaped by specific social, political, economic, and cultural contexts, as well as influenced by the personal values, constraints, and obligations of the assessors. As such, the concept of undeservingness indicates the assemblage of characteristics that anti-trafficking stakeholders recognize as not fitting the victim-of-trafficking profile and therefore undeserving of anti-trafficking support.

Modeled on Willen’s utilization of deservingness vis-à-vis the right to health (Willen 2012), I apply the notion of undeservingness vis-à-vis the definition of trafficking in persons as outlined in the Protocol generated at the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime that took place in Palermo, Italy in 2000. Article 3 paragraph (a) of what is commonly known as the Palermo Protocol defines trafficking in persons as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (UN General Assembly 2000)

Despite the UN's subsequent simplification of this complex definition into the “three elements of trafficking”—a) the *act* of recruiting, transporting or transferring, b) through the *means* of coercion, abduction, deception, etc., c) for the *purpose* of exploitation—the notion remains vaguely defined and subject to discretionary interpretation. What can and should be included or excluded according to this definition? Consequently, and most importantly, who can and should be supported on these bases? Given the discretionary space inherent in this vague definition, I chose to look at those working within the anti-trafficking apparatus as street bureaucrats, defined by Lipsky as civil servants who possess a certain degree of discretion on how to interpret and apply the policies regulating their job (1969).

### **Research Settings & Methods**

To examine how the above mentioned “negligence” translated into discursive renderings of deservingness, I selected as the main site of my investigation a network of anti-trafficking NGOs, scattered throughout the central Italian region of Tuscany, whose efforts were recently combined under the management of the program SATIS2 (Tuscan Anti-Trafficking System of Social Interventions). SATIS2 comprises 41 public and private entities, including faith-based and secular charities, cooperatives to empower vulnerable populations, health and welfare associations, women and youth centers, and multiple local government appendixes, one of which solely assisted “trafficked men”—a rare, under-researched occurrence which made this a unique

site of investigation. Moreover, within the global context, Italy has been internationally applauded for being on the forefront of both the adoption of international policy against trafficking *and* the making of national laws granting support to trafficking victims (Castelli 2015). As of 2017, Italy was also the leading European country in immigrant reception, hosting 80 percent of the continuous arrivals of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe. These factors made Italy a fertile arena in which to examine migrant-related issues in general and efforts to combat human trafficking in particular.

### *Sampling and Data Collection*

Through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, I conducted 50 interviews (4 preliminary and 46 new interviews), with a wide range of participants who, from different roles and statuses, embodied the anti-trafficking apparatus in Tuscany. What started as a study specifically focused on the work of SATIS2 personnel gradually involved a larger variety of stakeholders engaging with migrants and anti-trafficking efforts, including union workers, labor inspection officers, immigration lawyers, migrant organization representatives, asylum officers, and refugee center workers. Unfortunately, I did not have the chance to volunteer at SATIS2 as I originally planned, which would have given me access to work with the few migrants supported on the basis of labor trafficking allegations and hosted at the one and only NGO assisting trafficked men in the region. I nonetheless collected sixteen reports on such migrants, kindly shared by the NGO, and managed to conduct eleven interviews with migrant workers through unions and personal connections. In the nine-month fieldwork research, I participated in nine events related to trafficking, anti-trafficking, and migration issues organized by the local government and non-governmental entities. I also conducted participant observations, accompanying participants on road patrols that provided health assistance to migrant sex

workers. These observations were not directly related to the main focus of my investigation—the neglect of labor-trafficking issues—but they nonetheless provided insights into the challenges of addressing sex-trafficking issues and the efforts that nonetheless were made. Finally, to gain an understanding of the decisional power behind the allocation and management of anti-trafficking resources from central government to local entities, I collected and analyzed international, national, and regional legislations on trafficking and state grants for anti-trafficking programs in Tuscany over the last ten years. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Office of Research Integrity, Human Research Protection Program and Institutional Review Board at Oregon State University.

Importantly, my thinking has also been shaped in conjuncture with learning about public sentiment regarding the arrival and presence of migrants, as well as the aversion, or at best pity, and sometimes compassion that strangers, acquaintances, friends, and family harbored in their hearts and minds. In this sense, I embraced the methodological combination of emic and etic approaches, in that I diligently identified, recorded, and evaluated the narratives that emerged from the anti-trafficking apparatus. I compared and contrasted these narratives with migrants' insights, published ethnographic accounts, the news, participant observation, privileged witnesses' disclosures, and my own understanding, in what I call the *ethnoinquisitive* approach: an interview technique focused on stimulating the professional reflexivity of the participants, as well as gathering qualitative data on the issues at stake from a variety of sources. This approach became a tool for professional reflection for both researcher and participants, where I challenged the assumptions embedded in the participants' answers. It consisted of recording the narratives that emerged from interviews with anti-trafficking stakeholders, while comparing the information with migrants' insights, published ethnographic accounts, the news, participant

observation, privileged witnesses' disclosures, and my own understanding. This study benefited greatly from participants' self-reflexive insights: a few within the anti-trafficking apparatus engaged in open-hearted dialogue, not only providing me with priceless understanding of the current state of things but also critically pinpointing the shortcomings of the work to which they are integral.

Throughout this article, I use the terms *prostitution* and *sex work* interchangeably despite the different connotations they carry. The term *sex work* connotes sexual labor as work that has been chosen as a source of income, not exploitative by default, while *prostitution* implies victimhood and abuse. The complexities of migrants' experiences and the coexistence of different reasons behind migration and labor plans are not encapsulated fully by either term; I thus use both terms without relying on their common associations.

## ANALYSIS

### *Neoliberal Renderings: Deserving If They Only Emerged*

In order for migrants to access anti-trafficking services, the need to recognize themselves as victims and to comply with institutional procedures is paramount. It is quite unlikely, however, that those exploited for their labor in the Tuscan territory will come forth and report their exploiters. Many are bonded to their employers, or to the middlemen who work for their employers, by the debt they accumulated to travel to Italy, including transport, immigration paperwork, accommodation, food, and whatever expense their middlemen decide to make them accountable for. They understand that if they report the exploitation, their opportunity to earn (even a little) money would cease, and their debt more often than not burdens their family in their country of origin. Many are afraid to report their situation to the police, given their status as

“illegalized” aliens, or *clandestini*, which makes them susceptible to deportation and threatens their chance to send money home and/or pay their debts. Others do not fully acknowledge the gravity of their conditions, possibly when compared to the habitual circumstances in their country of origin, where the wages earned were low and labor rights nonexistent, as one lawyer explained:

The emergence in this sector [labor trafficking] has always been less. The reasons are, well, quite known. There is a scarce self-perception of one’s victim status, especially in people from countries with particular lack of resources, hence better to earn those 3 euros per hour here than to be without food there...

An anti-trafficking worker added, "Labor conditions have gotten so much worse; hence the perception of severe exploitation doesn’t really come forth...either there are beatings, kidnappings, otherwise you hear, 'well, at least I work.'"

#### *Omertà and Neoliberal Requirements*

These motivations, although recognized as valid by many anti-trafficking stakeholders, are often brought forth to justify a lack of self-determination on the part of the migrants, who are then rendered fully responsible for their own circumstances. In several instances, anti-trafficking stakeholders described exploited and potentially trafficked migrants’ attitude as *omertà*, the mafia code signifying avoidance to engage with authorities, lack of cooperation, and silence in the face of questioning. According to this view, migrants are co-responsible for the exploitation they are subjected to, since they are “not willing” to come forth and unveil the criminal activities they know of. This outlook fits into a wider socio-political framework that Aiwaha Ong describes as neoliberal, indicating the expectation of self-management of issues previously understood to be social responsibilities: “Indeed, neoliberalism considered as a technology of government is a profoundly active way of rationalizing governing and self-governing in order to optimize” (Ong

2006, 3). Here the neoliberal stance is adopted by anti-trafficking stakeholders, who expect migrants to overcome the systemic impasses that entangled them in the first place in order to earn their rescue and rehabilitation by the state. Self-governing on the part of the migrants translates into putting an end to *omertà* and helping themselves, thereby interrupting their work experience—no matter how improbable, given their circumstances. Moreover, the emerging anti-trafficking narratives convey that if only migrants used the technical tool of *denuncia* (official complaint filed with police), they could successfully address the exploitation they experienced. This process resembles what some anthropologists of humanitarianism have referred to as *rendering technical*, alluding to the making of political issues into technical problems that require technical solutions (Ferguson 1994; Li 2007; Maternowska 2006; Ticktin 2014). By doing so, these discourses obscure the political choices behind the management of migration and the political orchestration of the economic system, as well as the root causes behind migrant labor exploitation in the specific context of Europe, Italy, and Tuscany, alongside any meaningful reflections or solutions.

### *The Industrious Effort of Convincement*

“*Labor trafficking is a submerged phenomenon*” was the mantra I heard repeatedly from different anti-trafficking stakeholders, describing in a nutshell the difficulties of addressing the issue. The main difficulty identified was the reticence on the part of migrant workers to acknowledge their victim status. However, I challenged my respondents to think about what it took to make migrant sex workers recognize and agree that they were trafficked. Support workers and lawyers were regularly met with resistance from women who saw their madams and

pimps as helpers, similarly to, if not more fiercely than, non-sex migrant workers who did not agree with being categorized as victims of trafficking. As an anti-trafficking worker reflexively admitted:

Well, very often they do not realize they are victims. We provide this labeling—they have no idea what that means. Like with the burqa, that is normal for them, and then when they see other situations, they understand they have rights.

The perception and acceptance of being a victim is very often the product of an invested and industrious effort of convincement on the part of the anti-trafficking apparatus, which is typically not made for migrants working in sectors other than prostitution. For example, the SATIS2 anti-trafficking apparatus has multiple “street units” to patrol those streets known to be dotted with migrant women selling sex. They offer health advice and services, alongside phone numbers and addresses through which sex workers can learn how to exit prostitution. When asked why similar mobile units do not exist for migrant workers who might want to exit other exploitative circumstances, participants offered answers ranging from the promise that such units will be set up in the future to the difficulty of establishing something of that sort in the vast Tuscan territory. The effort of convincement was often reflexively acknowledged by my research participants during our *ethnoinquisitive* encounters, but it was also met with opposition by migrant workers, as this extract of an interview with an anti-trafficking lawyer reveals:

FN: There is less self-perception as a victim when it comes to labor exploitation than sex exploitation.

V: I’d like to say, the scarce self-perception of the victim as such is found also among those Nigerian women who say “no, no” to the victim narrative, as you were telling me earlier...

FN: But there, it’s not about scarce self-perception, there it depends. Sometimes is that, but when they figure out that they need to pay back a debt and they are thrown in the street in order to do that, it’s difficult. The young Bangladeshi who picks up onions in Calabria has the perception of being helped by someone who

financed his travels, and that he has a debt he has to extinguish but often there is less control—we are looking into this. There are also types of threats and strict control but not that often so, there is a perception of freedom, and of possible, even if thin, chance to bargain with the employer. A sort of gratefulness for the caporale<sup>5</sup> who is providing the job. Also an inadequate alternative offered by anti-trafficking workers...

### ***Othering Renderings: Deserving If Only Here!***

Many participants informed me repeatedly that people subjected to labor trafficking are significantly fewer in number than those trafficked for sexual exploitation. Within the existing cross-disciplinary literature on trafficking, it has been highlighted that when compared to other forms of trafficked labor, the issue of sex trafficking is notably over-reported by the media, NGOs, and academics alike (Bernstein 2010; Brennan 2008; Godziak and Bump 2008; Kelly 2005; McCarthy 2014; Molland 2013; Peters 2014; Wylie 2016; Zhang 2012). Given that the majority of the studies are concerned in the first place with issues of sex and not labor, statistics show the overwhelming prevalence of sex trafficking (Godziak and Bump 2008). Alarming, besides the absence of figures on labor trafficking, statistical information regarding sex trafficking is severely inaccurate (Blanchette and Silva 2012; Kelly 2005; Weitzer 2015; Zhang 2012). Blanchette and Silva, for example, analyze the only English-language report available on trafficking in Brazil (PESTRAF). Although it was gathered by unaccredited researchers and created from questionable data based on rumors and media stories, the information is utilized by agencies such as the International Organization for Migration and the UN as solid evidence about trafficking (Blanchette and Silva 2012, 109). Others agree that the low number of victims of

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<sup>5</sup> Middleman who employs workers outside a lawful framework, and who benefits from their exploitation.

trafficking in industries other than prostitution is “a consequence of not looking” (Brennan 2008, 45).

### *Geographical Othering*

In line with the issue of unaccredited statistics, my research showed that labor trafficking was thought of as not only less prominent but also geographically diverted, what I refer to as *geographical othering*. When participants admitted to the presence of trafficking for labor exploitation, most of them relocated the issue outside Tuscany, specifically to Southern Italy, a land imagined and widely depicted as separate, mafia-ridden, and where exploitation is out of State control. Today’s renderings of *geographical othering* are not born in a vacuum but rather deeply embedded in the rather tumultuous emergence of Italy as a nation state, considered the result of a critical socio-economic and even racial divide (Gramsci 1978). Early images of backwardness, laziness, and delinquency are still currently applied to the South and opposed to understandings of northern progress, zeal, and lawfulness, in a way that reifies North and South as discrete entities (De Martino 2000; Schneider 1998). Anti-trafficking stakeholders are not immune to these powerful conceptions and indeed replicate them in their own narratives, advanced to justify migrants’ *undeservingness*, since migrants trafficked for labor exploitation do not exist in Tuscany, merely in the South. However, the presence of vast *ghettos* in some southern regions such as Calabria, Campania, and Puglia, where hundreds of migrants live in hazardous conditions in order to work in the nearby fields (Palmisano 2015), does not imply the absence of trafficking and migrant labor exploitation in Tuscany. Although the issue of migrant labor exploitation is more covered by the media and seemingly of greater prominence in certain regions when compared to others, many participants promptly utilized *geographical othering* to justify the lack of mobilization in Tuscany:

SC: The street patrol unit exists, but it covers prostitution only.

V: Not for...

SC: Not for labor exploitation...there are experiences around Italy, especially in Puglia where the problem is numerically very big, very evident, and even in the North. There they do a sort of office on wheels, an itinerant unit where people can ask questions about union issues, so that they can figure out if there is something else. But we don't have it. We have done some monitoring, some mapping, but it is also true that our territory is very tranquil in that sense. Here we don't have big factories besides Piaggio, which would never dare to do anything like that, for its reputation. In the fields...yes and no. In the sense that there is the area between here and Siena, where there is wine...but it is not like 'giù' [Down, meaning Southern Italy], with never-ending fields.

### *Ethnic Othering*

When prompted to think about Tuscany, participants relegated issues of labor trafficking and migrant exploitation to the large Chinese community of Prato, an industrial town on the outskirts of Firenze where Chinese entrepreneurs have been successfully establishing textile and garment factories since the 80s. While there have been recorded instances of labor and human rights abuses (Storni 2017), those are utilized as scapegoats, which divert attention from more widespread exploitation all over the region, at the hands of foreigners or Italian nationals alike. I refer to these discursive framings as *ethnic othering*, well exemplified by this interview extract with an anti-trafficking worker:

V: You guys have a shelter for trafficked women. Have you ever supported any for labor trafficking?

CD: We are in business since 1999, and never! I have never even heard about it.

V: You never heard about migrants severely exploited in Tuscany? On the 5th of November, two weeks ago, four 'caporali' have been arrested in seven Tuscan provinces in which striking labor exploitation was happening, where migrants were driven on the back of trucks covered in PVC sheets, given three to four euro per hour, ten hours a day, without day off, in embarrassing housing conditions,

recruited from their country of origin, mostly Bangladesh and Pakistan, by fellow countrymen caporali in Italy. In short, scenarios you find in the UNHCR manual.

CD: Yes, now that you tell me I heard about this, and there is Prato, that is possible among the Chinese there, there it exists without a doubt. However, I never had Chinese women here, even though I know they are seen in the anti-trafficking circuit, but not here with us.

In the many references to exploitation of migrant workers in Prato, anti-trafficking stakeholders unanimously affirmed the impossibility of understanding and accessing the Chinese community. *Ethnic othering* is intrinsically connected to sentiments commonly described as racism, with the distinction that it specifically refers to the instrumental utilization of racial and/or ethnic difference to identify a group to blame for the wrong at stake and to free one's own cultural or national group from co-responsibilities. It stems from a racist bedrock and merges here with *geographical othering*, in that sentiment toward southerners is of the same nature as racist leanings against non-nationals. In fact, migrants are known as the new Southern Italians, sharing or even having shifted the hierarchical representation and mistreatment once reserved to southerners (Carter 1997). Renderings of *geographical* and *ethnic othering* come into play to justify *undeservingness* of migrants' access to anti-trafficking services: migrants subjected to labor exploitation are not to be found in Tuscany, and if they are, exploitation is at the hand of Others, whose communities are said to be impenetrable.

### **Technical Renderings: *Undeserving Because Not Strictly Trafficked***

Several participants argued that it is incorrect to talk about trafficking when the three defining elements seen above (act, means, and purpose) are not in the hands of one or more exploiters from beginning to end, that is to say, from origin to destination country. As an immigration lawyer put it:

In labor exploitation, even in its form of severe labor exploitation that happens after one enters Italy as described by the law, there is no connection between the country of origin and destination country, and this is certainly what happens most often in Italy.

This explanation evokes a juridical aspect of rights, where migrants are excluded from anti-trafficking services on the basis of not being fit for the services by definition. The definition in the Palermo Protocol does not mention the necessity of such continuity—and neither do the various articles of the Italian Penal Code and Immigration Code regulating trafficking, labor exploitation, and slavery<sup>6</sup>. There is a general consensus among lawyers and prosecutors that such continuity must exist, however, in order to recognize the crime and therefore its victims, giving priority to fighting “criminal organizations” rather than assisting those subjected to exploitation. This is not surprising given the origin of the current notion of trafficking, defined in the Palermo Protocol on the occasion of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2000.

The discursive renderings of deservingness that immigration lawyers and asylum officers provided can be largely encapsulated by the mantra “they are not technically trafficked,” alluding to the lack of juridical rights to be assisted. Through *ethnoinquisitive* interviewing, I problematized this answer, which was often reiterated mechanically without empirical validation. In the process, it emerged that a) often migrants were recruited and exploited as described by the official definition of human trafficking, but they were overlooked by the anti-trafficking system; and b) different degrees of exploitation occurred during travels and once in Tuscany but seemingly without central organization from the origin to the destination country, perceived as ineligible by the legal apparatus.

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<sup>6</sup> Article 18 of the Italian Immigration Code speaks about “*condizionamenti di un’associazione criminale*,” literally “conditionings of a criminal association,” interpreted on the ground as an orchestration of activities, with the intent to exploit migrants, that connects migrants’ country of origin and destination country. Law 228/2003 against trafficking in human beings does not mention the connection between origin and destination country, and neither do articles 600, 601, and 602 of the Penal Code that regulates labor exploitation and slavery.

*Disconnection Between Origin and Destination Country: Not Looking*

Although many migrants indeed arrive to Tuscany autonomously and are then exploited by individuals unrelated to their recruitment and travels, many are also recruited from their country of origin to work in exploitative conditions on Tuscan soil. In September 2018, for example, three caporali were arrested outside Firenze for having recruited migrants in Romania and Albania and having exploited them in various farms and building sites, imposing daily shifts of eleven hours, seven days a week, paying four euros hourly, using violence and threats, refusing to pay for overtime, and curtailing chunks of the migrants' already unconstitutionally low wage for the provision of embarrassing lodgings and transportation to the worksite ([https://www.lanazione.it/firenze/cronaca/caporalato-arresti- 1.4169655](https://www.lanazione.it/firenze/cronaca/caporalato-arresti-1.4169655)). When asked about available anti-trafficking support for these workers, none of my respondents were able to provide an answer.

Multiple stories of migrant exploitation defied the mantra so often repeated to me by different anti-trafficking stakeholders, “they are not technically trafficked.” In October 2018, a local trade union put me in touch with a witness who was initially suspected of criminal association with migrant exploitation, given their role within a large farm. Once the allegations were cleared, they felt comfortable sharing their story with those interested in knowing more about the exploitation of migrants in the area. Over flavorsome pizza and in the company of an investigative journalist, they informed me that:

The majority [of migrants] came by plane and were people who knew the caporale who lived in Italy. The fellow would go back to Pakistan and recruit himself or do that through friends of his. He would say “Look, you buy the airfare, I come pick you up, you give me two to three thousand euro when you start working and you don’t worry, I have the house, the contract is in place, and with that you get your documents to stay.” The thing is that the caporale has

control over the life of the person. It's not like they treat them bad, lots of people are treated 'bad', which is also serious, but here the problem is that the caporale is the owner of life: he gives them shelter, brings them water, gives them food, and drives them with the van; he is the one deciding if you eat today, and if tomorrow you annoy him or he thinks you haven't worked well and you embarrass him with the Italian employer, you don't eat.

Here too there was an existing connection between recruitment in the country of origin by the caporale—of the same ethnicity as the workers, in this case Pakistani and Bangladeshi—and exploitation in Tuscany. Yet the case was not known to SATIS2 agencies and those migrants were not knowingly supported. Many migrants on Tuscan soil could arguably be recognized as “trafficked,” if only their migration and labor trajectories were taken into account.

*Disconnection Between Origin and Destination Country: Yet Exploited*

The trajectories of many migrants who arrived in Tuscany as asylum seekers, hosted in the dozens of state-sponsored migrant centers scattered throughout the region, indeed resemble the disconnection between origin and destination country lamented above. Although each individual story is unique, the narratives collected present similar patterns of a) arrival into Libya from sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia, b) detention in Libya, c) work exploitation, d) sometimes torture, before e) embarking on a sea journey to the Italian shore—without a specific exploitative plan plotted from beginning to end. This was the case for the migrants I interviewed<sup>7</sup>, whose trajectories did not include the three elements of the trafficking definition but who nonetheless experienced severe exploitation during their journey and once in Italy. In many cases, the connection between origin and destination countries disappears at a certain point, making the migration and labor trajectory again irrelevant from this juridical trafficking standpoint, as one

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<sup>7</sup> These narratives are further analyzed in a forthcoming paper.

immigration lawyer narrates:

It emerged that multiple destinations are offered to migrants, such as Malaysia, Emirates, Dubai, or Italy, all with different costs. Qatar a lot, Malaysia less, Italy almost nothing, on the basis of how much they are going to earn there, and on that basis, they are also told how long they are supposed to re-pay their debt. Then Libya came into the picture, and people are often brought to Egypt or Dubai and then into Libya to get on a boat to Italy. What you hear from every Bangladeshi national is that in Libya they are awaited at the airport, where their passports are taken and they are brought into an enclosed space. At that point it is difficult to understand what happens, if there is a sale, or what. Someone said, "they explained to me that they had sold me and that I had to pay a big amount of money to be freed." It seems as there are all the characteristics of trafficking, from the country of origin to Libya, but once there, there is no continuity, especially for Bangladeshi nationals. Because they access the state-sponsored assistance system and at that point the trafficking phenomenon runs out, and what happens? That eight cases out of ten, they become inactive and they look for work— especially if we are talking about Prato and Pistoia in Tuscany—from Chinese packaging companies that at times are quite decent, other times slip into labor exploitation, but there is no continuity with their initial trajectory.

Another important aspect that immigration lawyers and asylum officers consider is the risk of being re-trafficked. If the migrants have no immediate ties to the alleged criminal organization that exploited them in the first place, they are considered safe and not in need of assistance.

Despite the endless opportunities to be exploited again by whomever becomes aware of their vulnerability, they are thus not recognized as victims of trafficking or provided support services and status, given that they are “no longer” in danger.

### ***Moral Renderings: Less Deserving Than Victims of Sex Trafficking***

Long-standing anxieties about female sexuality and women's autonomy have been identified as contributing to the shaping of anti-trafficking efforts in a fashion that privileges a focus on sex, at the expense of other forms of labor (Deozema 2002; Kempadoo 2015; Vance 2012; Weitzer 2007). This dynamic appeared with the emergence of the abolitionist movement, a campaign against “white slavery” developed in nineteenth-century England with an exclusive focus on

sexual violence against women. Abolitionists saw prostitution (i.e., sex work) as a patriarchal institution that without exception translates into violence against women and that should at all costs be dismantled (Kempadoo 2015). Today's difficulty in separating sex trafficking from sex work largely stems from the popularity of abolitionist principles within anti-trafficking frameworks, which, under the postulation that no woman can ever consent to prostitution, have well blended the two notions together (Vance 2012).

### *Faith-Based and Secular Approaches to Sex Work*

The majority of the agencies making up SATIS2 claimed to adopt a secular approach toward prostitution, seeing it as work that provides women with an income otherwise very difficult to earn. This attitude translates into reducing the health risks involved in sex work by distributing contraceptives and health support in an unprejudiced fashion, as the director of one anti-trafficking agency explains:

Our modus operandi is a non-judgmental approach, value-free, and our first interest is knowing, meeting the people that are in the streets, regardless of what they do and the choices more or less conscious or constrained that they make, without ever judging the person.

This view is explicitly opposed by one agency collaborating with SATIS2, which overtly condemns sex work as inherently detrimental to everyone practicing it, and to society at large. This anti-trafficking organization aims to “rescue” fallen women and girls and to rehabilitate their lives with what are considered safe and morally decent professions. I was informed by two of its co-managers that the organization is strongly rooted in Catholic principles, which shape its

approach towards sex, among other aspects<sup>8</sup>. Despite the apparent difference between the approaches taken by these agencies— judgment-free and respecting of individuals' choices on one hand, openly judging sex work as something inherently immoral and harmful on the other— they effectively join efforts in curtailing sex work. Anti-trafficking advocates of the secular approach do in fact hold judgment-free attitudes as central in their work; yet, by creating rapport and building trust with sex workers, they also aim to offer alternative ways of life, away from selling sex altogether. Selling sex remains perceived as an illegitimate type of work, something inherently detrimental that diverse efforts are combined to put an end to, as reflexively expressed by this trafficking expert:

We ask them to quit prostitution, otherwise we don't protect them. Hence, we deny a choice, because for us the migration project based on "I come to Europe, I work in prostitution for five years, I make my money," for us it is not a work project.

This view upholds the belief that working in the sex industry is inherently different than working in other sectors, and that prostitution is always coerced and no woman can possibly choose it.

This is contradicted by substantial work on the subject which shows the diversity of different trajectories in women's stories and in their own approach to their circumstances (Hoang 2016; Peters 2014; Witzer 2007). Migrants subjected to sexual exploitation name fear, isolation, deceit, and threats as the main sources of their suffering, as opposed to the sexual victimization highlighted by activists, governments, scholars, and the media (Peters 2014). Other women regarded factory work as much worse than prostitution, since the conditions they experienced were much more taxing (long hours, beatings, low pay), and as opposed to sex work, factory

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<sup>8</sup> For example, differing from anti-trafficking service providers regionally and nationally, the shelters are not gender-specific or anti-trafficking specific, but instead they aim to recreate what was referred to as a "family home" (*casa famiglia*) bringing together lonely elderly, women in the sex industry, people with disabilities, individuals exiting drug addictions, etcetera, with the hope to create a sense of "family" given the presence of different archetypical figures, such as the grandparents, mothers, fathers, and children.

employment did not provide opportunities for upward mobility (Hoang 2016).

### *Sex Work and “Actual” Work*

Despite the many similarities in the labor trajectories of migrants embarking on a migration project to ameliorate their and their family’s conditions—whether the money is made through farming, construction, sex work, begging, or domestic work—when it comes to trafficking, there persists an unchallenged distinction between exploitation occurring in prostitution and exploitation in any other industry that does not concern selling sex. It was consistently repeated to me that what makes prostitution so problematic and compelling is that Nigerian women, the most represented nationality in the streets of Tuscany, believe they will incur misfortune, diseases, and death if they exit prostitution, as the result of voodoo arrangements. Multiple publications, including the Trafficking in Persons Report released yearly by the United States, mentioned the issue of voodoo in relation to Italy and Nigerian trafficked women (*Trafficking in Persons Report 2018. Country narrative: Italy*). In March 2018, the Oba<sup>9</sup> of the Nigerian state of Edo announced that he had revoked the *juju* (voodoo) spells that kept Nigerian women enslaved to their exploiters (<https://terredeshommes.it/nigeria-tratta-juju/>). The Oba proclaimed that the spell chains no longer existed and that he was condemning all traditional healers who were using *juju* to promote trafficking of women, the majority of whom went to Italy. Once freed from the spell, however, many Nigerian women engaging in prostitution in Tuscany told my research participants that they still had to pay their debt and to earn money for survival—*juju* or not. The Oba’s proclamation even more readily revealed the existing similarities between the trajectories of sex workers and those of other migrant workers who had contracted a debt meant to provide

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<sup>9</sup> King, religious and political leader of Edo State, Nigeria.

for their economic endeavor. Yet across the board, anti-trafficking stakeholders continued to perceive the former as a separate category of an inherently different nature, as one support worker puts it: “For this reason I tell you, maybe sexual exploitation is easier to bring to the surface...for its visibility and for its diverse nature when compared to labor exploitation...it touches upon the sexual sphere.”

In the setting of asylum interviews, audition officers are in the unique position to acquire information about migrants’ experiences of labor exploitation, both sexual and non-sexual. Following up, investigating those cases further, and offering referral services are not components of their official duty, but they are performed with no exception for migrant women. Migrant men, undergoing the same asylum interviews, in the same courts, with the same officers, are not generally offered these services—as one of my participants admitted:

They [migrant women] are given the option to get in touch with the anti-trafficking entity to learn about possible services and protection, article 18 and the path of emersion and support, and with her consent then the asylum committee sends the referral to the anti-trafficking body. Whereas if the woman doesn’t want to go ahead with the referral but takes the Tuscan anti-trafficking toll-number, she will be called again in about a month to give her time for reflection.

When challenged to think about this double standard, audition officers shared the argument that migrant women very possibly, if not most likely, incur trafficking-like experiences; the possibility of men being trafficked seemed to have at best vaguely crossed their minds. In order to warrant assistance, humanitarianism requires the invocation of compassion and of exceptional stories of suffering, preferably bodily (Ticktin 2005). Sex evokes such emotions in a much more immediate fashion and appears to reach deeper levels of indignation in the collective imaginary, including that of anti-trafficking stakeholders. Even severe cases of domestic servitude where people are beaten or burnt are seen as less damaging since decency and a sense of personhood is

still maintained (Peters 2013). As one anti-trafficking worker explains:

Since the objective of migration at the end of the day is work, in the majority of the cases, I think, it's also more difficult for the trafficked person to gain awareness of this. There is less demand for support, hence, a little less awareness, and maybe it can be more accepted.

The unchallenged assumption remains that sex work is inherently different in nature from any other type of work, in that prostitution abroad cannot possibly be chosen as a project for migrating.

### **Conclusive Remarks: Overall Undeserving**

This article revealed and unpacked the discursive narratives brought forth by anti-trafficking stakeholders to justify the widespread neglect of issues related to trafficking for non-sexual labor exploitation. As shown, at the time of fieldwork, there was resistance to catering toward migrant labor exploitation in its different forms and extents, despite its presence being warned about in the literature and abundantly existing in the region (Idos 2019). This resistance takes behavioral shape in the form of the neglect of the mentioned migrants, and discursive shape in the form of narrations that justify the status quo. I call such narrations discursive renderings of undeservingness. Building on Wylie's work on the structural neglect of labor trafficking, this paper revealed the specific peculiarities of how such narratives are *de facto* created and re-offered every day on the ground.

The anti-trafficking apparatus is part of the existing migration regime, as it contributes with its narratives to conveying particular stories of migration trajectories, as well as of differentiation of specific types of migrants, to which it attaches priority for intervention. Discursive renderings of undeservingness become unconscious tools to replicate a very static vision of a phenomenon that instead is continuously changing; they can be seen as a comforting

way to gain a feeling of control in the midst of complexity, confusion, and changes, experienced in the era of liquid modernity (Baumann 1999). Anti-trafficking stakeholders are sometimes reflexively aware of the forced nature of such statements and premade narratives, expressing disillusionment about or awareness of the shortcomings of the industry they are part of. These cases are exceptions, however, and given their sporadic nature do not allow for substantial changes in the system, which remains anchored to static perspectives.

Through *othering* renderings, responsibility for the negligent status quo and its systemic causes is diverted externally, respectively towards another region altogether, the South, and towards others identified racially as the Chinese. Through *neoliberal* renderings, migrants are blamed for not coming forth and asking for help (*omertà*), and responsibilities are again diverted from the root causes of the phenomenon and the unpreparedness of the anti-trafficking apparatus. This can be further explained as a symptom of the restructurings of economic and socio-political systems initiated with the spread of neoliberal regimes in the 1990s (Ong 2006). Through *technical* renderings, migrants' experiences of exploitation are dismissed as trafficking cases on the basis of a shared, although unfounded, consensus on what trafficking entails—and labor trafficking is once more neglected. And finally, *moral* renderings reveal an existing hierarchy that ranks the severity of rights abuse and calls for more immediate action in the sex sectors than in any other, in combination with a shared intention of curtailing prostitution altogether.

Overall, the anti-trafficking apparatus, despite some existing forward-thinking stakeholders and progressive intentions, voices and justifies migrant undeservingness. The renderings of undeservingness identified above take shape from cultural conditionings, historical legacy, and simplifying assumptions, which reveal much more about the anti-trafficking apparatus than about the migrants undergoing exploitative non-sexual work experiences. Anti-

trafficking stakeholders do not rely exclusively on any one of these narratives; rather, they use them interchangeably, contextually, and choose specific ones depending on specific cases. They may also apply multiple renderings to describe the same case. Even with these entanglements, the four discursive renderings I offer delineate the different ways that undeservingness is reasoned and made sense of by anti-trafficking stakeholders. Renderings of undeservingness are brought up to justify the status quo and have the power of hindering change, as some self-reflective stakeholders admit themselves.

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## **Not Slaves Enough: on the Trivialization of Systemic Migrant Labor Exploitation in Tuscany, Italy**

*Keywords:* Labor trafficking, migrant workers, labor exploitation, Italy.

*Abstract:* This chapter focuses on the exploitation of migrant labor in Tuscany, Italy, in relation to labor trafficking. While attention to human trafficking has grown worldwide, the exploitation of nonsexual labor has been neglected. This research revealed that migrant labor exploitation is overlooked by labor and anti-trafficking organizations because it takes place publicly within the legal economy, and it is therefore normalized. This study used the extended case methodology, linking the context of labor in Italy with the analysis of interviews with migrant workers and with labor union and inspection officers. This chapter contends that a conceptualization of human trafficking centered on coercion, violence, and forceful movement of bodies focuses only on extra-ordinary cases, dismissing the widespread exploitation of migrants currently taking place in Tuscany.

*Overall research has moved away from labor as a topic of investigation  
at a time when the exploitation of labor emerged  
as one of the primary factors in the restructuring of global agri-food.*

(Bonnano and Cavalcanti 2014, xxv)

*If we don't dare, we risk giving up understanding reality, applying analysis schemes which,  
although reassuring, have lost their analytical value in the face of complexity.*

(Rigo and Dines 2011, 90)

## Introduction

In the last twenty years, attention to human trafficking has grown exponentially worldwide, although academics, non-profits, and governments have focused almost exclusively on issues of sexual labor at the expense of other forms of exploitation (Wylie 2016; Weitzer 2014). Critical anti-trafficking scholars agree on the inaccuracy of the information available, which largely portrays sex trafficking as overwhelmingly more present than any other forms (Kelly 2005; Brennan 2008; Godziak and Bump 2008; Bernstein 2010; Zhang 2012; Molland 2013; McCarthy 2014; Peters 2014). During fieldwork I encountered sparse cases of migrant exploitation based on coerced labor, sustained by violence and death threats. Finding these cases was one of my investigative objectives, in order to show that non-sexual labor trafficking was at least as alive and present as reported sex trafficking. I was searching for exceptionally ruthless cases, where coercion and brutality were unambiguous, the details so striking that those stories would finally compete on equal footing with the heart-wrenching and attention-grabbing narratives of sex trafficking. However, I found few such stories. The majority were much more ambiguous pictures of exploitation within acceptance, and seemingly consent, on the part of the migrants.

In Europe, labor trafficking is defined by a variety of documents, including the United Nations *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons* (2000), Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe 1950), and international treaties defining and prohibiting forced labor and slavery (ILO 2009, 2007, 1957, 1930). Despite these efforts to clarify the notion, consensus has yet to be reached over what exactly “exploitation” means in the context of trafficking (Shamir 2012). Moreover, theoretical definitions and specific policies very much depend on the entity that enacts the guidelines (Oliveri 2015), leading to

discrepancies in identifying who should be supported and how (Coghan and Wylie 2011). To add to the muddle, the use of terms such as slavery, labor trafficking, neo-slavery, slavery-like practices, human trafficking, and forced labor, often in an interchangeable fashion across documents, further creates definitional and operational confusion.

One useful analytical lens in untangling this confusion is that of “unfree labor,” to address the conundrum of “where to locate freedom in the transition from slave economies to contemporary labor regimes” (Calvao 2016, 456). Looking at labor as a continuum of questionably free experiences, each with various degrees of protection and possibility of negotiation, is central to shedding light on the difficulty of addressing labor trafficking in practice. Such a continuum calls into question a widely adopted binary approach to labor that distinguishes between two mutually exclusive possibilities: freedom or subjugation (Rodriguez Garcia 2016). This latter framework arbitrarily simplifies the complexity of lived experiences of labor, concealing the possibility of the simultaneous existence of choice and compulsion, self-determination and exploitation within the same labor experience.

To shed light on the complex reality of labor exploitation in relation to labor trafficking, this article first details pivotal features of the labor context in Italy and then takes into account the narratives and perspectives of a sample of migrant workers experiencing labor exploitation in Tuscany. In doing so, the article offers both theoretical and practical implications. On the one hand, it responds to Calvao’s recent call for anthropological engagement with notions of freedom and coercion, as “the problem of slavery is by and large absent from anthropological theorizations of contemporary labor” (Calvao 2016, 452). On the other hand, it addresses the ongoing failure of policymakers and legislators to consider the perspectives of those affected first-handedly by the crimes they are trying to address. Most academic studies on migrants come

overwhelmingly from the fields of demography, policy studies, and criminology, whose theories bring forth the perspective of the state—but rarely the migrants’ (De Genova 2002). This provides a supposedly neutral version of the law that is not problematized and in fact hides the “calculated interventions through which asymmetric inequalities are created and benefitted from” (De Genova 2002, 424). Embodied experiences of migrant workers are thus a unique investigative standpoint that, in combination with an understanding of structural features of the labor context, provide a privileged lens into the complexity of such experiences. Such complexity is mirrored by the definitional confusion around labor trafficking and the tools and strategies to respond to it.

### *Methods*

The ethnographic research that informs this study is based on 61 in-depth interviews with anti-trafficking workers, labor inspection officers, immigration lawyers, migrant workers, asylum application officers, migrant organization workers, and trade union officials, conducted between March and December 2018 across the central Italian region of Tuscany. While this article draws specifically on eleven interviews with migrant workers, the reflections it offers were rendered possible by the juxtaposition of those narratives to a contextualization of the labor regime, which I draw from eight interviews with union and inspection officials and corroborate with relevant scholarship. This methodology took inspiration from Michael Burawoy’s work, which strives to understand macro socio-political processes through ethnographic study of micro realities (Burawoy 2009).

Studying labor exploitation in relation to trafficking posed the methodological issue of speaking not only with affected migrants but also with those who worked to address migrant

exploitation. I conducted interviews with migrant workers through personal contacts who had become their acquaintances, coworkers, or friends, and through trade unions that arranged our meetings. The information I gathered was slow, sporadic, and not as conducive to insight as I hoped. Since I had not established rapport with my participants in the anthropological sense, most were intimidated and did not fully trust the motives behind my research, though there were limited exceptions: two participants engaged eagerly with the interviews and were grateful for my interest in their stories. The interviews took place in public spaces, such as coffee shops and restaurants, to create an informal setting and ease some of the tension related to being “officially” interviewed. They lasted between twenty minutes and two hours, and some of them ended before getting to any details of labor experiences. In a similarly reluctant fashion, many of those working in institutions tackling migrant labor exploitation cancelled or refused interviews, and many others nervously provided only vague information, especially when discussing non-sexual labor exploitation in relation to trafficking. This reluctance not only speaks to the difficulty of accessing the field as a methodological limitation but is also, retrospectively, an important piece of data itself. Interviews with union and inspection officials, however, were instrumental to navigating the complexities of some contemporary labor practices, and these interviews flowed without major hiccups—perhaps as I finally dropped the confusing notion of trafficking and focused on questions of labor.

### *Neoliberal restructurings*

From the late 1980s onwards, Italy started experiencing an ongoing arrival of migrant workers, which coincided with international, neoliberal restructurings of both the agricultural sector and the supply chain (Avallone 2017). Gradually, leading food franchises and corporations gained

growing power in establishing product prices, which led and continues to lead medium and small farms to spare on labor costs in order to stay afloat (Idos 2019, 293). In this context, to compete with large distribution systems, many local farms largely employ low-paid migrant labor (Avallone 2017; Corrado and deCastro 2016). Meanwhile, also due to the neoliberal restructurings, the recruiting role of public employment agencies was reduced in both Italy and the EU, and many formal or informal private intermediaries started appearing all over Europe (Fudge and Strauss 2014). These processes have since had an enormous impact on recruitment practices across various sectors of the economy and on hired workers, particularly in the agricultural sector. Given its seasonal characteristics, temporary work in this sector is considered the norm rather than an exception, so much so that agriculture is excluded from labor regulations binding the permanent job market (Oliveri 2015). Through interviews with labor unions and inspection officers, it emerged that the consequences of such restructurings are a central factor in migrant labor exploitation in Tuscany as well. This came as a surprise, given that both public understanding and the literature on migrant exploitation have depicted it as an issue concerning only Southern Italy, itself infamous for being the cradle of organized mafia (Palumbo 2015; Dines and Rigo 2015; Corrado 2011; Cole and Both 2007). The central region of Tuscany, proud producer and world exporter of some of the most well-known brands of wine and olive oil, is conversely hardly associated with exploitation.

#### *Caporalato: illegal labor brokerage*

In the course of our interviews on labor exploitation, labor unions repeatedly highlighted that, as elsewhere in Italy, farms do not control most of the production phases themselves but rather delegate those to third parties who contract their services and are the ones employing workers

directly. Through these service providers, farms can discharge all legal and financial obligations towards the workers onto these third parties, “which are more than happy to take that on, and to accept important farm jobs at low costs, thereby underpaying the workers. This is nothing else than *caporalato*,” a union worker explained. *Caporalato* is a criminal variety of labor brokerage first emerging from and managed informally by mafia families and currently widespread all over the Italian peninsula (Idos 2019; Cgil-Flai 2018). In Tuscany, however, *caporalato* is embodied by cooperatives more often than private individuals, as an inspector officer explained: “Recently, cooperatives have started to contract big farm jobs, and while they have historically provided some of the lowest salaries, now that they employ migrant labor they exploit it on the work hours and final paychecks all the time.” Although *caporalato* can take place informally at the hand of private individuals as well, my participants asserted that the illegal brokerage practices they have been observing in Tuscany are mainly and increasingly executed by cooperatives. Labor unions have registered high amounts of fraudulent activity in the officially stated working hours, pay slips, and labor taxes of their migrant clients. Pay slips report certain amounts but it is rather unclear when those amounts will be paid, or else they list far fewer worked days per month than those actually worked by the laborer. In this way, exploitation is managed not directly by the farm but at the hand of the cooperative that subcontracts the work, whether the commissioners are compliant or not. Farms often know of the exploitation behind the labor they are contracting and only in rare exceptions choose to investigate the details, as a migrant worker recalled:

We harvested grapes for the farm owner last year, who did not know that of the 15 euros hourly he paid for each worker, the worker got 5, and 10 were kept by the *caporale*! He treated us well. On Saturdays he brought in the field mineral water, desserts, coffee, and 1.5 liter of wine for the nine of us, each with his glass. Then, he’d eat with us. Once he asked me, ‘how much does your boss pay you people?’ and I told him about the 5 euros. He yelled, ‘what a piece of shit, he asked me 15 euros per hour!!!’ So many tricks...

*Good Law, Corruption, and Impunity*

In 2016 the state responded with law 199/2016, which addresses the growing phenomenon of the exploitation of labor in agriculture, punishing *caporalato* and the farms which, whether cognizant of it or not, utilize exploited labor. The law has the merit of identifying this specific crime and the vulnerable elements of the agricultural sector, but its applicability at the local level is still majorly lacking (Cigl-Flai 2018). An important piece of this law is the network of quality agricultural labor<sup>10</sup>, a national platform where farms sign up to be checked regularly to assure that they are transparent and respect minimum labor standards, yet only 2% of existing farms have signed up for it (Idos 2019). Moreover, as expressed by a union officer: “They made a perfect law and weakened inspections, thereby taking money away from monitoring activities: when you go to their offices they’ll tell you that inspectors have become rare, and they are not provided gas money to go for their inspections.” Inspection officers confirmed the difficulty of monitoring large agricultural areas while being understaffed and having access to limited resources.

Another issue reported by unions was widespread corruption, as a participant articulated: “When police are about to unveil who’s behind the operations, one officer is sent to a different jurisdiction, another is changed of duties, and nothing ever comes out of those investigations.” In the case of a conviction, such as the one that took place at the time of these interviews<sup>11</sup>, the *caporali* are often put under house arrest and in a few months resume their illegal activities under a new name. As one participant put it: “Even if some of these who are responsible pay half

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<sup>10</sup> Rete del lavoro agricolo di qualità.

<sup>11</sup> [https://firenze.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/09/12/news/caporalato\\_turni\\_11\\_ore\\_per\\_4\\_euro\\_l\\_ora\\_tre\\_arresti-206246093/](https://firenze.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/09/12/news/caporalato_turni_11_ore_per_4_euro_l_ora_tre_arresti-206246093/)

million euro here and there, that is nothing for them, and they keep playing the same game instead of being banned from the sector.”

The labelling of certain circumstances as human trafficking or forced labor is often accompanied by the assumption that such cases exist in the underground, unprotected, unlawful realms of work and employment. They are presumed and described to be external rather than within the legal economy, while being at the same time “the open secret of global commodity chains” (Calvao 2016, 453). As it emerged, migrant labor exploitation happens commonly in central Italy within the boundaries of one of the main sectors of the legal economy, not at the fringes of society. Moreover, the extensive involvement of cooperatives in the exploitation of migrants embeds unlawful practices even further within the legal economic structure, ensuring the existence of a type of exploitation that does not need to hide. I contend that this structural presence of exploitation within lawful frameworks normalizes exploitation itself and thus renders it invisible—as a result it can un-problematically take place in plain sight. While unlawful practices continue to be imagined as outside the legal boundaries of the economy, their occurrence within main economic sectors and under everyone’s eyes portrays exploitation as a naturalized, perhaps unfortunate but obvious, and integral aspect of the current labor configuration.

### *Migrant interviews*

While slowly getting my bearings within the context described above, I was still searching for stories of unmistakable coercion and headline-worthy exploitation to draw attention to the reality of labor trafficking and the injustices endured daily by migrant workers. What I learned from union and inspection officers, however, largely matched what was reported by the sample of migrants I managed to interview. This was in some ways disappointing, as it seemed to confirm the widely shared assumption that although migrant labor exploitation can and does occur, non-sexual labor trafficking hardly happens. I had been convinced that many migrants were undergoing severe exploitation that was remaining hidden from main narratives and media coverage. I had hoped to uncover such experiences, although most likely I was not in the position to establish enough rapport for migrant workers to disclose such charged occurrences. Mostly, I found what I had gathered from institutional interviews; few exceptions, however, added complexity to my results.

Table 3.1. Interviewed migrant workers

| <b>Story</b> | <b>Curr. age/Age<br/>@migration</b> | <b>Origins</b> | <b>Sector</b> |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| <b>1M</b>    | 25/18                               | Pakistan       | Kitchen work  |
| <b>2M</b>    | 45/32                               | Senegal        | Farming       |
| <b>3K</b>    | 48/30                               | Romania        | Farming       |
| <b>4F</b>    | 29/19                               | Gabon          | Security      |
| <b>5T</b>    | 27/23                               | Cameroon       | Farming       |

|            |       |                   |                         |
|------------|-------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>6M</b>  | 43/29 | Bangladesh        | Farming, kitchen        |
| <b>7C</b>  | 39/25 | Senegal           | Farming, handyman       |
| <b>8M</b>  | 24/23 | Mali              | Food delivery           |
| <b>9S</b>  | 19/18 | Senegal           | Farming (grape harvest) |
| <b>10S</b> | 34/30 | Guinea-<br>Bissau | Farming                 |
| <b>11S</b> | 18/17 | Ivory<br>Coast    | Farming                 |

### *Most common features of migrant exploitation*

Most participants mentioned long hours and low pay as the most common features of the exploitation they experienced, as exemplified by this interview extract:

Interviewer: How many hours did you work?

Participant: Normally from 8 to 18, ten hours. Twelve at times, seldom.

I: With a break?

P: Yes, break to eat at noon, 20-30 minutes.

I: And were you paid by the hour?

[Participant shook his head] P: Pay...800-900 euro for the month.

I: Working every day?

P: Every day.<sup>12</sup>

Another recurring issue concerned the disregard of contract agreements. One worker, for example, held a part-time contract for four hours a day but was required to work ten or twelve, with one day off per week. There was no certainty whether or when he would receive the money for his extra time, and he learnt to keep a vigilant count of it or else he would never receive it in full. Sometimes workers did not receive their payments at all, as described in this extract:

Participant: Piece of shit, I worked and I did not get paid.

Interviewer: How long had you worked for?

<sup>12</sup> Nine hundred euro for 30 days of work at ten hours a day averages to 3 euro per hour.

P: Three weeks. Other countrymen too, you call and get no answer. I tried, “When are you paying me?” You hear, “Eh, you come next week, this day.” You go and find no one; nobody answers the phone.

Another participant worked as security for a prominent bookstore in the city center. His shifts were generally of thirteen hours, from 7am to 11pm, at five euro per hour paid monthly. He explained:

On Monday you work from 7 am till noon, take an hour break without pay, and start again at 1 till 11pm. On Tuesday—you closed down at 11pm—you are back at 7, and considering that you can’t afford a flat downtown with such a job, you have to travel for at least 40-50km to go to sleep and then again to be back at work.

He held a contract on call and received his schedule weekly via text message. He had no paid leave or vacation, no overtime for working holidays, and when he left, he didn’t receive a severance package as established by the law. F was conscious of his rights as a worker, but he also knew that his only alternative was to leave the job. He told me:

P: Working at these jobs are always *extracomunitari*.<sup>13</sup>

I: Not Italians...

P: Not even Italians, no Europeans, because the French or German who come to Italy won’t work like this. They’d do something else—luckily for them!

K worked in the fields for six euro per hour, one euro more than his co-workers, as he also functioned as driver and picked his colleagues up early in the morning and brought them back at dusk. A third of his salary was paid in cash if and when his boss decided, even months later, if K repeatedly urged him. This was the situation of all of K’s dozens of colleagues. A few participants reported being paid between 25 and 35 euro for a full day in the field, without contract, paychecks, or continuity. As one put it: “What paycheck!! Everything under the table, 35 euro for a good day.” Others added that while they were aware of the exploitation, they still needed to work, and 25-35 euros a day was better than nothing. For some, the earnings would

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<sup>13</sup> People from non-EU countries, outside the European Community.

gross up to 1000 euros a month, despite the low wages and partial payments, which they considered good money they could in part send home to their families.

Exploitation of this kind does not need to hide and can take place in relatively public spaces, as one participant put it: “you say you don’t find people willing to share their experiences of exploitation, but I myself was very scared of doing so because after all, why do I have to risk to uncover something that is no longer covered since it is under everybody’s eyes?” Moreover, the acceptance of the working conditions, including low wages, portrays workers as agents free to choose their own circumstances while shifting the focus away from employers, who in fact decide those wages. Without depicting migrants as lacking agency, I suggest here that a binary focus on freedom or coercion distracts from the poor labor conditions workers endure regardless, including widespread instances of fraud.

### *Recruitment*

None of the workers I interviewed reported having arrived in Italy through fraud, abduction, or otherwise against their will, although remarkably some of them had risked their lives in the crossing.

Table 3.2 Motivations for migrating

| <b>Story</b> | <b>Origins</b> | <b>Motivations</b>               |
|--------------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>1M</b>    | Pakistan       | Ameliorating economic conditions |
| <b>2M</b>    | Senegal        | Ameliorating economic conditions |
| <b>3K</b>    | Romania        | Ameliorating economic conditions |

|            |               |  |
|------------|---------------|--|
|            |               |  |
| <b>4F</b>  | Gabon         | Family reunion                                   |
| <b>5T</b>  | Cameroon      | Ameliorating economic conditions                 |
| <b>6M</b>  | Bangladesh    | Ameliorating economic conditions                 |
| <b>7C</b>  | Senegal       | Ameliorating economic conditions                 |
| <b>8M</b>  | Mali          | Ameliorating economic conditions                 |
| <b>9S</b>  | Senegal       | Family persecution after his parents disappeared |
| <b>10S</b> | Guinea-Bissau | Ameliorating economic conditions                 |
| <b>11S</b> | Ivory Coast   | Ameliorating economic conditions                 |

Carchedi, in a large study, confirms how the conditions both of a sample of migrant workers before leaving the country of origin and of work in Italy were “situations after all of quasi-normality” (Carchedi 2017, 137). Echoing Carchedi’s study, my participants mentioned wanting to change their economic and life conditions as the main drive behind migrating, as shown in Table 3.2. A worker recalled: “Yes, I had some work at home in Ivory Coast, but the government doesn’t work, electricity and water are often off, you pay the bill and electricity is off. It is hard

to live that way.” Another described a similar situation: “I worked in a geothermal power plant since 1982, and in 2010 with the arrival of automated machinery, they laid off 80% of the workers, including me. They only kept family, cousins, nephews...” Such circumstances evoke ambitions to improve one’s life while lacking elements of coercion. Narratives of fraud or force during the travels were also missing; instead, workers recounted searching for someone with whom they could migrate, and most often they arranged their own travels.

The anti-trafficking apparatus supports migrants who were brought to Italy by a criminal organization and then exploited. This requires continuity between recruitment, travels from the country of origin, and exploitation in the destination country. More often, though, various degrees of exploitation take place when migrants are already in Italy, waiting for their asylum claim to be processed, as they represent an extremely cheap and disenfranchised source of labor (see Marconi forthcoming). Some are casually recruited on the spot, as a worker describes: “I took a walk, and at a bar they asked me if I was working. I said no. A man said to be back tomorrow to go to the field. I said ok, and next day very early I met him and others in a car, and he brought us to work.” Other times recruitment happens through word of mouth, as a participant explained: “At 6:30 in the morning if you go to X village, in the square of the old post office in front of the bar where people catch the bus, you see a lot of migrants of all colors. They see us and ask if you want to go to work...”<sup>14</sup> Coercion strictly understood was therefore largely missing from both their migration trajectories and recruitment contexts, which strengthens the idea of agency behind their circumstances.

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<sup>14</sup> At the time of this interview I was still looking for “trafficking strictly speaking,” and frustrated with yet another case of voluntary work, I did not drive to the recruitment spot to observe these encounters.

*The continuum of exploitation: extra-ordinary features*

Underpayment, long hours, wage retention, and a lack of time off were the exploitative features mentioned most often and across the board by participants. It is important, however, to report isolated testimony of a different kind, as disclosed by two of the eleven workers interviewed. One of them lived with 25 roommates in two rooms of 4x5 meters each, with mattresses against the walls during the day to permit circulation, and one bathroom. The *caporale* would charge each of them monthly for this shelter (120 euro) and transport to get them to work, curtailing a few hundred euros from their salaries. He also charged for shoes, and tools such as scissors, gloves, and hacksaws at a higher price, as well as for services, as the worker reported: “We had to ask him when we could go get groceries. One of us would call him and ask if we could take the van, because drinking water for example is very heavy to carry. Depending on his mood, he would rent us the van, or not.” One evening in August 2018, as the worker was biking to his shelter with some groceries, his *caporale*, who was sitting outside a small bar, asked the worker to pay for his beers. After a verbal altercation in which the worker refused, the *caporale* incited his Pitbull to attack, and the worker received severe leg injuries he still suffered from when we met for the interview. As the attack was taking place, those present ran inside the bar and no one called for medical attention. The *caporale* demanded the worker's silence about the incident and threatened to kill him if he showed up with the police. The worker called first aid but instead of explaining what happened declared he did not know who assaulted him, and that the dog had appeared from nowhere. This narration echoes what another participant shared:

The only people working in the fields are migrants. The *caporale*<sup>15</sup> has full control over the person's life. Caporale convince the potential workers, “there is work in Italy, come work for me, I come pick you up wherever you arrive, I have house and contract for you.” Then they are hosted with other 12 people in a 2 bedroom, 1 bathroom, 1 kitchen

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apartment, so crammed together that they had to lay the mattresses against the walls to move around. And that is slavery. It is not like I work and you mistreat me. A lot of Italians are not treated well and alright, that is also a problem, but here the *caporale* is the owner of life: he gives them shelter, brings them water, provides them food, and drives them in the van. He is in charge of whether you eat today and if tomorrow he's annoyed or he thinks you didn't work well, or make him look bad with his Italian employer, you don't eat. As in, you get nothing for the day.

This participant also mentioned surveillance: When the *caporale* is around, we cannot talk, of course, but even when we are alone it's difficult because there are always spies in the group, workers who might get an extra euro per hour. That's how everything stays secret.”

Psychological pressure was also present in participants' narratives, as one poignantly recalled:

My caporale would bark, “I offer you 5 euro, but you need to paddle, put your head down and paddle.” He was not interested in quality work, but production. You need to cover many hectares, because he needs money in his pockets. That is his goal: money in his pocket. Hungry for money. And stingy!! And then “Paddle—all day—paddle!” But we are people too; we are not animals, slaves, without a break.

When taking into account the various narratives, we observe a continuum of exploitation involving underpayment, longer hours, fraud, and in exceptional cases, violence and surveillance. Migrant workers' experiences move along this continuum, of which individuals can experience different degrees, at once or separately. The continuum, however, is not a static spectrum. There does appear to be a hierarchy of more or less exploited, nor a clear demarcation among categories of trafficked/not trafficked, exploited/not exploited, nor an ambiguous line being crossed from legal to illegal activity. This lack of clear distinctions helps to enable such a system of exploitation to flourish. It is not a linear taxonomy that goes from economically exploited to “actually trafficked,” as the existing literature on the continuum maintains (Carchedi 2018; Cohan and Wylie 2011; Kelly 2007). Such an approach differentiates between migrants deserving of support and others who, despite enduring exploitation, are not worthy. Such an

approach, which fixates on violence, coercion, and forced movement of bodies in order to identify and address migrant labor exploitation, inevitably drops labor from the picture.

*Riders, digital exploitation within legal boundaries*

The systemic exploitation of migrants takes place on the digital Tuscan market as well, with what are commonly called “riders,” individuals on bicycles delivering food from restaurants to homes and businesses upon request. These jobs, provided by service companies similar to Uber Eats though only requiring the use of a bicycle and a smartphone, also only guarantee the stipulated payment per km and nothing else. The easy access that allows migrants to get the job is tied together with the creation of a disposable mass of laborers who are not guaranteed any labor right besides the pay. The labor right erosion is legalized by the work agreement, which borrows the worker’s time, paddling energy, and brainwork required to follow the itinerary on the app in exchange for 0.5 euro per km without committing to social protection contributions for medical, pension, or sick leave. This system guarantees uninterrupted delivery of the service at a very low expense for both the providers and the receivers of the food delivery. It also promotes neoliberal values of flexibility and entrepreneurship (Ong 2006), where the workers are made responsible for their profits, which now depend on workers' own willingness to increase their availability to boost the chance of making money.

The phenomenon of food riders is one more symptom of systemic exploitation, which, because it is perceived as legal, is becoming normalized and institutionalized. The legal and illegal components of this model merge so well together that it becomes nearly impossible to discern them. This is rendered even more complex when looking at the agency of and co-participation in this system by migrants themselves. While I informally chatted with nine food

riders, I was informed by one of my participants during our scheduled interview that he had been a food rider while waiting for his residency permit. Just like other residents of state-sponsored migrant centers, he was not allowed to earn more than 580 euro monthly, at the risk of losing his bed and food at the institution. Being a rider was a great opportunity, yet he had to buy the equipment and the registered app code from a countryman, since he had not yet received the necessary work authorization. According to him, many migrants buy access from a countryman or an Italian national, usually paying them a 10% fee per delivery that becomes 20% on rainy days, as the app charges more for bad weather.

The case of food riders epitomizes the phenomenon of systemic exploitation and the blurred lines of legality and illegality. This meshed zone of legal and illegal practices sees migrants working in a legal sector yet also illegally through the *caporalato* system, leading migrants to be depicted as simultaneously victims and perpetrator. Although poor working conditions and the erosion of labor rights concern everyone, Italian nationals included, the food rider sector is largely occupied by migrants, given the relatively easy access that the system of contracting allows.

### ***Discussion: The Trivialization of Migrant Labor Exploitation***

A reflection on the notion of unfree labor allows us to revisit the illegal practices and exploitation within the boundaries of the legal economy. As shown above, a firm divide between legality and illegality lacks empirical validation, as exploitation often happens within legal boundaries. For example, the extensive involvement of cooperatives in the exploitation of migrants embeds unlawful practices within the legal economic structure, ensuring the existence of a type of exploitation that does not need to hide. Labelling certain labor circumstances as

human trafficking or forced labor is often accompanied by the assumption that such cases exist only in the underground, unprotected, unlawful realms of work and employment. As Calvao notes in a recent *Review of Anthropology* article, these circumstances are described to be external rather than within the legal economy, while being at the same time “the open secret of global commodity chains” (Calvao 2016, 453).

The continuum of labor exploitation as encountered by my participants, however, is not constituted of crimes taking place at the fringes of society but rather is situated at the very core of it— “under everybody’s eyes,” as it fuels the heart and pride of Tuscan wine and oil production, among other sectors. Focusing on extraordinary cases of exploitation and calling them trafficking reinforces the idea that exploitation in its various forms is incompatible with, and external to, the legitimate and legal economic market. I contend that the structural presence of exploitation within lawful frameworks renders exploitation itself invisible, as it happens in plain sight and it is therefore normalized. This, in turn, further obscures the conditions under which many migrant workers operate.

Proposed conceptualizations of a continuum of exploitation maintain a hierarchal distinction of shades of gravity (Carchedi 2018; Caghan and Wylie 2011; Kelly 2007), which unwittingly suggests that some exploitative experiences deserve recognition and support while others do not qualify. For example, Caghan and Wylie write: “many migrants are somewhere on a ‘continuum of exploitation’ between the poles of regular work with rights and remuneration and trafficking rigorously defined” (2011, 1518). Despite the good intention by the authors, who argue against measures that only support “a group of the super-exploited as the only one worthy of protection and vindication,” such a conceptualization does exactly that, reiterating a qualitative difference between merely exploited and “actually trafficked” (Caghan and Wylie

2011, 1552). In other words, distinguishing between extraordinary and ordinary exploitation merely replicates an approach that regards the latter as unfortunate but conventional—and thus, I contend, somewhat acceptable.

While a continuum is a useful conceptual tool, I suggest seeing it as a line *across* which workers move, instead of being stuck on the one point at which we placed them. In this way, we can understand the fluidity of such experiences without engaging in a ranking system. An approach that does not distinguish between the super exploited to be supported and the normally exploited to be ignored thereby highlights all circumstances of labor exploitation as compelling and deserving to be addressed. Similar to other humanitarian interventions around migrants (Ticktin 2005), the anti-trafficking apparatus requires victims to invoke compassion and to offer exceptional stories of suffering and exploitation. Anti-trafficking attention, sexual and non-sexual alike, has disregarded labor while fixating on coercion, brutality, and forced movement of bodies. Labor itself seems to have dropped outside the picture, which further obscures workers' conditions and gives rise to the trivialization of migrant labor exploitation. I suggest that such normalization plays an important part in the neglect of non-sexual labor exploitation. By instead integrating the experiences of migrant workers into the analysis of systemic exploitation, we can shine a light on the illegality within the legal, the labor exploitation hiding in plain sight.

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**Somewhat Documented: Migrant “Crisis,” Asylum Reception Centers, and Labor  
Exploitation in Tuscany, Italy**

*Keywords:* migrants, asylum, migrant crisis, illegality, anti-trafficking, policy, exploitation, Italy.

*Abstract:* This chapter focuses on migrant workers hosted in state-sponsored asylum centers (*centri d'accoglienza*), in order to analyze how migration measures implemented during the “migration crisis” in Italy and Europe are affecting migrants’ vulnerability to labor exploitation and how the anti-trafficking apparatus has integrated with emergency responses to the “crisis.” While much scholarship on migrant management has concentrated on Italian border areas—particularly the islands of Sicily and Lampedusa— non-border areas such as the Tuscan territory remain unexplored paradigmatic sites where anti-trafficking practices respond to, and contribute to shape, European migration regimes. The data used in this chapter was gathered through interviews with institutional personnel working with asylum seekers in different capacities and corroborated with information collected at public events on migration and trafficking. The article contends that despite the anti-trafficking measures in place, the inclusion of migrants within the asylum system allows for the exploitation of their labor in inconspicuous ways that render them more vulnerable and unprotected than ever.

*The intricate history of law-making  
is distinguished above all by the constitutive restlessness  
and relative incoherence of various strategies,  
tactics, and compromises that nation states implement  
at particular historical moments,  
precisely to mediate the contradictions immanent in social crises  
and political struggles,  
above all around the subordination of labor.*

Nicholas DeGenova,  
Migrant ‘Illegality’ and Deportability in Everyday Life

*[Migrants are] human beings  
who, today more than ever, often aspire  
unconsciously to a political emancipation that may  
only find space in a vision of the world free from  
constraints to subordinate to specific memberships.*

Abdelmalek Sayad,  
The Double Absence

## **Introduction**

Several scholars have emphasized the ambiguity of the notion of “migrant crisis” and the simple rendering provided by its conceptual framework (Andersson 2016; Beauchemin and Ichou 2016; Pallister-Wilkins 2016). Indeed, the concept of “crisis” contributes to hiding pivotal aspects of the issue, such as the “politics of crisis” itself. Sassen, for example, highlights how “migrations do not simply happen but are produced,” and how they “do not assume the form of invasions; they did not in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when border controls were minimal or nonexistent, and they do not today” (Sassen 1999, 155). Other authors emphasize the entangling of the “migration crisis” in broader processes, including austerity and the general restructuring of the welfare system, or the intersection of humanitarianism with securitization (Andersson 2016; Dines, Montagna, and Vacchelli 2018; McMahon and Sigona 2018).

During fieldwork I attended a conference on migration into Europe and the perceived crisis, where the anthropologist Didier Fassin framed the issue in a productive perspective (Fassin 2018). The notion of crisis comes from the Greek verb *krinéo* (to discern, to distinguish) and the noun *krisis* (the act of deciding, or pivotal moment). The French scholar highlighted how states and public discourse continuously frame the world as “in crisis,” urging thus to discern and decide hastily in such critical moments. The word crisis also depicts a state where the normal order of things is disrupted. It is important, however, to consider whose normalcy is taken into account, and what order of things is deemed objective. Fassin asked, “who has the authority of declaring the existence of a crisis,” addressing its ultimate fabrication by those who have the power of representation, including the state and humanitarian agencies (October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018).

Similarly, anthropologists of migration have stressed how the irregularization of migrants

does not naturally occur but is rather shaped by political and juridical practices, situated within specific socio-geographic contexts (Chavez 1990; De Genova 2002; Lawrence 2007; Sigona 2012; Molland 2012; Andresson 2014). Fassin, for example, relates how immigrants were seen as a resource for European reconstruction in post-World War II France, enticed through welcoming immigration policies until they were reconceptualized as a problem and a threat for the nation and consequently illegalized (2011). Analogously, in Italy, the illegalization of immigrants has been carefully engineered, as revealed by the numerous amnesties through the 1970s and 1980s that regularized undocumented migrants in connection with specific labor demands such as domestic work (Sciortino 2004). Greece in the 1920s welcomed migrants, while in the current era there is an illusion that human and labor rights are expanded and opened towards them. In fact, the main trend is a state enforcement of immigrants' illegal status and the erection of barriers to rights (Lawrence 2007). The United States offers numerous examples of the making of migrant illegality through state policies across time (Foner 1987; De Genova 2005; Smith 2006; Stephen 2007), revealing how undocumented migrations are "not self-generating and random; instead they are produced and patterned" (De Genova 2002, 424).

Since the 1990s, anthropologists have pointed out how Southern European countries engage in an approach divided between accepting migrants into society and denying them access through immigration policies (Carter 1997). This counterintuitive tendency, memorably described as "compassion and repression" (Fassin 2005), sees governments granting amnesties, welfare services, and some socio-political legitimacy, while enforcing deportations, detentions, disqualification of refugee status, and fines to undocumented migrants and to those who house and employ them (Colombo and Sciortino 2004; Fassin 2005; Lucht 2007; Lawrence 2007). Some explain this pattern as a state strategy to show an authoritarian façade to counteract what

has been widely perceived as a loss of political control during neoliberal restructurings (Glick-Schiller and Caglar 2011). Many agree, however, contrary to a mainstream rhetoric of globalization and neoliberalism, that the role of the state is not at all weakened but simply transformed—as nation-states still regulate and manage public policies (Bernal and Grewal 2014; Duffield 2012; Ong 2006; Shore and Wright 1997).

In fact, the state maintains its power to control or close national borders (Sorgoni 2011). In 2009, Italy ratified arrangements with Libya to deny access to migrants arriving by boat, which led to significant reductions of arrivals (Cuttitta 2012). In 2011, high numbers of Tunisians arrived in Italy following the onset of the Arab Spring. Around the same time, the Western-supported regime change in Libya ruined the lengthy and costly negotiations between the EU and North African countries regulating offshore containment. In response, Italy issued the “North Africa Emergency” decree, which granted temporary resident permits on humanitarian grounds to migrants escaping war-torn Libya in the post-Quaddafi era. In 2013, Italian authorities took control of maritime borders with the military operation “Mare Nostrum,” created to prevent illegal entries and rescue those risking their lives. Since these main events characterizing the “crisis,” the arrival of asylum seekers has decreased progressively, as shown by data on migrant arrivals from January to September in 2016, 2017, and 2018 (Table 4.1). As evident from these figures, 2018 saw a decrease of 80% of arrivals when compared to 2017 and 92% less than in 2016 (Idos 2019).

Table 4.1 Migrant arrivals to Italy.

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Migrant arrivals</b> |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| <b>2016</b> | 132,000                 |
| <b>2017</b> | 105,000                 |

|             |        |
|-------------|--------|
| <b>2018</b> | 21,000 |
|-------------|--------|

Stemming from this context, this manuscript reveals how the migrant "crisis" has coincided not at all randomly with a reconfiguration of the relationships between labor markets and state structures around (im)migration, such that the very laws and measures theoretically designed to protect migrants are ultimately what facilitates their illegalization and exploitation. A central aspect of such reconfiguration is the increase of the "compassion and repression" tendency (Fassin 2011) of state policies towards immigration, which fractures and divides state responses. In turn, this fracture introduces contradictions that, whether intentionally or not, render migrants more exploitable and further entrench their exploitation and marginalization at a structural level. As it will be shown, in the Italian context, the recent shifts in the asylum system from a holistic to an emergency approach render migrants further subjectable to exploitation. In parallel, the anti-trafficking system set up to support exploited migrants presents a similar "compassion and repression" tendency, which while establishing aiding policies only provides such support to few. The legal and policy analysis adopted in this manuscript helps to isolate and articulate these systemic contradictions and tensions, to highlight the divided approach of the state's response to the "crisis," while the interviews provide an access point to the de facto realities of these legal instruments that are designed to solve exploitation. Much scholarship on migrant management has concentrated on the Italian borders—particularly the islands of Sicily and Lampedusa—as the quintessential sites of migration. Yet less marginal areas such as the central Italian region of Tuscany provide uncharted sites where anti-trafficking practices respond to, and contribute to shape, European migration regimes.

## **Methodology and field site**

This manuscript combines an analysis of policies and situated interventions related to migration management in Italy and Europe with fieldwork data collected from public events on migration and labor exploitation. It also integrates interviews with institutional personnel working with migrants. I conducted 50 interviews (4 preliminary and 46 new), during which union officials, anti-trafficking workers, inspection officers, immigration lawyers, and asylum officers highlighted consistently that migrant workers exploited in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors in Tuscany were often asylum seekers, residing in state-sponsored centers.

In 2018, I conducted nine months of fieldwork research in the region of Tuscany, Italy to cast light on the neglect of non-sexual labor trafficking by the anti-trafficking apparatus. I engaged in participant observation, structured and semi-structured interviews, and surveys. I also attended several public events related to trafficking and migration issues, organized by the local government and non-governmental entities. Fieldwork material for this article was collected primarily in the area of Prato, a newly developed industrial town neighboring the city of Florence. Many other Tuscan provinces host and are fueled by the migrant workforce, yet Prato is one of the Italian provinces with the highest percentage of resident migrants, counting 36,400 out of a total population of 192,469, or 18.9% (Cagioni 2018). At the time of fieldwork, Prato's public administration, in collaboration with the anti-trafficking apparatus of the Tuscan region, was particularly active in organizing conferences on migration and exploitation. Moreover, since the 1990s, Prato has developed a network of migrant management public services, as well as research initiatives and centers (Cagioni 2018). As such, Prato is a productive site to examine the interconnections between migration policies, labor exploitation, and anti-trafficking practices.

## A window into asylum reception and migrant labor exploitation

The narrative below is an interview excerpt highlighting important and interconnected aspects of contemporary humanitarian approaches to migration management, as well as issues of migrant labor exploitation and its connection with anti-trafficking efforts. The interviewee was the coordinator of a migrant reception center in Prato.

It was September 2015, the Fondazione opera Santa Rita through Cooperativa 22 manages the reception of asylum seekers. We have big and medium buildings, monitored 24/7, which allows us to have a privileged observatory position onto the life of our guests, differently to those working with small apartments. In the Santa Caterina building, which has the peculiarity of being located downtown and hosting about one hundred people. The resident asylum seekers don't cook for themselves; there is a central kitchen that prepares meals, and there is also night security, a doctor, medical personnel, and case workers—not by protocol<sup>16</sup>.

One day the case workers told me that forty people did not show up for lunch. Lunch time is a staple moment (*punto fisso*) and since we distribute food self-service style, we realized that 40 guests (*ospiti*) were not there. We checked whether there was a party, but the same happened the following day and the one after. Forty to fifty people who were coming back very late at night, dirty, hungry, and angry, with everyone, even with the case officers. I realized that something wasn't right and I called them all to a plenary meeting. I called all the cultural mediators and divided them by languages and made a scene. I went, 'I am not sure what's happening with you, you are free men and you can do whatever you want' and then I talked about respect for the rules, saying that 'if someone invites you for lunch and you don't want to go you need to let them know', etcetera. 'If the problem is serious because you are victims of exploitation, then it's a real shame that you crossed the sea to go to a country to be exploited again, and I cannot think that that country where people are exploited is my own'.

I sat in my office the whole day and in the evening two young men—one from Sierra Leone, the other one I don't remember—came to talk. They said that they had been contacted by people who were working in the fields, they did not know where they had been brought to, they had to be ready early in the morning at a specific place. They were loaded onto a truck, worked all day, without eating or drinking, and then brought back to Prato in the evening. They were not paid, so their perception of exploitation came not from the fact that they were working 12 hours under the sun without food or water, but that in the end they were not paid.

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<sup>16</sup> i.e. this configuration was not required by central guidelines but was the coordinator and her team's decision and arrangements

The next day I accompanied them to the police, who told them to keep working so they could follow them and seize the fact in the act. All of our guests quit working sooner or later, because they weren't paid. In May 2016 this was made public, and thanks to the complaint of one of those two young men, a huge ring of exploitation in the Chianti region emerged, with more than three hundred people involved and many arrests—in fact the operation was named 'Chianti Nero' (black Chianti). In connection with this, we started collaborating with the anti-trafficking information service, but it all started with that act of trust by the two young men. One of them obtained a resident permit, because we asked the police to consider them as collaborators.

In the following sections, I elaborate on the emergence of migrant reception centers in Tuscany as a response to the “crisis,” drawing particular attention to the role of the extra-ordinary reception centers.

### **Responses to the “crisis”: migrant reception centers in Tuscany**

At the time of fieldwork, the Italian reception system for migrants offered a first level of responses, known as ‘hotspots’ and CARA centers, which had the purpose of providing identification and temporary shelter and of starting asylum claim procedures (Rapporto su Asilo e Immigrazione 2018). The second and more permanent level of assistance is articulated in two typologies: the Sprar system<sup>17</sup>, which translates as “protection system for asylum seekers and refugees,” and the CAS system<sup>18</sup>, or “extraordinary reception centers.” The former was designed as a more holistic approach to hosting migrants who were waiting for their asylum claim to be processed, as framed by Law no.189 of 2002. The approach incorporates a variety of services including immigration information and assistance, mentoring and support for employment, and schooling and socio-cultural opportunities, absent in the first level centers. The latter, on the other hand, was ostensibly established as an auxiliary system within an emergency framing. In

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<sup>17</sup> *Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati*

<sup>18</sup> *Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria*

2015, article 11 of the decree no. 142/2015 expanded the role of the CAS system, which shifted from its auxiliary function of providing “extraordinary centers” when needed to hosting the majority of asylum seekers in Italy and Tuscany alike (Rapporto 2016). As shown in Table 4.2, at the end of 2017, Tuscany hosted only 1,146 migrants in the Sprar system, accounting for less than 9% of the 12,753 migrants hosted in total (Osservatorio 2019). Similarly, in the rest of Italy, only 13% of asylum seekers were hosted in the Sprar system.

Table 4.2. Asylum seekers hosted respectively in the Sprar and CAS systems at the end of the 2017.

| <b>2017</b>    | <b>Sprar</b> | <b>CAS</b> | <b>Total asylum seekers hosted</b> |
|----------------|--------------|------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Italy</b>   | 24,573       | 151,239    | 186,833                            |
| <b>Tuscany</b> | 1,146        | 11,607     | 12,753                             |

One of the important differences between the two systems is that the extra-ordinary CAS facilities are not required to offer mandatory standards or to follow protocols central to the Sprar system (Rapporto 2016). For example, during fieldwork I visited CAS centers set up in for-profit facilities, such as bed and breakfasts, agricultural cooperatives, and hotels, where owners and managers become de facto coordinators of the migrant centers. The local government publishes periodic bidding competitions for the assignment of CAS management, to be taken on by very different service providers and translated into a variety of CAS configurations (Colombo 2020).

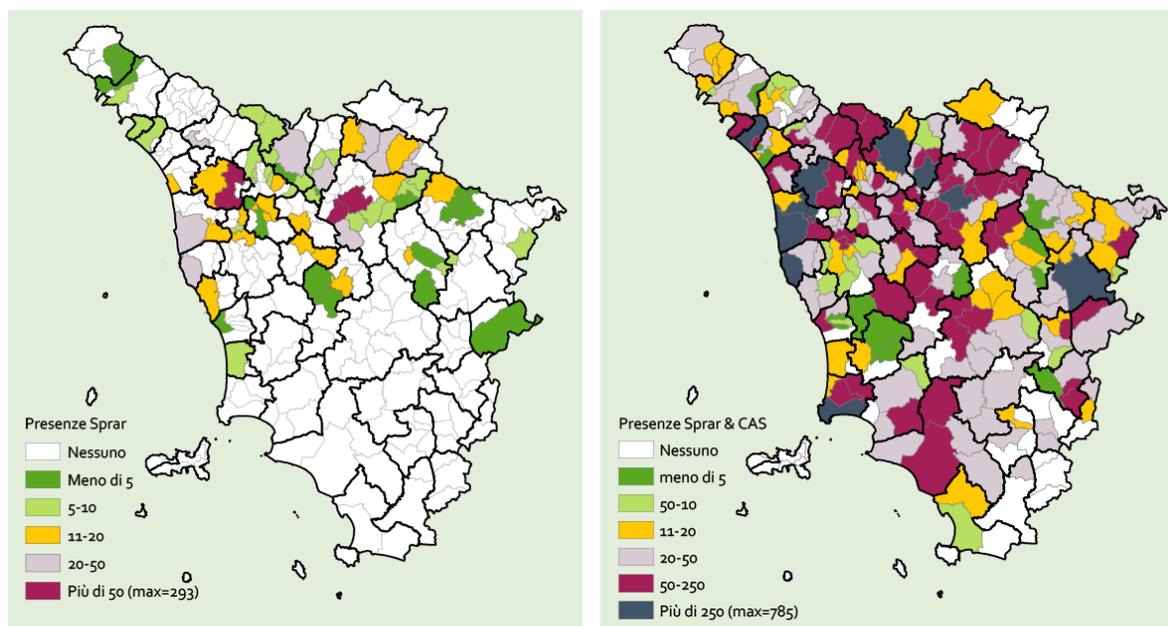


Figure 4.1. Migrants in the Sprar centers in Tuscany 2017      Figure 4.2. Migrants in the CAS centers in Tuscany 2017<sup>19</sup>

Recent data show that most asylum seekers in Italy spend from one to five years in reception centers (Faso and Bontempelli 2017). During their permanence, they are allowed to work as long as they do not earn more than 581 euro per month, or else they lose their seat at the center, as they are considered autonomous and self-providing. My interviews with asylum officials and union workers indicated that a large number of migrants hosted in reception centers in Tuscany work to fulfill their migration project and send money to their families. Six hundred euro is generally not enough to live autonomously and send remittances home. Moreover, they are often employed only for short periods of time such as 1-3 months, after which they find themselves jobless and also homeless if they are evicted for having a job. Hence, many asylum seekers do not aspire to a work contract proving their employment, which in turn makes them more vulnerable to exploitation. This is complicated by the fact that in case of exploitative labor conditions, most are reticent to come forth and file a complaint, dreading the loss of shelter at the center, alongside their income. Considering that 91% of asylum seekers in Tuscany are hosted

<sup>19</sup> Source: Osservatorio 2019

within the CAS system and that these centers are highly characterized by a lack of regulations and support services (Faso and Bontempelli 2017; Colombo 2020), it is rhetorical to wonder whether such a system is facilitating the exploitation of migrant labor.

The expansion of the CAS system, initially created as an extra-ordinary measure to host incoming asylum seekers for the briefest time possible, represents an emergency-like response to a phenomenon that, however, is not a temporary condition. As I articulated above, the so-called migrant crisis does not display temporary features but is instead an ongoing, complex, and policy-directed process—which, as such, requires long term approaches. The adoption of the CAS system as the main response to incoming migrant flows symbolizes the emergency logic adopted to address the “migration crisis,” largely treated by the state and its humanitarian responses as an abruptly emerged and temporary affair. The following section briefly addresses pivotal policies and interventions within the Euro-Mediterranean border in the last decade, to illustrate how the perceived migrant “invasion” has sprung from specific migration measures.

#### *Annual Quota System and Resident Permits*

Since 2011, as a result of the economic crunch in Europe and in conjunction with migrant arrivals, several countries including Italy have interrupted the annual quota system regulating entry for third-country national workers (Dines 2018). In the effort to promote a common EU strategy, in 2014, the European Council stated that “to remain an attractive destination for talents and skills, Europe must develop strategies to maximize the opportunities of legal migration through coherent and efficient rules” (European Council 2014, 3). In Italy, the *decreto flussi* (decree on flows or the quota system) allowed access only for high-skilled migrants, seasonal workers, and those who had attended training programs in their countries of origin (Faso and

Bontempelli 2017). These measures, however, have led not to effectively limiting so-called low-skilled migration but rather to a restructuring of mobility flows (Dines 2018). Despite the lack of significant data, scholars concur that few migrants entered Italy under these conditions, highlighting the gap between the discourse of a well-managed migration regime and what was concretely happening (Dines 2018).

Most migrants from non-European countries (*extracomunitari*) enter Europe and Italy as asylum seekers, as they would otherwise be detained in centers for permanence and repatriation (CPR) and expelled (Osservatorio 2019). Tuscany by the end of 2017 was hosting 12,753 asylum seekers, who usually remain in the reception centers between one and five years (Osservatorio 2019). Migrants claim asylum whether they run from their war-torn countries, want to find a job, or anything in between, as most situations are not clear-cut and neatly defined. Once they file their claim, they can either be granted refugee status or given what are known as “subsidiary protection” or “humanitarian protection”<sup>20</sup>, lasting respectively five years in the first two cases and two years in the latter (Colombo 2020). Given the length of such processes, characterized by denials, appeals, and much time in between all the bureaucratic steps, many migrants remain asylum seeker applicants for years (Faso and Bontempelli 2017). This results in what, during the conference on labor exploitation on occasion of the European day against human-trafficking, the investigative journalist Antonello Magnano called the “creation of an exploitation basin” (Magnano 2018). Although they reside in a limbo-like space—as they have not received an official verdict on their claim—migrants’ pending asylum application provides them with a (limited) work authorization and with documents that frame their lawful presence. This offers a different perspective from and adds new insights to anthropological conceptualizations around

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<sup>20</sup> Humanitarian protection was however eliminated in December 2018, by the Ministry of Internal Affairs Matteo Salvini through the Security decree.

migrant illegality and labor exploitation (DeGenova 2005), as I will detail further in the conclusive section.

### **Migration and Labor Exploitation**

Comprehensive legal scholarship shows that the majority of contemporary Italian laws regarding labor exploitation have been created explicitly in relation to immigration policies (Oliveri 2018)<sup>21</sup>. In other words, the persecution of labor exploitation of non-EU citizens has been tied to the notion of “migrant illegality” and has focused largely on addressing undocumented migration. More specifically, the laws have been shaped according to a security paradigm based on the regulation of migration flows linked to labor market demands, strict control of the frontiers, and the fight of irregular migration thus produced (Oliveri 2018). The focus of these laws<sup>22</sup> on “migrant illegality” has new repercussions given the current configuration of an important part of the migrant labor force which, as elaborated above, is largely documented.

Alongside these measures, concerned primarily with state security and market needs, two main legal instruments are in place to address and punish perpetrators of labor exploitation, while also providing migrants with protection and compensation. The first of these instruments is article 22 of the Italian Single Immigration Text<sup>23</sup>, which offers resident permits to undocumented migrants subjected to labor exploitation. The permit regularizes one’s status, allowing one to

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<sup>21</sup> The *Foschi law* regarding the placement and treatment of non-EU immigrant workers and against illegal immigration is the first to explicitly mention labor exploitation. The *Martelli law* codified the crime of aiding illegal entry, made more serious if such facilitation generated profit from labor exploitation<sup>21</sup>. The *Turco-Napolitano law*, the first in Italy to establish the crime of being undocumented, punished those who were employing undocumented migrant workers. Exploitation of undocumented migrant workers was later persecuted in Italy with the legislative decree no.109 of July 2012, in implementation of the European Directive 2009/52/CE, which is still active and relevant today.

<sup>22</sup> Very few exceptions do not technically tie together exploitation and migration, among which is Article 603-*bis* of the Italian Penal Code. This law punishes illegal labor brokerage and recruitment but requires labor brokerage activities to be “centrally organized,” the violations of labor conditions and wages to be “systematic,” and labor and living conditions of workers to be “particularly degrading”—all difficult elements to provide empirical evidence of in court (Cagioni and Coccoloni 2018). Theoretically the new law 199/2016 against gang-mastering and labor exploitation in agriculture makes up for these limitations. In practice, however, there are still serious difficulties in translating labor exploitation into neat, juridical definitions.

<sup>23</sup> Articolo 22 del Testo Unico sull’immigrazione, comma 12, *quarter*.

reside legally in the country and to obtain work authorization, theoretically enticing workers to file complaints against their exploiters. The latter is a central criterion for obtaining the permit and also one of its primary limitations, given the reticence of many migrants to approach authorities (Oliveri 2018a). Another intrinsic limitation of this instrument is that it only addresses undocumented migrants, excluding, among others, asylum seekers subjected to labor exploitation, such as those hosted in the reception center in Prato. Practically speaking, article 22 has never proved very effective, considered that the highest number of permits ever issued in a year was 14 out of 1227 undocumented migrants (in 2015) who contacted the authorities in relation to exploitation (Oliveri 2018a). Hence, among the high number of asylum seekers, who are by default documented, those subjected to exploitation are automatically excluded from this form of protection.

The second instrument is article 18 of the Italian Single Immigration Text<sup>24</sup>, which offers migrants the opportunity to escape situations of subjection<sup>25</sup>, including labor exploitation and human trafficking—a piece of legislation that made Italy notorious in the anti-trafficking world of Europe and beyond (Giordano 2008). As with article 12, protection is offered through the issuing of a resident permit. To obtain it, migrants can choose between two options, known as the social path and the juridical path (*percorso sociale e giudiziario*). While the juridical path requires migrants to file an official complaint against the exploiter, the social path asserts the right of the migrant to be heard and protected regardless of their willingness to participate in a criminal case (Castelli 2015). In spite of the theoretical existence of these two options, de facto only the juridical route—linked to official collaboration with the police—leads to protection and resident

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<sup>24</sup> Article 18, Legislative decree no. 286 of 1998

<sup>25</sup> Article 18 reads: “To allow the foreigner to escape the violence and conditioning of the criminal organization and participate in a program of assistance and social integration”.

permits (Castelli 2015; Nicodemi 2007; Santoro 2018)<sup>26</sup>.

Both article 22 and article 18 are built around a reward logic which requires the exploited worker to file a formal complaint and to collaborate with investigations in order to gain the coveted resident permit. As from the narration, one of the migrants hosted in the CAS in Prato obtained such a resident permit “because we asked the police to consider them as collaborators” (Ulivi, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018). Article 22, however, is merely applicable to cases of “migrant illegality,” making article 18 the only actionable instrument to support asylum seekers experiencing labor exploitation—provided their willingness to formally denounce their employers to authorities. The existence of all of these conditions clearly challenges the emergence of migrant labor exploitation to the surface, hindering effective support and allowing exploitative practices to take place without interference.

### **Trafficking and Asylum**

In her narrative, the coordinator of the CAS in Prato mentioned the incipient collaboration that her center started with anti-trafficking information services, following an incident of migrant exploitation<sup>27</sup>. I found this recent cooperation surprising, considered that both the CAS center and the anti-trafficking apparatus in Tuscany had been operating for several years<sup>28</sup>. The collaboration between the anti-trafficking system and asylum reception centers was officially

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<sup>26</sup> This central aspect, widely asserted in the literature, was also confirmed by immigration lawyers and anti-trafficking case workers I interviewed. It was experienced as a pivotal constraint and stress factor, in that both lawyers and case workers felt the need to pressure their clients into collaborating with authorities and filing official complaints in order to receive the permit.

<sup>27</sup> “In connection with this, we started collaborating with the anti-trafficking information service, but it all started with that act of trust by the two young men.” (interview December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

<sup>28</sup> While the information service for labor exploitation in Prato was opened on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018 as part of the anti-trafficking network in Tuscany, the network at large has been operating since 2011.

recommended with the legislative decree no. 142 of August 2015<sup>29</sup>, which acknowledged the European directive 2013/33/EU and incorporated it within the Italian system. The decree prescribed a focus on the relationship between the protection of victims of trafficking and exploitation and the system for the protection of asylum applicants (or successful holders of international, auxiliary, or humanitarian protection)<sup>30</sup>. In other words, the various entities participating in the Sprar/CAS system could use the toll-free number or ask for anti-trafficking support and ad hoc consultations on behalf of their guests to evaluate the most appropriate procedure based on the needs and wishes of the migrant<sup>31</sup>. This shift sees anti-trafficking and asylum no longer as separate migration issues but as different options within a unified set of interventions, at least on paper. One of the coordinators of the SATIS project put it in perspective:

We are experiencing an increasing number of people, hypothetically or actually subjected to trafficking, in all migrant reception centers. The phenomenon has fully exploded. Before, nobody really cared about the anti-trafficking system, now we receive requests from everywhere. We have to make distinctions, though, given the numbers of requests.

These requests are accepted by the anti-trafficking system only if the person is identified as a victim *and* if they need to flee because of a compelling state of danger. Another distinction is the type of exploitation suffered by the migrants: at the time of this preliminary interview (June 2017) only the sexual exploitation of women was taken into account as potential trafficking.

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<sup>29</sup> Attuazione della direttiva 2013/33/EU sulle norme relative all'accoglienza di richiedenti protezione internazionale

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2015/09/15/15G00158/sg>

<sup>31</sup> Retrieved in the Anti-trafficking National plan 2016-2018

## Anti-trafficking

Some anti-trafficking workers in Prato explicitly highlighted how the migration crisis affected their work:

For so many years the institutions ignored us. Now entities with policing roles (*prefettura, questura*) approach us in a very different modality from what you would expect, given that we are an organization disbursing social protection and support to those in need. Our people [beneficiaries] are desirable for what they know, and we are desirable as filters of such information.

This pressure goes against the premises of article 18, which states the paramount importance of safeguarding the migrants undergoing exploitation. The new policing approach, however, demands that both beneficiaries and humanitarian workers disclose information in a juridical context, which is different from the agreement initially made between the two parties. A critical anti-trafficking worker operating in downtown Prato lamented how this new type of approach “exploits and manipulates us beyond our capacity to resist.” These new developments can be interpreted as an integral part of the responses to the perceived migration “crisis” and the priority of tackling organized crime.

Another aspect emphasized by critical anti-trafficking workers in Prato was the simplification by investigative entities of a rather complex experience, such as the one at the intersection of migration and exploitation. While police forces expected and demanded a clear depiction of victimhood in dualistic terms of good or bad in order to consider supporting the migrant, anti-trafficking workers were aware of the messy, not clear-cut, contradictory aspects that more often than not are simultaneously present within the same personal experience. Support workers reported as extremely problematic the requisite for migrant stories to depict a linear trajectory, coherent and easy to assess, in order to be viewed as credible by the jury. The

frustrations created by such demands were exacerbated since, in the support workers' experiences, even if they managed to simplify their beneficiaries' narratives, the complex and messy reality of those trajectories would emerge when migrants were interrogated privately.

These insights into anti-trafficking workers' moral and psychological worlds concisely tease out the different forces at play within anti-trafficking responses. On the one hand, anti-trafficking can be understood as an instrument manipulated by state police to combat organized crime associated with migrant exploitation. Using Fassin's rationale (2011), anti-trafficking can be seen as the left hand of the state, an appendage that while showing compassion towards few covers up for the repressive (im)migration measures enacted towards most. In this sense, anti-trafficking is an attention-grabbing instrument in place, which does not, however, have to produce results because it is not designed—or therefore really expected—to. Its existence provides an appearance of control over allegedly heinous transnational crimes and at the same time of support to (exceptional and specifically compliant) victims of those crimes, without pragmatically changing the status quo. Not contradicting this interpretation but only enriching its complexity, ethnographic insights into the challenges and constraints of anti-trafficking workers reveal the genuine intentions and admirable efforts of some of those working within the anti-trafficking apparatus. This is as important to highlight when offering a depiction and critique of anti-trafficking.

### **Conclusive remarks: the state and the compassionate hand of humanitarianism**

While for many, humanitarianism is neutral and apolitical, Didier Fassin argues that an apolitical space does not exist, and that humanitarianism is a *policy of nation states*, itself a form of

governmentality that operates through morality at international and local levels (Fassin 2007, 508). Analogously, Redfield maintains that humanitarian action entertains a complex relationship with the nation-state, one that strives to redirect and restrict its sovereign power while also collaborating with it (2008). In this view, “humanitarians seek to humanize and reform political power, so that it will live up to its rhetorical promise of promoting welfare” (Redfield 2008, 197).

As seen in this paper, on the one hand we have a portion of the state that fights migrant exploitation through various regulations and humanitarian interventions, while on the other, a different portion of the state creates and maintains the systemic conditions for exploitation to take place undisturbed. This double dynamic is certainly compatible with a complex organism such as the status apparatus, yet it needs to be honestly and fully recognized in order to address migrant exploitation seriously. The activist and investigative journalist Antonello Mangano aptly described the coexistence of these opposing trends as the behavior of a “schizophrenic state”<sup>32</sup> that fills up a container while simultaneously emptying it (Mangano 2018).

On behalf of the state, humanitarian efforts of the asylum reception system and the anti-trafficking apparatus display and embody—to use Fassin’s oxymoron— “compassion” towards the migrants, while government policies prescribe “repression” through stringent and exclusionary regulations (Fassin 2005). As seen above, Europe and Italy have adopted specific immigration policies which are directly connected to the state. The decision not to allow the entry of many Global South nationalities and the changes in the *decreto flussi* have turned the asylum process, once reserved only for particular situations, into the only way for migrants to enter Europe as legal workers. The asylum reception system was designed with two functions in

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<sup>32</sup> Conference on labor exploitation, in occasion of the European Day against Human Trafficking October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

mind: first to provide shelter to migrants waiting for their asylum claim to be processed, and second to introduce refugees into the socio-cultural and economic context. Through the strengthening of the CAS system at the expense of the more holistically equipped Sprar system, the reception apparatus is reduced to the first function only: containing thousands of migrants in improvised conditions for lengthy periods of time, thereby resulting in a huge number of waiting people. These basins of waiting people are not created by nature, fate, or uncontrollable phenomena, as migrations are often depicted, but by specific policies and decisions. If Italy and Europe wholeheartedly want to fight (migrant) exploitation, they need not to create and maintain its systemic preconditions in the first place<sup>33</sup>.

DeGenova famously argues that immigration policies “activate the reification of migrant illegality in an emphatic and grandiose gesture of exclusion” accompanied by large scale recruitment of illegalized migrant labor (2014). It is the dissimulated creation of undocumented migrant workers—what he calls the fabrication of migrant illegality—through naturalizing policies that makes them a disposable commodity (DeGenova 2002; DeGenova 2014). Similarly, other scholars of migration in the Mediterranean point to the enforcement of immigrants’ illegal status as the condition triggering their exploitation (Lawrence 2007). In other words, they are vulnerable *qua* illegal. My research builds upon these findings, showing that recent reconfigurations of the European migration regimes during the so-called “migration crisis” produce masses of exploitable migrant laborers who, however, are somewhat documented—as asylum seekers aspiring to be recognized as refugees. While the spectrum of illegality continues to create vulnerability to exploitation for some migrant workers, the recent phenomenon that sees

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<sup>33</sup> An important part of this dynamic—to analyze adequately elsewhere—is the demand of cheap goods, which conversely requires the employment of cheap labor. Many Italian supermarkets, companies, and the big distribution are largely focused on price rather than quality.

the arrivals of asylum seekers offers a different perspective on the relationship between illegality and exploitation. Migrant exploitation happens without the need for illegalization, a la DeGenova. Migrants are still highly vulnerable holding their asylum claim papers, yet they have been more formally included within the legal framework *and* therefore I argue, become less deceptively exploitable. They are now included even more visibly within the state apparatus, which compassionately hosts them in the reception centers and puts in place anti-trafficking legislation to assist the ones in need—albeit without necessarily delivering that support, as seen above. I recognize with DeGenova, however, that the category of “illegal alien is a profoundly useful and profitable one, that effectively serves to create and sustain a legally vulnerable—and hence, relatively tractable and thus ‘cheap’—reserve of labor.” This category needs to be erased not only from the common vocabulary, but from the way states and members of the public are conceptualizing humans on the move, as well as from immigration policies and legislations currently structuring human movement.

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## General Conclusions

*To understand the concept of discourse is to remember that what we say about any given subject is always constructed, and there are only partial truths.*

Laura Maria Agustín, 2007

### *Introduction*

This research studied the neglect of non-sexual labor exploitation by the anti-trafficking system in Tuscany, Italy. At the time of fieldwork, Italy was one of the countries most involved in the management of migrants arriving into Europe. These flows of human mobility have been ambiguously referred to as the “migrant crisis,” with the effect of increasing the proliferation of emergency immigration measures, including anti-trafficking efforts. It has been extensively observed, however, that such efforts have been almost exclusively directed to supporting migrant women engaging in sex work, neglecting other forms of exploitation largely involving migrant men (Wylie 2016; Hoang 2016; McCarthy 2014; Peters 2014). By examining ethnographically the anti-trafficking apparatus intended as a global assemblage (Ong and Collier 2008) of legal frameworks, trafficking experts’ advocacy, situated humanitarian interventions, state and non-state actors, bureaucracies, and migrant workers’ perspectives, this study asked:

*Why is migrant labor exploitation neglected by the anti-trafficking system of Tuscany, Italy?*

The sub-questions guiding this study asked:

- a. What determines migrants' deservingness of anti-trafficking assistance according to members of the anti-trafficking system in Tuscany, Italy?
- b. What types of labor exploitation are experienced by migrant workers, and how do they resemble or contradict the notion of trafficking?
  - b.2 How does the State contribute to creating migrant workers' vulnerability?
- c. How are migration measures implemented during the "migrant crisis" in Italy and Europe affecting migrants' vulnerability to labor exploitation?
  - c.2 How has the anti-trafficking system adapted to and integrated with the asylum system emerged during the "migrant crisis"?

In answering these questions, the research adopted an anthropological approach which provides a holistic perspective to the study of human relations. As such, this study utilized various lenses to investigate the neglect of non-sexual labor trafficking by the anti-trafficking apparatus, including theories of humanitarianism and development, medical anthropological perspectives on migrant deservingness, insights from the anthropology of policy and anthropology of the state, theoretical discussions in migration studies, and scholarship on labor.

This study provided a critical account of human trafficking, challenging the assumption and mainstream narratives of much of the existing literature. I agree with Fassin (2011) and Ticktin (2014) that powerful analyses come from the uncomfortably edgy position that combines the belief in the potential of humanitarian practices and the courage to criticize their operationalization. Mine is not an isolated attempt, as a critical literature on trafficking does

exist. Most of it has challenged perspectives on sex work, bringing forth issues of politics and positionality embedded in notions of, and responses to, sex exploitation and the liminality of selling sex.

This literature, most of which comes from the fields of criminology, gender studies, social work, political sciences, and sociology, focuses primarily on anti-prostitution policy (Bernstein 2007; Chapkis 2003; Deozema 2002) and on notions of women's vulnerability and victimhood constructed by anti-trafficking campaigns (Andrijasevic 2007; Davidson 2006; Fukushima 2016; Hoang 2016; Peters 2014; Sharma 2005; Vance 2012). Important scholarship on anti-trafficking initiatives does exist among anthropologists (Augustin 2007; Giordano 2008; Molland 2012; Snadjr 2016) and other social scientists (Andrjasevic and Anderson 2009; Blanchette and Silva 2016; Bernstein 2010; Kempadoo 2015; Hoang 2016; O'Brien 2016), yet it focuses specifically and exclusively on sex trafficking and the trafficking of women.

This study is unique in that it focused on the widely recognized lack of attention to non-sexual exploitation in both anti-trafficking interventions *and* the literature. It strived to investigate such a neglect from both micro and macro vantage points, thereby analyzing policies and structural forces, as well as zooming into the empirical experiences of migrants and humanitarian providers. While the uniqueness of this specific investigation is a valuable contribution in itself, the theoretical contributions of this study address the scholarship on humanitarianism and migration and the interdisciplinary body of literature on human trafficking, as detailed below.

### *Humanitarianism*

Compellingly, an anthropology of humanitarianism has only recently emerged and registered within the disciplinary field (Feldman 2007). Humanitarianism heavily focuses on the physical and psychological conditions of those who suffer, although it generally “defines itself primarily through exceptional states of misfortune” (Bornstein and Redfield 2011, 6). Anthropologists working on humanitarianism have delivered studies in a variety of sub-fields, leading Pierre Minn to advance that:

...it is still too early to determine what form the anthropology of humanitarianism will take. What is certain, is that anthropologists choosing to conduct research in this area have the unusual luxury of working in a relatively uncharted domain, while drawing from a wide range of relevant scholarship in a variety of fields. (Minn 2007, 22)

Humanitarianism can be seen as an industry at the same time dependent on and complementing the state. The state is not necessarily weakened by the emergence of non-state actors but rather assisted by them in its workings (Bernstein 2013). In many cases, this might not be the original plan of humanitarian organizations but rather what happens along the way of becoming established as NGO entities. As articulated in chapter four, the anti-trafficking apparatus of this study can be understood as an instrument manipulated by the state to combat organized crime. In this sense, while providing an appearance of control over transnational crimes, anti-trafficking also supports (only exceptional and specifically compliant) victims of those crimes, all without having to produce results as it is not designed, and therefore expected, to do.

Critiques of post-modern development theories (Ferguson 1994; Escobar 1995) have reflected on the tendency of such theories to dissolve the object of their own study, hindering the

possibility of any further progress in the matter or advocating for getting rid of development altogether (Bornstein 2003; Mosse 2005; Englund 2006; De Vries 2007; Li 2007; Yarrow 2008; Friedman 2012). In line with anthropologists of humanitarianism and migration such as Didier Fassin, this research utilized the lens of post-development to examine humanitarianism as discourse holding and hiding relations of power, as exemplified above. However, it also acknowledged the agency of humanitarian actors in adhering to, opposing, and struggling with the discourse (policy) on trafficking, revealing the social life of humanitarian projects beyond hegemonic discourse (Mosse 2005).

#### *The migration and labor nexus in neoliberal times*

This study revealed that systemic factors at the intersection of labor and migration policies facilitated the possibility of the exploitation of migrant labor (chapter three and four). Such exploitation, however, was often acknowledged by the anti-trafficking apparatus and labor-related organizations in ways that depicted migrants as responsible for their own exploitation. In turn, this justified the lack of anti-trafficking support to migrants subjected to non-sexual labor exploitation. These findings highlight the interconnections between the emergence of anti-trafficking in the contexts of neoliberal, unprotected labor regimes (chapter three), and stringent migration measures (chapter four).

Chapter two reveals the different ways in which anti-trafficking stakeholders articulate answers regarding the neglect of non-sexual exploitation by the anti-trafficking apparatus—what I call the discursive renderings of undeservingness. What these narratives have in common is that they all express a reason why migrants known to be experiencing (different levels of) labor

exploitation in Tuscany are not deserving of anti-trafficking assistance. The different ways they justify migrant underservigness reveal socio-cultural, technical, and moral underpinnings.

Through *othering* renderings, participants denied the presence of trafficking for non-sexual labor exploitation in Tuscany, gesturing at Southern Italy and the Chinese community in Tuscany as the real sites of exploitation. Through *neoliberal* renderings, migrants were blamed for not actively asking for help (*omertà*), thus diverting attention from the root causes of exploitation and the lack of support by the anti-trafficking apparatus. Through *technical* renderings, migrants' experiences of exploitation were dismissed as trafficking cases on the basis of a (in this instance) shared, although problematic, consensus over what trafficking entails. Finally, *moral* renderings revealed an existing ideological hierarchy of rights abuse that prioritized the sex sector over any other.

These narratives reflected the diversity of roles and professional perspectives present within the anti-trafficking apparatus (lawyers, social workers, asylum officers, etc.). They expressed confusion, contradictions, and a lack of clarity, especially in the way that such answers were delivered. They also showed that the anti-trafficking apparatus is an integral part of the existing Italian and European migration regime, as it contributes with its narratives to conveying specific representations of migration trajectories—such as economic migration or forced migration. These trajectories, in turn, are associated with and translated into specific types of migrants, deemed deserving or not of intervention and support. Discursive renderings of undeservingness become thus an instrument, conscious or less so, that replicates a very static vision of the complex web of dynamics linked to migrant exploitation.

*The issue with neatly defined categories*

Chapter three revealed a messiness of categories that often, if not always, marks conceptualizations of trafficking, and consequentially rescue operations. This is rendered visible through the experiences of migrant workers, which did not fit the available categories and distinctions. In fact, the development of such neatly and defined categories is an essential element to creating and carrying out the various jobs related to the migration industry, which includes the anti-trafficking apparatus. Clarity regarding victimhood allows lawyers to win their case, NGOs to support victims, and researchers to identify a subject of study. The constructed clarity of such distinctions, however, does not find its correspondent in empirical reality.

The continuum of labor exploitation as encountered by my participants is not a crime at the fringes of society but is situated at the very core of it, and under everyone's eyes: the heart and pride of Tuscan wine and oil production. Looking at extra-ordinary cases of exploitation and calling it trafficking reinforces the idea that exploitation is incompatible with and external to the legitimate, legal, economic market. Moreover, proposed conceptualizations of the continuum maintain a hierarchy in categories of gravity, which unwittingly suggests that some exploitative experiences deserve recognition and support, while others do not qualify (Coghan and Wylie 2011; Kelly 2007).

Despite the opposite intention by the authors, such a conceptualization reiterates qualitative difference between merely exploited and actually trafficked. In other words, distinguishing between extra-ordinary exploitation and less severe exploitation purely replicates an approach that regards some labor interactions as unfortunate but conventional—and somewhat acceptable. The continuum packages together a set of traits and characteristics and lays them out in a crescendo of gravity. Migrant workers' narratives show that people may

experience some of those characteristics, for example no pay and long hours, but not others, such as surveillance and violence. The fact that they are not paid should be taken as seriously as if restriction of movement or violence were added to that. While a continuum is a useful conceptual tool, I suggest imagining a line *across* which workers move, instead of being stuck on the one point where we placed them. In this way, we can understand the fluidity of such experiences without replicating hierarchical distinctions. In turn, this would allow us to disengage from crystallized notions of gravity and deservingness and to extend justice to many migrants who work.

### *Migrant illegality*

Chapter four showed that the recent reconfigurations of the European migration regimes have turned the asylum process, once reserved solely to specific cases, into the only way for nationals of the Global South to enter Europe as legal workers. This has created large numbers of migrants hosted in state-sponsored centers, waiting for years to receive a response to their asylum claim. While waiting, they are not allowed to earn over 581 euro monthly or else they lose their shelter, yet most of them do not earn enough to live on autonomously. This causes many to accept underground work that cannot be tracked on paper, which in turn makes them more vulnerable to exploitation.

The literature on undocumented migrants showed how the framing of illegality has created the condition for exploitation (DeGenova 2002, 2014). It is the dissimulated creation of illegalized migrant workers through naturalizing policies that makes them a disposable commodity (DeGenova 2014). Similarly, other scholars of migration in the Mediterranean point to the enforcement of migrants' illegal status as the condition triggering their exploitation

(Lawrence 2007). In other words, they are vulnerable *qua* illegal.

My research builds upon these findings, showing that recent reconfigurations of the European migration regimes during the so-called “migrant crisis” produce masses of exploitable migrant laborers who, however, are somewhat documented—as asylum seekers aspiring to be recognized as refugees. While the spectrum of illegality continues to create vulnerability to exploitation for some migrant workers, the recent arrivals of asylum seekers offer a different perspective on the relationship between illegality and exploitation. Migrant illegality is no longer needed in order to create exploitation, as the majority of new arrivals into Italy receive (pending) documentation. Migrants are still highly vulnerable holding their asylum claim papers, yet they have been more formally included within the legal framework *and* are therefore, I argue, less deceptively exploitable. They are now incorporated even more visibly within the state apparatus, which compassionately hosts them in the reception centers and puts in place anti-trafficking legislation to assist the ones in need—although as I demonstrated, that support is rarely disbursed.

### *Policy and practical implications*

My research offers implications at meso and macro levels. The utilization of the ECM as the methodology of choice allowed me to connect the micro level, explored through ethnographic data, with meso and macro dimensions of the systemic level. In this section I offer pragmatic, community-oriented and state-level reflections on how this research can influence the existing anti-trafficking, migration, and labor systems in Italy.

Migration policies: From their inception, migration policies have controlled and hindered people's freedom to move and to choose where to establish a livelihood. Migrants have been subjected to different rules and provided different rights than those applied to citizens. My research shows that such legislations have generated the conditions for the creation of vulnerability and systemic exploitation. It is extremely difficult to tackle such exploitation, specifically because of the institutionalized difference in human and labor rights given by the law between migrants and citizens. Hence, it is of primary importance to eliminate any qualitative difference in the access to human and labor rights between citizens and non-citizens. Humans on the move—whether undocumented, asylum seekers, refugees, or migrants only temporarily present on Italian and EU soil—should not be penalized by their migrant status. Equal rights should be fully applied and granted to non-citizens.

Migrant reception: It is paramount to realize that mobility is a central part of the experience of a large portion of humanity—thus, it is central to think thoroughly and pragmatically about reception and integration. Currently, Italy relies primarily on the emergency asylum reception system (CAS), which does not offer meaningful paths to citizenship or to integration, although a more thoughtful system (*Sprar*) is in place. Resources currently allocated to create and process applications, to host migrants waiting for their status, and to maintain the bureaucratic apparatus of lawyers, case workers, and the various administrative officers should instead be assigned to integration programs (see below).

Labor regulations: Labor practices should be strictly monitored, and existing regulations should be implemented. Italy has recently produced important labor legislations (such as Law

199/2016), yet their implementation is hindered, for example by the defunding of inspection activities. Labor rights and regulations need to be taken seriously by the Italian government, ensuring accountability. Most importantly, workers' rights should not apply only to Italian citizens; they need to be extended to any human who works, regardless of nationality.

Integration programs: The important resources allocated to the anti-trafficking system (in Tuscany alone the budget is 1 million euro per year) should be utilized towards what I call the integration programs. These programs would not be exclusive to migrants but accessible to any person who applies. This would allow for stronger support of integration programs by the local population, as well as filling the gaps within the current welfare system. These programs may include, but are not limited to, low income housing, language classes, expanded health care, job training and start-up facilitation, full-potential mentorship, and cultural exchange workshops. The first three services and specialized personnel already exist, but their application is rather limited. Job training is currently offered by the Sprar and anti-trafficking systems, which connect migrants with local businesses and encourage internships. Adding the start-up facilitation program would allow many migrants who had successful businesses or ideas and skills before migrating to implement those in Italy, thus enriching the economic landscape by providing new jobs for the local population. This, in turn, would change the widespread discriminating attitude by native populations who often see migrants as freeloaders and competitors for low-level jobs. Alongside this program, I suggest the creation of full-potential mentorships: empowering sessions that facilitate the identification of individual (migrants and non) skills and knowledge. Whereas the start-up facilitation program helps find resources and connections to implement already available business ideas and plans, the mentorships are designed to facilitate the

emergence of not yet discovered individual talent. Rooted in the principle that each individual holds unlimited potential, the program I suggest is designed to bring self-awareness to one's skills and talents in order to ameliorate not only one's life but also the collective's. While these two programs surreptitiously work in concert to change prejudices and racist perceptions of the local populations towards newcomers, the third program does so overtly. Cultural exchange workshops are created to celebrate diversity within the understanding that the co-presence of different ideas, artistic expressions, and cultural solutions to life problems is highly beneficial for society. The workshops, designed to shift the collective consciousness from limiting ideas about migrants from the Global South and to offer tangible and continuous cross-cultural collaborations, are an essential part of the new system. As mentioned, most of the resources needed to implement these services already exist, as they are allocated to finance the anti-trafficking and asylum systems. With a reallocation of available resources, such as funding, visibility and awareness through medias, and the existing know-how and expertise of institutional personnel currently working with migrants and in different areas of the Italian welfare system, the implementation of these services is feasible.

**Anti-trafficking:** One of the primary recommendations to anti-trafficking lobbyists and policymakers is to undo and renounce the notion of trafficking altogether. Human trafficking is a notion that is only rarely found in empirical cases of (migrant) exploitation. As shown, the concept is rather an obscuration of the root causes behind what is currently defined as trafficking: migration and labor restrictions and the exploitation that derives from such restrictions. Instead of maintaining a concept that complicates and hinders the efforts to ameliorate the lives of workers, existing resources and efforts should be reallocated towards

integration programs. Current critiques of eliminating the notion propose that human trafficking as a concept has gained momentum that can be utilized to better the lives of some. I contend that it would be more beneficial to restructure the system in place in order to better the lives of many more, including native populations.

Inter-agency collaboration: The anti-trafficking system in Tuscany is set up as a network, intended to maximize results from the collaboration of multi-lateral agencies working together. These agencies include law firms, anti-trafficking NGOs, police departments, asylum committees, researchers, and trade unions, among others. My research showed that although the system was formally structured as a network, the various agencies did not generally work together. Trade unions and inspection offices, for example, though experts in labor exploitation, were often unaware of anti-trafficking legislations and possibilities to rely on the anti-trafficking system. I recommend harnessing lessons on the importance of actual inter-agency collaboration. In the new system proposed, the various services would be highly connected and effectively collaborating.

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