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Parea non servin¹: Strategies of exploitation and resistance in the Caporalato discourse.

Abstract

In this article, we analyse the ideological content of the discursive strategies used by a group of migrant workers subjected to "Caporalato", a form of illegal hiring and exploitation of farm day workers through an intermediary. Starting from a series of collective open interviews with farm workers, we examine the way in which both dynamics of exploitation and resistance are reproduced through linguistic and discursive practices. What emerges from the analysis is a complex set of ambivalent experiences and representations. Despite its inherent exploitative and controlling nature, the workers tend also to justify, legitimize and deny the negative aspects of Caporalato. Nonetheless, they also use linguistic devices of resistance to reconfigure the meanings of, and their role in, Caporalato. Interestingly, the analyses show that Caporalato is also perceived as a mechanisms of social mobility. Only limited attempts of calling explicitly into question its criminal nature are strategically expressed.

Keywords:

Caporalato; Discursive strategy; Exploitation; Gangmaster system; Interviews; Resistance

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1 Latin: "I obey but not as a slave"

1. Introduction

Linguistic and discursive practices are powerful tools for understanding society and the dynamics of power and resistance that shape social organization (see van Dijk, 2008). Such dynamics can take different forms and have a profound impact across several different domains. It is therefore crucial for discourse studies to explore and analyze them in contexts that have yet to receive much attention from researchers.

One such a context is *Caporalato*. Caporalato is broadly defined as as an illegal and exploitative form of mediation and labour organization. This practice is typical of Mediterranean societies and it has been examined particularly in the Italian and Spanish contexts, but it also plays a key role in contexts where the prevalent agricultural economy is based on large estates (e.g., California; United Kingdom) shaping the organization of the labour relationships (see Krissman 2005; Perrotta, 2015; Rogaly, 2008). Thus, Caporalato provides a unique opportunity to examine and analyze the dynamics of exploitation and resistance in the highly relevant social situation of migrations and work relations. In this article, we investigate how workers exploited by Caporalato (i) make sense of the inherently exploitative nature of the system, and (ii) whether and how they react to Caporalato through resistance and social engagement. We do so by examining workers' discursive strategies, forms of discursive manipulation of reality enacted by social actors in order to achieve a certain goal and, potentially, changes with significant social and material consequences.

In this article we provide an overview of some of the approaches to the study of the Caporalato and of the discursive strategies, focussing specifically on how the concepts of exploitation and resistance can be understood (section 2). We then illustrate the methodological approach and the data used in this article. We also describe the social context where the interviewees live (section 3). Section 4 describes the analysis of the interviews. In this section, we contribute to previous literature by suggesting a distinction between different forms of exploitation

and resistance strategies. In the last section, we discuss the findings and draw conclusions to better understand the practice of the Caporalato.

2.   Theoretical framework

Caporalato — roughly translated into English as a *gangmaster system* — is a form of illegal hiring and exploitation of farm day workers through an intermediary and a key concept to understanding the labour market and power relations in the Italian agricultural labour system[2]. The word Caporalato comes from the Latin word *caporalis*, a derivative of *caput,* "boss", and is used as extension of abrupt and imperative manners produced by an authoritarian figure (Treccani)[3]. Caporalato is a system based on outsourcing the employment of farm workers to illegal intermediaries (Caporali[4]) who can easily and quickly find disciplined and cheap workers to satisfy employers' demands (Perrotta, 2014). As claimed by Pugliese (2015), the phenomena of Caporalato and of illegally hired migrants fit the context of a system of agricultural production and distribution often called the "Californian model" (see also Krissman 2005; Perrotta, 2015). This system is based on the idea of 'cheap food for cheap labour' obtained through the exploitation of 'disposable' people (Bales, 2000; Berlan, 2002; Cristaldi, 2014; Garrapa, 2016), and it is widespread not only in Italy but also throughout the Mediterranean area (Michalon and Morice, 2008). As suggested by authors such as Avallone (2017) and Corrado (2017), Caporalato - in the sense of system of exploitation - is the ineluctable result of a structural lack of efficiency and planning in the laws concerning the recruitment of workers. In the Italian context, similarly to other countries where agriculture is based on large estates, there are no well-defined and practical labour policies able to support seasonal workers and to provide them with relevant services such as accommodation and

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[2] For a discussion regarding the legal aspects of Caporalato, see Piva (2017).

[3] http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/caporale/

[4] It should be noted that in Italian "Caporali" is the plural form of "Caporale", i.e. one intermediary.

transport. Thus, Caporalato occupies an organizational and legislative vacuum contributing to the 'illegality' and exclusion of migrant workers.

As investments into technical innovation are very limited, landowners profit from lowering the wages of the pickers and from increasing their work schedule, violating the national and international labour laws (Oliveri, 2012). As claimed by Corrado (2017: 6), the Caporalato represents the only available solution for small and medium farmers and food processors because of "the inefficiency of the supply chain organization, pressure by retailers, and lack of investment in the mechanization of harvesting operations". In such a context, Caporali manage several activities, including transporting migrants to the fields and organizing the production and payment of farm workers. To 'offer' these 'services', Caporali take portions of workers' salaries (see Corrado, de Castro and Perrotta, 2016).

Caporali are social and political figures mediating between farm workers looking for a job, and employers looking for for cheap and disciplined workers (see Corrado, 2011; Avallone, 2014). Farm workers are often are under pressure due to restrictive migration laws and the weakness of public employment services. Importantly, whereas their relationship with farmers is stable, Caporali's relationship with farmworkers is characterized by contradictions. On the one hand, Caporali sell a resource to workers that they do not have, privatizing the labour market and exploiting them (see Corrado, de Castro and Perrotta, 2016). On the other, they enable workers to access work they could not autonomously access, thus creating an ambivalent feeling of gratitude.

Although there are previous studies analyzing the phenomenon of Caporalato from the perspective of the workers (e.g. with the use of interviews; see Leogrande, 2008; Perrotta, 2015), what remains to be examined from a linguistic point of view is workers' processes of self-definition, as well as their definition of the situation. In this article, we aim to investigate how workers subjected to Caporalato (i) experience and make sense of the inherently exploitative nature

of the system, and (ii) whether and how they react to Caporalato through resistance and rebellion against it. We do so by examining workers' discursive practices.

In the context of discourse studies, the Caporalato phenomenon has been interpreted in terms of "exploitation" and "modern slavery" discourses (see Davidson, 2010; Gray, 2002), as well as a "resistance discourse" (Putnam, Grant, Michelson & Cutcher, 2005). Whereas the conditions of exploitation and slavery are embedded within Caporalato itself[5], the dynamics of resistance can assume at least two different forms. First, workers' resistance has resulted in forms of social mobilizations such as strikes and attempts of self-management (see Perrotta and Sacchetto, 2012; 2014). Second, other forms of protests have been described in terms of symbolic reinterpretation of Caporalato. Thus, the discourse around the practice of Caporalato does not automatically imply an acceptation of the system but may contain important aspirations for the improvement of one's own personal conditions and status in society.

Caporali are often formerly exploited workers that have 'made career' within the system. Thus, the symbolic reinterpretation of Caporalato may consist of reconstructing the phenomenon as a possible means of social mobility (Montagna, 2013; Avallone, 2014). As claimed by Bourdieu (2002 [1977]: 179), a person's role (also in marginalized contexts) mainly depends on their ability to gain cultural power, that is their ability to gain and show their distinctness owing to the accumulation of 'a capital of honor and prestige' (see Poppi and Castelli Gattinara, 2018). This cultural power is created through symbolic practices — for instance linguistically driven processes of understanding the reality and self-definition — since they enable an individual to communicate about, and frame relationships through, the expression of values, ideas and attitudes, the reinterpretation of past and current events, and the description of future scenarios. As argued by De

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[5] The extreme conditions to which migrants are subjected, including blackmail and violence, have also been analysed in the context of the Ragusano area in Sicily by Palumbo and Sciurba (2015) and Corrado, de Castro and Perrotta (2016). For journalistic reports on the situation, see also Lorenzo Tondo and Annie Kelly, "Raped, beaten, exploited: the 21st-century slavery propping up Sicilian farming", *The Guardian*, 12 March 2017.

Fina (2008: 437) "[t]hrough the construction of positive images of themselves, social groups can accumulate symbolic power and ultimately achieve changes in their position".

One of the main difficulties with defining 'discourse' concerns the plurality of meanings this practice can assume. In general terms, discourse can be reduced to a series of fundamental features, including the fact that it refers to "linguistic units which generally exceed the limits of a single sentence" (Thompson, 1988: 368), the characteristic of being identified in "in textual and verbal communications and located in wider social structures" (Lupton, 1992: 145) and the capacity of giving a "structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about" (Kress, 1985: 7). Because of this complexity, the choice of the analytical methods to study discourse should take into account not only what type of discourse one is dealing with, but also the context where it develops.

As Caporalato may refer to the dynamics of simultaneously exploitation and resistance, it is crucial to emphasize those processes that help to understand how such practices can be enacted and reproduced through linguistic and discursive strategies. However, these practices cannot be reduced to the mere combination of a plurality of statements that describe and explain the Caporalato experience. It is instead important to identify and analyze particular linguistic processes that work together to reveal patterns of representations that led to the formation of shared views (Kwon, Clarke and Wodak, 2014). For this purpose, discursive strategies represent an ideal framework for analyzing these aspects.

Generally discussed within organizational and communication context (see Klinke and Renn, 2001; Marchetti, 1994; Poncini, 2007), discursive strategies are defined by Carvalho (2006: 3), as "forms of (discursive) manipulation of 'reality' by social actors in order to achieve a certain goal". Discursive strategies refers to the (more or less) intentional use of discursive processes that are influenced by habitus and internalized dispositions (see Bourdieu, 1979). Following Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 44-45), the essence of discursive strategies can be found in the aim of achieving a

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particular social, political, contextual, psychological, or linguistic objective. The use of discursive strategies is therefore a goal-directed behaviors used by the agent to leverage knowledge and communicate persuasively (see Kwon, Clarke, & Wodak, 2014; Wodak, 2007). In this sense, the impact of discursive strategies on social contexts depend on how people use them to enact a change with significant social and material consequences (see Vaara and Tienari, 2008: 991). A discursive strategy is, in this sense, a transformative discursive move involving the semantic re-definition of an object (or an actor). The intervention and its aim can be more or less consciously pursued. In this paper, we examine the discursive strategies that darkers express in relation to exploitation and resistance.-

Regarding exploitation, the strategies of justification, legitimization and denial are apt to reflect the logic of acceptance and control that Caporalato conveys. Such strategies are especially relevant in contexts where individuals or organizations engage in crimes or other types of stigmatized actions (Poppi and Di Piazza, 2017; Poppi, Travaglino and Di Piazza, 2018; Poppi and Campani, *forthcoming*). Specifically, justification strategies assert a connection between the agent and a negative situation, but at the same time develop a frame through which delinquent and transgressing actions are justified as being due to external factors or perpetrators' attributes (see Sykes and Matza, 1957). Conversely, legitimation strategies not only establish a connection between the agent and the situation but also try to legitimate it by linking the situation to an authority (i.e., tradition, custom), to the utility of institutionalized social actions or to a specific value system (for an overview, see van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999). Finally, as it has been shown in analyses about corporate discourse (see Coombs, 2007: 171), denial strategies are strategies that try to establish a certain frame in which the agent (i.e., an organization) tries to remove any connection between itself and the situation (i.e., a crisis).

The theoretical distinction between justification, legitimation and denial strategies has several different aspects, but one of the most important is that while denial and legitimation

strategies are usually related to organizations (e.g. multinational corporations), justification strategies concern more explicitly the actions of isolated individuals (e.g., domestic violence, bullying). Although these three discursive strategies often reflect and provide a frame for the role of perpetrators, they can be also discussed in relation to the victims. As argued by Wetherell and Potter (1993), the legitimation of exploitation may operate through strategies that reflect how the victims invoke forms of self-blaming and acceptance for the exploitative situation (see also Berns, 2001).

Concerning resistance discourse and the dynamics of social mobilization and symbolic reinterpretation mentioned earlier, in this article we focus on two main discursive strategies that we label as *struggle strategies* and *re-symbolization strategies.* As claimed by Putnam, Grant, Michelson and Cutcher (2005: 7-8), discourse analysis has yet to try to understand the resistance dynamics rooted in labor processes (see also Mulholland, 2004). But how can resistance be defined in the context of caporalato practices?

Individuals may express their dissent against the status quo in several different ways, including direct mobilization or protest (Travaglino, 2017a). There are circumstances in which such forms of direct engagement are unwarranted, dangerous or impossible. For instance, individuals may not possess the necessary intellectual, social or material capital to engage in a social movement. Factors such as large differences in power between dominant and subordinate groups, or the (perceived or real) inability to express one's political grievances may limit one's capacity to take part in the political process (Travaglino, 2017b). Such circumstances are present in the Caporalato, given the strong inequality between dominant and subordinate groups, the hardships experienced by exploited workers and the very low bargaining power those workers have.

Yet, this does not mean that individuals accept their marginalization passively. Instead, they may engage in alternative forms of dissent, the most important of which concerns altering the meanings of their disadvantage and their lower status (Leach & Livingstone, 2015). This form of

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psychological resistance is extremely important because it enables individuals to put forward systems of values and meanings alternative to those used by the dominant groups, build new identities and ultimately achieve social change (Gramsci, 1971; Leach & Livingstone, 2015; Scott, 1990; Travaglino, 2017b).

Critical-cultural approaches have considered resistance as a process largely embedded in historically based struggles, where the discursive practices of the subjects involved have received far less attention compared to the those of the dominant groups (Jermier et al., 1994). However, discourse plays a particularly important role in endowing situations, identities and contexts with new meanings that promote and facilitate *psychological resistance* against dominant groups.

Here, we label as *struggle strategies* those attempts to question the way in which Caporalato operates, and its the exploitative nature, indicating forms of struggles within routine labor activities. Moreover, those discursive strategies that aim at reframing and reinterpreting the identity of the workers, and their expressions of values, ideas and attitudes towards the Caporalato have been labelled as *re-symbolization strategies*. Re-symbolization strategies may have the function of reconciliation talk (Cameron, 2007), because they enable us to understand how groups and individuals in contraposition perceive each other. Specifically, the use of these strategies indicate the "re-negotiation of identities, the re-humanization of self and Other, and the development of empathy between people who previously perceived each other as enemies" (Cameron, 2007: 198).

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

To understand the discursive dynamics related to the experience of Caporalato, we interviewed simultaneously ten West African workers (6 males, 4 females) aged 22-34. We conducted collective interviews in three different moments with a variable number of participants.

The participants for   this study were selected with the help of volunteer workers' associations in Italy. They were selected according to two criteria. First of all, we preferred to interview participants who had a good command of Italian, in order to facilitate the interaction with the researchers; second we interviewed only those participants who claimed to have had a direct and prolonged experience of Caporalato (2 years minimum). The participants claimed to be from Senegal (4), Nigeria (3), Ghana (2) and Liberia (1). At the time the interviews were held, the participants were located in the CARA ('*Centro Accoglienza Richiedenti Asilo*' — 'Reception center for asylum seekers') in Borgo Mezzanone, a small village close to Foggia, in southern Italy[6]. The decision to use collective interviews was based both on practical and analytical reasons. Since the criminal context in which the participants were subjected did not allow us to organize individual interviews, we managed to set three different group interviews. This was the result of negotiation between the participants and other agents (i.e., volunteer workers of the CARA) that allowed us to organize the present study. Although the possible limitations of this method, collective interviews have made possible to create an ideal context where discursive strategies, as expression of shared views, could be easily identified and collected (see Kwon, Clarke and Wodak, 2014)[7].

3.2. Setting and procedure

The collective interviews were conducted in public spaces (e.g., squares, or public parks). The three interview sessions lasted approximately 420 minutes in total and were organized around a series of questions. Although it was made clear to the participants that they were free not to reply to questions or to interrupt the interview at any time, none of the participants refused to answer. Each participant received a small sum (5 euros) and a soft drink in return for their participation in the study. Because some of the participants did not have residence permit to stay in Italy legally, we did

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[6] For a discussion regarding the role of the Caporalato in the area of Foggia, see Curci (2008).

[7] For a justification of interviews in natural contexts see De Fina and Perrino (2011).

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not ask them to reveal personal details (e.g., name, surname, occupation, etc), with the exception of age and nationality.

We focussed on fragments that included explanatory and representational processes of exploitation and resistance. The identification of discursive strategies was based on analyzing responses produced through open collective interview questions (see Appendix). The answers were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were then coded manually by the first author and the second author reviewed the three interviews and the coding process. In the transcriptions, the presence of overlapping voices is represented with the use of different bracket types (such as round ( ), square [ ] and curly { } brackets) and the contribution of the researcher in italics in curly brackets ({ }). Specific fragments were selected when they matched the discursive strategies mentioned above. Only those extracts that were unanimously interpreted by the two authors as matching these strategies were included in the analysis.

The interviews present a wide number of references to events and characters that may not be familiar to the reader. Thus, we also provide a brief description of the contexts to understand the setting in which the discursive strategies were enacted.

4. Analysis and results[8]

4.1 Justification strategies

• **Extract 1:**

"The people here are shit and the Caporale has to be like that, too   (being like that's normal), because some people here is difficult (What do you mean, "the people are shit";

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who are you talking about?) I mean the people is bad, they not good people (What, like criminals?) People that was criminals before they arrive here and after, too.'"[9]

Justification strategies are generally used to explain the reasons behind a negative situation. In Extract (1) the workers seem to condone the Caporali by emphasizing some alleged features of the workers themselves. The Caporali's exploitative behavior is connected to the wicked morality of some workers, described as having a criminal background, in what seems to be a form of self-blaming. Similarly, authors such as Soysal (1994) and Bhugra and Jones (2001) have discussed how migrants in contexts of exploitation tend develop forms of self-blaming that affect the perception and moral evaluation of their in-group. The exploitative and controlling nature of the Caporali is justified in attempting to cope with "difficult people". This is in line with psychological theories suggesting that individuals have a set of assumptions and beliefs that characterize the world as a just place in which people 'get what they deserve and deserve what they get' (Lerner, 1980). These assumptions provide individuals with a sense of control and understanding of the world. Yet, they also reduce the likelihood that individuals put the system into question.

- **Extract 2:**

"Lot of us want to be the Caporale, because the Caporale has car, too (a car and a van), plus he got good food (he got a good life and he can do anything he want), he does loads of things and that not easy (he knows a lot of us want his job). [He got a good life and we don't, but it's a hard thing to do and that why he's the Caporale]"[10]

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[9] **Original transcription:** "Qua c'è gente di merda e il Caporale deve anche essere persona così (è normale essere persone così), perché alcuni di qua sono gente difficile. *{Che intendi per "gente di merda", di chi parli?}* che sono gente cattiva, gente non buono *{come dei criminali?}* (gente che era criminale prima di arrivare qua e anche dopo)"

[10] **Original transcription:** "Molti di noi vogliono anche diventare Caporale, perché Caporale ha anche una macchina (anche macchina e furgone), poi mangia bene (vive bene e fa tutte le cose), fa tutte un sacco di cose che non è facile fare. (Lui sa che molti di noi vogliono prendere il posto di Caporale). [Quello fa una bella vita e noi no, ma quella è una cosa difficile da fare e questo è perché lui è Caporale]"

Another justification strategy is represented in Extract (2) and reflects the challenging role of being a Caporale. Within a practice of reframing, Caporali are described as people performing a very difficult task and their life standards are somehow proportioned with their role. In this case, the exploitative dynamics are considered as the result of expertise and competence that, as Extract (1) suggests, also depends on the troubled people that are subjected to the Caporalato. The combination between self-blaming and reframing contribute to relativize the figure of the Caporale and to shift over a less negative interpretations of its role of exploiter.

4.2. Legitimation strategies

- **Extract 3:**

"I know none of this right, but the Caporale has to do things right, he got to do things that work, do everything properly (otherwise no-one know what's going on]. (The Caporale keeps order so the one with land can go and get other workers). [He has to do that]"[11]

The first example of legitimation was in line with the use of higher term constructions such as specific value systems. In Extract (3), the lack of justice that characterize Caporalato is legitimized in the name of the need for "order" that such a system provides. Caporalato is (perhaps idealistically) regarded as a way of making things work and its exploitative and controlling dynamics are see as functional to it. Individuals involved in Caporalato perceive the system as difficult and the Caporale's perceived competence and ability to deal with the system becomes one of the bases for their legitimacy.

- **Extract 4:**

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[11] **Original transcription:** "Io so che tutto questo non è giusto, ma Caporale deve fare le cose ordinate e che funzionano, fare tutto bene [Perché poi altrimenti non si capisce niente]. (Caporale tiene l'ordine ed così che quello che ha la terra va a prendere altri lavoratori). [Lui deve fare così]."

"This illegal work in fields is shit (it's a shit system, but) maybe that's just how things have to be. (If we say) If we get pay more the Caporale might (might find other people that want less money). That how you work here."[12]

Beyond the order that it brings, Extract (4) shows that Caporalato is conceived as ineluctable, a system that could not be different from the way it is. This example shows how often legitimation is articulated in terms of customs and traditions, two constructions that are considered as immutable and fixed. The fact that workers can hardly conceive of a different way of expressing and representing their work relationships seems to be one of the most effective legitimization strategies operating in this context.

- **Extract 5:**

"(Even if it's hard), [nothing easy in life, that's how it is]. Everyone has a hard life, even the Caporale has hard life because if he do something stupid they make someone else Caporale [I seen loads of Caporali. Every so often one disappear and new one arrive in his place]. I understand that."[13]

As the above example shows, Extract (5) justifies the Caporalato in terms of sort of competition dynamics that occur among Caporali. Workers are aware of the fact that Caporali obey to the logic of profit and productivity and their criminal behaviors are condoned as part of their professional unsteadiness. Despite the way in which they wield power over the workers, Caporali are justified because if they had a different attitude or different behaviors they would be substituted. An interesting implication that emerges from this justification strategy is the understanding of Caporali's productivity in terms of exploitative and controlling behaviors.

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[12] **Original transcription:** "Caporalato è cosa di merda (è un sistema di merda, ma) ma forse cose non possono essere diversi da così. (Se diciamo) Se noi veniamo pagati di più, è possibile che poi Caporale deve (deve trovare altre persone che vogliono meno soldi). E' così che si lavora qua."

[13] **Original transaction:** "(Anche se è difficile), [la vita niente è facile e così è]. Tutte vite sono difficili e anche la vita da Caporale è difficile perché se poi fa cazzata viene cambiato con un altro Caporale. [Io ne ho visti tanti Caporali e se ogni tanto uno sparisce uno nuovo arriva]. Io capisco questa cosa qua."

- **Extract 6:**

"We here to work and we know it's illegal and against the law in Italy (this system?) Yes, this system, but otherwise, how can you do anything else   when everything illegal here? (This thing's important because if it isn't, how can you understand?)"[14]

Similarly to Extract (4), this example shows how legitimation often works in relation to situations which can hardly be conceived in different ways. Workers know that Caporalato is an illegal system for outsourcing employment, but they are also aware that if it did not exist, they could not have any chance of finding a job. In this sense, Caporalato is legitimized because it is regarded as the only way workers have to be employed.

- **Extract 7:**

"We even against other workers here who want to do the same thing, and the Caporale is in on it (is like me against you) and you can't stop for a moment…(because otherwise you out) (what does 'you out' mean?) (It mean another Caporale come along with other people and you get sent away) (Who sends you away?   The Caporale?)   The one who got the land."[15]

As Extract (7) shows, the logic of profit and productivity is also projected on the workers. The conditions of exploitation and control that characterize Caporalato seem to be justified by the ease with which the workers can be substituted with other workers. People subjected to the power of the Caporali are willing to accept hard work conditions and poor pay because of the awareness that other workers would otherwise take their jobs. The acquiescence to radical forms of profit and productivity is one the key aspects that seems to justify the functioning of Caporalato.

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[14] **Original transcription:** "Noi siamo qua per lavorare e sappiamo che questo è illegale e contro la legge dell'Italia… *{questo sistema?}* Sì questo sistema, ma altrimenti come fai a fare cose diverse se qua tutto è illegale? (Questa cosa è importante perché se no come fai a capire?)"

[15] **Original transcription:** "Qua noi siamo contro anche altri lavoratori che vogliono fare la stessa cosa, e il Caporalato è come essere in (come io contro di te) e tu non ti puoi fermare mai qua…(perché se no tu sei fuori) *{cosa vuol dire con"sei fuori?}* (Vuol dire che poi arriva altro Caporale e porta altra persone e tu vieni mandato via) *{da chi viene mandato via il Caporale?}* Da quello che comanda la terra"

4.3 Denial strategies

- **Extract 8:**

"I work because I have to. Otherwise what I going to do? It's not too bad here because I know my family and my brothers is much worse off.   This is my life and I not hurting anyone."[16]

Denial strategies aim to remove any connection between the agent and the situation. However, the oppressing nature of the Caporalato seem not to afford this opportunity. Yet, the interviews reveal that the workers deny part of the connotations associated with their role. In Extract (8),   the workers deny some of the negative features of the Caporalato by claiming how their families — for instance — live in worst conditions and how their work on the field does not hurt anybody. While in contexts of exploitation, family is used as an element of threat and fear (see Shelley, 2007), in the Caporalato discourse family is used as moral reference for embracing a difficult life and the hard work duties. This form of reductionism and relativization helps the workers to negate (at least partially) the exploitative and oppressing nature of the Caporalato.

- **Extract 9:**

"I get pick up and take to the field. That's how the day start. It's hard and I don't get much money but that's my job. (There's nothing here, no water, it's hot and really hard). I have to keep my mouth shut and not make trouble but I'm not a slave [even if you think that we] I'm a slave, I can't be slave because a slave work for no money."[17]

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[16] **Original transcription:** "Io lavoro perché mi serve e se no che faccio? Io qua non sto male, perché so che mia famiglia e miei fratelli stanno male anche (di più) molto male. Questo è mia vita e io non faccio male a nessuna persona"

[17] **Original transcription:** "Io vengo preso e portato al campo e così che la giornata comincia. E' difficile e i soldi non sono tanti, ma questo è solo il mio lavoro. (Manca tutto, manca l'acqua, fa caldo ed è tanto difficile). Io devo stare zitto e non fare casino, ma io non sono un schiavo, [ma anche se tu pensi che noi] io sono uno schiavo, io non posso essere schiavo perché schiavo è fare qualcosa senza soldi"

After attempting to deny some negative aspects of Caporalato, Extract (9) shows how workers reject the exploitative and controlling nature of the Caporalato by denying it is slavery ("I am not a slave") and by attempting to normalize the practice ("this is only my job"). This extract shows how the workers can admit the hard conditions which they suffer, but at the same time reject with pride any interpretation that could affect their dignity.

4.4 Struggle strategies

- **Extract 10:**

"Every now and then we steal some fruit or tomato and take it back to where we staying. So even if we not got much money we got plenty to eat. That's what we do (that's what you got to do because we're the only ones in the fields)"[18]

As we have discussed earlier, resistance strategies are attempts to put into question the functioning of the Caporalato. In this regard, Extract (10) shows how the workers take advantage of some flaws in the system of exploitation and control of Caporalato, stealing some of the products that they are appointed to harvest. Although the loot has certainly a small economic value, it may be construed as a form of rebellion against the poor salaries the workers receive (cf. Travaglino, 2017b). The migrants involved in the harvest see as justifiable to take away something for themselves. This demonstrate that they are well aware of the unfairness of the conditions in which they are asked to work.

- **Extract 11:**

"Some people leave as soon as they can and try to get to France or some other place where life is more easy and even if the Caporale don't want them to (why doesn't the Caporale want them to?) Because he want to control the people who go to work for him. Then

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[18] **Original transcription: "**Noi ogni tanto ci freghiamo frutta, pomodoro e portiamo tutto dove stiamo [a casa] Così anche se soldi sono pochi mangiamo bene e così facciamo (e così che bisogna fare prendere perché sul campo ci stiamo noi e basta)."

supposing someone was bad and go to the police? (so some people leave without say nothing and try for a more good life)"[19]

Another form of resistance strategy is represented by the prospect of escaping (exit). As stated in Extract (11), workers oppose the control exercised by the Caporali by migrating towards other places, where life is supposed to be easier (or by expressing the desire of migrating). In line with this perspective, the idea of planning an escape — despite the power of the Caporali of avoiding similar attempts — is one of the most common ways of evading dynamics of exploitation and control. Similarly to other forms of resistance described here, (the dream of) escaping is not a way to put into question the system, protest an unjust situation or seek social change. Yet it enables migrants to signal their awareness of their dire conditions, and their aspiration to a better, perhaps fairer life.

- **Extract 12**

"People have try to go against the Caporale and the landowner but nothing ever come of it because they afraid (they afraid because they might not get no more work)[I know that if everyone that works the land stop picking the fruit and tomatoes everything will go wrong and then people understand what we do here"[20]

More in line with organized forms of dissent, Extract (12) shows how some workers are aware of the fact that more structured and direct forms of struggle would have a positive effect against the Caporalato. Here, the workers claim that a potential mass strike would make the system collapse because it would block the entire chain of the harvest. A crucial aspect of this resistance

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[19] **Original transcription:** "Ci sono alcuni che appena possono vanno via e provano ad andare alla Francia o da qualche altra parte dove la vita è più facile e anche se il Caporale non vuole *{perché il Caporale non vuole?} [*Perché lui vuole tenere controllo e ordine su chi va a lavorare] e poi se qualcuno va alla Polizia se è stato male? (allora alcuni vanno via senza dire niente e così provano a stare più bene di così)"

[20] **Original transcription:** "E' successo di provare ad andare contro il Caporale e quello che ha la terra, ma non è successo mai niente perché uno ha paura (hanno paura perché poi non lavori) [io so che se tutti quelli che lavorano qua la terra smettono di raccogliere la frutta e il pomodoro qua tutto si rompe e poi la gente capisce che cosa noi facciamo noi]"

strategy seems to be the necessity of creating awareness among people. Awareness of injustice and of individual's ability to effectively act against the status quo may play a key role in the formation of new shared identities, and in the creation of an 'us' with shared goals and objectives. Those identities may in turn facilitate mobilization and more overt forms of dissent (Thomas, Mavor, McGarty, 2012).

4.5 Re-symbolization strategies

- **Extract 13:**

"You eat fruit and tomatoes thanks to us. Otherwise, who harvest the crops and work the land? (Italians can't be racist because we the ones that work here and without my work you don't have anything to eat."[21]

While struggle strategies are used to put the Caporalato into question in terms of actions, re-symbolization strategies enable processes of reconceptualization and meaning negotiation. Extract (13) shows how the workers reaffirm their condition by claiming the importance of their work. In this case, the subordination is reinterpreted to avoid the racism that the workers seem to experience. According to recent studies, this discursive strategy can be interpreted as a concrete attempt of putting into question the racial discrimination workers are subjected to, and to reposition the workers more favorably in Italian society (see Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy, 2015). The central idea expressed in this extract is that the workers cannot be discriminated against because — in spite of the Caporalato — their role is fundamental for the existence of the food market.

- **Extract 14:**

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[21] **Original transcription:** "Noi siamo quello che facciamo mangiare la frutta e il pomodoro a te, se no chi raccoglie e lavora sulla terra? (Qua italiani non posso essere razzisti perché noi lavoriamo e senza del mio lavoro tu non mangi più niente)"

"The Caporale is the one with power and money and you afraid of him (he's important; I wish I was the Caporale because it's something really important.) The Caporale is like businessman, someone with money. I'd like to be Caporale [it better like that!]"[22]

In line with Extract (2), in this example it emerges a perspective of the Caporali as positively connoted. Using a perspective of re-symbolization, the workers conceive the Caporali as a figure they can aspire to become. This strategy helps to overcome the condition of exploitation and control represented by the Caporali and to re-conceptualize them as something desirable and positive. Interestingly, a conceptualization of the Caporali as business-oriented figure is also used in academic contexts, as for instance Krissman (2005) and Perrotta (2014: 16) that refers to them as "brokers".

- **Extract 15:**

"What we do in the fields is really hard and I sure a lot of Italians can't do what we do (it's hot and it hurt your) (your back? Back here?) (everything, here too, your hands, your head, it's hot) we're strong, I know that, you can't complain about us if you can't do what we do, that's right, no?"[23]

Similarly to the example in (13) that presented a form of workers' reaffirmation of their dignity, the Extract (15) conceptualizes the workers as figures who give a vital contribution, perhaps who are able to do something that Italian people cannot do. While in (13) the main goal was to overcome racism, here the workers state how their contributions to the Italian society, is not only fundamental but could not be replaced. Through this strategy, the workers symbolically overturn their role as exploited and describe themselves in terms of better individuals.

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[22] **Original transcription:** "Caporale è uno che ha potere, soldi e che tu hai paura di lui (è una cosa importante e magari io sono Caporale che è una cosa molto importante) Caporale è come businessman, una persona che ha soldi e magari io faccio Caporale [molto meglio di così!]"

[23] **Original transcription:** "Quello che facciamo al campo è molto difficile e sono sicuro che molti italiani non ce la fanno a fare quello che noi facciamo (fa caldo e ti fai male al) *{alla schiena? Qua dietro?}* (tutto anche qua, le mani la testa fa caldo) noi siamo forti e questo lo so [uno non si può lamentare di noi se poi non ce la fa a fare quello che facciamo noi] è giusto no?"

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this contribution we have identified and analyzed the discursive strategies of exploitation and resistance used by a group of migrant farm workers subjected to Caporalato. Caporalato is an extremely exploitative practice due to the harsh work conditions, and control experienced by the workers, as well as the poor pay. While strategies of justification, legitimation and denial are generally explored from the point of view of the perpetrators of negative actions, we have here interpreted these strategies as part of the linguistic and discursive practices that reproduce but also contest the exploitative nature of the Caporalato.

As it emerges from the empirical analysis of the interviews, the workers seem to justify, legitimate and deny some of the Caporalato most illegal aspects, employing beliefs such as *self-blaming* (Extract 1), *idealization* (Extract 3), *reductionism* and *relativization* (Extract 8). Caporali's exploitative and controlling practices are construed as being the the only possible means for regulating and managing this exploitative system. In the workers' discourse, the workers' and the Caporalato's moral dimensions are deliberately distorted. The workers are portrayed negatively so that the Caporalato may be conceived as something different from slavery. The Caporale is represented as a person who can deal with hard to manage workers, and give them the job opportunity they could not otherwise have. In this sense, the Caporale is indeed a negative character, but a character endowed with expertise and competence. The Caporale must affirm their power within a professionally unsteady context based on profit and productivity.

Whereas the Caporale's criminal actions are condoned as part of their professional background, some strategies of resistance see the Caporale as an ideal figure to aspire to. Extracts (2), (13) and (14) show that the Caporale is perceived as a successful person and this idealization is part of re-symbolization that characterize the Caporalato system. Interestingly, workers' negative self-evaluation is referred only to their role within the caporalato system. Outside such role, their

self-evaluation becomes largely positive. The workers compare themselves with the local Italian population, emphasize their good qualities as workers and place themselves at a higher level than Italians, in terms of their physical resistance and moral ethos.

The discursive strategies used show how every aspect of the Caporalato system is subject to two contrasting appraisals. For instance, the Italian context is directly responsible for the existence of the Caporalato. Nonetheless, the workers who suffer from this system perceive the Italians as inferior on some dimensions. Similarly, the portrayal of the Caporale oscillates between a figure of exploitation and control, and an attractive role of power and economic success.

One of the reasons why the Caporalato system is represented with such contradictions may depend on its inherent ambiguous nature. As it has been argued by other researchers (see Avallone, 2014; 2017; Perrotta, 2015), Caporalato is a criminal system to which is not offered any other effective legal alternative. In the Italian context, for instance, land owners do not seem to have other ways for employing labour forces. The lack of structural and organizational processes for outsourcing labour makes Caporalato an effective (despite its exploitative nature) employment system, the only system migrant workers can rely on (Garrapa, 2016; Leogrande, 2008; Perrotta, 2014). This feature of Caporalato, together with the lack of other concrete legal employment opportunities, makes the Caporalato one of the few mechanisms of social mobility workers can use to improve their position in society. The role of the Caporale — which often is a former farm workers who achieved a position of power — becomes then a concrete opportunity of social and economical development.

Thus, the limited presence of struggle strategies in the interview may depend on the symbolic and economic capital that the Caporale seems to hold. We have identified three discursive strategies that attempt to put into question the Caporalato. Yet, only one sequence (Extract 12) presents a concrete scenario of social mobilization. While Extract (11) and Extract (13) describe

two modalities of struggle that aim to exploit flaws in the control of workers, only Extract (12) considers the idea of substituting the Caporalato.

The other discursive strategies of resistance employed by workers suggest that they are engaged in redifying the meanings of their identity and worth in the context of an oppressive system. These attempts of changing the meanings associated with oppression are nonetheless important because they show how individuals may use different channels to make sense of, and ultimately resist against a system who may be (objectively or subjectively) seen as ineluctable. In circumstances in which direct engagement in protest is difficult, actions such as stealing fruits and vegetables, prospecting the opportunity of exiting the system and redefining the physical and moral qualities of the people involved may provide important psychological tools to create more cohesive identities, thus providing the opportunity for social change.

Given the complexity of the topic, it is important to note some issues concerning the methodology and the limitations of the study. Discursive strategies present a wide range of contents and implications, and they are largely shared among workers. This is not in contrast with a view of the Caporalato as a multidimensional phenomenon that triggers various and even contrasting interpretations. Nonetheless, perspectives about Caporalato are remarkable similar within the group. This is because while the Caporalato is characterized by multiple and contradictory symbolic meanings, all the workers seem to agree about this ambivalence. At the base of the workers' evaluations, there is the inherent violence that characterizes many Caporalato dynamics. As Sandberg, Tutenges and Copes (2015: 4) discussed, for controversial issues such as the use of violence or the representation of violent systems, the contrasting nature of the discursive processes play a crucial role because it allows us to break 'binary structural oppositions that implicitly operate to quell the insistent ambiguity and openness of linguistic and cultural signification'. In line with Frank (2010) and Polletta (2006), violent systems such as the Caporalato trigger dialogical process that always consider multiple voices, the negotiation of point of views and are hence ambiguity.

One of the limitations of this contribution is that it deals with a reduced number of participants. This work uses a qualitative in depth analysis analysis to reveal the structural ambiguity of the Caporalato - which may be perceived at the same time as a phenomenon of exploitation and of potential social and symbolic mobility. As we have discussed, workers are subjected to such an invasive and oppressive reality that conducting more sophisticated analysis is difficult. For instance, although we have tried to guarantee workers freedom of expression during the interview and to protect them from potential external pressures, we cannot exclude that some of the less negative interpretations about the Caporalato may have been affected by a kind of direct or indirect concern towards their condition (e.g. the interviewers could have been seen as "friend/spy of a caporale" and workers could have feared that the content of the study could be communicated to the Caporale). We believe there is enough information in this study to avoid this interpretation. Workers seemed to express themselves with genuine frankness and they seemed interested in communicating their concerns about their conditions, as well as their aspirations and hopes. Future research should devise alternative strategies to examine workers' perception of and ideas about Caporalato, perhaps using quantitative anonymous surveys or enabling workers to express their ideas in more anonymized form.

Appendix

-   How does the Caporalato work?

    (*Come funziona il Caporalato?*)

-   What does the Caporalato mean to you?

    (*Cosa rappresenta il Caporalato secondo te?*)

-   Who are the Caporali?

    (*Chi sono i Caporali?*)

-   What is the Caporale, what does he do?

    (*Che cos'è il Caporale, cosa fa?*)

-   Would you ever become a Caporale?

    (*Diventeresti mai un Caporale?*)

-   What do you think about this area, Foggia and the Italians in general?

    (*Cosa ne pensi di questa zona, di Foggia e degli Italiani in generale?*)

-   Cosa significa per te sfruttamento?

    (*What does exploitation mean to to you?*)

-   Cosa significa per te resistenza?

    (*What does resistance mean to you?*)

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Notes on Contributors

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