

New Plantations

Arbitrating ‘Seasonal Migrant Labour’ in Europe

Working Paper

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Abstract

The present working paper summarizes the results of a project titled *New plantations Migrant mobility, ‘illegality’ and racialization in European agricultural labour*. Our work in this project focuses on labour market mediation in the domain of expanding agro-business in Europe. We start from the consideration that a large section of agricultural labour today is performed by transnational migrants coming from both within and outside the European Union (see e.g. Forum civique européen 2002, Potot 2010, Morice and Michalon 2009, Gertel/Sippel 2014, Dufлот 2011, Corrado/de Castro/Perrotta 2017). While practicing different strategies of mobility, such migrant workers are typically caught in a web of multiscale border assemblages, which channel, filter and differentiate their permissions, rights and claims. At the same time, their presence is also partly a reaction to the generated need for cheap and flexible labour in what have become increasingly globalized food production chains on the continent. One of the major factors behind the rapid expansion of precarious migrant labour in the European agri-food sector, for example, has been the intensification of flexible, retail-driven – or monopsonic – agricultural production in the context of international trade liberalization. Such transformations often fall back on, and keep on propelling the demand for malleable, low-paid work these migrant workers are increasingly asked to fulfill. *New Plantations* highlights this new labour paradigm while also pushing for a conceptual innovation to better grasp the multiscale and multidimensional dimensions of migrant labour in this context.

1. Introduction

A large part of agricultural labour today is sourced from transnational migrants coming from both within and outside the European Union – both legally and illegally (EUROSTAT 2013). These migrants are pushed by various conditions (e.g. economic precariousness and/or spiralling political crises). While practicing different strategies of mobility, they are caught in a web of multiscalar border regimes and asylum politics that channel, filter and differentiate this agricultural labour force on the continent. Though critical scholarship in this domain is growing (Gertel/Sippel 2014, Corrado/de Castro/Perrotta 2017), one constraint is that most studies focusing on migrant labour in European agriculture remain largely single-case oriented and focus on one sub-field or area. This makes it difficult to gain an in-depth understanding of the intricate dynamics between migrant illegality and exploitative labour conditions at various scales and in various places, including so-called sending countries in e.g. West Africa and Eastern Europe.

Considering this complexity, there is a need for a more exhaustive and in-depth analysis that addresses the structural processes at work while bringing together data from beyond the Southern European hotspots in an empirically more holistic way. This involves considerations not just about labour exploitation (or forced labour) in a strict sense but also about market dynamics and labour-capital relations that ‘push’ and ‘pull’ certain labour regimes as well as the ways in which such relations are regulated by a conglomerate of state and non-state actors. One of the major factors behind the rapid expansion of precarious migrant labour in the European agri-food sector, for example, has been the intensification of flexible retail-driven – or monopsonic – agricultural production in Europe (the so-called ‘Californian model’) in the context of international trade liberalization. Such transformations often fall back on, and keep on propelling the demand for malleable, low-paid precarious migrant labour, which helps pushing down the costs of production and mobility.

Taking this transformation as a vantage point, our project adopts a comparative ethnographic lens towards these migrant workers, which at once takes seriously their agency and structural constraints. Rather than following the *a priori* categorisations of legality & illegality, or forced & free labour, our project prefers to examine such categories as dynamic conditions that are governed in complex ways through processes of (ir)regularization (Squire 2011), racialization (de Genova 2013) and (in)formalization (Mac Kenzie et al. 2008, Chauvin 2012). Instead of assuming migration as a ‘problem’ that needs to be ‘resolved’, therefore, the research seeks a more comprehensive understanding of the question of forced migrant labour – or what is understood as such – in the productive relationship between (supra)national legal frameworks, globalized/liberalized markets and migrants’ own political agency.

Our methodological entry points for this project are those of the multiplication of labour and autonomy of migration launched by Boutang (1998) and Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), which we would like to both enrich and complement. A key interest here is how the ‘objectifying’ processes (of labour, of state-society relations, of agricultural production) enter into a productive relationship with the ‘subjectifying’ processes (of e.g. migrant autonomy and agency, ‘race’ and social identity; see also De Genova 2013). While following a political economy lens, we are aware that the relationship between capital, labour, government and

economic markets need further specification, especially if we consider the widening delegation (outsourcing) of government and the heterogeneous market and labour conditions characterizing migrant labour markets entails today. Within this context, we conceptualize the border regime as an ensemble of institutions, protagonists, discourses and practices involved in the conflictual process of governing migration flows (Tsianos/Karakayali 2010, Mezzadra 2007).

A border regime is not targeting the total exclusion of migrants and hermetically closure of state borders, but it builds up a system of barriers that serves to differentially include migrant work – often through their illegalization and according to different citizenship status. A useful perspective here is that of the border as a membrane, which channels, selects and filters the various flows of people and goods passing it ('selective inclusion') and in the same time hierarchizes them ('hierarchical inclusion'). This understanding opens up the analytical focus for a heterogeneous European space that does not only expand externally, but also internally excludes migrants through manifold drawing up of borders, a stratification of citizenship and new kind of gendered and racialized workforces. The working of a border regime only becomes understandable when putting into relation the different official (non)citizen statuses that subjectivize people according to the right of residence, work permits and social rights (Isin/Neilson 2008, Squire 2017).

The concept of the 'autonomy of migration' in turn allows for an analysis of the production of irregularity not as a unilateral process of exclusion and domination managed by state and law, but as a conflict-driven process, in which migrant movements and struggles are an active and fundamental factor. It means looking at migratory movements and conflicts in terms that prioritize the subjective practices, the desires, the expectations, and the behaviours of migrants themselves (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013).

2. Research questions

Our research involved a most different extended case study comparison (see Burawoy 2000, Berg 2011). This means we confronted most different cases (which demonstrate substantial differences with regard to the organization of labour, capital and government regulations as well as agricultural markets) to answer the question how migrant precariousness is affected comparatively across different sites. Our driving hypothesis is that precariousness is driven by two main factors, which we summarize as the 'illegalization', 'precarization' and 'racialization' of migrant labour, but which may involve quite different dynamics in the various cases. In addition to the various case sites, our research has focused on two segments of the migrant labour force that are channelled into the labour market as different groups with different rights and labour conditions: Eastern Europeans and West Africans (see e.g. Perrotta 2015, Andrijasevic/Sacchetto 2015, Gertel/Sippel 2014). Given the dynamics at work, we kept these categories open so as to leave as much space for flexibility in the field (e.g. not pinpointing nationalities but rather investigating how identities are formed as a result of labour-capital-market-government dialectics). Before explaining our hypothesis and resulting research questions, we dedicate some space here to outline the underlying concerns that have driven us to this methodological choice as summarized in the attached matrix.

Within the historical conjuncture (Massey 2005) of contemporary European agricultural labour markets, our main concern on the economic side lies with the spatio-temporal dimensions of agri-food markets (i.e. how is the economic model of agricultural industries shaped) and its impact on the lower ends of the production network (how does this model intersect with a specific demand for migrant labour). Concerning the social dimension we are interested to find out how migrant labourers negotiate (or rather navigate: Vigh 2008) their work and status conditions in a fluid terrain of obstacles and opportunities, and what impact these negotiations have on their self-perception and political mobilization. On the institutional side, we are mainly concerned with the delegation of state authority in the domain of migration control and labour regulation, which undoubtedly has a crucial impact on migrants' economic and political status. Finally, we are mainly concerned with questions of 'race' (or rather racial categorization) as a dynamic outcome of capital and market (re-)organization and the regulation of migrant labour in the context of reconfiguring state-society relations in the case study sites at stake. Together, these concerns should help us open the 'black box' of forced migrant labour in European agriculture between dynamics of market (re)organization, public authority and citizenship practice. Specifically our research focuses on the following questions:

a) ***Illegalization***

The question *how and why illegal migrant employment persists* in European labour markets includes, first of all, an analytical distinction between different forms of 'illegality' that are tied both to the juridical status and economic working conditions of labouring migrants – or what Walters (2008) calls the 'micro-politics of illegality'. Indeed il/legality is not a passive condition but should be considered an active dimension of migrant trajectories and as a spectrum/fluid continuum, not a dichotomy (Samers 2004, Wright and McKay 2007, Ruhs and Anderson 2010, Walters 2008). To give one indication, illegal residence status of workers in the European agro-industries range from *sans papiers* to failed/rejected asylum seekers or migrants who have no further right to appeal but have not left the country, to legal residents with fragile status who are thrown back into 'illegality' for a number of reasons. Likewise, *illegal employment status* in these sectors can take varying forms, ranging from the (partial) absence of contractual agreements, to suffering from gang mastering and subcontracting, to various levels of non- or semi-compliance with national or EU legislation.

Specifically, therefore, the project has concentrated on the following questions:

1. **The production of 'illegality'**: What kinds of 'irregular' migrants exist in the studied cases (stratification of status rights)? How is their status (re)produced, by whom and/or by what means (political/economic dynamics, recruitment strategies)? How, why, and by what means do migrants move in and out of 'illegality' (individual trajectories)?
2. **'Illegality' at work**: How does 'illegality' work out on migrants' lives within and beyond the workplace? How does their illegalized status (in terms of labour conditions and political status) influence both individual navigation strategies and collective action?

b) Racialization

Strictly considered, a second concern would involve the functions and effects of ‘illegality’ in the organization and segmentation of agricultural labour markets. In order to (sociologically, politically) situate contemporary dynamics of exploitation, however, this question should be expanded towards migrants’ own aspirations, self-categorisations, and self-positioning as part of postcolonial, gendered subjectivities in Europe’s border regimes. Considered more broadly, therefore, this question also involves a rising concern with the racial and territorial segmentation that comes along with the ‘whitening’ (or nativisation) of European agro-food products (i.e. ‘Swiss’ and ‘Italian’ produce) against the increasing ‘blackening’ of migrant labourers through what some scholars have started to call Europe’s new colour line (Mezzadra 2010, Mezzadra and Rahola 2006). Concrete questions that arise in our context are:

1. **The production of ‘race’:** in other words, how racialization operates along a continuum of capitalist restructuring, mobile border deployments and the enactment of cultural/gender difference of European and extra-European migrants (Kearney 2004, Piper 2007, Lister et al. 2007, Mezzadra/Neilson 2013) – in other words: how ‘race’ is a result of these multiple enactments rather than the other way around.
2. **Segmentation:** How do processes of differentiation along race, nationality and gender contribute to the social/spatial segmentation of labour markets in this sector?
3. **Migrant subjectivities:** Which kind of hybrid or militant identities, which collective forms of action and resistance emerge in the midst of these flexible labour regimes and, and to what extent are they able to overcome ‘race’?

Together, these questions add up to our main concern with the widening segmentation and territorialisation of migrant labour markets in the European agri-food sector and its impact on migrants’ precarious social, economic and political status.

3. Research approach and methodology

The multi-disciplinary research team of this project has gathered and compared systematic data across four sites in Italy, Belgium and Switzerland, both separately and with the help of MA students. Access to field sites has been ensured through local partnerships with non-governmental and syndicate organizations (see list of partners on the SNIS website). In addition, two research trips have been undertaken to look into migrants’ regions of origin to assess push factors, international recruitment strategies and trajectories (through network contacts in Romania, and in Moldavia in particular).

Our methodological choice has been inspired both by actual labour force divisions as well as the team’s expertise in European and African studies. The team draws its expertise from a wide disciplinary field in the social sciences and humanities (geography, anthropology, sociology, political philosophy, law and economics). It has a long expertise in border and migration studies, African studies, economic anthropology, sociology, and gender studies. It

is furthermore embedded in a wider network of active scholarship, socio-cultural and international organizations to increase its impact in the public domain. Throughout the research the team has demonstrate a strong dedication to applied analysis through its partnerships responsible for coordinating the research in the different field sites. Several of our collaborators (in particular Ilaria Ippolito, Cristina Brovia and Sandro Mezzadra) have extensive knowledge of international and national immigration laws.

Our method has favoured the analysis of mobile circulations of migrant labourers rather than maintaining an artificial distinction between lifeworld and system, labour and livelihood conditions (Marcus 1995, Burawoy 2000, Tsianos/Karakayali 2010, De Genova 2013). Rather than a standard survey inferring statistically relevant target populations, which – given the extremely volatile context (a season-bound, hypermobile labour force in the margins of state control) – might be simply impossible to pursue, we have favoured in-depth ethnographic fieldwork emphasizing longitudinal participant observation of livelihood practices along trusted groups. In each of the five sites, this fieldwork will be corroborated by (semi-structured) stakeholder interviews with institutional and third sector representatives as well as sectoral organizations/enterprises.

Concretely the project has pursued the following **case studies**:

Belgium

Research team: Karel Arnaut, Johan Wets, Abby Golub, Walenka Raeyen

Research director: Karel Arnaut

Fruit farming in the Belgian province of Limburg, more particularly the southern region of Haspengouw, is a very important economic activity in terms of production, income and employment. Over the last five years fruit farmers hired 30.000 to 40.000 seasonal labourers per year, mostly non-Belgians or Belgians with a migration background. This figure equals the maximum number of miners active in the Limburg coalmines during its peak period following WWII. Also then, foreign labour was attracted on a massive scale and resulted in the regulated mass migration from the Mediterranean, from Spain to Morocco, over Italy, Greece, Turkey and Algeria, until the early 1970s when the mining activity collapsed. The ensuing reconversion was slow and difficult, but at least in southern Limburg the fruit production and export is considered a viable alternative that has absorbed a part of the unemployed from the wider region. Nonetheless profit margins are very sharp. This became clear when last year Russia blocked the import of Belgian (European) fruit. This provoked a major crisis and put additional pressure on the wages of the (seasonal) workers. The latter group is a very diverse group, consisting of second or third generation labour migrants issued from the ‘old’ migrations, as well as new (post-1990) migrants from eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. Moreover, the latter group consists both of Africans who have been residing in Belgium (mainly Brussels) for more than a decade and commute to the Limburg for seasonal labour, and of more recent arrivals from, mainly, West Africa (Loose and Lamberts 2010). The latter groups consists of men and women of very different legal statuses: refugees, asylum-seekers, persons granted exceptional leave to remain, undocumented migrants, and

people granted refugee status in another European country, which in itself indicates different degrees of vulnerability to exploitation or illegal employment (Rea and Wets 2015).

Up to this date, very little data, both qualitative and quantitative are available on the astounding 35.000 seasonal labourers active in the Limburg fruit farming every year. Apart from some general figures, the experience of the local organisation 'Vzw Masala' and Mrs. Anne Dussart who works for Caritas International (Dept. Social Programme and Reintegration), strongly indicate that such data are timely and will be possibly revealing in terms of working conditions, payment regimes, labour brokerage and patronage, housing conditions and health situations.

This case study cannot hope to fill this enormous data gap. In line with the general goals and theoretical outlook of the project, the research nonetheless gathered substantial data through its focus on the way seasonal workers *navigate* the established regime of diversity/mobility in which they find themselves caught, but also *resist/renege* the racialisation processes and inequalities which are constitutive of the human resources dimension of the agro-industrial complex. Based on this approach, we generated the following key insights:

1. The *regime of diversity and mobility* which regulates the migration infrastructures of seasonal labour in southern Limburg. This regime is a composite, multi-scalar assemblage of legal arrangements and regulatory and controlling institutions at the European, national (Belgian) and regional (Flemish) level. In most general terms, there has been a major shift in legislation and organisation encouraging intra-EU labour mobility and discouraging labour influx from outside the EU. Over the last 25 years, there has been a gradual but now almost complete shift from non-EU (Punjabi, African) to EU workers from Poland, Bulgaria and Romania predominantly, with a minor but significant participation of workers from Southern Europe but with a Maghrebi migration background. Seen from a broader historical perspective, the current regime of mobility/diversity shows the traces of the Belgian/European colonial past (Africans as exploitable subjects) and the post WWII labour migration from the Mediterranean which in Belgium produced an autochthone-allochthone dichotomy. This regime lays the foundation of mechanisms of *racialisation* of the work force in the agro-industrial complex of fruit production in southern Limburg.
2. The Limburgian *agro-industrial complex* in which employers/farmers and seasonal workers operate, comprises: (a) public, semi-public and private centres of expertise built-up and knowledge/technology transfer and distribution, (b) networks and centres of commercialization (cooperatives / fruit auctions, tourist offices,), (c) mainly informal networks of labour mediation and recruiting based on both strong (kin-based, 'ethnic') or weak (friends and acquaintances, religious, or nationality-based) ties. This agro-industrial complex forms the dynamic infrastructure for the ongoing neoliberalisation of the fruit production activity. In the face of the extraversion/globalisation of all aspects of the fruit production/marketing, one observes a double process of '*domestication*': farmer-seasonal worker relationships are framed as family-like but accommodate deep misrecognitions and inequalities, and fruit production is increasingly/spectacularly framed as a local

(heritage) tradition. This ‘autochthonisation’ fits the racialisation dynamics observed in the hegemonic regime of diversity/mobility and results in hierarchisation along the autochthone-allochthone continuum, the denial/misrecognition/effacement of the constitutive role of ‘allochthone’ seasonal workers, which strengthens racialisation.

Italy

Research team: Timothy Raeymaekers, Ilaria Ippolito, Mimmo Perrotta, Cristina Brovia, Marc-Antoine Frébutte

Research director: Timothy Raeymaekers

Italy has been relatively widely discussed both in the press as well as in more sociological studies preoccupied with migrant labour and capitalist market re-organizations. A large ‘grey’ literature exists on the widespread abuse, exploitative labour and living conditions, and the infiltration of organized crime, particularly in Italy’s southern regions (e.g. MSF 2005, Eurispes 2011 and 2013). Much less attention, though, has gone to the deeper social dynamics ensuing from migrant’s dynamic political status and social mobility in correspondence with an increasingly segmented labour market for agricultural workers across the country. It is this dynamic relationship that the Italian fieldwork seeks to uncover.

Piedmont

The first Italian case study focused on Saluzzo and the so-called fruit-growing municipalities (“Comuni della Frutta” Verzuolo, Revello, and Lagnasco) in Piemonte, famous for their blueberries, peaches, apples and kiwis. Since several years, the area has become the destination of Subsaharan African agricultural workers: from only a few in 2009 to about 700 people in 2016. Year by year the situation has become more and more critical, especially regarding the accommodation of migrant labourers, which is almost completely run by the NGO CARITAS, which runs a provisional reception settlement in Saluzzo as part of its nationwide Presidio Project. The main focus of this research focused on the connection between the ir/regularity of seasonal migrant workers and their diversification as a labour force. Depending on their working class and whether they have a residence permit, they are integrated into the labour market in various ways (Mezzadra, 2008). To analyze this differentiated statuses, the research started from an overview of the current Italian regulatory framework concerning migrant work, devoting particular attention to the issue of residence permits. The condition of ir/regularity with respect to the residence permit is closely related to the necessity to have a regular and continual working relationship. Therefore, Italian immigration policy creates a remarkable asymmetry between employers and workers, because the latter depend on the formers not only with regards to the possibility of obtaining a job and an income, but also concerning the acknowledgment of their rights as (non-)citizens. So, the possibility to be recognized as a citizen and not just as labour force depends on the migrants’ labour status. This situation of dependence, combined with social and cultural segregation that affects most of the seasonal workers, and with the strong fear to become irregular and being “deported”, nourishes the vulnerability of workers, as well as the possibility for them to be blackmailed – a vulnerability that already strikes workers because of the economic crisis – and easily leads to situations of serious exploitation (see also De Genova, 2002). This

precariousness does not concern only undocumented migrants, but it affects also all those who do have a residence permit, but are likely to lose it because of the dissolution of their work contracts – which leads them to return to the circuit of irregularity. They are illegalized (Bauder, 2013) owing to a migration politics based on precariousness rather than on protection. Nonetheless, a diversification can be observed: besides “stable” workers, who have been present on the territory for more time with residence permits for employment reasons, we can find that workers who are beneficiaries of international protection or humanitarian protection are present in large numbers. Furthermore, since 2016 in Saluzzo's area many asylum seekers have been present, waiting for the evaluation of the international protection application and/ or its outcome at the concerned territorial Commission. This process lasts about two years on average. But many of them already received a denial for their application, so they have already become irregulars or maybe have appealed and are waiting for the outcome. The informal interviews conducted with precarious migrant labourers brought out a confusing and rather new situation as regards their stay in reception centers, besides a remarkable vulnerable condition¹. Asylum seekers try to protract the stay in the reception centers in various ways in order to have their rights acknowledged, negotiating constantly their conditions while living in a constant state of (legal and social) uncertainty. Within this increasing ‘refugeeization’ of the agriculture workforce (Dines and Rigo 2015), the research considered an increasing precarization of migrant workers. On the one hand, the analysis further deconstructs the dividing line between so-called political and economic migrants, which has become problematic because of this rising precarity. On the other hand though, this distinction remains sharp from a legal and a political point of view. The social exclusion and marginali circumstances these migrant workers experience nourish a kind of informal economy and forms of serious labour exploitation. Besides, this situation decreases the possibility to create a cohesive workers movement that could put pressure on different levels: unlike who has a residence permit for employment reasons, the beneficiaries of international protection don't need to demonstrate an income to renew the permit, increasing in this way the possibility of the farms to cut the cost of manpower using a large number of migrant workers with no guardianship.

Basilicata

In Southern Italy, our analysis concentrated on the Northern tip of Basilicata. In the alto piano of the Murgia bordering Puglia, between Lavello and Palazzo San Gervasio, every year between July and September, more or less 900 migrant labourers are employed during the tomato-picking season by local enterprises through a system of gang-masters. The regional government's response to this phenomenon has been mixed, involving long-term indifference followed by forced re-settlement and repression of ‘clandestine occupations’ more recently. A hybrid Task Force currently tries to officialize employment by imposing subscription lists to labourers who are relocated from various temporary settlements (‘ghettos’) to official host centres. For the next two years, our research will concentrate on labour-capital relations in this volatile institutional context by focusing on the following specific aspects:

¹ The field research in Piedmont produced interviews with more or less 100 day laborers coming from Mali, Burkina Faso, Ivory Cost, Senegal, Guinea, Guinea Bissau. They are mostly young men (20 – 30 years old) and living in the Caritas camp of Saluzzo.

- Analysis of the local geography of production, including labour organization and labour-capital relations (caporalato system) and their territorial implications (production clusters);
- Analysis and follow-up of institutional responses (government and third sector, e.g. regional Task Force) and their impact on the local geography of production;
- Analysis of migrant agency, including employment histories, political status and political mobilization.

Our research method involved a combination of semi-structured interviews with key institutional stakeholders (e.g. regional Task Force, mayors and councillors of the interested municipalities, inspecting and policing bodies; Caritas, Red Cross, labour unions and other third sector organizations involved in the protection of migrant labourers) and local agricultural enterprises (amongst others through their sectorial representation), and a two-fold participant observation with a trusted group of migrant day labourers.

Based on these two case studies, we observed the following trends:

1/ *refugeeization*: because of the rising number of asylum seekers and refugees in the agricultural workforce, we decided to examine more deeply the relationship between the Italian asylum system and labour exploitation, and the effects recent legislative changes regarding protection are having on the lives of migrant workers. Though it is premature to jump to conclusions, we observed indeed a high incidence of so-called ‘informal’ labour among refugees with temporal humanitarian status – and who find themselves in a widening limbo – or grey zone – between temporary international protection and economic precarity.

2/ *ghettoization*: given the radical changes in housing conditions for mobile workers in both regions in 2017 (relinquishing and even destruction of temporary accommodation by regional authorities), we decided to adopt a more systemic approach, focusing more attentively on the relation between migrants’ precarious housing situation, their precarious legal status, and their isolation from access to social services. Taking the analysis away from a purely legal framework towards a more systematic overview of the institutional mechanisms that continue to reproduce migrant workers’ precarity proved to be fruitful strategy to unveil some of the less formal aspects of labour mediation, which persist despite the intensive legislative reform in Italy since the ‘anti-caporale’ measures of the last 5 years.

Switzerland

Research team: Sarah Schilliger, Tina Bopp, Simon Affolter, Nils Wyssmann and Meret Barfuss

Research director: Sarah Schilliger

Horticulture in Switzerland faces profound structural changes due to agrarian reforms that shifted the mode of production to a more competitive and multifunctional agriculture. As a consequence, in the last decade the number of farms declined and the size of the remaining farms increased. The majority of people working in Swiss horticulture are still family

members, but non-family labour gradually became more important. Especially during the harvest season additional and flexible low-cost labour is needed. The recruitment of this labour force is organized both via institutional and informal channels and shows a great variety with respect to the origin of the workers and their juridical status. While seasonal labourers from within the European Union (especially from Poland and Portugal) are recruited through informal networks and through an employer-led agency ('Agrimpuls'), agronomy students ('stagaires') from countries outside of the EU (esp. Moldavia) are legally employed for a maximum of 18 month (institutionalized in the 'Stagaires-Agreement') and asylum seekers living in camps are employed through state-led working programmes. Beyond that, *sans-papiers*, mainly from South Eastern Europe (esp. Kosovo and former Yugoslavia) and rejected asylum seekers (mainly from African countries) belong to the working force employed in the Swiss horticulture sector as well. Due to a stricter targeting of undeclared work (following new legislation against 'black labour' installed in 2008) and also due to institutional reforms in the aftermath of the national referendum against mass immigration in February 2014 a racialized recomposition of the migrant labour force is currently taking place in this sector.

The team decided to focus on the production of vegetables and fruits in the Swiss Midlands. Our research team explored the function and effects of racialization in the production process and the way the racialized labour market is institutionally produced through different state and employer-led recruitment systems in the context of current dynamics of migration politics. In turn, the research specifically associated these institutional developments to ongoing transformations of the agricultural sector, taking into account the increasingly industrialized modes of production in horticulture, the diversification of commodity chains for agricultural products and the centralization of retailers (mainly by Coop and Migros).

These aspects have been addressed by focusing on the following elements:

- Social networks and formal/informal labour intermediaries that serve to channel labour both in Switzerland and in some selected countries of origin (Moldavia, Poland) as well as the role regulatory authorities and non-state actors play in these filtering processes
- Racialization and informalization of the labour market and increasing competition between different groups within the labour force from the perspective of migrant labourers and with respect to their actual working conditions
- Interrelation of different agricultural production regimes (e.g. conventional versus organic production) and the respective working conditions, alternative production regimes of cooperatives and producer/consumer-networks supporting a socially sustainable agriculture.

The Swiss research methods involve a combination of semi-structured interviews with key institutional stakeholders (particularly cantonal inspection bodies, recruitment and placement agencies, farmers organizations like the Swiss Farmers Association and Uniterre, professors of a training school for agriculture in Zurich) and extended ethnographic research on selected farms together with migrant workers (i.a. cherry and strawberry in Basel-Land, vegetables in the Bernese Seeland) – wherever possible with us as researchers being directly involved in the actual work process in order to get deeper insights into migrants' working and living realities.

The contact to migrant workers has been initiated through collaborators from NGOs and through existing contacts to the Polish community. Beyond that, one researcher (Tina Bopp, who grew up in Moldavia) explored the transnational recruitment networks through field trips to Moldavia and Poland.

Based on this approach, the Swiss research produced the following results.

1. *Differential inclusion, precarity and social isolation.* Different from our case studies in Italy, we cannot observe for Switzerland an ongoing ‘refugeeization’ of the workforce. Despite governmental initiatives like the pilot project „Refugees as workforce in agriculture“ which started in May 2015 and was launched by the Swiss Secretariat for Migration and the Swiss Farmers Association, there is only a slightly increased number of refugees employed in agriculture. The official authorities still praise the pilot project, but in fact they hardly find neither farmers nor migrant workers who want to be part of this project. The farmers prefer to recruit seasonal workers from Eastern Europe (mainly Poland and Romania) and Portugal with whom they have a long tradition of collaboration. The number of undocumented migrants from Non-EU countries has declined in the Swiss Midlands since the introduction of the ‘Federal Act on Illegal Employment’ in 2008. Nevertheless, there still exists forms of semi-compliant labor (i.e. short-term labor without announcement at the cantonal labor office). Legal status does not inevitably lessen workers vulnerability to exploitation and deportability. The disciplining of the labour force, which is usually explained partly through their deportability (de Genova 2002) extends towards documented migrants as well. A central importance should be given here to the employers who discipline their workers through the threat of deportation. As a result, temporary migrant workers in Swiss agriculture constantly have to prove themselves to be a ‚good/strong/healthy worker’ in order to get a contract in the subsequent season and not to be denied the opportunity to return to work in Switzerland in the future (and potentially to take family members with them who are employed at the same farm).

2. On the farms, we nonetheless observed a growing *hierarchization and rivalry* between different migrant groups, with refugees having a very low status, while migrants from Portugal often having supervising positions. While there exist social networks within the Portuguese communities in the villages where we did our field work, this is not the case for most of the migrant workers from Eastern Europe and Non-EU countries. Our analysis of selected trajectories of migrant workers shows a strong tendency to social isolation. Concerning the situation of refugees: While the authorities especially expected an improvement of the social integration of refugees into the labor market and into swiss society in general, the project seems – at least from the perspective of the refugees – to fail. Our research shows that the refugees experience hard conditions of work and life: long working hours, marginal leisure time for having a social life beside work and as a result social isolation. This is also the reality of many migrant workers from Eastern European countries. Despite their annual return to the same village/farm, they hardly establish social networks in Switzerland, can’t improve their language skills and often suffer from loneliness. The main

reasons for this social isolation are the very long working hours, the remoteness of the farms and the hard physical work which leads to a fatigue and missing power for leisure activities.

Concluding insights

Based on this in-depth research in the various case sites, we raise the following preliminary conclusions.

a) on labour mediation

The specific focus on labour intermediation we adopted in this project helps to untangle some of the intricate dynamics involved in the *reproduction* of labour. We refer to such phenomenon as the process of separating the gains from labour *power* from the cost of producing a steady and flexible labour *force* (Burawoy 1976). The role of labour brokers, for instance, has been said to facilitate externalizing the costs of this reproduction, while internalizing the gains from their labour power (Lindquist et al. 2012). Labour brokers particularly assure a maximum extraction of labour power while often imposing the ‘social’ charge of its reproduction onto the labourers, their families and communities at home. While partly building on this analysis, we also think the phenomenon of brokerage needs to be deconstructed and complexified further, in social (i.e. who is involved and how) and legal (what dispositions and devices are applied) but also in cultural terms (i.e. how is difference culturally and discursively constructed and reproduced). First, questions need to be answered about the different, legal devices that are associated with bordering migrant labour from the ‘national’ workforce, which typically fulfil the role of ‘selectively excluding’ and ‘differentially including’ migrant workers within national labour markets (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). This raises the question where to draw the line between such ‘legal’ and supposedly more ‘informal’ (or ‘illegal’) brokerage operations. Secondly, with respect to absorbing the gains from migrants’ labour power, brokers typically fulfil the role of ‘embedding’ (trans)national labour markets within the social domain of families and extended social networks, while at the same time they also harden socio-cultural boundaries. This makes one wonder where the social (or the political) begins and market dynamics end. Especially in a situation where migrant infrastructures include multiple logistics (including the flexible recruitment of labourers, the organization of – temporary or permanent – labour accommodation; and, often also, multiple institutional negotiations), it makes little sense to centre our analysis exclusively around one key figure (of the ‘broker’, or the ‘bureaucrat’, or the ‘entrepreneur’). But we need to find out more about the different, intersecting devices (dispositifs, technologies, infrastructures) that continue to fulfil the crucial role of extracting the migrants’ labour *power*, while at the same time externalizing the reproduction of a renewable labour *force*.

b) on differentiating and subjectivating labour

For these reasons, we have decided to focus on two set of dynamics that highlight the bridging and separating functions of labour mediation.

First, we look at the dynamics of *differentiating* labour, among workers themselves, but also, between their capacity to produce and to reproduce labour. On the one hand, this analysis directs attention to the enforcing institutions (Burawoy 1976), which, often forcefully, separate migrant workers from the society for which they are invited to produce. On the other hand, attention needs to be placed also on the cultural repertoires that perform this segregation process. As Tsing (2009) writes, culture remains central to migration infrastructure in general, and to the production of channels that allow for the circulation of migrant labour. Secondly, we analyze the **subjectivation** of migrant labour, i.e. the how multiple boundaries erected to separate labourers from their productive power are also multiplying different “subject positions” (De Genova et al. 2014: 3). The concrete question we want to address here is how the ongoing delocalization of territorial borders is also transforming workers’ subjectivities, for instance in the way they navigate and negotiate different residence statuses, work permits and social rights.

Some of the more concrete questions we address in these two domains are the following ones:

How is migrant employment il|legalized and in|formalized in European labour markets, and how does this process influence migrant labourers’ subject positions? This question includes, first of all, an analytical distinction between different forms of ‘illegality’ and ‘informality’, which are both tied to the juridical status and to the economic working conditions of labouring migrants – or what Walters (2008) calls the ‘micro-politics of informality and illegality. Indeed such forms should not be considered as passive conditions but they are an active dimension of migrant trajectories (Samers 2004, Wright and McKay 2007, Ruhs and Anderson 2010).

How do dynamics of ‘race’ and ‘culture’ intermingle with mobile border deployments and capitalist restructuring in the domain of European agri-food production? This question addresses a rising concern within current postcolonial scholarship with the so-called ‘whitening’ (nativisation, domestication, heritagisation) of European agri-food products against the increasing ‘blackening’ (colouring) of migrant labourers (Mezzadra and Rahola 2006). It also points to the “intra-European hierarchy of cultures” (Böröcz 2006:132), analysing the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000) within Europe. Rather than sticking to a single colour line, the contributions in this volume adopt an intersectional perspective that takes account of the interconnecting dynamics of race, gender and class in this specific domain (Kearney 2004, Piper 2007, Hillmann and Wastl-Walter 2011).

The comparative outlook of this project helps to understand the intricate dynamics of labour intermediation in so-called ‘seasonal’ agri-food production on the European continent. Purposively taking examples from apparently quite disparate cases, they aim at revealing convergences in the way such intermediation practices materialize into certain institutional, cultural and spatial ‘effects’. While these contributions certainly help to overcome the analytical dichotomy between supposedly fluid mobility and fixed infrastructures of migration, they also add more flesh to the debate on migrant labour and subject positions. Rather than following a priori categorisations of legality & illegality, formality and informality, forced & free labour, our project prefers to examine such categories as dynamic

conditions that are governed in complex ways through different processes of differentiation and multiplication. Our method, which is interdisciplinary (the team consists of sociologists, anthropologists and geographers), aims to further the kind of multiscalar but place-sensitive engagement on which current critical scholarship in this domain is founded (Tsianos and Karakayali 2010, De Genova 2013, Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, Xiang 2013). At the same time, it tests new grounds for the collaboration between such scholarship, activism and the performative arts that have been at the centre of this two-year research project. This tight collaboration have made us aware both of the performative aspects of our research as well as our own positionality in the field (see also Haraway 1988, Pratt 2000), and, as such, open the road for new explorations.

The team thanks SNIS (The Swiss Network for International Studies) as well as all its partners for making this contribution possible.

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