Migration Management?
Accounts of Agricultural and Domestic Migrant Workers in Ragusa (Sicily)
Sandra Paola Alvarez Tinajero
This book takes the reader into the lives of migrant workers who perform low-status occupations in Ragusa, Sicily. By drawing parallels between the experiences of live-in care and farm migrant workers, the author reveals remarkable similarities in how they relate to the labour market, to the state, and to the employers, building bridges between two sectors of the economy often studied separately. Through extensive fieldwork and interviews with workers and employers, the author explores how structural processes affect, and at the same time enable these actors to act upon them. First, she situates the mobility of low-status workers within larger economic, social and political processes that have reconfigured local areas assimilating them into the global economy and into specific migration systems. She offers insights into the discourse and practices of migrant workers and employers, revealing the importance of the human dimension of migration, an aspect often neglected in the market-based ‘migration management’ discourse. The author reveals how this human dimension touches upon every aspect of the migration experience from recruitment, to policy implementation, to the mutual construction of the identities of employers and workers, which are inevitably negotiated in the intimacy of the home-workplace.

Ce livre étudie la question de la construction d’un statut subalterne chez les travailleurs migrants agricoles et domestiques. Une analyse à trois niveaux - structurel, institutionnel et subjectif - vise à comprendre la manière dont les processus de restructuration néolibérale affectent les travailleurs migrants. Parallèlement, il s’agit de savoir comment ces derniers agissent sur ces mêmes structures. Les expériences parallèles des travailleurs agricoles et domestiques sont comparées afin de mettre en lumière l’approche gestionnaire actuellement prédominante dans le domaine de la migration de travail. Cette approche est informée par la contribution de diverses disciplines - la sociologie, l’anthropologie, et les sciences politiques - et puise dans la littérature spécialisée relative aux migrations et au travail domestique. L’analyse se fonde sur des données qualitatives collectées à Ragusa (2008-2011) auprès de travailleurs agricoles indiens et tunisiens et de travailleuses domestiques polonaises et roumaines. L’argument principal du livre est que l’approche gestionnaire des migrations s’aligne sur les principes du marché qui, à leur tour, touchent directement à la vie des migrants. Une attention particulière est ainsi portée à la dimension humaine, dont l’étude s’avère nécessaire pour comprendre non seulement comment les migrants se positionnent socialement mais aussi quels sont leurs moyens de résistance.

SANDRA PAOLA ALVAREZ TINAJERO

Sandra Paola Alvarez Tinajero is currently a Migration and Development Project Officer at the International Organization for Migration. She holds a PhD in Anthropology and Sociology of development, and a Master of Arts in development studies from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva. Her extensive research experience revolves around the fields of labour migration and the linkages between migration and development. Alvarez Tinajero has worked as an independent consultant, has advised policymakers, and conceptualized and delivered training for government officials. Her major publications include "Migration for Development: A Bottom-Up Approach" (2011; co-author) and "Angola: A Study of the Impact of Remittances from Portugal and South Africa" (2010).
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction**  
Why Ragusa?  
What: ‘emblematic figures of migration’ as units of analysis  
A comparative approach  
How: overview of theories and methods  
Structure of the book

**Acknowledgments**

**Chapter 1. Labor migration flows to Ragusa: the fuzzy boundaries between cores and peripheries**  
Ragusa: core or periphery?  
Structural needs  
Linkages with source areas  
Chapter conclusion: Fuzzy boundaries between north and south

**Chapter 2. Labor migration management: neoliberal calculations, human implementation**  
Neoliberalism as a technology of governing and labor migration management  
Labor migration: A patchwork of policies and practices  
Contracts and pay: personalizing formality and informality  
Chapter conclusion: Labor migration management vs unintended outcomes

**Chapter 3. Labor market incorporation of care and farm migrant workers: the odds of social capital**  
Labor supply *ad infinitum*: referrals, rotation, place-based-knowledge and trust  
The two sides of network-mediated recruitment: solidarity vs profit  
Chapter conclusion: Social capital and labor market segmentation

**Chapter 4. Employer-worker relationships: buying “personhood”**  
Skillful and manageable: marketable talents and hiring decisions  
Building and negotiating status and identity in the home-workplace  
Chapter conclusion: Live-in jobs and local techniques of optimization

**Chapter 5. The contradictions of self-enterprising migrant worker subjects**  
Neoliberalism as a technology of governing, migration and subjectification  
Response tactics  
Chapter conclusion: Exceptions to neoliberalism and their interstices

**Conclusion**

**Appendices**
EDITOR'S NOTE

Cover Filippo Bentivegna, Il Castello incantato, Sciacca (Sicily). Photo: Marie Thorndahl.
Introduction

1 In 2010, in Ragusa (Italy), I met Urszula, a 59-year-old Polish woman who looks after an elderly married couple. It was Rita, a friend of her employer, who introduced us. During our first chat, Rita praised Urszula's friendship with her employers and added: “You’re lucky to work in this family”. But Urszula was quick to retort: “They are the ones who are lucky!” This incident gave me food for thought. I wondered why Urszula, who was already retired and received a pension in her country of origin, came to Ragusa in the first place. Indeed, her sister-in-law, who had worked in Ragusa before, had found her a job there. Feeling lonely and frustrated because she liked to work, Urszula said, she decided to venture out.

2 So did Rajesh, a 27-year-old Indian national employed in a cattle farm. Rajesh took a plane from New Delhi to Moscow, then hitch-hiked all the way down to Slovakia and from there to Italy. He travelled for near to eight months. Rajesh was an IT specialist. He had no prior experience working with animals; but he insisted that his pay was good and that his coming to Ragusa had been worth it.

3 In Ragusa, I encountered many other migrant workers. I was curious to know why they had chosen Sicily rather than Milan or Rome. Ragusa is a pretty town with some beautiful late Baroque architecture. But it was not its tourist attractions that had brought Urszula and Rajesh there. In fact, I was intrigued about the two faces that Ragusa presents to its foreign visitors, that of an idyllic enclave rich in cultural attractions, Michelin-starred restaurants and all kinds of facilities that ensure a pleasant stay, but also that of rustic surroundings dominated by greenhouses and cattle farms that employ migrants, as do many individual households who have the care of their elderly family members. These two faces of Ragusa, and of many localities of the so-called “global South”, are shaped by processes of neoliberal restructuring.

4 Migration is one among the various processes that shape local contexts as well as people's lives, whether they are mobile or not. In present-day Ragusa, one encounters Indian, Polish, Romanian and Tunisian nationals, to name but a few. Many are employed in agriculture and domestic service. The presence of migrant workers has enabled farmers to maintain their small businesses afloat in an environment of economic liberalization and harsh competition, and allowed native-born Ragusan elderly to enjoy personalized assistance services provided in their own homes.
This shows the truly global nature of the labor markets where farm and domestic workers seek better opportunities, and employers seek flexible labor power. Indeed, today there are many “lucky” employers, as Urszula might say, of farm and domestic workers in Italy. One in ten Italian families has become badante-dipendente or “care worker-dependent”; (La Repubblica 2009). Likewise, recognizing the importance of foreign labor in the dairy industry of the Po Valley, in the north of Italy, a newspaper recently announced: “Without the Indians, say goodbye to Grana Padano”. The Mayor of the municipality of Pessina Cremonese that hosts many Indian workers told The New York Times: “They saved an economy that would have gone to the dogs because young people didn’t want to work with cows” (Povoledo 2011, see also Al. S. 2011).

Despite their crucial functions, care work and farming represent two of the lowest-ranked occupations in the global division of labor. Conversely, Urszula’s assertiveness tells us that migrant workers are agents who craft their own destinies. Migration allows some people to participate actively in the redistribution of global wealth. This is not to say that all benefit equally from the accumulation of capital. Migrant workers such as Urszula and Rajesh occupy multiple and even contradictory positions that become manifest when one looks deeper into their local social standing in the workplace, and the interpersonal relations they create in specific contexts. For receiving states, they might represent a tool to overcome labor shortages in specific sectors; for the countries of origin they may embody a source of hard currency that helps ensure macroeconomic stability; for employers they may be more than “just workers”, and become allies, friends, and even akin to family members... Domestic and agricultural migrant workers themselves may be compelled to find ways to conciliate their self-improvement projects and the low-status positions that are ascribed to them in the context of reception. Migrant workers’ different positions cannot be analyzed solely by reference to the historical, political, social and cultural factors that structure labor migration flows today. It is equally important to look at migrant agency. This research is an attempt to connect the structural, institutional and interpersonal dimensions of migration through the specific case of Ragusa. The rationale behind this approach is that while one cannot disregard the structural forces that underlie international migrations, it is nevertheless impossible to understand the latter without analyzing the intermediate institutions that shape migration processes and migrants’ lives, as well as migrants’ practices, positions and discourse.

This book takes the reader to a journey into the lives of migrant workers employed in cattle farms and eldercare and their employers in Ragusa. It is concerned with uncovering the factors that determine the shared conditions of contemporary migrant farm and domestic workers as low-wage laborers, and how these workers and their employers navigate, manipulate or affect those larger structures.

Why Ragusa?

Formerly a migrant-sending area, Ragusa now hosts migrants hailing from many different countries. I view this transition as an interesting point of departure to analyze contemporary labor migration through a ‘development lens’. Ragusa offers a case to question the North-South development divide as a former reservoir of cheap labor of the global North (e.g. North America, northern Europe or northern Italy), now fully integrated into the world economy. In other words, although some may consider Ragusa
as something of a backwater in rural southern Italy that once supplied cheap labor, it now welcomes migrant workers to meet its structural needs, similar to the cities in Italy's "developed North", integrating them in a unique migration and production system. Along these lines, the relevance of Ragusa as a research site is not directly related to the fact that it could be representative of other migration realities in southern Europe, but to the fact that its recent migration patterns present an academic interest and may challenge traditional assumptions within the field of development studies. Ragusa offers an interesting example of how international labor migration has become a structural feature of not so affluent, and not so global cities (Sassen 1991) within the “developed north”.

The case of Ragusa has also policy relevance in view of the renewed interest of Western European governments, or rather, their ‘rediscovering’ of the idea of “managed migration” (Menz and Caviedes 2010: 2), which touches upon economic and security concerns, including the optimization foreign labor flows for the satisfaction of the structural needs of their post-industrial and growing service economies. This study explores the articulation of market principles and contemporary migration management concerns. Indeed, comparing the experiences of domestic and agricultural migrant works allows me to address the main question underlying my study: what do the parallel experiences of domestic and agricultural migrant workers imply about labor migration management under the current processes of neoliberal restructuring?

Ragusa is particularly well placed to answer this question as it has witnessed structural changes that provide a specific context for international migration inflows. It provides a case for the study of the interaction between the market principles that underlie labor migration management practices, as well as the study of the social and human dimensions of migration that shape and even question those same principles in migrants and employers’ everyday lives. These human dimensions bring a refreshing perspective from which to study international labor migration in the context of neoliberal restructuring. Ragusa allowed me to explore and compare the conditions, positions and experiences of two low-status migrant workers and their employers, and inquire into how they affect and are affected by market-oriented migration management principles in a concrete context of reception.

What: ‘emblematic figures of migration’ as units of analysis

Male and female migrants who produce our food, clean our homes, and look after our loved ones represent the prototype of lowest-ranked occupations in the global division of labor. I explore the experiences of these migrant workers, whom I regard as “emblematic figures of migration”, insofar as mobility is likely to characterize these jobs. In post-industrial societies facing labor shortages in these two sectors, workers are often “imported” and incorporated in the specific places (e.g. homes and farms) where their labor power is required. Despite the illusion of modernity (Appadurai 1996), these two low-status occupations cannot be eliminated and often contradict the aspirations of “decent work”. Their labor is a source of economic growth and for the maintenance of certain welfare patterns of affluent, and not so affluent societies, such as Ragusa.
Farm workers

Seasonal migrant labor is a structural feature of Southern European agriculture (Reyneri 2001). However, Ragusa remains relatively unexplored. Studies on labor migration in southern Italy typically document the experiences of migrants in greenhouse cultivation, fruit and vegetable harvesting. The zootechnical branch has been little explored, except for a few studies on the cattle industry in northern Italy (see Reyneri 1998, 2001). Although Ragusa is well-known for its horticulture industry, most male workers interviewed are employed in cattle farms active in the milk, dairy and meat industries. I focus on the experiences of male migrant workers, whose main tasks relate to animal husbandry or zootechny. Nevertheless, at the peak periods of the sowing or harvesting seasons, farm workers are drawn into typical agricultural tasks. Therefore, we could also think of them more generally as “agricultural” workers (in Italian braccianti agricolo). Most farm workers in my study follow a similar routine. They get up early in the morning, milk cows twice a day, clean out the cattle sheds, feed and graze the animals. After a regular ten-hour (sometimes longer) working day, few have energy left to socialize and prefer to stay at home and go to sleep. Zootechny, as practiced today in Ragusa, entails a 365-day working calendar. It requires a labor force capable of enduring particular conditions of work over relatively long periods of time. Most interviewees hold annual fixed-term contracts and live within the farms, in facilities specifically built to lodge foreign workers.

Agriculture lies at the heart of our subsistence; livestock contributes to the livelihoods of approximately 70 percent of the world’s rural poor. In Europe, the dairy sector is an important component of contemporary agriculture. The total EU expenditure for the milk sector for 2008-2011 is estimated at €3,500 million. Despite the national and regional variations of size and importance of the dairy sector in Europe, the milk processing industry employs 400,000 people (Jongeneel et al. 2011); independently of undeclared migrant workers. Since 2003, the European Union (EU) has adopted market-oriented policies (e.g. replacing price support with direct income payments) to promote a more competitive agriculture. Hiring foreign labor is one strategy deployed by Ragusan farmers to remain competitive in global open markets. Interestingly, few scholars dare to delve (again) into the all too well-known hard conditions of work faced by agricultural migrant workers (for recent accounts see Holmes 2007, Maldonado 2009). Yet, agriculture is a prototypical low-status occupation linked to international migration ever since the birth of global capitalism from slave trade, to indentured labor in plantations, to guest worker programs, to more recent circular, temporary and seasonal recruitment schemes. Agricultural (migrant) labor, thus, continues to be relevant in the midst of technological progress because it cannot be outsourced to low-wage countries; this is also the case with domestic labor.

Domestic workers

Convention N°189 (C189), or Domestic Workers Convention, defines domestic work as “(a) [...] work performed in or for a household or households”; and domestic workers as “(b) [...] any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship” (ILO, C189, Art. 1). These definitions highlight the private nature of paid domestic work, confined to the intimate sphere of household. Nevertheless, domestic work is highly heterogeneous
in terms of the tasks performed, the employment arrangements and the modalities of service provision. This heterogeneity has different implications for workers’ upward mobility opportunities within and outside the sector.

All domestic workers with whom I engaged with for my research in Ragusa are women. Indeed, the domestic service sector is highly feminized. The majority are live-in workers, who look after the elderly. I focus, therefore, on the experiences of female migrant workers who provide home-based (live-in), paid eldercare. However, the difference between “care” and other “domestic work” is sometimes hard to establish. Elder care implies long hours of work; a feature shared with agricultural jobs. In addition, it is embedded in commercial, yet often personalized employment relationships, and it is very often viewed by workers as a temporary condition. Domestic work is also a globalized occupation, qualified as a global industry by some authors (Anderfuhren 2002, Anderson 2000, Destremaub and Lautier 2002, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, Lutz 2008 and 2011, Salazar Parreñas 2001).

In contrast with the declining interest in agriculture, studies on domestic labor have gained increasing importance since the 1980s (Chaney et al. 1989, Rollins 1985, Young 1987). Domestic service constitutes a hot topic of migration. This is in part owing to the inherent links between gender, class, migration, ethnic origin, and (economic and social) development as epitomized, for example, in the constitution of hierarchical global care chains by “global women” (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002).

Domestic work is frequently analyzed through the concept of “regimes”: gender regimes, in which the organization of domestic work is linked to the social construction of gender; care regimes, which look at the distribution of welfare responsibilities between the state, the family and the market; and migration regimes, which support the employment of migrant domestic workers (Lutz 2008: 2). Domestic labor has also acquired international political salience, as suggested by the adoption of ILO Convention N°189, and Recommendation 201 concerning domestic workers of 16 June 2011.

My study differs from the few other studies that have focused on labor migration in general, and in the province of Ragusa in particular, in that it attempts a systematic comparison of domestic and agricultural labor migration, in a specific context of reception. There are indeed inherent difficulties in comparing apples with pears. However, an in-depth analysis of my data allowed me to identify shared processes and similarities of the situation of farm and care migrant workers that transcend the gender, ethnic or occupational realms.

A comparative approach

Why compare migrant farm workers to domestic workers? At first glance, it would appear that they do not share much in common, given their different backgrounds and types of employment. To my own surprise, and after having observed and spoken to migrant workers active in such diverse sectors as farming and domestic service, I have come to the conclusion that they share much more than the condition of low-wage workers in the global division of labor. They share similar processes of incorporation into the receiving labor market; they face similar conditions as live-in workers; and they maintain comparable employment relations and social positions in the receiving society.
The conflation of the home and workplace is one of the most salient features of both farm and domestic (live-in) work in Ragusa. It is precisely this situation that made me aware of the personal intimacy that characterizes the employment relationships of agricultural and domestic migrant workers, clashing with modern notions of contractual employment. This stimulated my interest in adopting a comparative approach to the examination of farm and domestic migrant labor, two gendered occupations often studied separately. When I started my fieldwork in Ragusa, the gender and occupational differences between female domestic workers and male agricultural workers, more than obvious, felt difficult to overcome. Nevertheless, as I conducted more and more interviews in the intimate sphere of the homes of employers and workers, which in most cases happened to be their workplaces too, those boundaries I initially conceived of as rigid, seemed more elastic. The former also underlies my decision to avoid comparing different migration streams or migrant communities represented in Ragusa, and thus to contribute to migration theory by de-ethnicizing the study of the migrants’ incorporation in contexts of reception (see Wimmer 2007). These are, indeed, the innovative aspects of this research.

By identifying these similarities, I do not imply that (mostly) male farm workers and female domestic workers interviewed in Ragusa follow analogous migration paths, or that their lives are unaffected by specific social, economic, political, or cultural factors. It is my contention that in drawing on the similarities of their experiences, one gains a better understanding of the complexities of contemporary labor migration, from the structuration of labor migration flows to the constitution of migrant workers as subjects of current neoliberal restructuring.

I articulate in this study the structural, institutional and subject levels of analysis. I start by situating the parallel experiences of migrant farm and eldercare workers in the macro-structural context and processes that affect labor migration inflows to Ragusa today (Chapter 1). I then focus on farm and eldercare workers’ similar processes of incorporation into the receiving labor market, and the institutional structures that influence this process, including migrant workers’ and their employers’ relation with the receiving state (Chapter 2) and the role of social networks in recruitment (Chapter 3). Finally, I focus on the processes of identity construction and subject-making at interpersonal level; that is, how migrant workers’ social positions are defined, negotiated and contested in their daily interpersonal relations with employers (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). The productive and reproductive functions of these workers, the common live-in condition, and personalized employment relationships serve as points for comparison of two seemingly different units of analysis. In what follows I briefly outline the theoretical framework and the methodology that allowed me to navigate the three levels of analysis outlined above.

How: overview of theories and methods

In crafting the articulation of different levels of analysis I have built on pioneer migration theories, and on the insights of anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, and globalization scholars to reexamine the experiences of low-wage contemporary migrant workers. In drawing a comparison between the experiences of farm and domestic migrant workers I have not hesitated to take concepts elaborated in a particular context (e.g. in the analysis of domestic labor), and apply them to different situations (e.g. in the study of
employment relationships in agriculture). Indeed, many migration scholars recognize the importance of “talking across disciplines” (Brettell and Hollifield 2008), support more integrated multilevel, multidisciplinary research (Favell 2008), and claim that to understand local processes one must also look at global dynamics (Kearney 1995, 2004). By drawing on relevant theoretical insights from several disciplines and linking these to the concrete experiences and practices of migrant workers and their employers, revealed through primary, qualitative research conducted in Ragusa (2008-2011), I contribute to migration scholarship through a localized perspective. My special hope is that my study offers insights towards a deeper understanding of the relationships between migration and the neoliberal restructuring of space, self, and society (Glick Schiller 2009: 5), in an effort to ground migration in a “global power framework”.

Explaining labor migration flows

24 The structural level of analysis relies on two influential migration theories: dual labor market, and migration systems. Historical-structural approaches shed light on how Ragusa’s structural needs underpin the demand for foreign labor, and what linkages exist with the regions of origin of migrant agricultural and care workers.

25 Dual labor market approach combines the analysis of economic and social dimensions of migration. From this perspective, it is the attributes of the jobs performed by (and available to) migrants, and the meaning attached to those attributes in the social context in which work is performed” (Piore 1979: 8, emphasis added) that explain: a) that labor migration can be demand driven, initiated by active recruitment on the part of the employers (be it individuals, recruitment agencies, public or private entities, etc.), and b) how labor migration allows filling specific jobs; overcoming labor shortages; and filling the bottom positions of the social hierarchy. This approach sheds light on the factors allowing for the replacement of Ragusans by foreign workers in domestic service and agriculture.

26 Contemporary labor migration flows to Ragusa are also historically, politically, socially and culturally structured. World-systems theory is relevant to contextualize current labor migration flows to Ragusa, despite its deterministic stance, to the extent that “migrant labor can be more fully theorized within the complex problematic of circuits of capital and commodities” (Kearney, 1986: 340). In Ragusa, for instance, farmers struggle to remain competitive in global markets, and families to ensure the provision of care for the elderly; opening up job opportunities for foreign workers. At the same time, small farmers in distant India have lost their livelihoods as a result of externally-driven as well as endogenous (e.g. water resource management) interventions; some are now, with the help of their networks, employed in Sicily. Likewise, the transition to the market economy, in former communist states compelled many people to look for employment opportunities abroad.

27 As the systems approach posits, migration flows do not occur randomly; but arise from prior historical, colonial, cultural and economic ties between the different migration poles of a system, mass culture connections, family and personal networks and migrant agency (Fawcet 1989, Kritz and Zlotnik 1992). The dissemination of knowledge of migration routes, job opportunities and social capital are further facilitated by globalization processes (Castles and Miller 2009: 56, Cohen 2006). This approach provides a relevant framework to better understand the geographical and historical linkages
between Sicily and Tunisia, the role of migrant networks (e.g. in the case of Indian migration), or even the cultural ties seem to render acceptable the presence of certain migrants in the intimacy of Ragusan homes (e.g. Romanian and Polish care workers).

Navigating migration institutions

28 The institutional level of analysis concentrates on the experiences of migrant agricultural and care workers as they navigate two major migration institutions: the state and the labor market. I focus on migration (and employment) policy implementation by migrant workers and their employers, and explore how social networks influence migrants' incorporation into the receiving labor market and their labor market outcomes.

29 First, I draw some linkages between the concept of labor migration management and migration policy in Italy, which is often portrayed as a “latecomer” to (im)migration, as it was indeed “shaped by emigration” (Calavita 1994: 303). The state did not actively organize labor migration inflows until the mid-1980s. However, domestic and external forces have pressed for migration policy-making. To explore contemporary developments in this regard, I draw on the work of scholars engaged in the study of (im)migration policy (Cornelius et al. 1994, Geddes 2008, Lahav and Guiraudon 2007, Messina and Lahav 2006, Schain 2009), and labor migration in contemporary Europe (Menz and Caviedes 2010).17

30 I focus on the current managerial approach to labor migration that relies on market principles. The term “management” implies a strong conviction that migrations can be controlled, and that labor, a flexible factor of production, can be traded in a global market. From this angle, the migration management approach differs little from the guest worker programs of the 1960s. However, while the individual was barely pondered in the 1960s equation, in the current view, it is present and conceived of as an economic actor whose maximization interests are, hypothetically, in perfect convergence with those of receiving and sending countries. Not only states are assumed to be competing for (scarce) skilled labor, or seeking to maximize migration benefits (e.g. financial remittances), but workers are also recognized agency and are expected to actively build themselves into worthy laborers and market actors to be admitted in the places where they seek to ‘make profit’.

31 Labor migration management relies on governments’ intervention in the labor market. Ong’s Foucauldian reading of neoliberalism explores the creative and flexible ways in which the political and economic (market) realms may articulate in order to enhance capital accumulation and optimize all kinds of resources. I apply her views to the field of labor migration policy. This allows me to examine the relationship between states’ economic concerns, migration policy-making, and policy outcomes. Similarly, I inquire into how low status workers, such as the ones I engaged with in Ragusa (and their employers) navigate, reproduce, manipulate or question the larger structures of inequality that influence their constitution, sometimes creating gaps between migration policy stated goals and outcomes (what some authors call the “gap hypothesis”; see Cornelius et al. 1994).

32 Some authors argue that such gaps result from the structural demand for foreign labor, the conditions of sending countries (i.e. dependence on remittances), the action of social networks that challenge the effective implementation of migration policy (Cornelius et al. 1994), or simply from policy irrelevance (Lahav and Guiraudon 2007). In Italy in
particular, the economic function of migrants and the limits within which liberal democratic societies operate seem to create that gap (Calavita 1994). However, the decentralization and the (official or unofficial) privatization of migration control, implying the proliferation of non-state and transnational actors in migration regulation, and the introduction of structural and institutional reforms to deal with enforcement also affect policy implementation (Lahav 2006). A wide range of actors, including migrant workers and employers, may be seen as enforcers of migration (and employment) administrative measures, which is consistent with the current burden-sharing and shared-responsibility approach to migration management. As Lahav suggests, it is necessary “to move beyond a unitary view of the state and adopt a neo-institutional perspective in analyzing the regulation of migration” (2006: 292-293). I explore, at the micro-level, migrant workers’ and their employers’ concrete interpretations and implementation of migration (and employment) policy in Ragusa to gain a better understanding of the factors underlying the gap hypothesis. The relevance of this exercise relies on establishing a connection between policy goals and the concrete practices of the actors affected by the former. Moreover, migrants’ agency and the human dimension of labor migration should not be disregarded. Indeed, I see employers and migrant workers as agents that navigate the institutions, sometimes succeeding in making them work their way.  

I further explore migrants’ and employers’ agency through recruitment processes. My analysis relies on the premise of embeddedness, which implies that economic transactions are embedded in social relations (Granovetter 1985). I build on some concepts of the economic sociology of immigration in order to explore the similar recruitment processes of farm and care migrant workers in Ragusa. 

In migration studies, as Waldinger argues, “the various sociological attempts to theorize the economic sociology of immigration – whether appearing under the label of ethnic economy (Light and Karageorgis 1994), ethnic enclave (Portes and Bach 1985), ethnic niche (Waldinger 1996), or the latest neologism of the day – all involve variants of network theory” (1997: 3). Articulatory perspectives (network theory, institutional theory, cumulative causation approaches for instance) on international migration have shed light on the importance of social networks in structuring, perpetuating and even institutionalizing migration flows, constituting “transnational social fields”, and supporting migrants’ “transnational living” (Kearney 1986, Rouse 1991, Massey et al. 1993, Goss and Lindquist 1995, Glick Schiller 2009, Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc 1992 and 1995, Guarnizo 2003). In addition, networks play a crucial role in recruitment mediation, as sources of social capital – or the potential embedded in social relationships to yield other resources (Bourdieu 1986) – and as a resource inherent in social structures that helps actors achieving their goals (Coleman 1988). Trust is a factor that enables social networks’ recruitment mediation to the extent that (in Coleman’s view) it has the potential to reduce the uncertainties related to the engagement in a new employment relationship for the parties involved. Labor market outcomes, in turn, depend upon the composition of the networks, and the kinds of resources that their members control, and are able to mobilize (Gurak and Caces 1992, Sassen 1995). These dimensions of social capital shed light on processes of labor market segmentation. 

By focusing on the institutions migrants (and employers) navigate in the process of labor market incorporation, network approaches effectively articulate structure and agency.
Nevertheless, the accent is placed on social processes, rather than on the agents of those processes. To explore this last point, I build on concepts developed in ethnic studies, sociology, and domestic labor scholarship.

**Exploring the constitution of migrant worker subjects**

The subject level of analysis focuses on the examination of the processes of subject formation (or subjectification) and identity construction of migrant workers. Migrant agricultural and care workers share similar social positions as low-wage laborers. This level of analysis allows me to focus on how migrants perceive themselves, as well as on the social processes that intervene in the construction of their identity, and their position in the receiving society. For Giddens, a social position involves “the specification of a definite ‘identity’ within a network of social relations...” (1984: 83). A social position is thus different from a “role” in that it does not imply a pre-written script to be performed by the actors. Being knowledgeable subjects, migrant workers neither passively internalize, nor identify themselves with, the labels or identities ascribed to them. As agents, migrant workers and their employers participate actively in the construction and negotiation of their respective social positions or identities. These processes are rooted in their social interaction, which is embedded in power relations (relations between employers and workers are asymmetrical). This does not mean that the weak have no means for contestation. As Giddens noted, power characterizes all action, and “all forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activity of their superiors” (1984: 16). I focus on the stories of everyday life told by employers and migrant workers to examine the ways in which migrant workers’ occupational and class identities are defined, negotiated or contested.

My analysis of the similar processes of constitution of agricultural and domestic migrant workers as subjects is largely inspired by the literature on domestic labor (Anderson 2000, Constable 1997, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, Lan 2003, Lutz 2008 and 2011, Salazar Parreñas 2001), which is grounded in and combines different sociological traditions (e.g. feminist and gender theories, symbolic interactionism, postmodern theories). It employs a wide range of concepts derived from those traditions, and has developed original insights from which I draw in my analyses.

In addition, as migrants’ occupational and class identities are constructed at the intersection of various axes of domination, I rely on the concept of intersectionality to explore some the different and overlapping factors that intervene in that process (age, gender, class, ethnicity, religion, nationality, etc.).

Another concept that allows me to explore employers’ and employees’ negotiation of identities and status is “boundary work”. The concept of boundary has been used to explain ethnicity as the product of the creation and maintenance of boundaries as social groups come into contact with one another (Barth 1969). This approach has yielded useful insights to the study of identity, to the extent that ethnicity, as identity, is not to be viewed as a fixed property. Identities are dynamic, relational and processual (Rummens 2003). In domestic labor literature, the concept of “boundary work” was employed by Lan (2003) to elaborate a typology of the different strategies deployed by employers and workers in negotiating socio-categorical boundaries (class, ethnicity or nationality), and socio-spatial boundaries (that separate public and private spheres) in the intimacy of the private home.
Although subjectification and identity construction are related, I have divided my analysis into two separate chapters. In Chapter 4 I focus on employers’ participation in the construction of migrant workers’ occupational and social position, namely through othering practices, including the ascription and essentialization of the qualities of foreign workers, used as criteria to justify hiring decisions. I also analyze some strategies deployed by employers to negotiate their own status vis-à-vis foreign workers, based on boundary work. Chapter 5 explores workers’ migration projects and decisions as part of the construction of their own identities, social positions and self-improvement endeavors. I see such projects as influenced by self-improvement aspirations, following again Ong’s (2006) conceptualization of neoliberalism as a technology of governing. I further examine how migrant workers perceive the (class) contradictions that emerge from the inconsistencies between their projects of self-improvement and their low-status positions in the receiving context. As challenging as they may be, such experiences are open spaces where agency manifests itself, as demonstrated by the range of strategies migrants deploy to negotiate their status in the receiving society. In their quest for recognition and dignity, migrant workers may capitalize on the positive markers or criteria ascribed to them, or detach themselves from the identity ascribed by the employer. They may contest, negotiate, or ease the different class contradictions generated by their low-status position through “immediate struggles” (Salazar Parreñas 2001, building on Foucault), or creating alternative social boundaries without, however, challenging structural inequalities.

**Methods**

My research compares and situates the shared experiences of migrant agricultural and domestic workers within the larger structures, the institutions and the interpersonal relations that influence their incorporation into the receiving labor market, their conditions of work, and their social standing in the receiving society. This required gathering data on the perceptions and the lived experiences of people. Inasmuch as social life is actively generated in agents’ practices (Bourdieu 1977, Giddens 1984) I sought to understand both employers’ and migrant workers’ practices in their day-to-day interaction, as well as their discourse. I adopted, therefore, a qualitative approach to understand the practices of migrant workers and their employers.

This research is based on fieldwork, conducted in Ragusa, Sicily, for over eight months (January to early September 2008, and two additional visits in 2010 and 2011). I carried out 35 semi-structured interviews with 26 agricultural and domestic workers and nine employers, as well as additional interviews with one construction worker, two employers, and two trade union representatives. The interviews lasted from forty minutes to three hours; they were digitally recorded and fully transcribed. Most interviews were conducted in Italian; some were held in English and in French. No significant language edits have been made to the quotes originally in English. Interviews with employees were designed to collect basic demographic data, information on their migration history, their reasons to migrate, migratory status, the characteristics of their jobs and conditions of work, the relationship with employers, and their own perceptions of their position in the receiving society. Interviews with employers revolved around the same topics, and added the history and reasons underlying the recruitment of foreign workers, recruitment procedures (including preferences), and perceptions on labor relations. A random sample...
of employers and workers was identified through referrals and snowball technique, starting with my close acquaintances that employed migrant workers. I did not set out to interview a pre-arranged category of migrant workers (e.g. a specific nationality or gender category), but my contacts led me almost inevitably to interview female live-in care workers (from Poland and Romania) and male (also live-in) farm workers (from Tunisia and India).

The conflation of home and workplace, both in farm and care work, being a central aspect of the working conditions of my interlocutors, represented all at once a complication during fieldwork and a source of valuable insights. Most interviews took place in the home/workplace, where third persons were sometimes present during what I had originally planned as personal interviews. While most employers respected the privacy of workers during the interviews, some interruptions and purposeful interventions were inevitable. While I first experienced this as a sign of power imbalances between myself and employers, and between employers and workers, I could not have been more privileged to witness the very core of the interactions between employers and employees and to seize those spans of vivid exchange as bonus sources of precious insights.

To ensure confidentiality, my interlocutors have been anonymized by giving them pseudonyms, and through the codification of the interviews (Appendix 1). In addition, I collected and analyzed information from secondary sources of information (relevant literature, press reports, international organizations’ materials, national legislation, labor and immigration national statistics, and relevant internet sites), to complete, contrast, and contextualize the information collected through interviews and observations.

During my fieldwork, I also had ample time to familiarize myself with the places in which migrant workers gather in the city, to pay informal visits to migrant workers and employers and engage in informal conversations with them, in which both ventilated some aspects of their relationships. I could observe the dynamics of the city’s old town, where many migrants live. I had time to consult the local press regularly, and to participate in conversations with locals and inquire into their perceptions about migrant workers. These insights were recorded as field note evidence.

I privileged a bounded field-site instead of a multi-sited ethnography (see George Marcus1995), and concentrated exclusively on the receiving end of the migration spectrum. This allowed me to balance out the present methodological trend in migration studies and to focus on the practices and relations that develop in a concrete spatial framework (as suggested by Candea 2007).

I decided to focus on the experiences and practices of employers and migrant workers as the main actors concerned with labor migration, instead of expanding my sample to incorporate local immigration authorities, labor inspectors, police officers, or conducting more interviews with trade union representatives. Although not comprehensive, my findings are compelling enough to offer the basis for an original discussion on the experiences of two seemingly different categories of migrant workers.

Structure of the book

This book starts by explaining labor migration as organized by the structural needs of Ragusa that underlie the demand for foreign labor, including the reconfiguration of the local dairy industry and the welfare sector, and by the historical, political, economic and
cultural linkages that integrate Ragusa and some areas in India, Poland, Romania and Tunisia into a unique migration system (Chapter 1). This is followed by an analysis of the current discourse on labor migration management, highlighting its consistency with market principles, and focusing on the concrete interpretation and implementation of migration policy (i.e. administrative measures that regulate the incorporation of migrant labor into the receiving labor market) by migrant workers and their employers. In this manner, migrant workers’ experiences are situated in relation to the state. Some of the gaps between the stated policy goals and the outcomes of the practices of such private enforcers are discussed in terms of the coherence between the assumptions that underlie migration policies and the human dimension of migration (Chapter 2). The crucial role of social networks in structuring labor migration flows, mediating recruitment processes in Ragusa, and shaping the labor market segmentation is also recognized and examined (Chapter 3). It is argued that solidarity and self-interest coexist within social networks, and that the analysis of the intervention of social networks in recruitment processes sheds light on the reasons why labor migration does not always translate into upward social mobility for migrant workers. Focusing on the subject-level of analysis, the book then examines employer-worker interpersonal relationships and the constitution of migrant workers as subjects. A key aspect of this process is the constant (re)definition and negotiation of employers’ and migrant workers’ respective social positions, or the creation and negotiation of social boundaries that separate employers from workers, along the lines of class, gender and ethnicity. Indeed, employers’ hiring decisions and practices to affirm their status vis-à-vis migrant workers, affect the construction of migrant workers’ occupational and class position in the receiving society (Chapter 4). Conversely, migrants’ self-perceptions and how they negotiate their identity and status in the receiving society are part of the same processes of subjectification (Chapter 5). Class contradictions faced by migrant workers often result of the inconsistencies between their condition as low-wage laborer and their self-improvement aspirations. However, migrants deploy specific strategies to conceal, negotiate and contest those contradictions, including the creation of alternative social boundaries in relation to their employers or to other migrant workers or groups in the receiving context.

NOTES

1. In a recent paper, Glick Schiller conceptualizes neoliberalism as “a series of contemporary projects of capital accumulation that beginning in the 1970s sought to reconstitute social relations of production, including the organisation of labour, space, state institutions, military power, governance, membership, and sovereignty (Harvey 2005, 2006, Jessop 2002)” (2009: 9-10). The author continues, “[t]he accumulated impact of the transformations wrought by these projects and the policies and technologies that accompany them can be called neoliberal restructuring and the policies that institute the transformations can be termed the neo-liberal agenda” (2009: 10). Those projects pervade the fields of economics and politics, as well as cultural practices, ideas about self and society, and the production and dissemination of images and narratives.
2. I use the term “global” instead of “international” to highlight the contemporary complexities of the integrated capitalist world economy, increased interconnectedness, interdependencies, as well as time and space compression and awareness of the latter that entail globalization processes (see Appelrouth and Edles 2012, chapter 17, The Global Society).

3. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), “Decent work” involves fair income, security in the workplace, social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom to organize and equality of opportunity and treatment for women and men (ILO, Decent Work, http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm, accessed 5/04/2012). ILO’s “decent work” political agenda is based on four pillars: job creation, the recognition and respect of rights at work (following international labor standards), the promotion of social protection and social dialogue, and gender equality as a crosscutting objective. The concept of decent work is closely associated with ILO’s organizational priorities.

4. For a recent account of labor migration in domestic service, horticulture and prostitution in Palermo and parts of the province of Ragusa see Cole and Booth (2007).

5. For an account of migrant workers incorporated in the informal economy in the south of Italy see Mingione and Quassoli 2000; in greenhouse cultivation Cole and Booth 2007 and CeSPI 2000. Also, in southern Italy, migrant workers are employed in the underground footwear, clothing, leather tanning and building sector and in commerce and tourism (Frey, et al. 1996). Kosic and Triandafyllidou 2004 provide a brief but instructive account of the paths of Albanian migrants, who initially arrive in the south of Italy, and find their first jobs in agriculture, then move north (to Florence), where they are employed as builders.

6. According to the first definition provided by the Merriam-Webster dictionary zootechny is “the scientific art of maintaining and improving animals under domestication including breeding, genetics, nutrition, and housing: the technology of animal husbandry” (Merriam-Webster Online, “zootechny”, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/zootechny, accessed 30/04/2012). Animal husbandry is defined as the “[c]ontrolled cultivation, management, and production of domestic animals, including improvement of the qualities considered desirable by humans by means of breeding. Animals are bred and raised for utility (e.g. food, fur), sport, pleasure, and research” (Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. “animal husbandry”, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/25739/animal-husbandry, accessed 30/04/2012). The terms “farm work/er” and “zootechny”/“zootechnical” are used interchangeably to refer to this kind of employment, following the practice of my interlocutors, who use both terms in their own discourse to refer to their sector of activity (in Italian, zootecnia).

7. According to the United Nations Population Division, in 2010 the total rural population worldwide was estimated at 3.4 billion. This estimation is based on a definition of “rural population” as that living in areas not classified as urban according to the criteria used by each country or area (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, Rural Population, Development and the Environment 2011, www.unpopulation.org, accessed 7/06/2012). The figures referring to the overall situation of agriculture can be found at ILO and FAO, Food, Agriculture and Decent work, http://www.fao-ilo.org/ilo-dec-employ/en/?no_cache=1, accessed 6/04/2012.

8. Domestic labor entails such tasks as washing, cleaning, sweeping, mopping, tidying, cooking, laundering, ironing, buying food and groceries, and caring for children or older persons, to name but a few examples. Employment arrangements also vary from hourly work, to part-time or full-time work and informal or formal contractual employment. Service provision can be ‘live-out’ or ‘live-in’.

9. Some authors argue that domestic workers’ social mobility is limited and at best horizontal: from live-in to live-out; from full-time to part-time employment; from working for a poor family to working for middle class family; from having a “bad” to having a “good” employer, from
working in a private house to being hired by a cleaning enterprise, etc. (Lautier 2003: 802-803; see also Anderfuhren 2002 and Oso Casas 2002).

10. Generally speaking, the fact that the employment relationship is often established between two women complicates the study of the intersections of gender, class and ethnicity (Constable 1997). Men are also employed in domestic service, but the tasks allocated to male and female domestic workers often differ. Male domestic work tends not to be strictly confined to the private sphere of the house (Destremau and Lautier 2002: 251). Partly as a result of international migration, Italy is witnessing a revival of male domestic service (also in eldercare) since the 1980s (Sarti 2010, Bartolomei 2010, Scrinzi 2010).

11. As Mundlak and Shamir note (2008, footnote 1, p. 161), there is a debate about the definition of “carework” including its relationship with “emotional work”, care “labor”, and “women’s work” (see also Folbre and Nelson 2000, and Folbre 2006 on the commodification of care; and Razavi 2007, and Anderson 2001 on conceptual issues surrounding “care” and “domestic labor”). “Care work” is here understood as the direct provision of care to persons. I agree also with Folbre’s definition of the “care sector” “as economic activities in the home, market, community, and state that fit loosely under the rubric of human services and have a particularly strong personal and emotional dimension...” (2006: 12). Some authors have further raised the question of whether domestic work is a “normal job” (Anderson 2006 and 2001, Lutz 2011), and whether the terms “employer” and “employee” apply to the actors involved in the kind of informal employment relationships characteristic of this sector. I keep these terms because, despite the fact that eldercare provided by migrant workers in Ragusa are not fully governed by the relevant legislative framework, they remain employment relationships to all affects. I use the terms “care”, “eldercare”, and “care work” interchangeably to refer to this type of employment.

12. Anthropologist Jeffrey Cole and education consultant Sally S. Booth have recently published a descriptive study of the lives of migrants employed in domestic service, greenhouse cultivation, and prostitution. The research sites include the city of Palermo, and parts of the province of Ragusa (Cole and Booth 2007). The CeSPI, under the research program “Migratory and Economic Circuits in the Mediterranean” also published one study (2000) on migration in the province on Ragusa, focusing on the horticulture sector.

13. The study of migration requires an interdisciplinary approach (Brettell and Hollifield 2008; Portes and DeWind 2004). Some scholars optimistically argue that there is significant interchange of migration objects of study among different disciplines. Others instead question the degree of actual interdisciplinarity achieved in migration studies, as opposed to “friendly dialogues” among disciplines with specific “mindsets” in which major differences regarding research questions, methods and levels of analysis prevail (see Brettell and Hollifield 2008; and Favell 2008).

14. Dual labor market is based on economic dualism, reflected in the polarization of the labor market. It distinguishes, therefore, between highly skilled, relatively stable and well paid jobs in the primary or industrial sector, and low-skilled, unstable and precarious jobs in the secondary sectors of the economy, such as agriculture and domestic service. The characteristics of jobs in the secondary section of the labor market make the receiving society resistant to their elimination; and make native workers reluctant to accept them (Piore 1979: 9).

15. This approach is inspired by Marxist political economy, and dependency theory advanced in Latin America in the 1960s (Castles and Miller 2009), and is largely informed by Wallerstein’s (1974) concept of the modern world-system, containing a multiplicity of political systems and an integrated (capitalist) world-economy. It is based on relations of domination and an unequal, occupational and geographical international division of labor: (Wallerstein 1974: 350). The world-system is divided into cores (strong states), peripheral areas (weak states or areas) and semiperipheral areas (that prevent the total polarization of the system and are both exploiters and exploited). All regions can advance or lose their status within the world-system (Wallerstein
This social organization of work entails the accumulation of wealth in some regions of the world at the expense of the continuous impoverishment of other regions. On this basis, world-systems theory posits that the penetration of capitalist economic relations in non-capitalist societies causes disruptions and dislocations which create mobile populations, prone to migrate abroad (Massey et al. 1993: 444-445). Under this approach, labor migration is thus part of the uneven processes of production, exchange, and transfer of surplus among peripheries, semi-peripheries and cores, which perpetuate the underdevelopment of migrant-sending regions by draining their labor force, and at the same time help satisfying the structural needs of late capitalist societies by filling the labor market gaps generated by the horizontal and vertical mobility of native workers (Nikolinakos 1975).

16. The systems perspective admits that migration can be reversible, multidirectional, and differentiated (permanent, temporary, seasonal, circular); as it responds to transformations caused by external factors and the migration process itself. Likewise, the distinction between “sending” and “receiving” countries is problematized (most countries experience inward outward and transit flows). This approach poses, however, empirical difficulties concerning the identification of the units of a migration system. Moreover, the complexity of the political, economic, and social dynamics that define the system, and the potential overlaps that exist among systems (e.g. when a single country belongs to two or more systems; see Zlotnik 1992), induce researchers to arbitrarily delimit the boundaries of system under consideration, which I have done in this work by limiting the system to the sending areas represented in my sample (specific areas of India, Poland, Romania and Tunisia).

17. While this literature often refers to “immigration” I retain the term “migration” for two reasons: first, most migrant workers in Ragusa do not envisage permanent or long-term stay, but are highly mobile; second, the assumptions underlying the notion of “immigrant” (i.e. long-term migration) are as empirically problematic as the definition of the contents of policies targeting a category of population whose conditions are constantly shifting, and whose definition varies from state to state (see Messina and Lahav 2006, chapter 7).

18. Giddens suggests that “norms figure as ‘factual’ boundaries of social life, to which a variety of manipulative attitudes is possible” (1984: 4).

19. Embeddedness is both “relational” (personal relations), and “structural” (the larger network of social relations to which actors belong) (Portes 1995: 6).

20. Economic sociology admits that economic action is socially oriented as far as it entails moral considerations, it is inserted in power relations, and it can be constrained by social forces (Portes 1995: 4-5). Social networks have a fundamental role in economic transactions, because economic transactions are embedded in them; because networks are sources for the acquisition of scarce means; and because networks can effectively constrain the pursuit of personal gain, by imposing obligations and sanctions to their members (Portes 1995: 8-16).

21. Intersectionality was originally used by legal theorists to refer to overlapping social statuses. The concept was also applied in the study of minorities, in order to de-essentialize identity. In domestic labor literature, intersectionality is often implicit in the analyses of the ways in which ethnicity, gender, class, migratory status, nationality define the specific position of domestic workers in the larger social structures in which they participate.

22. Migrant workers and employers as here considered purposive agents (Giddens 1984), whose action is both enabled and constrained by the larger structures in which they are situated. I assume therefore that employers and employees are knowledgeable subjects, capable of elaborating discursively upon the reasons underlying their activities and intentions.

23. Field note analysis, Bond warns us, should consider field notes as living, mutable texts that cannot be given a single interpretation, because of the interplay between the text, our memory and the context (G. Bond, in Sanjek 1990).
Acknowledgments

Although any omissions and mistakes are my own responsibility, I would like to thank those who made this research endeavor achievable. I am deeply thankful to the 35 workers and employers who welcomed me in their homes and shared their opinions and experiences with honesty and dignity. I would like to thank Prof. Isabelle Schulte-Tenckhoff for her rigorous mentoring and continuous inspiration, as well as Prof. Ibrahim Awad and Prof. Gopalan Balachandran for stirring my thoughts regarding my theoretical contributions to migration scholarship. I thank Alessandro for introducing me with love and patience to the realities of Ragusa and for accompanying me along this journey. I am thankful to my parents, Margarita and José Luis, my brother José Luis, and my sister Yvette for their unconditional support and complicity. And last, but not least, thanks to Marta, for the years devoted looking after me and for showing me the importance of her labor.
Chapter 1. Labor migration flows to Ragusa: the fuzzy boundaries between cores and peripheries

1 Ragusa is an Italian province that receives labor inflows from specific regions of different countries including India, Poland, Romania and Tunisia. These inflows result partly from Ragusa’s contemporary structural needs in the agricultural and care sectors, as well as from the different ties it maintains with those regions and the action of social networks. Ragusa holds a contradictory position in the North-South conventional development divide: while this province is often associated with the South (the ‘underdeveloped’ end); given its participation in the world economy, it exhibits core-like structural needs met through the integration of labor-exporting regions within a specific migration system. This is further explored in the following, including a discussion on current labor migration inflows to Ragusa and their contextualization.

Ragusa: core or periphery?

2 Ragusa is one of the nine provinces of the autonomous Region of Sicily, Italy, located in South-Eastern end of the island. It consists of twelve municipalities including the capital, the comune of Ragusa.¹ (See Appendix III: Location maps). There are many Sicilies, as the Sicilian writer Gesualdo Bufalino aptly argued. Ragusa is one that proudly embraces the makeover that the touristic sector has recently promoted, shaking the image of the typically sealed rural Sicily that once captivated Italo-American filmmakers. Fully incorporated into the global economy, Ragusa is responding to its internal labor imbalances by welcoming labor migration. However, Ragusa is somewhat different from the cities that Sassen (1991) qualified as global.²

3 In 2002, Ragusa – and the old town Ibla – was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.³ Since then, tourism has developed at a rapid pace. The old town was renovated, and noble palazzi and rural bourgeoisie houses (masserie) were converted into luxury hotels and high-end restaurants. There has been a massive expansion of agritourism and, in Ibla and the coastal area, of bed and breakfasts (B&Bs).⁴ A large number of shops offer curious
travelers a wide range of traditional products from olive oil, to chocolate, sun-dried tomatoes, local cheese, handmade embroideries, and even T-shirts with hilarious phrases in Sicilian dialect... Two shopping malls opened in the suburbs of Ragusa city; the touristic seaport of Marina di Ragusa was renovated (in 2009); a five-star golf resort and spa was built in Donnafugata (in 2010); a new Mediterranean wine and food school was recently inaugurated in Ibla, and the former military airport and NATO base of Comiso opened for civilian use in 2013. Along with visitors, a burgeoning upper-middle class benefits from this recent makeover.

During the day, Ragusa offers marvelous views, great food and wine, warm weather, and hospitality to the visitors that admire the architecture of the Late Baroque Towns of the Val di Noto. At night, the old town of Ibla turns into a sort of real Christmas crib, on the top of a hill, with tiny yellow lights illuminating its alleys... On my first trip to the beach, however, I noticed that the roads were bounded by massive plantations, greenhouses and dry-stone walls (muri a secco) that once divided feudal concessions. Despite the stylish looks of the capital city, I could understand why Tariq, as many other migrant workers, was taken by surprise: ‘... [W]hen I arrived my dad brought me from Palermo... I had seen the pretty houses, lots of beautiful things... And then when I arrived [here] I saw the mules, the cows, and then I thought ‘where am I?’ [laughs]...’ (Interview A.12.5.09). Indeed, Ragusa did not entirely fit into the image of the developed North he had in mind.

It was in that kind of setting that a few foreign workers became visible, as they walked down the same dusty roads that took tourists to the beach. I was curious about the reasons that bring migrant workers to Ragusa, instead of other Italian urban centers well-known to tourists and foreign workers alike.

For better or for worse, Ragusa is portrayed as “an island within the island” (un’isola nell’isola). While the expression depicts an idyllic enclave, it also reflects the contradictory position of Ragusa within the North-South development divide. To borrow another expression coined by Bufalino, Ragusa province is babba, naïve, or innocent in a colloquial sense. This portrait is proudly adopted by Ragusans, as the province seems to be spared the backwardness, the organized crime, and the fiefdoms that prevail in ‘other Sicilies’. Ragusa is arguably one of the wealthiest provinces. Its wealth relies on sophisticated agricultural practices. Mining, asphalt, cement, and black-stone industries and the renewable energy industry also play a significant role in the provincial economy. Conversely, geographical isolation, and a poor economic and social infrastructure constitute major obstacles to Ragusa’s economic development (SISTAN 2007: 21).³ Putnam (1993) was certainly not the first to notice the stark disparities that divide Italy.⁴ 150 years after unification, some voices still claim that “Garibaldi did not unite Italy [but] divided Africa” (The Economist 2011).

Nonetheless, Ragusa is not exempt from the effects of neoliberal restructuring. Struggling to maintain high economic and welfare standards, it has turned to foreign workers to fill essential production and reproduction jobs in its farms and homes. Two conceptual frameworks within which to contextualize contemporary labor migration inflows to Ragusa are dual labor market, and migration systems theory. Dual labor market focuses on structural factors that drive labor migration flows and is useful to analyze Ragusa’s structural labour needs (or core features) in the dairy and care sectors. The systemic approach provides a useful framework to explore the ties between Ragusa and different migration poles.
Structural needs

8 Dual labor market theory is based on economic dualism, which opposes the modern industrial sector and the traditional agricultural sector; reflected, for example, in the polarization of the labor market. From a dualist perspective, it is the characteristics of the jobs and their social meaning that turn certain sectors and occupations unattractive for local workers and create a structural demand for foreign labor. Two prototypes of secondary jobs in the Ragusan economy are agriculture and domestic service (especially eldercare). The share of the foreign population employed in agriculture and domestic work is noteworthy.

9 Dual labor market posits that labor migration is demand-based. The demand for foreign labor emerges from the structural characteristics of destination societies including the duality of the labor market, structural inflation, motivational problems, and demographic and sociocultural changes. Technological advancement cannot curtail the demand for foreign labor because the positions at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy can never be eliminated (see Nikolinakos 1975, Jenkins 1978, Hojman 1989). Despite the various shortfalls of this approach, the characteristics of the jobs that migrants perform in Ragusa, and thus the structural factors underlying the demand for foreign labor, can be read in dual labor market terms.

Agriculture: structural needs and the challenges of open economies

10 Agriculture has always played a key role in Ragusa’s economy. The province is renowned for the production of fruit (citrus fruits, grapes, apricots), vegetables (cherry tomatoes, eggplant, zucchini, artichokes), and flowers, mostly grown in greenhouses situated along the coast. Ragusa is the second largest producer of vegetables in Italy, and contributes 40 and 5.4 percent to the Sicilian and the national gross marketable production, respectively (2004 estimate). Ragusa has also specialized in cattle-farming, meat, milk and dairy products. The province contributes to 80 percent of the milk and dairy production in Sicily (Telenova 2012). However, Ragusan milk, dairy and meat industries are modest compared to those of the north of Italy, which concentrates over 50 percent of Italian cattle farms, and 70 percent of the cattle itself (ISTAT 2010).

11 The Ragusan dairy industry is being severely affected by the liberalization of agricultural products, which places a great burden on small farms to remain profitable:

I think agriculture and zootechny in our South are disappearing because we can no longer afford to produce owing to the costs we have [...] It is not an issue of mechanization, but of political choices, globalization, financial markets [...] The problem is twofold: production costs and the markets; we sell in the same markets than countries with lower production costs... [...] Today, producing milk is nonsense, especially here, 10km away from the sea, with regular droughts and the weather we have... Producing one liter of milk in this part of the world costs 32 cents, but we sell in the same market than the Germans, whose milk costs 18 cents [...] We cannot afford to sell our product at such prices... [...] If you have to work from two in the morning to eight in the evening, 365 days a year and you can’t make a thousand euros a month (which is what I pay my employee) there’s no point in assuming all this responsibility (Interview L.11.5.09)
European agricultural policies and international market dynamics have caused the exit of many small agricultural businesses, in favor of more competitive and larger entities. Most farms in Ragusa are small family-run businesses (of an average size of 4 hectares per unit; SISTAN 2007). In the past decade, the number of agricultural businesses has decreased significantly both at provincial and regional level. Large firms (30 hectares and over) make up five percent of the agricultural businesses in Italy, and cultivate 54.1 percent of the arable land (ISTAT 2010). In an open economy, the effects of regional agricultural policies are not contained within the Italian or European borders, but affect the global agricultural markets and prices, with consequences in third countries including emigration.

Ragusan products are not competitive in international markets. Hostile geographic conditions, deforestation, water scarcity, a poor infrastructure and important energy requirements translate into high production costs. An agreement recently signed between the European Union (EU) and Morocco concerning the liberalization of agricultural products further provoked outrage among Sicilian farmers. The text indicates a strong conviction on the part of its drafters that liberalization can alleviate poverty and unemployment, pointing to what are conceived of as the root causes of economic, migratory and security “problems” in the region. Property is another indicator of the challenges experienced in the agricultural sector. Although direct ownership of the land is the prevailing form of tenure, many farmers have leases; as a result, they face greater pressure to make profit in order to repay their loans or recover their investment. The consequences are the flexibilization of labor and the increased vulnerability of (migrant) workers.

Some authors argue that the Italian economy has experienced a crisis of the “Fordist” model, and has reorganized production accordingly, emphasizing flexibility (Calavita 1994). The global economic crisis further aggravated the situation. Because labor costs directly affect the price of agricultural products, farmers turn to less labor-intensive products to cut production costs. A horticulture entrepreneur, for example, used to grow vegetables and ornamental flowers in greenhouses. His firm started as an individual business in the 1980s. By the mid-1990s it had grown sufficiently to become a cooperative. However, within twelve years it had experienced losses that made it necessary to turn into an individual business again. Ornamental flowers are no longer profitable. People cut this kind of unnecessary expenses in times of economic recession. The entrepreneur in question possesses 2.5 hectares, and admits that to make what he calls “a good product” the firm requires four workers per hectare; thus, approximately ten workers. However, but from the eleven workers he once had, he has kept only three (all foreign). Despite cutting by more than half the labor force, he produces a less labor-intensive product sold at a high price, using a cheap labor force, and still makes a profit. (Interview F.26.8.11).

Social transformations have also affected the composition of the agricultural labor force in Ragusa, especially in the farming sector. While for many decades agriculture has been the main source of income and employment, today, the service sector absorbs the largest share of the labor force. Wages play a key role in the definition of occupational hierarchies. In the agricultural sector, besides long-standing income stagnation, low wages (around 40 euros a day; INAIL 2010) make the sector unattractive to Ragusan workers. Furthermore, higher educational rates and perceptions about prestige and social status shape local workers’ attitudes towards agricultural jobs. Such attitudes combine with employers’ assumptions about the qualities of foreign workers. According to the
discourse of employers interviewed in Ragusa, migrant workers are being hired because: a) local workers shun agricultural jobs; and b) foreign labor force is cheaper, more 'committed' to work, and more available (as live-in workers).

\[16\] Agricultural jobs are associated with a low social status, as described in employers' discourses: “Ragusans do not want to work with the cows”, “they don't like to work on the farms”, “they snob agricultural work because they have become bourgeois and they want clean jobs; and it has nothing to do with a financial incentives”, as some employers noted. Although many Ragusans are employed in the agricultural sector, they often detach themselves from the more degrading or ‘dirty’ tasks (i.e. those involving direct contact with the animals and the soil) and prefer to perform ‘cleaner’ tasks (e.g. driving a tractor). An employer observed that “the countryside is perceived as a place where you get dirty; so people disdain the countryside; they prefer to work in [urban] Ragusa where they may take up construction jobs, and even if they have to toil when they go back home they're clean” (Interview R.23.08.11).

\[17\] Landlords constitute an important share of the agricultural labor force (97.6 percent of the businesses in the province remain under direct supervision of the owner; SISTAN 2007: 49). However, family labor has decreased by 36.7 percent in Sicily.\[17\] Most employers inherited the farms from their grandparents and parents. Over 70 percent of farm supervisors in Sicily are 50 to 70 years old and over (ISTAT 2010). Indeed, young Ragusans are not taking over family businesses. Most employers insist that their adult children, who had better educational opportunities, refuse to take up agricultural jobs, which encourages them to continue recruiting foreign workers,\[18\] as illustrated below:

Since there is progress, Italians no longer sleep in the countryside… My son wants to work, but you see, he holds a diploma [sarcastic tone], how cute! He told me 'it's boring' [working on the farm]… It would be good if he helped me… but, poor guy! Can you imagine? In the milking room, with his white shirt, with a pen in his hand to write letters and numbers! [sarcastic] I know what the problem is... I start milking at 5:30 in the morning... the poor child is not used to it... (Interview C.26.12.10)

\[18\] The family plays a key role keeping local educated youth at home or in the university “rather than have them dent family prestige by taking [on] low-status jobs” (King 2000: 15, see also Reyneri 1998). The employer cited above, further claimed that young Ragusans can afford to shun agricultural work because they are (financially) supported by the parents.

\[19\] In sum, Ragusan farmers are struggling to fit in highly competitive global markets, and to cope with the price volatility of agricultural goods. In this context, production costs, especially labor, are cut to keep their activities profitable. This is yielding results: Sicily is the third most cost-competitive region after Lombardy and Puglia (ISTAT 2012). Employers turn to foreign workers not only to reduce costs, but also – given that most of these workers live on the farms – because of their 'greater availability'. Social factors (higher educational standards, social aspirations, and family support) encourage and allow local workers to shun agricultural jobs. Simultaneously, informal social mechanisms allow Ragusans to seize the cleaner tasks of agricultural work and avoid the dirtiest ones. Most employers interviewed have actively recruited foreigners since the 1980s. By the turn of the century, 92.6 percent of foreign residents in Ragusa were employed in agriculture; today the figure is 62.6 percent (CeSPI 2000, Caritas 2011).\[19\]
Eldercare: structural needs and market-oriented welfare choices

There are 1.5 million domestic workers in Italy, and 71.6 percent of these are migrants (CENSIS 2009). Since 2001, 400,000 new employees have entered this sector, and the share of ‘senior’ workers (aged 50 and over) is growing (CENSIS 2009). The number of foreign domestic workers in Italy has increased in the past decades, and demand continues to grow.

Domestic work cannot be outsourced to low-wage countries, as it requires migrants to integrate in the employer’s household and adapt to their preferences and habits (Lutz 2008: 2). Contemporary demand for foreign domestic labor in post-industrial societies is often explained through economic and socio-demographic factors, including: demographic changes (e.g. the aging of the native population); the greater participation of women in the labor force; the lack, or inadequacy, of public welfare services; the commodification and privatization of domestic work and care provision; the expansion of the middle classes (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2010, Lutz 2008 and 2011, Yeoh et al. 1999). Some authors conceive of domestic service as an intrinsic element of (economic) development and the related political choices (Chin 1997, Glantz 2005). Moreover, in Italy, in particular, the Catholic ideology of charity and the family are thought to substitute the state’s welfare responsibilities (Baganha 2009).

An aging population certainly influences the demand for care workers. Between 2000 and 2010 the number of persons aged over 65 years (1.8 million) was larger than that of the active population (1.4 million). About one sixth of the population aged between 70 and 74 years, and almost half of those aged over 80 years, is no longer autonomous (Caritas 2011). In Sicily, the number of (officially registered) foreign domestic workers passed from 5,516 in 1995, to 8,483 in 2001 to 11,809 in 2005. Ragusa has witnessed similar demographic changes; and it has turned to new European and third country workers to satisfy its care needs.

Although the domestic sector is highly heterogeneous, this study is concerned with female migrant workers employed in eldercare. Sarti argues that until the mid-nineteenth century “domestic servants were mainly hired to free housewives from the drudgery of housework, not to allow them to have a job” (2008: 92, emphasis in original). In Ragusa, I found a partial continuity of that pattern. Caring for the elderly is part of the families’ responsibilities. The family, though highly heterogeneous, is a powerful institution in Sicily. Expanded family ties are highly desirable, as reflected in practices of residential propinquity, household extension, and frequent social interaction (Cole and Booth 2007: 36). Traditionally, eldercare is entrusted to female adult children or female relatives. In this context, the greater participation of local women in the labor force offers an incomplete explanation of the demand for foreign care work, especially given the prevailing disparities in employment rates between men (72.5 percent) and women (32.2 percent) in Sicily (SISTAN 2007).

Most employers interviewed (the majority of them female) recall having only recently required some kind of ‘help’ at home. Ragusan women continue to be largely responsible for care and domestic work, and everything related to the domestic realm. To all appearances, foreign care work is not a substitute for women’s family and care responsibilities; rather, it coexists with them, allowing local women to share the burden.
As Lutz notes “the asymmetry between the genders does not disappear... by outsourcing the ‘female work’ to migrant women...” (2008: 49), gender regimes remain intact.

As in other European countries, in Italy the demand and greater access to foreign domestic labor appear to be also linked to market-oriented welfare policies (see Williams and Gavanas 2008) that support the privatization of care. In addition to the eldercare facilities being insufficient, social factors play a major role in structuring the demand for private eldercare services, as enrolling the elderly in a private or public facility is considered to be unacceptable (as ‘a source of shame’ and a ‘strategy of last resort’. See Cole and Booth 2007).

Welfare policies with a market-oriented taste have enhanced families’ primary role in the provision of eldercare through direct payments. In 2004, the province disbursed 57,890 pensions (SISTAN 2007), almost half of these to the elderly (47 percent), of an average amount of 618 euros. In 2005, the average monthly salary of care workers in Italy was estimated at 662 euros (Caritas 2005). The former suggests that average pensions of the elderly could hardly suffice to afford private care services, on top of other basic expenses. Indeed, it is often adult children who hire foreign caregivers. Currently, direct cash payments or allowances to eligible relatives of care users is the prevalent welfare intervention at local level (Piperno 2006). Besides subsidizing private care, welfare policies have made private domestic service more affordable. Since 2005, families willing to hire a domestic worker can do so if their annual income is twice the worker’s annual remuneration. It is estimated that about half a million families can afford domestic service (Caritas 2005).

As argued by some authors, it is not the absence of public support, but the nature of that support that enhances the privatization of care provision (Williams and Gavanas 2008: 14) and possibly fuels the demand for foreign labor. Similar policies are found in France, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom (Anderson 2006, Scrinzi 2008). Cash payments in Italy are unregulated; the recruitment, management and remuneration of care workers is left to “individual care consumers”, as Ungerson has noted, with the likely result being that “such consumers will seek out labour that is cheap, and yet authentically ‘caring’” (Ungerson in Anderson 2006: 3). The former is duly accompanied with migration policies, which favor the recruitment of foreign work force in the domestic sector (Scrinzi 2008: 29). The recent regularization of about 300,000 domestic workers, for example, has yielded positive outcomes not only for domestic work or care consumers, but also for the public finance. It can be thus argued that the Italian state supports the market ideology and freedom of choice of consumers, privatization and deregulation of the care sector, including the recruitment of foreign care workers, while maintaining the gendered care regime unchanged.

Furthermore, domestic service is associated with issues of class and status (Constable 1997, Destremau 2002, Dickey 2000, Hojman 1989, Mozère 2002, Piette 2000). In Ragusa, there is a burgeoning middle-class that inherited the wealth of the peasant generations. As an example, affluent families normally own an urban dwelling, and a summer residence by the sea, which lies at a distance of some 25km from the city. This is quite astonishing for visitors in general, and for care workers in particular, as stated by several of my interlocutors. Middle-class women with higher consumption standards can, and eventually prefer to, hire foreign domestic workers to look after the elderly. It is also worth noting that this job entails intimacy. Hiring foreign care workers allow native-Ragusan women to abandon ‘embarrassing’ or ‘dirty’ tasks, maintain their independency,
without dishonoring their family obligations (see also Cole and Booth 2007). In addition, local women employed in domestic service tend to prefer housecleaning over eldercare, because the later it requires 24-hour availability and it is perceived as a low-status occupation.

Seemingly, the demand for foreign domestic labor in Ragusa results from a combination of structural needs, social attitudes, and market-oriented welfare policies that allow families to uphold their solidarity and reciprocity values through money or direct payments. The supply of foreign labor may help local women to conciliate their gendered role of caretakers and their independence, by sharing their care responsibilities with a (female) migrant worker. As such, the provision of (affordable) paid care by foreign workers makes Ragusan women’s life more comfortable.

The dualist approach thus uncovers a number of formal and informal economic and social mechanisms underlying the demand for agricultural and care foreign labor in Ragusa.

**Linkages with source areas**

Migration is everything but a new phenomenon to Ragusa. The province has experienced a range of migration transitions first as a colony of the Roman Empire, as well as under Arab, Norman, Savoy and Bourbon rule; latter as a migrant-sending area, a transit zone, and currently as a receiving area. Contemporary labor migration to Ragusa is better understood if situated within the Southern European framework. King (2000) provides a succinct account of Southern European migration transitions (namely in Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) ranging from early intra-Mediterranean trade-based migration during the mercantilist epoch to colonial emigration to the Americas in the following centuries, which fostered the expansion of the world capitalist economy, to mass emigration from Southern Europe to North America in the late nineteenth century until the Great Depression, to renewed emigration under recruitment schemes to northern Europe (Belgium, France, West Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland) in the post-war era. Almost half a million Sicilians emigrated in the decade 1950-1960 alone (Cole and Booth 2007: 17). Some authors see this phase as an “internal colonization” process driven by the expansion of capital in Western Europe (Nikolinakos 1975). By the early 1970s, in view of the economic recession, labor-importing countries ended recruitment; but family reunification continued to enlarge the share of foreign residents in their territories. Recently, Southern Europe was seen as a transit zone for migrants heading towards more attractive northern destinations. Yet, immigration became a key feature of regional migration dynamics since the 1970s, gaining momentum in the 1980s; consolidating Southern Europe as a destination area in the 1990s (Consoli 2009, King 2000, Reyneri 1998).

Many authors agree on the shared determinants of recent labor migration flows to Southern European countries, from tighter immigration controls in traditional destinations (e.g. France, Germany) that favored the emergence of new Southern European destinations, to the lax implementation of migration policies and the difficulty to police the region’s borders, to the heavy dependence on tourism, shipping and trade that led to the simplification of the admission of a large number of visitors, to a prosperous informal economy that could absorb a flexible supply of foreign labor force (King 2000: 8-11). Some authors argue that the position of migrant workers in the Italian dualistic economy is partly the result of extensive government and union regulation of
the formal economy (Calavita 1994: 308). It is estimated that the highest share of informal employment (45 percent) is absorbed by the south of Italy (CENSIS 2009: 12). Finally, recurrent regularization campaigns seemed to have encouraged further immigration (Consoli 2009, Reyneri 1998).

It is in this context that Ragusa, which had been a peripheral migrant-sending area, became a receiving area. Nationals mainly from Tunisia, Romania, Albania, Morocco, and Poland, together, make up 81.5 percent of the foreign resident population (Demo ISTAT 2010). India also figures among the first fifteen countries of origin. Foreign residents represent 6.6 percent of the total provincial population (estimated at 316,113 in 2010).

As in the rest of Italy, the number of foreign residents in Ragusa has increased steadily passing from 8,698 in 2001 (despite falling to 7,547 in 2002), to 10,281 in 2005, to 18,472 in 2009, to 20,956 in 2011. The municipalities of Vittoria (4,675), Ragusa (3,366), Comiso (2,002), Modica (1,754) and Santa Croce Camerina (1,660) concentrate about 73 percent of the foreign resident population. Needless to say, official statistics neither capture the size of undocumented migrant flows or stocks in Ragusa, nor trace the high internal mobility of this population.

Following migration systems theory, in which labor migration is an inherent feature of the contemporary global economy, some historical, economic and cultural ties between Ragusa and the sending areas included in my sample (India, Poland, Romania and Tunisia) can be identified.

**Linkages with agricultural labor-exporting areas**

Tunisian migration to Sicily started in the 1960s; and stabilized in the 1990s in Palermo, Catania, the port of Mazara del Vallo (in the fisheries sector) and the province of Ragusa (especially in horticulture and zootechny) (Avola 2009, CeSPI 2000, Cole and Booth 2007). Ragusan employers recall recruiting mainly Tunisian workers around the 1980s, which coincides with the arrival dates of Tunisian interviewees. Tunisian workers interviewed are legal residents; they come mainly from Monastir, and they all had already some relatives or contacts in Sicily before migrating. In some Tunisian sending areas, the longstanding character of migration to Sicily has developed into a culture of migration, as illustrated by a Tunisian worker’s statement: “... Everyone, even those just born, or little kids, they tell you they want to go to Italy because they see you coming back and forth, bringing stuff, cars...” (Interview A.11.5.09).

Specific linkages between Ragusa and Tunisia have developed based on a common history, geographic proximity, trade, and international and bilateral cooperation. Italy is Tunisia’s second most important trading partner and largest investor. Ragusa in particular has established commercial relations with Tunisia and other North African countries (35 enterprises were reported to exist by 2000). Some Ragusan entrepreneurs have also made investments in the agricultural sector in Tunisia (CeSPI 2000). Also, a joint Italo-Tunisian electricity project was recently launched. Tunisia and Italy are further linked by important touristic flows and cooperation agreements in this sector. In addition, the Italian development cooperation supports public and private initiatives in a wide range of sectors and decentralized cooperation initiatives exist between Palermo and Tunisia (Stocchiero et al. 2005). Bilateral cooperation also touches upon migration. Bilateral agreements have been signed both in response to security concerns, and co-development incentives (e.g. on seasonal labor migration – in 1997 and 2000, readmission
In exchange for collaboration in the fight against undocumented migration, Tunisian nationals benefit from preferential entry quotas in Italy. Tunisia is also a major recipient of remittances. This has raised the interest of the Tunisian government in fostering links with the expatriates through its consular network.

In Ragusa, Tunisian workers are mainly active in horticulture. Some have achieved better working conditions; a few have become entrepreneurs in this sector (there are about 800 Tunisian and Algerian small agricultural businesses in Ragusa; La Repubblica 2012. See also Cole and Booth 2007). In the zootechnical branch, Tunisians are being increasingly replaced by Indian workers.

India and Italy are bridged by migration networks and financial flows. Indian migration to Italian northern cities was most likely facilitated by the regularization processes of the 1990s, which allowed for migrants’ recruitment in small- and medium-sized factories (Reyneri 1998). In northern cities, Indian workers have been traditionally employed in manufacturing and in the dairy sector. In Ragusa, the size of the Indian community (regular residents) is small (59 residents in 2010, 61 percent male; Demo ISTAT 2010). My Indian interlocutors in Ragusa come from Punjab and Haryana, which are primarily agricultural regions.

Data from interviews suggest that labor migration flows from specific regions in India to specific areas of destination in Italy are backed by robust social networks and a particular migration industry (see Chapter 3).

Economic and social transformations in the agricultural sector in Punjab and Haryana -- in particular local and national resource management policies and lack of wage earning -- have also resulted in the displacement of small-holders and subsistence growers. Some farmers are mobilized, through their networks, into local or international migrations. Sanjeev, who works on a cattle farm in Ragusa, comes from Punjab; he used to be a farmer. The rising production costs (linked to fuel prices and lack of access to water) pushed him out of the sector, and out of his country:

In my country even agriculture has become difficult to practice, because fuel is expensive... in my village there’s a lot of water, but I am not allowed to take even a bottle of water, that’s how law works in India... water must go to Rajasthan and Haryana... they say those regions are poor and Punjab is rich... but there are no rich in India; [...] the government has harmed us. That is why all peasants are here, in England, Mecca, Jeddah, all abroad... (Interview I.12.5.09)

As Sassen further observes, “[m]easures commonly thought to deter emigration – foreign investment and the promotion of export-oriented growth in developing countries – seem to have had the opposite effect” (1996: 84). Small farmers around the globe share similar pressures linked to rising production costs, price volatility, competition, lack of viable local markets, and wage stagnation. Aware of its role as a migrant-sending country, India established the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs to protect and assist Indians abroad. Punjab, a major region of outmigration, concerned with engaging migrants in local development initiatives, also established a local Non-Resident Indian (NRI) Affairs Department in 2007.

Economic interdependency, trade, bilateral relations, regional cooperation regimes, agricultural and migration policies and migrant networks have fostered some linkages between Ragusa and northern Indian regions, and enhanced longstanding relations with Tunisia. In this particular migration system, sending countries are not necessarily subordinated regions. Localized linkages among agricultural sending and receiving areas,
reveal how the world economy affects small farmers worldwide. As Grasmuck noted more
than thirty years ago, “early versions of dependency theory overemphasized the eternal
determination of peripheral economies and erroneously minimized the autonomous
capitalistic growth possible within the periphery” (1982: 366). Nevertheless, power and
economic imbalances do enable some countries to satisfy their structural needs, and to
bargain for favorable conditions for their farmers, whereas others do not have the same
privilege. Market forces can shape migration flows, but they should not be overestimated.
Cultural and ideological links have also an important role bridging various migration
poles, as discussed below.

**Linkages with eldercare-exporting areas**

The presence of foreign workers in the Italian domestic service sector has a long history.
The Catholic Church played an important role in the early recruitment of foreign
domestic workers in Italy in general, and in Sicily in particular (e.g. the Salesian order).
The Church was a key employment broker of female migrants from the Philippines, Cape
Verde and Mauritius to Palermo (Cole and Booth 2007; see also King 2000, Reyneri 1998,
Salazar Parreñas 2001, Scrinzi 2008). Colonial ties facilitated the incorporation of female
migrants from Ethiopia and Somalia into the domestic sector as well. These migration
flows were eventually perpetuated through chain migration. Today, some female
migrants of the above-cited communities continue to be employed in domestic service.

There are indications that pioneer domestic workers in Sicily have achieved horizontal or
vertical mobility, leaving the bottom ranks of the sectoral hierarchy to newcomers (Cole
and Booth 2007). Sarti (2008) claims that domestic migrant labor from Eastern Europe is
the result of the enlargement of the areas where domestic workers were traditionally
recruited since the late nineteenth century. Some studies highlight the growing
importance of Eastern European women’s integration in domestic service in Western
Europe as a whole (Currie 2009, Lutz 2008, Romaniszyn 2000). Recently, a large number of
Eastern European female workers have entered this niche in Italy too (see Appendix II:
Domestic work in Italy).

In Ragusa, the number of Romanian residents is estimated at 4,098 (53.6 percent female),
while Polish residents amounts to 772 (77.2 percent female) (Demo ISTAT 2010). Several
factors explain the increasing presence of care workers from these two countries in
Ragusa: the transition of these countries to the market economy; the accession of both
countries to the European Union; the relative geographic proximity and greater access to
transportation means that connect Ragusa and specific sending areas; cultural ties;
migrant networks (Chapter 3 http://books.openedition.org/iheid/1730). The transition to
the market economy had devastating effects, including high rates of unemployment and
underemployment, and the dismantling of the social protection system, as described by
interviewees:

Woman 1: For many years Romania was a communist country... under communist
rule, everyone had a job, everyone!
Woman 2: Little by little jobs disappeared and factories closed down... we have had
democracy for twenty years now... the situation was better under communism;
eyery young person had a job.
Woman 1: There were jobs, houses, everything! [...] Ours is a forced migration, we
are forced to migrate, do you understand? We have to migrate in order to move
forward. (Interview R1.3.1.11)
Before you could find a job; I had a job, I worked in a clothes factory, sewing, but it was not well paid [...] In Romania people are lazy, especially after the revolution. Before it was not like that... It was a communist country, so you had a job; everyone worked. The problem was that we didn’t have anything to eat. Now we have everything, except for money! (Interview V.3.1.11)

The fall of state-run industries, high levels of unemployment among women, gender discrimination and little government support for women in paid work (Currie 2009: 107), encouraged many to seek for job opportunities abroad. There are also indications of the emergence of a culture of migration in certain sending areas. Additionally, labor migration is seemingly viewed as a tool that may alleviate unemployment pressure in Romania, and bring hard currency through workers’ remittances. Through the Office for Labor Migration (Oficul pentru Migratia Fortei de Munca, OMFM) established in 2001, overseas employment of Romanian workers has been actively promoted. The migration corridor between Romania and Italy is one of the ten most important corridors in Europe and Central Asia (WB 2011). Today, Romania is the second most important destination of Italian remittance outflows after China; it received 823 million euros (12.2 percent of the total Italian remittance outflows) in 2009 (CENSIS 2010). Poland and Romania are the 15th and 18th most important countries of emigration, with 3.1 and 2.8 million emigrants, respectively, and both are among the top remittance-receiving countries worldwide. It can be argued that there is some interest among sending countries to protect their nationals abroad and, if not to promote, at least not to curtail labor migration outflows.

Some scholars argue that migration outflows from Poland are not entirely new. Unemployment increased almost twenty-fold between 1989 and 1991 and compelled many people to migrate (Cohen 2006), especially from single-industry and agricultural areas. Some scholars argue that growing consumption aspirations, combined with the economic and political changes that took place in the 1990s, explain the persistence of labor migration flows to the Mediterranean region. These flows, however, started as a political exodus in the 1980s, in the aftermath of the imposition of travel restrictions under the martial law in Poland (Romaniszyn 2000). Some authors thus distinguish between the early flows of Polish refugees/migrants that arrived in Italy in the 1980s, and the new (economic) migrants, engaged seasonal and long-term migration (Kosic and Triandafyllidou 2004). Wage differentials between Italy and Poland constitute an important pull factor, not only for young male economic migrants as commonly assumed, but also for retired women, as stated by most of my interlocutors in Ragusa.

The accession of both Poland (1 May 2004) and Romania (1 January 2007) to the European Union brought a new dimension and further facilitated circular migration between these two countries and Italy. ‘New’ Europeans can travel freely with their identity cards between Ragusa and their areas of origin. They do not need a work permit to perform domestic or care work, only their identity cards and a fiscal code, which is relatively easy to obtain (Caritas 2007). In addition, as part of the ‗migration industry‘ that has developed between Ragusa and the specific sending areas in Romania and Poland, a transport industry that caters to these migrants and offers relatively cheap services (from transport to bus rental and touristic tours) has expanded, connecting several towns in Romania and Poland with Ragusa.

Finally, some argue that labor migration flows between Italy and Poland (and I would add Romania) hardly fit into the systems hypothesis of prior contact or penetration of the receiving nation, in the form of state-run recruitment of foreign workers (Romaniszyn
Italy did not initiate labor migration schemes, and does not maintain ‘colonial’ ties with these countries. Yet, cultural linkages, such as a common Christian faith, explain why so many care workers (in particular from Poland) feel so welcome in the private sphere of Ragusan households:

Woman: This family wants only Polish, if there are not Polish [workers]... I don’t know... maybe they hire others... in my opinion it’s like that because of the Pope, Pope Wojtyła, because the Pope was Polish, and everyone is religious, they prefer Polish.

Question: The family with whom you worked before hired Polish workers?
Woman: Yes, yes, many, many, because of Pope Wojtyła (Interview T.24.8.11)

The Christian faith is one factor around which employers and workers build their resemblance. A Romanian worker specified that every day after lunch she prays together with her employer. Questioned about the religion she professes she clarified: “I make Orthodox prayers and mamma makes Catholic prayers” (Interview V.26.8.11). About half of the migrant population in Italy professes a religion derived from Christian faith (Caritas 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009). In Ragusa, a Catholic religious service is offered in Polish every Thursday, catering especially to care workers. Orthodox devotees are also widely accepted (Caritas 2009). The premises of a Catholic church in Ragusa have recently been renovated to host Orthodox devotees; the church was entrusted to a Romanian priest (see Figure 4). Future research could inquire into how locals perceive the religious practices of other migrant groups (e.g. Indian and Tunisian).

Chapter conclusion: Fuzzy boundaries between north and south

In conclusion, it could be argued that Ragusa’s participation in the world economy translates into structural conditions, such as the pressure on farmers to cut their production (especially labor) costs to remain competitive. The demand and growing presence of foreign workers in the care sector points to the demographic (e.g. the aging of the population) and social factors (e.g. gender regimes, the expansion of the middle class), as well as to market-oriented welfare policies (direct payments to families) that render foreign care labor an opportunity to ‘share the burden’ for Ragusan women. The recruitment of migrant workers in Ragusa is further determined by the nature of both agricultural and eldercare work, which cannot be outsourced to low-wage countries. Moreover, migrants are perceived as more suitable and available to fill the marginal occupations that locals shun. Thus, the need for (low-skilled) foreign labor is also a social construction.

Dual labor market theory, however, assumes that most migrants in secondary jobs are virtually unskilled and inevitably confined to low-status positions. However, more attention has been paid to the characteristics of the labor market, the contexts of reception and social mechanisms that shape migrant worker’s labor and social mobility. The dualist approach also posits that competition with native workers is unlikely, unless migrants settle permanently and develop similar aspirations to those of locals. Ragusans do compete for agricultural and domestic jobs with migrant workers, but tend to avoid the more degrading tasks. Moreover, under the dualist perspective, it is assumed that migrants’ economic motivations enable them to dissociate their jobs from their social status in the receiving context. As argued in Chapter 4 http://books.openedition.org/
iheid/1731 and Chapter 5 http://books.openedition.org/iheid/1732, migrants are keenly aware of their social standing both in their region of origin and in Ragusa, as shown by the strategies deployed to contest their status in the receiving context. Finally, the unilinear pattern of rural (traditional) – urban (modern) migration implicit in the dualistic perspective does not allow to question Ragusa’s position in the North-South development divide, and migrants’ preference for a region that hardly qualifies for many as developed North.

The migration systems perspective provides a more comprehensive framework to identify the various kinds of ties between Ragusa and some sending areas. In the Mediterranean basin, migration has been facilitated by historical ties and geographical proximity (e.g. with Tunisia). Also, the integration of a world (neoliberal capitalist) economy has had far-reaching effects displacing poor farmers (e.g. in Sicily and in India). The transition to the market economy in former communist countries of Eastern Europe, and regional integration processes, increased the provision of foreign (care) labor to Ragusa. Furthermore, globalization processes and a growing ‘migration industry’ have rendered transportation and communication means more accessible, enhancing the existing linkages between Ragusa and specific sending areas. Cultural ties (e.g. Christian faith, cultures of migration, TV broadcast) have further contributed to building links between sending areas and Ragusa. Migrant networks play a central role in structuring and shaping these flows (Chapter 3 http://books.openedition.org/iheid/1730).

In sum, structural approaches shed light on the factors underlying the integration of Ragusa and a number of sending areas into a unique migration system. Along these lines, Ragusa seems to be caught in an odd contradiction, as it is often located at one end of a North-South development divide, where the South is considered as typically backward, traditional, and underdeveloped. To the disenchantment of migrant workers, Ragusa keeps a range of peripheral traits. Yet, the structural demand for foreign agricultural and domestic labor has been met by a supply of workers from both European and third countries. This core outlook indicates that its structural economic and social needs are comparable to those of other post-industrial economies that benefit from global regimes of inequality. The boundaries that once divided core and peripheries are blurred by the same processes of capital expansion that created them, challenging the simple geographical North-South divide still widespread in migration and development studies.

NOTES
1. The province of Ragusa includes the following municipalities: Acate, Chiaramonte Gulfi, Comiso, Giarratana, Ispica, Modica, Moterosso Almo, Pozzallo, Ragusa, Santa Croce Camerina, Scicli, and Vittoria.
2. Sassen conceives global cities as those in which some of the global economy’s key management and coordination functions are concentrated. These cities produce both a demand for highly skilled professionals and (through the consumption practices of highly paid professionals) for low-wage service workers (Sassen, 1991 and 2002).
3. Ragusa was nominated because of the late Baroque art and architecture concentrated in these towns, all rebuilt after the 1693 earthquake. Ragusa is built over three hills separated by a valley. The old Ragusa (inferiore, or Ibla) has existed since medieval times; whereas Upper Ragusa was built after 1693. Ragusa hosts nine Baroque churches and seven palaces. UNESCO, “Late Baroque Towns of the Val di Noto (South-Eastern Sicily)”, http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1024, accessed 26/01/2012.

4. Hotel and non-hotel accommodation facilities passed from 52 in 1999, to 382 in 2009, increasing also the bed density distributed among structures ranging from one to five star categories: resorts (536 beds), “houses” for holiday use (766 beds), B&B structures (1064 beds), agriturismo (324 beds), rooms for rent (383 beds). B&Bs represent 60 percent of all non-hotel facilities. (Provincia Regionale di Ragusa, Direzione Generale Ufficio Statistica, updated 31/12/2010, http://www.provincia.ragusa.it/statistiche/statistica_pubblicazione.pdf accessed 29/01/2012.)

5. For example, the construction of the highway Siracusa-Ragusa-Gela, a project initiated in 1974, remains incomplete. Despite a 250 million euros investment, only 14km are functional (Felice 2008). The airport of Comiso, despite being inaugurated in 2007, opened only in 2013. Administrative obstacles and conflicting political interests at local, regional, and national level hamper the completion of these projects (see Bellano 2012; Redazione Corriere di Ragusa 2008; Redazione Reteiblea 2011).

6. Putnam, nevertheless, essentializes social capital, depicting it as the endowment of certain groups. In his book Making Democracy Work he argues that virtuous circles of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement, and collective well-being characterize northern “civic communities,” whereas vicious circles of defection, distrust, shirking, exploitation, isolation, disorder and stagnation are found in Italy’s south.

7. Skilled jobs in the capital-intensive sectors tend to guarantee work-related security and higher wages; whereas lower-skilled jobs in the labor-intensive secondary sector are characterized by informality, low wages, poor working conditions, a weak organization of the labor force, insecurity, limited mobility prospects, and inferior social status.

8. Over eight million people are employed in manual occupations in Italy, including: specialized artisans (over 4.2 million); technicians such as electricians and plumbers (1.7 million) and lower-skilled workers (2.2 million). The most common occupations are domestic service (969,580); construction, carpentry, etc. (705,126); drivers (588,262); mechanics (511,636); electricians, plumbers (472,435), and specialized agricultural workers (354,325). Between 2005 and 2010, the share of Italians in manual occupations decreased by 11.1 percent, whereas the share of foreign workers increased by 84.5 percent; about 718,000 migrant workers have replaced Italian workers in manual occupations (CENSIS 2011).

9. The notion of structural inflation relates to the social function of wages. Wages convey social status and prestige. Rising wages at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy in order to attract the native labor force to low-status positions would entail wage-wage inflationary spirals in other jobs, a consequence that employers are often unable or unwilling to afford. Motivational problems refer to the difficulties in attracting native workers into secondary jobs because of the few opportunities for upward mobility that they offer. Employers, therefore, turn to migrant workers, who are likely to accept low wages and instability, owing to the fact that they are temporary target earners in the receiving society. Sociocultural changes relate to the expansion of education, and the increasing participation of youth and women in the labor force who leave vacant positions at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. Demographic changes include population aging, the decline in birth rates. Other social factors refer to the availability of public and private services; and even changes in lifestyles and in the family structure (e.g. single parent families, the expansion of the care industry, the emergence of new middle-classes) (Piore 1979; see also Massey et al. 1993)
The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has introduced market-oriented reforms since the early 1990s. In 2003 the CAP reform encouraged farmers to produce according to demand, supporting them with direct income aid. The reform included direct payments to producers, payments for private storage and the public storage regime. Compliance with environmental, food safety, public health, and animal welfare standards have become part of contemporary farmers’ responsibilities. Failing to meet “cross-compliance” rules entails reductions in direct payments. The issue of surpluses and subsidies is at the heart of the agricultural policy debate. Despite the introduction of measures that limit surplus products (e.g. quotas on milk production) neither regional nor international regulatory frameworks (e.g. the 1995 WTO Agreement on Agriculture, the Doha Development Agenda) have eliminated EU subsidies to agriculture, which affect third country farmers (EC n.d.). The CAP is due to be reformed by 2013, embracing the principles of “inclusive, sustainable, and smart growth”, designed to cope with food security, environmental, employment, competitiveness, and innovation concerns. Direct payments continue to be paramount to achieve “viable food production”, sustainable resource management, and “balanced territorial development”. While a recent communication acknowledges that this policy could cause potential “disruptive changes” with “far reaching economic and social consequences in some regions or production systems”, it does not discuss further the position of the EU on this matter (EC 2010).

The general agricultural census is conducted every ten years. The 2010 census reveals that the number of agricultural and zootechnical businesses in Italy decreased by 32.2 percent since 2000, passing from 2,405,453 in 2000 to 1,630,420 in 2010. In Sicily, the figures are respectively 349,134 in 2000 and 219,095 in 2010 (ISTAT 2010). In Ragusa, the number of agricultural businesses decreased by 8 percent between 1990 and 2000, according to the 5th agricultural census (SISTAN 2007).

Ragusan products are seldom commercialized at international level. In 2005, provincial exports contributed only 2.6 percent of the total exports in the region (SISTAN 2007: 43). Regarding energy consumption, while the number of farms in Ragusa represents half of those in Catania (25,230 and 50,290, respectively; SISTAN 2007: 49) their energy requirements are identical.

The Agreement between the EU and Morocco concerning the liberalization of agricultural products was passed on 16 February 2012 by the European Parliament. It entails an increase in the number of quotas and the reduction of import duties for a wide range of fruit (oranges, clementines, melons, strawberries) and vegetables (tomatoes, eggplant, zucchini, garlic, cucumbers) that compete directly with Sicilian products. European Parliament resolution of 16 February 2012, 2012/2522(RSP).

The number of businesses with land property titles passed from 327,874 in 2000 to 175,589 in 2010, whereas leases passed from 2,843 in 2000 to 9,838 in 2010 (ISTAT 2010).

In 2005, the agricultural sector in Ragusa employed 16.5 percent of the total agricultural labor force in Sicily (excluding foreign workers), whereas the service sector absorbed 61.4 percent of the total active population, and the industrial sector employed 11.2 percent of the labor force (SISTAN 2007).

Recently, the European Commission recognized that the agricultural income dropped substantially in 2009, aggravating the already significant disparities between agricultural income (lower by an estimated 40 percent per working unit) and other sectors. Income disparities between rural and urban areas were also exacerbated; in rural areas the income is about 50 percent lower than in urban areas (EC 2010).


Most farm supervisors in Sicily completed either a primary or secondary school cycle (32.3 and 30.6 percent respectively). Today, the share of farm supervisors with a university degree
related either to agriculture (1 percent) or other fields of study (7.7 percent) remains small (ISTAT 2010).

19. In Italy the number of foreign agricultural workers with a definite contract was estimated at 113,112; while those with an indefinite contract were 17,979 in 2004. Most workers from Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Albania and Morocco tend to hold definite contracts, while Indian workers tend to have indefinite contracts (Caritas 2005).

20. The number of domestic workers was estimated at 124,885 (76 percent female) in 1999; 409,307 (83 percent female) in 2002, and 342,065 (87 percent female) in 2005. Italian domestic workers (129,020; 96 percent female) are clearly outnumbered by foreign workers (INPS 2005). Demand continues to grow as shown by the number of people benefiting from the regularizations that took place in 2002 (500,000 foreign domestic workers; over half of them from Romania, Ukraine and Poland) and in 2009 (300,000 domestic workers; one third were care workers) (Caritas 2005; Caritas 2009). In 2006, out of the 350,000 authorizations approved under the decreto flussi, half of the applications belonged to the family-services category; by 2007 the number of foreign domestic workers had reached 700,000 (Caritas 2007). It is worth noting that statistics reflect a partial reality only as not all the workers admitted under the family services may ultimately take up these jobs.


22. In Ragusa, in 2005, 18 percent of the population were aged 65 years and over, and 4.5 percent 80 years and over. The provincial aging index (the number of people aged 65 and over per 100 youths under age 15) was estimated at 109; while in 2003 it was 106.7 and in 2002 104.9. The dependency ratio (the number of dependents aged 0-14 and over the age of 65, to the total population aged 15-64) is estimated at 52.3 percent (SISTAN 2007: 25). Concomitantly, the number of regular domestic workers in Ragusa passed from around 283 to 841 in 2005 (INPS 2005), to between 538 and 1,360 in 2008 (INPS, Osservatorio sui lavoratori domestici, http://www.inps.it/webidentity/banchedatistatistiche/menu/domestici/main.html, accessed 26/01/2012).

23. Men are also employed in the care sector in Sicily (Cole and Booth 2007). Their incorporation in this sector can be explained: a) through employers’ preferences (e.g. for same-sex caretakers); b) through migrant networks that channel male workers into domestic service; and c) thanks to the greater possibilities to obtain a work permit in this sector (on this last point see Reyneri 1998). The local press has reported cases in which male workers fake their occupation to obtain domestic work permits (Redazione Corriere di Ragusa, 2010a and 2010b, Ragusa News 2010).

24. The infrastructure of assistance to the elderly in Ragusa is composed of 51 structures (out of which only three are public) designed to accommodate 1,353 users. In addition, 14 residential structures accommodate 3,777 users (SISTAN 2007).

25. It is estimated that 154 million euros were collected in taxes; and the national social security expected to collect 1.3 billion euros between 2010 and 2012 (Caritas 2009). While the regularization decreased the absolute number of irregular workers, certain provisions are judged by advocates of the affordability of domestic service as incoherent with the needs of employers and employees. Families willing to hire domestic workers must demonstrate an annual income of 20,000 euros. In 2008 only two regions exhibited such income (Caritas 2008); which suggests that domestic service remains largely informal (Caritas 2010).

26. After World War II some industrialized countries initiated labor recruitment programmes. France, Switzerland, and Germany were the main destinations of virtually half of the 15 million Italians who emigrated between 1876 and 1920 (Cinanni in Castles and Miller 2009: 87). Between 1945 and the early 1970s, emigration from the Mediterranean to cores in Europe, North America and Oceania was the predominant migratory trend. In the 1960s rural-urban labor migration
from the south contributed to the economic development of northern cities such as Milan, Turin and Genoa (Castles and Miller 2009: 100). In addition, the free movement of workers within the European (Economic) Community, effective since 1968, fostered emigration from Italy to Germany (Castles and Miller 2009: 101).

27. The share of the foreign resident population (foreign citizenship) in Italy passed from 1 percent in 1995 to 7.5 percent (4.5 million) in 2011. Regularization campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s contributed to the (statistically reflected) increase of the foreign population (ISTAT 2008, ISTAT 2012 Noi Italia), which grew threefold since 2001. This trend has slowed down owing to the economic downturn. Moreover, new EU citizens are no longer reflected in these records. Almost half of the foreign population (49.4 percent) is employed in domestic service (or “services to persons”); in industry (21.1 percent), construction (16.5 percent), trade (8.9 percent) and agriculture (4 percent); the majority as subordinated labor (CENSIS 2010). Statistics need to be interpreted with caution. The numeric increases in the foreign resident population can be explained, for instance, in terms of the number of work and residence permits released in a specific year; which does not necessarily reflect new arrivals.

28. Sources: SISTAN 2007; Demo ISTAT, as of January 1st 2010; and Provincia Regionale di Ragusa, Direzione Generale Ufficio Statistica, as of December 31st 2010.

29. There is evidence of a high incidence of irregular immigration in Ragusa, estimated at 31 percent (number of irregular migrants out of 100 migrants present; ISMU 2006: 49). The share of unauthorized landings passed from 27.3 percent in 2001, to 99.7 percent in 2004 (ISMU 2006: 16). The number of landings intercepted in Sicilian coasts was 21,400 in 2006; 16,875 in 2007, 34,540 in 2008 and 8,282 in 2009 (CENSIS 2010). The number of landings decreased in 2009 (9,573) but increased again in 2011 (over 60,000 by September) in the midst of political turmoil in North African countries. More than 10,000 asylum requests were filed in 2010 (Caritas 2011).

30. World systems theory posits that capital penetration in non-capitalist societies generates material and ideological linkages that facilitate migration, as well as disruptions such as commodity relations that create wage-labor force and uprooted people (at all ranks of the social hierarchy) who are prone to migrate. Some authors identify three phases of capital penetration and misbalancing of labor exporting areas: the coerced labor extraction (slavery); deliberate labor recruitment practices (nineteenth to mid-twentieth century); self-initiated labor flows, which result from cultural diffusion of consumption patterns from the advanced centers to peripheral societies (Portes and Böröcz 1989: 608). This approach has been widely criticized for adopting a deterministic approach, a sedentary bias, and market rationality principles. Both equilibrium and structuralist approaches treat labor power as a commodity and are based on market rationality (supply and demand forces) and the principle of maximization (Bach and Schraml 1982). Deterministic perspectives, grounded in modernization or dependency theories, at the individual or macro-structural level, have been also criticized for assuming that prior to capitalist development, ‘pre-modern societies’ were stable, static, and homogeneous peasant communities – known as the “sedentary bias” (de Haas et al. 2009: 16-17). “Migration systems theory” (Massey, et al.1993) is inspired by economy (and is grounded in dependency theory), social psychology (it acknowledges migration decisions), geography (it looks at migrant networks), and law (it is concerned with immigration frameworks). A migration system is defined as two or more places linked by flows and counterflows of people (Fawcett 1989: 671). From this perspective, the processes underlying, structuring, and sustaining international migration include: a) (in line with world systems) the historical, economic and cultural ties that may exist between areas bridged by migration, and the political, demographic, economic and social contexts in which migration occurs; and b) migrants’ agency, networks, and a wide range of actors that structure and sustain migration flows (Kritz and Zlotnik 1992, Portes and Böröcz 1989). Individual and collective migration decisions matter, but are always affected by economic, political and cultural contexts (Faist 1997: 199).
31. The number of Tunisian residents in Ragusa is estimated at 6,419 (74 percent male; Demo ISTSAT 2010), concentrated in the municipalities of Vittoria and Santa Croce Camerina, which host about 3,119 Tunisian nationals (over 70 percent male; Comuni Italiani 2010, http://www.comuni-italiani.it/, accessed 2/02/2012).

32. There are 744 companies entirely or partially owned by Italians in the country, employing 55,600 people in agriculture, tourism, industry and services (Republic of Tunisia, Ministry of Regional Planning and International Cooperation, http://www.mdci.gov.tn/, accessed 26/01/2012). Trade between Sicily and Tunisia is also important. In 2000, out of the 400 Italian firms established in Tunisia, 22 percent were Sicilian enterprises, mainly from Palermo and Caltanissetta (CeSPI 2000:12-13).


34. Accord de coopération touristique entre la Tunisie et l’Italie, 18 janvier 2006.

35. Thematic areas include agriculture, environmental issues (sewage water and solid waste management, reforestation), cultural and natural heritage, social affairs (disability, healthcare), infrastructure works (construction of dams), technical cooperation and financial aid (credit lines for SMEs in agriculture, fisheries, and services – transport, education, health), and emergency aid (e.g. improving the facilities hosting Libyan asylum seekers). The duration of the projects and the amounts disbursed varies widely, from a couple of months to several years; and from a few thousand to billions of euros. In general, project implementation is ensured by local governments, the Italian cooperation and their partners (Cooperazione Italiana allo Sviluppo, http://www.cooperazioneallosviluppo.esteri.it/, accessed 26/01/2012). According to Tunisia’s Ministry of Regional Planning and International Cooperation (http://www.mdci.gov.tn/), there are more than 53 bilateral agreements. The Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) programme recently implemented between Italy and Tunisia 2007-2013 benefits from the financial support of the EU and includes 13 projects, many of which relate to agriculture and agro-industry (Coopération Transfrontalière Italie-Tunisie 2007-2013, http://www.italietunisie.eu/, accessed 26/01/2012).

36. The stock of emigrants in Tunisia makes up 6.3 percent of the population; the main destination countries are France, Italy, Libya, Germany, Israel, and Saudi Arabia (in order of importance). The stock of immigrants represents 0.3 percent of the population; Italy is the fourth most important source country, after Algeria, Morocco, and France, and followed by Libya. The volume of workers’ recorded remittances reached 2 billion US dollars in 2010 (5 percent of the country’s GDP); classifying Tunisia among the ten most important remittance recipients in the Middle East and North Africa (WB 2011).

37. The government offers consular and social assistance through the appointment of social attachés and assistants (in Sicily, the Tunisian consulate is based in Palermo). The Board of Tunisiens Abroad, established in 1988, provides customs benefits, information related to return, social coverage, financial, postal, social and cultural services (e.g. Arabic lessons and summer schools), among others (Board of Tunisiens Abroad, http://www.ote.nat.tn, accessed 26/01/2012).

38. Worldwide, India is the second largest emigration country after Mexico (with 11.4 million emigrants, in 2010) and the largest remittance recipient country (officially recorded remittances were estimated at 55 US billion dollars in 2010). Italy is an important remittance source country (the sixth in the world) and India is among the first fifteen destinations of Italian remittances (WB 2011, CENSIS 2010).

39. Both Punjab and Haryana were at the center of the Green Revolution in India. Punjab is known for the production of wheat; it contributes two-thirds of the annual food grain production in India; a share of its food grain stocks is transferred to deficit areas through a public distribution system. Punjab has witnessed a rapid industrialization and was nominated as a good place for doing business in 2009, by the World Bank. It hosts many national and multinational corporations (Government of Punjab, http://punjabgovt.gov.in/, accessed 18/02/2012). Haryana
is also an agricultural region known for the production of rice, wheat, maize, and cash crops such as sugarcane, cotton, and oil seeds. It is also specialized in dairy products. Agricultural and manufacture industries are important for the local economy, and the state provides incentives for IT and ITES/BPO Industry including facilities for IT Parks. Haryana is the beneficiary of a large irrigation project, together with Punjab and Rajasthan. The project entails the construction of the Hathni Kund barrage, a 109km multipurpose canal, and low height dams (Know India, National Portal of India, Haryana, http://india.gov.in/knowindia/state_uts.php?id=9, and Government of Haryana, http://www.haryana.gov.in/; both accessed 18/02/2012).

40. After the partition of the country in 1947, the water treaty of 1960 restricted India’s right to usage to three rivers Satluj, Beas and Ravi. Punjab has three dams (Bhakra Dam, Pong Dam, and Ranjit Sagar Dam) and a 14,500km-canal surface water distribution system, and some low dams in the disadvantaged Kandi Area. According to the Government National Portal, the canal water and electricity is provided for free to Punjabi farmers (Know India, National Portal of India, Punjab http://india.gov.in/knowindia/state_uts.php?id=22, accessed 18/02/2012). Even so, some farmers interviewed in Ragusa deplore the fact that they have to travel long distances in order to get water, which implies additional fuel costs and the rise of production costs.

41. This entity is entrusted with the responsibility for facilitating the engagement of Punjabi migrants in development initiatives. Highlights of its activities include: matching grants to finance government-NRI joint infrastructure projects; the promotion of foreign investment and cultural exchange (mainly with the UK), fostering NRIs’ attachment to their motherland; providing online services to NRIs and maintaining effective links with NRIs through the creation of a Data Bank of NRIs, and through the dissemination of the Government’s efforts to assist Punjabis abroad in foreign media (Government of Punjab, NRI Affairs, http://www.nripunjab.gov.in/index.htm, accessed 18/02/2012).

42. These are the two countries represented in my sample of domestic workers.

43. Romania signed bilateral agreements with Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, and Switzerland. The OMFM also signed a partnership agreement to start an employment program of Romanian workers in catering, healthcare and the information and communications technology sector, in specific Italian regions including Friuli-Venezia-Giulia (Diminescu 2004: 67).

44. In 2010 the volume of remittances in Poland was estimated at 9.1 US billion dollars and in Romania at 4.5 US billion dollars (WB 2011).

45. Romaniszyn concurs with Ciesińska’s (1995) distinction between three periods of migration from Poland to Italy: “the ‘Solidarity’ wave of 1981-86; the refugee-economic wave of 1987-88; and the more extensive labour migration which began after 1989” (2000: 134).

46. By 2007 there were about 100,000 foreign sojourners from Poland in Italy, and more than half a million foreign sojourners from Romania (Caritas 2007; see also Cohen 2006:124).

47. Nevertheless, Italy signed a readmission agreement with Poland in 1991 (Chaloff 2004).


Chapter 2. Labor migration management: neoliberal calculations, human implementation

1 In a context of neoliberal capitalism, and growing interdependencies and interconnections, the role of the states in migration governance is increasingly scrutinized. Some scholars argue that states are being overshadowed by transnationalism (Levitt and De la Dehesa 2003, Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, Vertovec 2004), globalization processes (Sassen 1996), de-territorialized social networks, the activities of non-state actors (private corporations, financial entities, NGOs, etc.), as well as by supra-national political processes (e.g. regional integration, international cooperation) which pervade some spheres of states’ sovereignty. Political scientists, whose primary unit of analysis is the state (Brettell and Hollifield 2008), stress instead its central role in shaping migration (Geddes 2008, Hollifield 2004 and 2008, Schain 2009). However, it is recognized that policy choices arise from compromises among various interest groups (Lahav and Guiraudon 2007: 4; see also Freeman 2004), and that policy-making depends upon a wide range of factors (Castles 2004).

2 One issue at stake is the extent to which states are able to organize, control or ‘manage’ labor migration. Receiving states do regulate the admission, residence, and labor market participation of foreigners, and their access to social, political and civil rights through migration policy, and influence the magnitude, composition and direction of migration flows (Weiner 1985). Labor migration management involves a complex articulation of international and internal compromises (for example, with non-state actors such as employers, or human rights advocates), including the introduction of market considerations to respond to market-driven constraints (e.g. competitiveness).

3 Despite the “‘fortress Europe’ rhetoric” (Lahav and Guiraudon 2007) and a strong commitment of EU member states to regulating migration, there is a tacit acceptance of undocumented migration in countries dependent on foreign labor in specific sectors. There are also openings to new migration to overcome labor force imbalances (Geddes
In this context, labor migration management has become an important dimension of migration policy in Italy.

Inconsistencies or 'gaps' between stated policy goals, their outcomes and the realities they attempt to tackle are frequent. The implementation of migration policy depends, ultimately, on a wide range of actors (public and private; e.g. local authorities, security and travel agencies, transport companies, airlines, civil actors), operating at different levels (international, national, local), which have been delegated migration control functions (Lahav 2006, Lahav and Guiraudon 2007). Employers and workers themselves can be considered agents or (official or unofficial) enforcers of migration policy, rather than only the objects of such policy. The reasons underlying this partial devolution of implementation functions to private or civil actors are consistent with the migration management approach.

In what follows, the interpretation and implementation of labor migration policy is examined through the concrete practices of employers and migrant workers in Ragusa. First, I assimilate labor migration management to a neoliberal technology of governing. On this basis, I review Italy’s labor migration and employment policy tools regarding farm and care workers and discuss some gaps and how they relate to concrete implementation practices of employers and migrant workers.

Neoliberalism as a technology of governing and labor migration management

Labor migration has become an issue of 'high politics'. There is also a renewed interest among policymakers in national governments, intergovernmental organizations and beyond in 'managing migration'. The notion of migration management emerged in the post-Cold War era, in a context of increased concerns (namely of Western states) about migration's perceived potential to generate crises, and the desire to make it a more predictable and (economically) beneficial phenomenon. This would be achieved, inclusively, through a “‘regulated openness’ toward economically needed and beneficial flows” and continued restrictions concerning “unwanted migration”, as some authors put it (Geiger and Pécoud 2010: 3). Also, as noted by Gieger and Pécoud (2010), migration management entails a notion mobilized by different actors to justify their interventions in this area, a set of practices, often performed by the institutions that mobilize the notion, and a set of discourses about what migration is and how it should be 'managed'.

In the field of labor migration, indeed, an optimistic discourse has pervaded labor migration policy-making for quite some time already, promising win-win-win scenarios for receiving and sending states and for migrants themselves, as a result of managed migrations (see Papademetriou and Meissner 2006). This discourse is based on the assumption that countries of origin and destination have shared migration-related concerns, interests and responsibilities; this eclipses conflict, divergent interests and power imbalances. Migration policies are further aligned with a market ideology, based on the assumption that governments and migrants have similar maximization interests of the (mostly economic) returns of migration: for example, depicting labor migration of as a 'solution' to receiving states’ economic (e.g. labor imbalances) or demographic (e.g. aging populations) 'problems', to sending states' unemployment and macroeconomic instability or lack of creditworthiness (e.g. by securing workers' remittances), and to
migrant workers’ desire of capital accumulation. As some authors aptly argue, “the issue, then, is not whether migration should be authorized or not, but rather how it is to be ‘managed’ in order to maximize (or ‘optimize’) its impact” (Geiger and Pécoud 2010: 9). For these authors the discourse is also performative, to the extent that is seeks to influence how the actors managing it perceive migration.

Along these lines, labor migration management could be conceived of as a neoliberal technology of governing migration, aligned with market principles. The use of the term “management” reveals a conviction that migration can be influenced by migration policy. In addition, the introduction of market calculations helps de-politicizing labor migration, and dealing with it as a technical issue that requires technical solutions. The attractiveness of the notion of management relies perhaps on a commercial conceptualization of the migrant worker that dissociates the human being from the labor it embodies. Labor can thus be depicted as a factor of production, tradable in an international labor market, without the uncertainties (e.g. claims for rights) inherent in hiring human beings.

The term neoliberalism usually evokes an economic doctrine promoting market ideology through financial deregulation, privatization, liberalization, and the erosion of social protection and welfare systems. In this context, it is often assumed that states are shrinking, subjected to the interests of capital.

Ong (2006) suggests, however, that while neoliberalism is often seen as an economic doctrine that seeks to limit the scope of governing, it could also be conceptualized as a flexible tool of governance. As such, neoliberalism (with a small n) could be conceived “as a new mode of political optimization”: “… neoliberalism can also be conceptualized as a new relationship between government and knowledge through which governing activities are recast as nonpolitical and nonideological problems that need technical solutions” (2006: 3). Neoliberalism as a technology of governing “is a profoundly active way of rationalizing governing and self-governing in order to ‘optimize’” (2006: 3, emphasis added). It introduces market-driven calculations in the management of individuals and populations, as well as in the administration of specific spaces.

I build on Ong’s insights to assimilate contemporary labor migration management discourse and practices to a neoliberal technology of governing migration; a mode of governing migration aligned with market principles focused on optimization. First, because migrant workers embody labor, and thus represent a necessary factor of production and reproduction, they may be regarded as living resources that labor migration management technology seeks to harness and optimize. Second, labor migration management can be considered an intervention of optimization, to the extent that it aims at providing technical ‘solutions’ to technical issues such as labor imbalances (e.g. finding the optimal match between labor demand and supply). Moreover, as some scholars have argued, European states tend to deal with foreign labor recruitment as an economic issue in order to alleviate internal anxiety or to avoid certain debates (see Menz and Caviedes 2010: 6). Others claim that the “shift in the terms of debate away from ‘immigration control’ and towards ‘managed migration’” (Geddes 2008: 39) is linked to an increased interest in attracting the highly skilled, as well as concerns regarding the aging of the population and its effects on the European labor markets. Again, this is an issue of optimization.

As a neoliberal technology of governing migration, labor migration management comprises a number of practices or techniques of optimization, such as the assessment of the demand for foreign labor, the formulation of ad hoc admission and recruitment...
policies, the establishment of mechanisms for the protection and even the integration of migrant workers, the regulation of private recruitment actors, the provision of pre-departure and post-arrival orientation and assistance in countries of origin, the development of labor market strategies to deploy nationals in foreign labor markets, and even the design of interventions to harness or optimize the resources generated or enhanced through migration ‘for’ development (see IOM/OSCE 2010, ILO 2006). Such techniques have been widely disseminated through the production of knowledge that legitimizes these practices, the provision of expertise and technical assistance to national governments by intergovernmental organizations, through international dialogue mechanisms and other fora. Labor migration management can thus be seen as a neoliberal technology of governing migration aimed at optimizing or making migrant labor economically beneficial for states, employers, and migrants.

Ong further notes that “[n]eoliberal reasoning is based on both economic (efficiency) and ethical (self-responsibility) claims” (Ong 2006: 11). Therefore, it relies on market calculations to control and create neoliberal subjects, namely through two kinds of optimizing technologies: *technologies of subjectivity* that induce self-animation and self-government in order to optimize one’s choices, efficiency and competitiveness; and *technologies of subjection* or political strategies that regulate populations for optimal productivity (Ong 2006: 6). In the migration management context, the latter technologies may include admission, residence and employment legislative frameworks, sanction mechanisms, labor inspections, etc. Technologies of subjectivity are discussed in Chapter 5. Suffice it to note that migrant workers, as self-enterprising subjects, may be compelled to demonstrate, for example, their worthiness both as laborers and as consumers in reception contexts, but also in the areas of origin.

From the perspective of receiving states, two important aspects of labor migration management refer to the admission and employment of foreign workers. Aiming at the optimization migrant workers as living resources, admission regimes favor those workers who are perceived as ‘useful’. The market-oriented approach to migration management further de-personalizes the contractual relationship between workers and employers. However, migrant workers and their employers are agents that self-manage, interpret and implement migration policy and often re-personalize what are conceived of as purely commercial employment relationships. In the following section, Italy’s current labor migration regime concerning agricultural and care workers is briefly described. Then labor migration policy implementation is analyzed at the micro-level, namely through the interpretation and implementation strategies of ‘self-governing’ actors: employers and migrant workers. The main argument revolves around the articulation of migration management and the human aspects of the employment relationship, which result in implementation gaps.

**Labor migration: A patchwork of policies and practices**

Labor migration policies in Europe are increasingly driven by sector-specific considerations; influenced by globalization and regional integration; characterized by a growing privatization and externalization of migration control, by the persistence of undocumented migration, and by a powerful informal economy (Menz and Caviedes 2010). Italy’s migration policy illustrates such dynamics.
The Italian state was not actively involved in the organization and regulation of labor migration until the mid-1980s when it adopted the first legislation to regulate migration. Since then, a patchwork of decrees and laws has been passed to reformulate the conditions of admission, residence and deportation of migrants. Law 40/1998 exemplifies Italy’s acknowledgement of the need for foreign labor through the adoption of the quota system, the current labor migration management primary tool. Once workers are legally admitted to work in Italy, their working conditions are regulated by specific occupational national standards.

The implementation of such policies has been increasingly entrusted to local authorities and, in official and unofficial forms, to private and civil actors. In what follows, I discuss the application of norms on migration and employment of farm and care workers by employers and employees interviewed in Ragusa.

Farm workers: irregular stay and ex post facto regularization

In Ragusa, most third country farm workers are Tunisian and Indian nationals. Access of third country nationals to the Italian labor market as subordinate workers occurs either on Italian territory through the direct recruitment of foreign lawful residents in Italy, or through the system of quotas that applies to the recruitment of workers residing abroad. The Law on Security (Law 94/2009) considers irregular entry and stay in Italy a crime. The recruitment of unauthorized (or “illegal”) migrants is penalized. The admission of non-European workers is currently regulated by the Immigration Act (1998), amended by Law 189/2002 (known as Bossi-Fini Law).

The number of third country nationals admitted every year in Italy for the purpose of employment depends on a contingent, based on estimated annual labor requirements. The annual entry quota is published by official decree (Decreto flussi) by the Prime Minister, which establishes a maximum threshold, often adjusted through complementary decrees. The national quota is distributed according to territorial and occupational criteria, type of employment (subordinate, autonomous, seasonal), and preferential country-based quotas (i.e. for countries with which Italy has signed bilateral cooperation agreements, namely in the fight against undocumented migration’).

Economic and political factors influence the annual contingent (e.g. governments’ political leanings; gendered welfare regimes; participation in the Schengen zone; the enlargement of the European Union; social perceptions etc.). For example, there is a clear preference for seasonal workers and domestic workers, who are perceived as less likely to settle, or second less troublesome, respectively (Scioritino 2009: 8 and 10). Domestic workers have traditionally been granted preferential treatment; since 2005, a proportion of migration quotas have been reserved for domestic workers.

The quota system has been increasingly questioned, as jobs become scarce even in seasonal sectors (quotas for seasonal workers in agriculture and hospitality were foreseen to be reduced from 65,000 to 35,000 in 2012). Moreover quotas are not perceived as selective; the system works on a first-come, first-served basis on the ‘click day’, when thousands of electronic requests are submitted.

Once the quota is set, employers declare their intention to hire a specific worker living abroad, provided they assert their credibility as potential employers. The prospective employer submits a nominative request to the local Single Desk for Immigration.
Employers can nominate the worker directly, or make a collective request and rely on skills-matching schemes set up through Italian embassies and consulates. Employers commit themselves to hire the nominated worker upon arrival in Italy, to offer at least the minimum wage for the relevant sector of employment, to demonstrate the availability of adequate housing, and to pay for the return trip of the foreign worker to the country of origin.

If the employer’s request falls within the limit of the local quota, the relevant embassies issue an entry visa to the prospective worker(s). Within the eight days that follow the arrival of the foreign worker in Italy, the work contract must be signed and a residence permit (permesso di soggiorno) for employment purposes must be requested. Workers have the right to change employers, but the original employer must communicate any changes to the local immigration office. Residence permits are issued for a maximum duration of nine months for seasonal work, one year for fixed-term (definite) contracts and two years for indefinite contracts. Foreigners unable to satisfy the conditions for legitimate stay in Italy (e.g. regular employment) are subject to deportation. In case of resignation or dismissal, unemployed workers are allowed to stay for six additional months to find employment; this period could be extended to twelve months according to current discussions (Polchi 2012).

The most common difficulties reported by my interlocutors regarding the quota system include the length (ranging from one to four years), the cost, and the depersonalized character of the process. Because the residence permit is issued with the date of request, by the time it is released in most cases its actual validity is quite short; workers are compelled to engage in recurring renewal processes, which often results in frustrating experiences, as illustrated below:

I applied for the residence permit... but they still have to take my fingerprints. [...] I checked on Internet the status of my application and I was called to the police headquarters at 8:50 to take my fingerprints. When I arrived people were already queuing and they had written their names on a list... at 8:50 it’s my turn; the police officer opens the door, takes inside only ten people... Outside the police headquarters we are 50 people queuing on the street, there are no chairs, nothing... the police officer comes back at 11:00, and then at 12:00 and he says that’s it for the day... those who remained outside, basta, ciao ‘he can’t do anything’ ... what does that mean? ‘Excuse me’ I was there from 7:50 am to 12:00pm, without eating... he told me to come back the next day, but then he didn’t have my code to take my fingerprints, so he couldn’t take them... why is it like that? [...] The system should change... they always tell you some document is missing, and it’s really slow, it takes one year... by the time I will receive the permit it may be valid only for fifteen days... but the law requires to start the renewal procedure thirty days before the permit expires... you’re always queuing at the police headquarters, always taking your fingerprints; now, tell me, if they’ve already taken your fingerprints, do they change the year after? [Ironic laugh] (Interview I.12.5.09)

The electronic request procedure for work permits, and the submission of residence permit requests at postal offices, effectively de-personalize bureaucracy, making it more difficult or even impossible for workers to establish any contact with immigration officials to obtain information or to complain.

As stated above, the implementation of labor migration management has been delegated to local bureaucracies and to civil actors (employers and foreign workers). Compliance with admission procedures on the part of workers is affected by a number of factors including the importance of the informal economy, perceptions regarding the lax
implementation of migration control, complicity and the instrumentalization of trust bonds built with employers.

Among interviewees, there is a widespread idea that police controls are especially lax in the south of Italy. Many workers try their chance to get a permit in southern cities, hoping to be able to move north once they have a work permit. Ragusa appears to grant them the possibility to achieve these mobility projects. Comments like the following were not uncommon among workers: “First I did not have a permit, which is why I have stayed here for four years... In the north, there is law, and there are also lots of police officers, it’s difficult...”; or “I have no problems here, even without documents, I go out with Mrs. [employer], I walk on the streets freely in the evenings, even if there are policemen; I don’t avoid them...”. The feasibility of obtaining a work permit is increased by the likelihood of employers embarking in the regularization of undocumented workers, despite being aware that most abandon their post almost immediately after receiving the work permit, normally in search for better opportunities in northern cities.

Proximity between employers and workers is perhaps the characteristic that best describes farm and care live-in jobs in Ragusa. Proinquity implies frequent interaction, which helps fostering trust and personalized and intimate labor relationships (see Chapter 4 and 5). Decisions to adhere to, to enforce, or otherwise to circumvent norms may stem from both self-disciplining attitudes (fear to sanctions) of employers and workers, as well as from a sense of mutual dependency, trust, solidarity, or complicity.

For example, many Tunisian interviewees acquired a regular migratory status thanks to previous amnesties. As self-enterprising subjects, many workers were willing to reimburse part of the contributions to their long date employers (and even to fictive employers) to regularize their status (see also CeSPI 2000). Some migrant workers also instrumentalize the trust built with employers over time. A Tunisian worker, who has been working for same employer for 22 years, asked the employer to issue a work contract to two of his daughters, who were aged over 25 and could not benefit from the family reunification scheme. The employer acceded to his request, given that “he knows” the worker quite well, as he argued. Longstanding social ties with employers may allow migrants to be granted favors, simultaneously putting them in a disadvantaged position, as employer-worker relationships are inherently asymmetrical and workers may incur in “moral” or other debts toward their employers.

On the part of self-disciplining employers, compliance with labor migration norms oscillates between moral concerns and self-interest (risk-avoiding attitudes). One employer, for example, believes that although the quota system is difficult to navigate, it is a tool capable of guaranteeing a “humanitarian behavior” and fair treatment on the part of employers, as well as greater control over migration inflows (Interview F.26.8.11).

Compliance is also motivated by the fear of facing sanctions for hiring undocumented workers, notwithstanding the fact that labor inspections are seemingly infrequent in cattle farms. My interview data suggest that labor inspections are triggered by specific events such as work accidents, or by the noticeable presence of foreign workers in specific industries, such as horticulture.

Employer sanctions are not systematically implemented, because of administrative (i.e. lack of appropriate infrastructure; Sciortino 2009: 14), or political reasons (i.e. avoiding upsetting the electorate; Avola 2009). For example, I did not find any indications of sanctions being enforced against employers who fail to respect their commitment to hire
a nominated foreign worker upon his or her arrival in Italy (an example is provided below). In fact, non-compliance with the commitment to hire nominated workers upon arrival seems to be a common practice. Interview data with trade union representatives reported cases in which prospective employers provide incorrect or nonexistent addresses, making it impossible for newly arrived foreign workers to find their prospective employers and sign a contract, a situation that eventually turns them into ‘irregular’ migrants. Profit calculations on the part of employers explain some of these situations. The owner of a farm reported that some employers make profit out of the ‘regularization’ process by requesting money from prospective workers in exchange for initiating the (sometimes fake) application for a work authorization under the quota system (Interview R.23.8.11)

33 Employers’ self-disciplining calculations (e.g. avoiding potential sanctions for hiring undocumented workers) are not necessarily incompatible with moral considerations. Reducing the labor transaction to pure market calculations would deny the intrinsic human dimension of employer-worker relationships. Many farm workers have benefited from some kind of ex post facto regularization after a period of irregular stay in Italy. The majority holds valid annual, renewable residence permits for employment purposes provided they have a work contract. In some cases employers have renewed work contracts for up to twenty years. This is common among Tunisian migrants, but there are indications that Indian interviewees have been in Ragusa for up to six years, in some cases working uninterruptedly with the same employer.

34 In fact, while the quota system is based on the assumption that the encounter between labor demand and supply occurs outside the Italian territory (Sciortino 2009: 4), the selection of prospective workers is often made beforehand, as most nominated foreign workers are already active in the Ragusan labor market. Needless to say, migrants already informally employed in Ragusa have more opportunities to gather information and engage with a prospective employer, than those outside of Italy (Sciortino 2009: 12).

35 Many workers enter Italy with a short-term visa issued at the Italian consulate in their respective country of origin, including for work purposes. Work contracts are often ensured through relatives who are already settled in Italy. There are also organized recruitment systems, such as the “caporalato” (see Chapter 3), which facilitate the entry, employment and mobility of migrant workers all over the country.

36 Workers, who lose their regular status because of visa overstaying or failure to sign the work contract within eight days upon arrival, have few opportunities for future lawful employment. Nevertheless, many employers regularize undocumented workers. Ex post facto regularization efforts seem more noteworthy when personal ties have been established with the candidate; complicity, compassion, or moral concerns, may encourage employers to embark in a regularization process, depending on the relationship with the worker in question:

Employer: ...he was clandestine; we waited for the first occasion [to submit a request] after he arrived in 2005... we made the request under the quotas of 2007... the authorization (nulla osta) arrived in 2008, and in 2009 he received the permit. When we received the authorization he returned to India, we pretended he was in India, so that he had a passport with the stamp that supported our request... because we believed this person was trustworthy, we wanted to regularize him ... (Interview S.27.12.10)
Interview data suggest that employers request (undocumented) workers with whom they already have established a work relationship over a relatively long period of time (from three to six years of uninterrupted employment), and who have already demonstrated their abilities and trustworthiness. Workers employed in Ragusa may return temporarily to the country of origin in order to prove that they reside abroad when the authorization is released; meanwhile, members of the same migrant network replace them in Ragusan farms. This creates a rotation system linked specifically to ex post facto regularization strategies.

These examples illustrate the gaps between the stated policy goals to manage migration flows, and implementation as delegated to self-disciplining employers and foreign workers. Instead of effectively managing labor migration flows, quotas have become a regularization tool (see also Cuttitta 2008). Whether this is a policy success or a failure “depends on the eye of the beholder”, as Castles (2004) argues, as only few policies fail completely. Lahav further observes that policies’ success should also be measured against their effectiveness in containing political debates and enhancing the state’s efficacy and legitimacy (2006: 309), which is something that the quota system effectively achieves in Italy. Nevertheless, the system’s unintended outcomes relate to the opening up of unofficial avenues to formalize existing (irregular) employment relationships.

Care workers: regular stay, undeclared employment

Most interviewees employed in eldercare in Ragusa are European citizens (from Poland and Romania) for whom the enlargement of the European Union worked as de facto regularization. Currie notes that, after the fall of the socialist regimes most East-West migrations took place informally, as the negotiation of the accession of EU8 and EU2 countries to the European Union did not immediately extend rights of residence or labor market access to CEE nationals (2009: 108). Italy initially introduced transitional restrictions on the movement of workers from Bulgaria and Romania. Most of my interlocutors were already living and working in Ragusa before the accession of their countries to the European Union and the removal of transitional restrictions.

Polish and Romanian workers employed in Ragusa can circulate freely throughout Europe with an identity card. As Recchi and Triandafyllidou observe, under the EU enlargement, “[m]obility’ means first class migration, without the fatigue of controls, visas, permits of stay, and the overall risk that marks traditional migrants’ typical travel and settlement experiences” (2010: 127). European citizens willing to reside in Italy for more than three months must announce themselves to the municipal registry office, and provide proof of employment when residence is for work purposes. EU citizens are exempt from employment restrictions in domestic service (Polish and Romanian workers are exempt from work permits). Nevertheless, Law 296/2006 requires employers to declare the recruitment of any worker (including care workers, regardless of citizenship), at least one day before engaging in an employment relationship. Although all interviewees are regular sojourners in Italy, their formal residence often overlaps with undeclared employment.

Most care workers keep an informal employment relationship for various reasons. First, as most interviewees argue, they ‘are Europeans’. As such, many do not see the need to declare their jobs, as they are regularly staying in Italy. They work in private houses where inspections are unlikely, and their employers do not seem to be concerned about
declaring their employment either. These conscious decisions sometimes arise from a lack of information (of both employers and workers) regarding the legislative framework regulating this sector.

Second, self-enterprising attitudes of migrant workers also affect their decision not to declare employment. Many workers are what Piore (1979) called target earners; declaring their work would jeopardize their savings projects. All interviewees expressed their desire to save as much money as possible during their short, but recurring visits to Ragusa. A circular migration pattern and rotation characterizes, indeed, the local employment dynamics in the care sector. Most workers stay in Ragusa between two weeks and six months. As live-in workers they can secure free accommodation and meals, which allows them to pursue their savings plans. Many interviewees declared being primarily motivated by economic interests; and to have no intention to settle in Ragusa. Lawful employment and fair conditions of work thus become secondary concerns:

Let’s be honest… Romanian legislation is pathetic but Italian is no better… The fact is that families do not care [about declaring employment] I don’t want to settle here, I want nothing! I want to work for one year, or two or three and leave… that’s all I can tell you [laughs] the contract… I don’t care; if they are fair or not fair I don’t care either, I don’t want to stay here; so I don’t need a contract. [...] I have no problem with the permit, we’re [from the] European Union. (Interview R1.3.1.11)

Employee: All of us work illegally… I have worked in Poland; I am retired, I don’t need a work contract [...] we don’t need any documents, we’re now European… (Interview R.21.12.10)

Third, as one of my interlocutors argues, the priorities, self-enterprising attitudes, and accumulation goals may change with age (the share of domestic workers aged 50 and over passed from 14.8 percent in 2002 to 23.8 percent in 2006; CENSIS 2009: 3). According to a 59-year-old care worker, there is a fundamental difference between younger workers who tend to plan their future in Ragusa (e.g. having a family there), and thus actively seek for lawful employment that would guarantee their access to social benefits; and older workers (the majority) who receive a pension in their country of origin. Declaring their employment in Italy would subject them to taxation, potentially compromising their actual or perceived temporary stay, their entitlement to retirement benefits in the country of origin, and their savings projects. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that older eldercare workers plan a long-term sojourn in Ragusa:

Employee: When people are young they think about retirement and getting a pension, so they’re interested in [lawful employment]… Because I’m retired I don’t care about the permit.

Employer: In fact, when she came she told me ‘I am retired, I don’t need a permit’.

Employee: People want the work permit and appropriate documentation because of the insurance, because if they fall ill they’re in trouble. I don’t have any problem with that because I’m retired and I have a medical insurance… (Interview R.21.12.10)

The importance of the age factor is confirmed by several other interviews, and by the fact that many care workers refused to be interviewed because of fear to disclose information that could put them at risk of losing their pensions.

However, circumventing the labor regulations would not be possible without the complicity of employers. Some authors have emphasized the convenience for employers of maintaining informal employment relationships to subject undocumented workers to poor working conditions (see Currie 2009). I partly agree with this analysis. As noted above, proximity with employers may also foster trust bonds between employers and
workers and moral obligations on both sides. For instance, an employer ceded to the employee’s pleads to keep an informal employment relationship, because otherwise she would lose her pension in the country of origin, and she could not afford that because her son is ill. While the employer is aware of the risks this entails, honoring the trust relationship she established with the worker seemed more acceptable (the morally ‘right thing to do’) than complying with a more abstract legal framework:

Question: How does the fact of declaring or not this person affects you, for example, does it have anything to do with taxation?

Employer: [...] it’s not a matter of money… we would have had preferred to... [declare her] ... for her it was a sine qua non condition; otherwise she would not have accepted the job... I heard it’s quite difficult to be entitled to a state pension in Romania and, even if it’s little money, is better than nothing, especially in her situation...

[continued]

We haven’t signed any contract... we wanted to establish a formal relationship. But it was impossible; she asked me not to do so, otherwise she would lose her pension in Romania;... she said ‘it’s not for me is for my son; if I work here I lose my pension in Romania’. First we were not happy with this situation... but because we trust her we decided to go ahead... (Interview N.26.8.11)

In sum, compliant and deviant behavior regarding the recruitment of foreign care workers is never a case of black or white. Even in the case of Europeans sojourning legally in Italy, the implementation of labor migration norms is permeated by the human aspects of the employment relationship, as well as by employers’ and migrants’ agency. Unless workers have specific needs or consider a long-term sojourn, lawful employment is often disregarded. Adriana, who is in her mid-twenties and lives in the countryside declared her residence in Ragusa only in order to get a driver’s license to be able to drive her child to school. Tatiana and her husband declared their employment to demonstrate that they were able to provide for their three children, only once they decided that their children should join them in Ragusa. Justyna did not plan to stay in Ragusa but after realizing through brief stay in her country that the conditions that made her seek for employment abroad had not improved, she declared her employment to apply for long-term residence.

The situation of most care workers in Ragusa is characterized by their regular stay or residence and irregular or undeclared employment. This points to the difficulties to establish clear boundaries between formality and informality. In the case of eldercare workers, European citizenship, self-enterprising behavior, temporary stay, age and proximity with employers shape labor migration management implementation with a wide range of outcomes. In the case of farm workers, most of which are third country nationals, there is not a straightforward division between ‘regular’ or ‘irregular’ migratory status and employment either. They may enter the Italian territory through regular channels, and be authorized to work, but may lose this regular status (e.g. by overstaying their visas or failing to sign a contract), until employers deploy ex post facto regularization strategies.

Labor migration management ultimately depends upon the interpretations, priorities and concrete relationships of employers and migrant workers. While it appears as if some implementation spaces had been left unregulated, it could also be argued that the devolution of implementation responsibility to private actors, inherent to contemporary migration management as a neoliberal technology of governing migration, is affected by the human dimension of employment relationships that counter the de-personalization of what are often perceived as purely commercial labor relations.
Complicity, trust, and morally acceptable behavior, as conceived within employer-worker relations, partly explain the different degrees of compliance with administrative norms. The articulation of market calculations and the human dimension of the employment relationship results in inconsistencies in the implementation of labor migration management schemes. The same applies to the regulation of working conditions, as discussed below.

**Contracts and pay: personalizing formality and informality**

Regardless of the specific characteristics that differentiate farm and care jobs, and of the degree of formalization of the work relationship, regulations concerning contracts and pay are often implemented randomly. These two elements of employment are important because contracts formalize the labor transaction, and wages, besides their economic function, play a social function as they relate to notions of status and prestige.

In the agricultural sector, wages and conditions of work are regulated by agreements set at national, regional and provincial level. The main trade unions (FLAI-CGIL, FAI-CISL, UILA-UIL) and employers’ associations negotiate those agreements jointly. Minimum standards are outlined in the national labor collective agreement (*Contratto Collettivo Nazionale di Lavoro*, CCNL). National agreements apply even in non-unionized sectors, and the constitutional guarantee of “reasonable compensation” is often based on what is stipulated in those contracts (Calavita 1994: 309). The wage scale and the sectoral hierarchy depend upon employees’ level of qualification and the specific tasks performed. The national agreement establishes a basic three-tiered hierarchy of agricultural workers. The latter is further detailed in the provincial agreement, which identifies seven sub-levels of specialization. Most of my interlocutors perform tasks that fall within various sub-levels of that hierarchy, including tasks that are deemed to require a specific know-how (driving a tractor), semi-complex chores (e.g. milking cows), and generic tasks such as cleaning out the cattle sheds. Remuneration can comprise cash and in-kind (room and board) compensation. The official monthly salary of agricultural workers with indefinite contracts goes from 993.99 (unskilled workers) to 1,231.76 euros (skilled workers). However, the salaries of the farm workers I interviewed range from 700 to 1000 euros. As most workers are live-in, their remuneration may be adjusted and include in-kind payments, as one employer noted:

> ... he's got everything here. We have an agreement on this. I pay for the documents, social insurance, everything... you see what I mean? So, all the money he makes he can send back home... That's why they don't take the risk of seeking for other posts where they may make 100 euros more, but end up spending 200 in groceries...

(Interview S.27.12.10)

Social mechanisms also influence the establishment of parallel wage scales. Some interviewees reported that Italian workers are paid more than foreign workers. Citizens of certain countries (Romania) are particularly disadvantaged, and arguably accept salaries as low as 400 euros. In addition, the modalities of pay seem to be directly influenced by the state of affairs of the farms. In some cases, workers are paid on a three-to-four-month basis, owing to the fact that employers themselves are paid within 90 to 120 days following the delivery of their products (milk) to their clients. Employers and workers are often able to negotiate parallel modalities of pay thanks to the mutual
dependency and trust bonds built within their employment relationships. Some employers facing difficulties may withhold the workers’ salaries, with the workers’ consent, and make random instead of monthly payments at the workers’ request:

Payment is monthly... but if I need more money I can be paid more. Sometimes... when I told the boss that I need 1000 euros, he’s been good, he paid; because I’ve been here for four years, he knows me. Sometimes, when I haven’t had any need, I let three or four months accumulate and then I ask him for 3000 euros. He gives me 3000 and I’m fine. (Interview I.12.5.09)

In addition to pay, labor regulations stipulate work security measures, health standards, and limits on working hours. The working week in the agricultural sector is 39 hours long (6.5 hours a day; maximum 44 hours a week), but these limits may be negotiated at local level. Overtime and work on Sundays, public holidays and night work should be compensated. My interlocutors reported to work from eight to sixteen hours a day; most work ten or eleven hours a day, even if their contracts specify a different schedule. Workers are entitled to one day of rest a week. However, animal husbandry requires a 365-day working calendar.

Regarding social benefits, employees and employers jointly contribute to pension funds. Migrant workers who hold a 50-day contract for two years of uninterrupted employment are entitled to unemployment benefits, as long as employers pay the corresponding contributions to the national social security scheme. Employers also cover health, accident, and unemployment indemnities. However, the most common problems faced by migrant agricultural workers, as reported by two trade union officials, comprise withholding of payment, low-pay, irregular hours of work, unpaid overtime, and tax evasion on the part of employers. Some employers refuse to either declare or pay in full the taxes corresponding to the actual number of days worked, jeopardizing migrant workers’ entitlements to unemployment indemnities (Interviews I.17.8.11, A.17.8.11). However, many employers and workers underreport the number of days worked on purpose, out of mutual convenience: employers avoid paying taxes and workers maximize their social benefits by underreporting the actual number of working days and receiving unemployment indemnities on top of their salary.

In the care sector, conditions of work and minimum standards are also specified in a national collective agreement (CCNL of 13 February 2007) negotiated by the employers’ association and trade unions (FILCAMS-CGIL, FISASCAT-CISL, UILTuCS-UIL and FEDERCOLF). The employment relationship must be formalized through a contract (lettera di asunzione), unless it is considered occasional (not exceeding twelve days a year). Employers must declare workers and cover the relevant social insurance contributions. Working hours are limited to ten hours a day (maximum 54 hours a week), and workers are entitled to 36 hours of rest (24 hours of these on Sundays). Domestic workers’ remuneration should be monthly and can include cash and in-kind compensations (room and board), seniority allocations, and cash equivalents when room and board are not provided by the employer (art. 6,L. n. 339/1958). The national agreement establishes a four-tiered wage scale, according to the tasks performed (e.g. from mere company to specialized assistance) and workers’ qualifications. However, these categories are rarely observable in practice. Minimum monthly salaries of live-in workers currently range from 676.84 to 1,093.36 euros. As argued above, most workers chose not to declare their jobs. In addition, some employers seem reluctant to file income tax, in part or in full (Interview I.17.8.11).
Informality, however, does not always act in the disadvantage of care workers. The informal wage scale (ranging from 650 to 900 euros a month) reported by interviewees is somewhat consistent with the official scale (although Romanian workers arguably accept lower salaries). Parallel wage scales are negotiated between employers and workers on the basis of several criteria, which may include the number of persons assisted, the health condition of these persons, the extent to which they are deemed able to carry out basic tasks independently, the perceived or actual wealth of employers, and the working environment:

When I meet my employers for the first time I pay attention to the type of house, the number of persons to be assisted, and the kind of help they require. We know what the minimum salary is. In Ragusa, if you care for one person the minimum is 800; if you look after more than one person and you have to get up at night then it’s 1000 or 1100. In Modica if you care for a sick person it’s 1000. But if you do not speak Italian fluently and your employer is poor you may get 700 or 650. When you know the language you can negotiate for better pay... I know a lot of Polish workers... when I hear that they get 1000, 900 or 950, 800, 850 for looking after one person I also ask for that amount... (Interview R.21.12.10)

If the persons are autonomous you ask for less money, if it’s just one person and she’s autonomous is 650-700, for one person in bed it’s 700-800, if there are two people and one is fine but the other is in bed it’s 1000-1200, maximum 1200. (Interview I.22.8.11)

Perceptions about the working environment further influence the establishment of wages. A care worker explained that when she met her prospective employers, she perceived that establishing a good relationship with the female employer would be difficult. After confirming with the male employer that his spouse had a ‘special’ character and yelled at people, the worker raised her fee to 1000 euros instead of the usual 800 euros she bargained for.

In addition, some eldercare workers negotiate salaries and working conditions according to their personal concerns regarding leisure time, independence, or a desire to keep a good relationship with employers; these concerns sometimes override economic incentives. One of my interlocutors reported to prefer keeping a good relationship with the employer over an increase in pay, as a good relationship is more likely to increase her bargaining power, for example, to ask for time off (Interview R.21.12.10).

Overall, parallel wage scales in both farm and care jobs, are established and institutionalized through the flow of information that circulates via migrants’ and employers’ networks. Employers and workers are well aware of informal standards; and are rarely able to contravene those tacit rules.

Moral and ethical concerns contribute to the definition of parallel wage scales too. Many employers admitted that they would not run the risk of losing a good worker by denying the person an increase of pay, or that “even when one is free to decide how much to pay, the pay should be fair” (Interview C.11.5.09). Concerning workers’ perceptions about pay, about half of all workers interviewed claimed to be satisfied with it, which may be partly explained by an internalization of a marginal occupational status and by moral considerations towards employers. Some workers, for instance, justified their pay in terms of the low-status of their jobs, arguing that they do not have a lot of responsibilities. In some cases, the perceived or actual wealth of employers, and thus their ability to pay, generates expectations or, alternatively, resignation and moral concerns. A farm worker mentioned that workers in the area have a similar income,
except for those who work for a ‘richer’ employer (Interview I.12.5.09). A care worker observed: “if the lady is poor, how is she supposed to pay?” (Interview R.21.12.10); another interviewee noted: “when the person is good, calm, it doesn’t matter if she’s poor. If she treats you well, if she respects you, [...] you have no right to complain if your pay is low” (Interview B.6.1.11). Farm workers also expressed consideration towards their employers regarding their ability to pay or the adjustment of their wages according to the state of affairs:

…I can’t ask for more, even if I asked for more, you know about the situation in agriculture, the price of milk is constantly falling, fodder is expensive… there are also problems here [in Italy] […] Before I went to India I was paid 750, but when I came back this year the boss said he made small profits so he paid 500, I said, ‘it’s OK’. (Interview I.12.5.09)

Those who were not satisfied with their pay did not describe their discontent in ‘professional’ terms (e.g. referring to de-skilling), but referred to the risks run in their jobs, or to personal disappointment, as they felt that their work was not sufficiently ‘appreciated’, or ‘recognized’.

In sum, tacit rules established through social mechanisms and interpersonal relations influence the application of employment regulations in the agricultural and care sector, from the definition of wage scales and the modalities of pay (i.e. institutionalizing parallel wage scales), to conditions of work and access to social benefits, to migrant worker’s bargaining power (e.g. owing to moral considerations of employers towards workers and vice versa). The practices of employers and workers reveal how spheres of formality and informality overlap, with unpredictable consequences for farm and care workers. Legal migratory status and formal employment do not necessarily guarantee fair conditions of work, as demonstrated by the experiences of some farm workers. Third country farm workers with formal work contracts appear to be more dependent on their employers to maintain legal status in Italy, and to have less bargaining power (e.g. concerning their salaries) than European eldercare workers who are not subjected to formalized employment relationships.

Chapter conclusion: Labor migration management vs unintended outcomes

After discussing the conceptual tools to understand labor migration management as a neoliberal technology of governing I might say that market calculations introduced in contemporary migration policy allow dealing with labor migration in technical terms, conveniently concealing its political, ideological and human aspects. Market-based assumptions underlying migration management discourse, policy and practices promise triple-win scenarios by simultaneously addressing the optimization goals of receiving and sending states and of self-enterprising migrants. By dealing with labor migration as a technical issue, the Italian state has managed to maintain a steady supply of foreign labor, easing internal and external pressures, such as the criticism over repeated regularization campaigns run in the past decades, which are perceived as the antithesis of effective migration management (ISMU 2005, online). At the same time, annual quotas effectively function as a regularization tool.

A key aspect of contemporary migration management discourse and practice is the (partial) delegation of migration policy enforcement functions to private actors (see Menz
and Caviedes 2010: 184). As such, private actors do not substitute, but complement the state. Neoliberalism as a technology of governing migration, as reflected in the migration management approach, does not coerce enforcers (i.e. employers and migrant workers). Rather, these presumed self-enterprising subjects are granted relative autonomy to display the expected self-disciplining behavior. In some cases, self-interest and accumulation goals encourage compliance with migration and employment regulations. Self-disciplining employers may fear facing sanctions for hiring undocumented migrants. Likewise, self-enterprising migrant workers may seek to regularize their status as a means to achieve other goals (e.g. moving north to find a better job, initiating family reunification). Employers and third parties (e.g. illegal recruiters) may also participate in regularization endeavors for profit.

Nevertheless, it may be more appropriate to consider selective compliance as dependent upon interpersonal relations. Evidence from Ragusa shows that interpersonal relations at the local level directly impact the implementation of migration policy. Proximity, trust, complicity, mutual dependence and moral considerations influence the way in which employers and foreign workers interpret administrative norms and deploy joint strategies to comply with or circumvent those norms. The former may result in a number of implementation gaps, such as *ex post facto* regularization, undeclared employment, and random observance of work standards and official wage scales. The relative autonomy of these agents; the distance that separates them from central authorities (e.g. labor inspections); and the intimacy that characterizes the interpersonal relations of farm and care workers in Ragusa further facilitates the subjection of policy implementation to the human dimension of employment relations.

In sum, questions of migratory status and conditions of work are resolved in a discretionary manner, at the intersection of market calculations, self-interest, and the human aspects of interpersonal relations maintained by allegedly self-disciplining agents. The divergent levels of compliance and the permeability of the boundaries of the spheres of formality and informality have different implications for migrant workers. Some authors emphasize the negative aspects of informal employment in terms poor working conditions (Mingione and Quassoli 2000). While I do not deny these realities, evidence from Ragusa suggests that migrant workers do not passively conform to employers’ decisions or to institutional norms that attempt to control their lives in the receiving society. Contrary to the assumption that the interests of self-enterprising migrants are in perfect correspondence with states’ optimization goals, empirical evidence shows that migrants’ and employers’ choices and practices not always fully match stated policy goals. Employers and migrant workers participate actively in the selective application of norms, and sometimes even succeed in making such norms work *their* way.

Optimization calculations that deal with labor migration as a purely technical issue, fail to recognize the importance of the human dimension of employment relations. Such a technical conceptualization of labor migration impedes a comprehensive understanding of the local social mechanisms that shape policy implementation. For instance, the boundaries between legality, illegality, formality and informality become problematic to identify foreign workers’ shifting status, and the advantages and disadvantages they may garner from their shifting positions along such a continuum. Migration management relying on technical assumptions lacks the suppleness necessary to identify and influence the processes that create implementation gaps, and react in such flexible ways as migrant workers and employers are able to.
NOTES

1. Juan Somavia, Director-General of the International Labour Organization, notes that "[m]igration for employment and its linkages with development has now emerged as a global issue which affects most nations in the world. It is high on international, regional and policy agendas" (ILO 2006, Preface: v).

2. Bimal Gosh elaborated the concept in 1993, at the request of the UN Commission on Global Governance and the Government of Sweden (Geiger and Pécoud 2010: 2).

3. These go from counter-trafficking efforts; to 'capacity building' of civil servants in transit and sending countries; to the provision of technical assistance for the formulation of migration policy; to 'development' projects or programs aimed at maximizing the economic returns of migration through workers' remittances, or diaspora's contributions to the counties or regions of origin (Geiger and Pécoud 2010: 6).

4. Indeed, Geiger and Pécoud (2010: 11) argue that the depoliticization of migration is reflected, for instance in "the 'triple-win' objective, which negates the existence of divergent interests, of asymmetries of power and of conflicts (both between and within countries)".

5. Ong builds on Foucault's concept of "governmentality" ("the practices that constitute, define, organize and instrumentalize the strategies that individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other"; 2006: 4) to conceptualize neoliberalism as a technology of governing. She applies this concept to examine specific alignments of market rationality, citizenship and sovereignty. She argues that neoliberal governmentality results from the "infiltration" of market truths and calculations in politics (2006: 4). A neoliberal rationality informs the government of free individuals, who are encouraged to self-manage according to market principles (2006: 4). Neoliberalism, according to Ong, is a form of biopolitical mode of governing that seeks to harness the capacity and potential of individuals and the population as living resources managed by governing regimes (2006: 6). Accordingly, new modes of citizenship and sovereignty emerge as the latter articulate and disarticulate with neoliberal reason. Citizenship rights and entitlements, for example, are granted to people according to neoliberal criteria (e.g. marketable skills), rather than political membership within nation-states. Ong also uses the concept of exception to explain a departure in policy deployed either to include or to exclude. For example, neoliberalism as exception can be selectively deployed in political settings other than liberal democracies (i.e. in authoritarian, postcolonial and postsocialist regimes) where neoliberalism is not characteristic of technologies of governing. Likewise, exceptions to neoliberalism can involve positive (inclusion) or negative (exclusion) decisions, aimed at preserving welfare benefits for certain populations (e.g. citizens) and excluding others (e.g. migrants) from the benefits of capitalist development (see Chapter 5). For Ong it is important to understand the interplay between technologies of governing and of disciplining, of inclusion and exclusion and of giving or denying value to human conduct (2006: 5).

6. For instance, through renewed temporary, seasonal and circular migration programmes to address the demand for low-skilled labor force (Castles 2006, see also CEC 2007).

7. Law 943/1986 was the first comprehensive attempt to regulate migration flows in Italy. It guaranteed equal treatment for legal foreign residents, and included a regularization program (Calavita 1994). Law 39/1990 (known as Martelli law) established stricter controls of unauthorized entries and visa overstay, included provisions for the regularization of migrants (generally initiated by workers), and introduced the programming of labour migration flows. Law 40/1998 refined the conditions of legal status, and opened more regular avenues for immigration. This
law was integrated in the “Consolidation Act on Immigration and the Status of Foreigners” (known as Turco-Napolitano law or Testo Unico), which established a system of annual quotas (Law 286/1998). It included the possibility of sponsoring the entry of foreign workers by direct nomination. Owing to security concerns imposed by membership in the Schengen area (1998) the Act was amended by Law 189/2002, which imposed stricter controls on new entries, and tightened the conditions to maintain legal status (linking it to a work contract) and to renew residence permits so as to discourage permanent stay (Vitiello 2008, Sciortino 2009). Between 2004 and 2006, following the enlargements of the European Union, Italy introduced a ban on the freedom of movement for new Europeans, but allocated large quotas for these workers (Sciortino 2009).

8. Law 943/1986 established a sponsor system (foreign workers are nominated by the employer) along with labor market tests; these provisions resulted inadequate in view of the actual size of inflows. Law 39/1990 introduced the programming of inflows based on inter-ministerial decrees. Restrictive quotas on new entries were established only in 1995, and redefined in the 1998 Immigration Act (Art. 3, para.4). Under the 189/2002 Law, the sponsor system was eliminated. Quotas are established according to labor market needs, family reunification and asylum permits already issued (Vitiello 2008).

9. The size and distribution of quotas is negotiated among the Ministry of Labor, employer associations, trade unions, local and regional labour offices, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Foreign labor demand is assessed against local employment rates. The national quota is divided into sub-quotas for the 20 regions, and 104 provinces. Sub-quotas are distributed according to the type of labor (seasonal, dependent, or independent work); occupation, and specific nationalities. Preferential quotas include countries with which Italy has signed bilateral labor management and readmission agreements (Chaloff 2004, Cuttitta 2008): Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Ghana, Moldova, Morocco, the new EU Member States, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Senegal, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Tunisia (Sciortino 2009; Zunino 2012). Foreigners who have followed a training course sponsored by the Italian government in their country of origin are awarded preferential treatment. Italy has also run six regularization campaigns (1986-87; 1990; 1995-96; 1998-99; 2002; and 2009, for domestic workers) reaching about 1.7 million migrants (calculations based on data from Vitiello 2008 and Caritas 2009). As of 4 January 2012 employers can declare their intention to confirm (extend) electronically the employment relationship with workers recruited through the 2011 annual quotas, independently from the publication of the 2012 annual quota decree (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, Newsletter February 2012).

10. For a discussion on this matter see Sciortino 2009. The annual quota for subordinate seasonal work passed from 13,000 in 2001; to 33,000 in 2002; 29,500 in 2004; 79,500 in 2005; 350,000 in 2006; 80,000 in 2007, 2008 and 2009; again 80,000 in 2010; but later increased to 98,080 (for the first time including 1,800 Indian nationals among country-based quotas); to 60,000 in 2011. (The annual decrees are available at Ministero dell’interno, online).

11. Until 1986 Italy did not have a legislative framework to regulate migration flows, except for domestic workers. Likewise, the programming of labor migration flows stipulated in the 1990 law was not fully implemented and, excluding domestic workers, few migrants could enter Italy with a work permit (Reyneri 1998: 314). Since 2005, domestic workers have been particularly favored within the occupation-based quotas. For this category the contingent passed from 15,000 slots in 2005, to 45,000 in 2006, 65,000 in 2007, and 105,400 in 2008 (in 2010 the quota decreased to 30,000 slots).

12. The authorization of entry is given by the local office of the Ministry of Labor after the job offer has been listed nationally for twenty days. The authorization is transmitted to the relevant consulate, which then issues a Schengen work visa covering the period of employment, for a maximum of two years (Chaloff 2004).
13. The renewal procedure must start 90 days before the permit expires in case of indefinite contracts; 60 days for fixed-term contracts and 30 days for all other cases.

14. For instance, regions can initiate specific labor migration schemes at local level, or undertake international cooperation initiatives (Chaloff 2004). The municipalities are responsible for implementing measures to promote the integration of regular sojourners, especially regarding housing, language training, social integration and human rights. The Territorial Councils for Immigration were established by presidential decree (18 December 1999) to monitor the presence of foreigners on the Italian territory, and the carrying capacity of the locality regarding the absorption of migration flows. They are established within the local government (Prefettura) and involve local representatives of the state, region, the chamber of commerce, local organizations providing assistance to immigrants, trade unions and employers’ associations (Ministero dell’interno http://www.portaleimmigrazione.it/ accessed 2/02/2012).

15. EU8 countries include the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia, which acceded to the EU in 2004. EU2 countries, Bulgaria and Romania, acceded to the EU in 2007.

16. In July 2006, the centre-left government of Italy ended the transitory measures. Italy introduced labor market restrictions, however, for workers from Bulgaria and Romania (EU2), except in agriculture, tourism, domestic and care service, construction, engineering, managerial, seasonal and high-skilled work (see Euractiv.com, http://www.euractiv.com/social/eu-27/article-12948, accessed 5/03/2012). Some authors argue that such restrictions resulted in increased irregular and precarious employment of migrants from countries who acceded to the EU in 2004 and 2007, perpetuating the pre-accession trends (Currie 2009, Rechhi and Triandafyllidou 2010). As of 1 January 2012 labor market restrictions imposed to EU2 nationals were removed in all sectors.


18. In Italy, employment in agriculture can be full-time, seasonal or on a daily-basis. Most farm workers interviewed hold annual, fixed term contracts of 51, 101 or (a maximum of) 151 days. A contract exceeding 151 days becomes an indefinite contract. Under the national collective agreement, Category 1A involves highly skilled workers with certified professional qualifications, who are deemed able to undertake specialized/complex tasks. Category 2A involves semi-skilled workers (with practical experience or formal qualifications) who carry out non-complex tasks. Category 3A refers to unskilled workers entrusted with generic tasks that do not require professional qualification. The Ragusan provincial agreement further details the chores and level of expertise corresponding to the three basic categories outlined in the national agreement: Area I (specialization levels VI and VII) includes skilled workers who possess a drivers’ license and can operate and fix sophisticated agricultural machinery. Area II involves semi-skilled workers capable of milking mechanically various species and of operating plowing and sowing machinery (level V); as well as workers capable of milking one single species; farm personnel (level IV); and workers capable of building greenhouses, preparing the land and irrigating the plantations (level III). Area III comprises workers entrusted with the removal of animal dung, animal feeding, generic cleaning services, fruit and vegetable pickers, packers, land workers, among others (levels I and II), thus the lowest positions in the sectoral hierarchy.

19. For example, the provincial agreement specifies that the daily remuneration of workers who hold fix-term contracts ranges between 50.61 and 62.71 euros, depending on the level of qualification and the tasks performed by workers. A trade union official reports cases in which daily remuneration falls to 30-35 euros. Some employees have indeed started legal disputes against employers, with the support of the trade union.

20. Level A includes unskilled “generic family collaborators” with less than twelve months of professional experience; level B includes more experienced semi-autonomous workers; level C autonomous, experienced workers who possess basic technical/theoretical knowledge related to
Chapter 3. Labor market incorporation of care and farm migrant workers: the odds of social capital

1 Research on migrants’ incorporation into receiving societies has paid particular attention to labor market participation and outcomes. Economic theories have traditionally explained labor market outcomes through human capital differences (migrants’ individual capacities, qualifications, and talent endowment; Borjas 1989, Chiswick 2008). However, scholars have increasingly paid attention to the social mechanisms that enable or constrain migrants’ participation in the receiving labor markets and their structuration (Reitz 2002).

2 Recruitment is a key aspect of labor market integration; it influences migrants’ trajectories and positioning in the host society. Recruitment is also an essential component of what Sassen (1995) calls the “local labor market”. Assuming that economic transactions, such as employment relationships, are embedded in social relations (Granovetter 1985), this concept focuses on how networks, social capital, cumulative causation, and other variables (e.g. ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, household structure) shape labor markets. Labor market segmentation is thus understood as part of the internal operation of the labor markets rather than as the result of human capital deficiencies.

3 Under this approach, social networks influence recruitment processes and labor market outcomes by shaping workers’ patterns of job search and access to information. Social networks are seen as sources of social capital, which operate on the basis of trust and reciprocity. Their composition, the kind of resources they offer, the motivations for releasing such resources, and the positioning of their members are crucial to understanding the different labor market outcomes of network-mediated recruitment.

4 Through the example of Ragusa, and building on these insights, some implications of network-mediated recruitment of eldercare and farm workers are here examined. First, I discuss the role of networks in structuring labor migration flows to Ragusa, and in
mediating the recruitment of migrant workers through referrals, rotation, and the provision of information. I then explore role of trust in network-mediated recruitment practices. Lastly, I discuss the mixed outcomes of network-mediated recruitment through the examination of the intervention of the migration industry in recruitment processes, and the commodification of reciprocity among migrant workers.

**Labor supply ad infinitum: referrals, rotation, place-based-knowledge and trust**

In Ragusa, word-of-mouth is the most widespread mechanism to disseminate information on vacancies. In the following, I discuss three ways in which social networks allow migrants to secure a job before or on arrival in Ragusa: through referrals, though rotation systems, and through the dissemination of place-based knowledge.

**Chain migration and referrals**

Chain migration is facilitated by the presence of relatives or acquaintances in the reception area. All migrant workers interviewed, regardless of their nationality and sector of employment, had relatives or acquaintances working in Italy, and sometimes specifically in the province of Ragusa. This is illustrated in the cases discussed below.

Tunisian workers claimed to have followed a relative (in most cases the father, uncle or older brother) who had settled in Ragusa or in other regions of Sicily (e.g. the province of Trapani). Early migrants carved their own paths over the years. Jamal, for example, came to Ragusa at the age of 16, in 1988. His father had some friends in the port of Marsala, who hosted him before he found a job in the construction sector in Vittoria, and then on a cattle farm in Ragusa. His younger brother followed him in 1989. Jamal and his brother regularized their status through the 1990 amnesty. Later on, Jamal’s wife and four children joined him in Ragusa; all this, “without any help”, as he argues.

Chain migration patterns are also evident in the trajectories of younger migrants. Tariq came to Ragusa in 2004, under the family reunification scheme. His two older sisters (aged over 25) could not apply for family reunification. Tariq’s father thus asked his employer to issue a work contract for his two daughters, which allowed them to join the family in Ragusa in 2007. One of them is married and her husband has joined her recently.

Tunisian workers claimed to have never worked abroad before coming to Ragusa, although they have worked in other areas of the province (e.g. Vittoria). Their migration trajectory is mostly unilinear, and largely shaped by their social networks, as observed by an employer:

> It works like this: one calls the other; basically it’s word-of-mouth. I have noticed that about fifty people from his country [Tunisia] are either siblings, or cousins... They arrive illegally in Ragusa, and who picks them up? They take the mobile phone: ‘Listen, there’s the brother of my mom, of your grandma...’ that’s how they get picked up... (Interview L.11.5.09)

Indian agricultural workers follow different migration trajectories and move within truly trans-territorial networks. Most of my interlocutors have at least one relative (mostly siblings) who has been living in Italy for up to ten years (in Latium, Tuscany, Piedmont...
and Emilia-Romagna). Their relatives are employed in factories (of textiles, buttons, and leather), cattle farms, in the dairy industry, and in retail stores.

All my Indian interlocutors stayed in other Italian cities (where their siblings or acquaintances reside) before coming to Ragusa, and some had worked in other countries (the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates) before moving to Italy. A few had met before moving to Italy and recommended each other when job vacancies were opened in Ragusa. For example, Sanjeev, Naveen and Jitinder come from Punjab. Sanjeev and Naveen met in Dubai, where they worked for over ten years after graduating from high school. Eventually, Sanjeev decided to join his older brother, who worked on a cattle farm in Ragusa. As Sanjeev’s brother quit this job to move to the north of Italy, he recommended Sanjeev to replace him in the farm. An employer willing to hire an Indian national approached Sanjeev a few years ago. Sanjeev recommended Naveen, his long-time friend from Dubai. Naveen has been working in Ragusa for four years. When Naveen had to return to India to collect his entry visa as part of his regularization strategy, he recommended his cousin, Gotam, who was working in Rome, to replace him for a period of four months. Gotam had been able to obtain an entry visa thanks to his sister, who has been living in Rome for over ten years. A shop assistant, she managed to obtain a temporary work contract for Gotam. Lately, the owner of a cattle farm in Ragusa was seeking for personnel. He asked Naveen to spread the news. Naveen recommended his brother.

Most female Polish and Romanian eldercare workers are not pioneer migrants either and came to Ragusa independently; not as dependents. All my interlocutors came for the first time to Ragusa because a (female) friend or relative had informed them about a job opening, or referred them to employers. Typically, women who are already employed as caregivers in Ragusa act as recruitment intermediaries for newcomers. They usually recommend their relatives (sister, sister-in-law, mother, godmother, etc.), friends or acquaintances (neighbor, former work colleagues) to their employers as substitutes, in case they need to return temporarily to their country of origin. Most, if not all female domestic workers had secured a job before coming to Ragusa, which explains why they chose Ragusa over other destinations. One of my interlocutors highlighted the importance of social networks not only for recreation or to keep abreast of the latest events in the area of origin, but also to have access to information on job vacancies. One worker claimed: “Contacts are also useful to find jobs; if one moves from a house she tells the others... when you have contacts it’s easy to find a job.” (Interview R.21.12.10)

Once in the destination area, proximity and social relations established with locals (employers, neighbors, etc.) expand migrants’ networks and provide further opportunities for labor market incorporation and employment continuity. This is illustrated in the case of Sylwia, who came to Ragusa to replace a friend of hers who had returned to Poland. When Sylwia’s employer died, the neighbors offered her a new job as they had established a good relationship with her. (Interview T.24.8.11)

Overall, these examples show that migration decisions are made within specific social structures that tend to foster chain migration. Migrants’ incorporation into the labor market is effectively backed by trans-territorial networks, which rely on weak and strong ties (Granovetter 1973), as networks include relatives, friends, acquaintances and even Ragusan employers, neighbors, etc. Networks ensure the continuous replenishment of labor supply in specific male- and female-dominated sectors, hinging around a narrow pool of candidates who are members of relatively sealed social networks. As such,
network mediation effectively takes vacancies out of the market. There is little or no competition as jobs tend to be filled by pre-selected candidates (Waldinger 1997; see also Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Therefore, the match between demand and supply is socially structured. Referrals further facilitate the rotation of migrant workers in eldercare and farm work. The functioning and implications of rotation are further discussed below.

**Rotation**

15 One of the outcomes of network-mediated recruitment practices is the emergence of rotation or replacement systems. Rotation mobilizes the members of specific migrant networks both in close and distant areas (e.g. in areas of origin) and ensures a steady supply of labor in marginal jobs such as farm work and eldercare in Ragusa. Rotation mechanisms are activated for various reasons, as explained below. Rotation allows reducing the uncertainty about losing secured jobs in Ragusa through enforceable trust, as discussed in the following examples.

16 Rotation among Tunisian nationals is facilitated by geographical proximity. Many workers travel from Ragusa to Tunisia several times a year. In the case of Indian workers, rotation tends to be associated with *ex post facto* regularization strategies. They are often replaced by members of the same migrant group when a worker has to return to India to prove residence abroad following the announcement of the *nulla osta*, or the awarding of an authorization to come to Italy to work. Another common reason to activate rotation is to take a holiday. Many workers take breaks in between contracts to visit their families; meanwhile they are replaced by other Indian nationals on the farms.

17 Rotation is equally common among Romanian and Polish care workers. Rotations allow them to take holidays, participate in family events, and honor family obligations. This is illustrated by the case of three friends and who have been repeatedly rotating and exchanging jobs in Ragusa. Anita came for the first time to Ragusa in 2002, to replace her friend Sylwia, whom she has known for 40 years. Sylwia wanted to spend Christmas in Poland and asked Anita to replace her for two weeks. In 2009, Sylwia was working with a different family, she wanted to help her son in planning his wedding and asked Ludwika, her friend and neighbor, to replace her. When Sylwia came back, the employers kept both Ludwika and Sylwia. After spending seven months in Ragusa, Ludwika wanted to go back to Poland to meet her newborn grandson. Sylwia remained in Ragusa and covered the two posts. When I met Sylwia again in 2011, she was about to leave for Poland. She wanted to visit her family and called again her friend Anita to replace her. Anita was looking for a new job, as the woman she helped died. This rotation pattern was repeated and confirmed in almost all the interviews.

18 Rotation further allows migrant workers to honor moral obligations towards employers and functions as a proof of a certain work ethics, as workers are expected to find an apt substitute in case of temporary absence or resignation. Workers often use this sign of 'responsibility' to distinguish themselves from other workers. One of my interlocutors, for example, praised the high work ethics of Polish workers, arguing that “Polish would never leave if she [sic] has not found a substitute... You never start in another job unless you have found a substitute”. (Interview R.21.12.10)

19 Moreover, by pre-selecting their substitutes themselves, migrant workers reduce the risks of losing what they consider to be good jobs. Enforceable trust seems to operate to reduce the likelihood that a trusted substitute takes over. Many respondents claimed to
take other posts once they fulfill their engagement with the respective sponsors: “This man sent me here; he went to India for four months, and when he comes back, I am going to Rome, I won’t continue here…” (Interview Ch.11.5.09). Taking over a job from a member of the network would ban the person from the group jeopardizing her opportunities to have access to the networks’ resources or to enjoy the support or favors from its members. Therefore, the rotation system carries the promise that workers will be able to get back their ‘good’ jobs as soon as they return to Ragusa. Trust between migrant workers and employers also increases the possibilities for workers to keep those jobs. Urszula, for example, looked after an elderly married couple for one year and established a good relationship with the female employer. She went back to Poland undecided about returning to Ragusa. She recommended a substitute before leaving, but after four months, Urszula decided to return to Ragusa and called her former employer. The employer claimed that she dismissed Urszula’s substitute that same day.

In sum, networks allow Ragusan farms and homes to have a continuous source of migrant labor through referrals and rotation mechanisms. Simultaneously, referrals and rotation allow migrant workers to deploy regularization strategies, take holidays, and honor family obligations with the assurance that good relationships with employers and enforceable trust will operate to thwart the risks of losing what are perceived as advantageous jobs. Because zootechny and eldercare entail hard conditions of work, perhaps rotation also enables migrant workers to build resilience to poor working conditions by allowing them to temporarily detach from their marginal positions in Ragusa.

Place-based-knowledge

An important resource that social networks can offer to migrant workers during their job search is information on vacancies. Some authors have recognized the limits of the economic conceptualization of the (perfect) information context. Because information is subject to variations in time and space and because it is often grounded in one’s personal experiences and (social) positioning, it can never be assumed to be complete or perfect.

The concept of “place-based knowledge” accounts for the incompleteness, one-sidedness, and power imbalances that characterize information flows within the (migrant) household or the community (Sassen 1995). Place-based-knowledge is situated in time and space, and influenced by the specific position of informants (e.g. by gender, nationality, ethnicity, and class). As such, place-based-knowledge influences migrants’ labor market incorporation by effectively restricting “knowledge” about jobs that migrants are most likely to have access to (Sassen 1995: 113). Indeed, care and agricultural migrant workers in Ragusa participate in relatively closed referral-rotation circles from which it is difficult to exit. As a result, male and female migrants in Ragusa are effectively incorporated into male- or female-dominated jobs. Interestingly, confirming the argument that the information that circulates within their networks is incomplete, most workers, regardless of their occupation or the source of information used, recognized that before coming to Ragusa they had little knowledge about the specific characteristics of their jobs other than the location or the characteristics of potential employers. The lack of information was more acute when recruitment was mediated by informal for-profit recruiters. In view of the poor information about jobs, imagination and stereotypes intervene in the assessment of the referred job
opportunities; it was not uncommon to hear such things as “The only thing we know is that the job is in Sicily”; or “We know about the mafia, it’s scary!”

Also, farm and care migrant workers selectively disclose or withhold information about the jobs they perform in Italy when in the areas of origin. The way in which migrants deal with information provision in the areas of origin may be associated with class contradictions that emerge from the low-status of their jobs and the selective sharing of information with relatives, friends and acquaintances back home. Imperfect information may also be a by-product of migrants’ own interests and objectives. For example, many workers revealed that when they ask for further details about the job description, their first (and often most important) question is about income. Indeed, in some cases the former may override migrants’ attention to the characteristics of the job and conditions of work, as illustrated below:

When people are in Poland they have no problem, they don’t care much about the type of job, they ask about the money... they often ask about location, whether it’s in the north or in Sicily, but that’s not really important, what is important is money. Only this, money... (Interview B.6.1.11)

Question: Did you know how it was? Did he tell you about the job; whether it was good or bad?
Employee: Nothing.
Question: Didn’t he tell you about the tasks, the location, the boss...?
Employee: Well, let’s say that... because I needed money, because I was unemployed, I didn’t have a job before, I was looking for a job...
Question: So you didn’t know much about the job?
Employee: It’s fine, pay is good. (Interview M.14.5.09)

Finally, it is worth noting that moving within a context characterized by the flow of imperfect information implies that things do not always turn out as expected, even when recommendations are made by trusted sources. For example, a woman recommended her sister-in-law a ‘good job’ based on her own appraisal of the visible physical health of an elderly married couple, the future employers. She mentioned that when she met them they were apparently autonomous. In her opinion the pay was also more than acceptable. She encouraged her sister-in-law to take the job. But just the week after her sister-in-law arrived in Ragusa, the man fell ill, the lady became more and more absent, and “the only thing left was the good money”, she told me regretfully.

Place-based knowledge narrows the range of job opportunities that migrant men and women are likely to have access to. In a context of imperfect information in which migration decisions, vacancy appraisals and recommendations are made, migrant workers and employers may wish to reduce the potential uncertainties associated with the establishment of new employment relationships. Trust helps easing employers’ and migrant workers’ reservations, as discussed below.

Circles of trust

Employers and migrant workers rely largely on referrals from their contacts when engaging in a new employment relationship. Some degree of trust must be assumed for such a referral system to operate. Trust, in Coleman’s (rationalist) view, does not arise from an emotional or moral bond among actors, but from rational calculations of the potential risks, benefits and costs involved in placing trust in another person, or trustee (see Appelrouth and Edles 2012: 445-450). Thus, the intermediation of trusted sources has
the potential to reduce the perceived or actual risks any trustor incurs in placing trust in a stranger.

Employers, migrant workers and their respective contacts constitute circles of trust, not necessarily based on strong ties, which influence farm and care migrant workers’ incorporation into the Ragusan labor market, through word-of-mouth recruitment, candidates’ screening and on-the-job training.

Regarding word-of-mouth, referrals (from employers and workers themselves) play a major role in favoring workers who are perceived as having a good track record. According to most of my interlocutors, it is hard to find a job without a recommendation. An employer further confirmed that recommendations function as a guarantee of a worker’s reliability. Conversely, a domestic worker expressed her disappointment as she realized that recommendations may outweigh qualifications, linguistic skills or other qualities and are essential to secure jobs both within and outside domestic service. Recommendations are often the product of the relationships that migrant workers and employers have built and consolidated over time. For instance, an employer mentioned that there is a group of foreign workers in the agricultural sector who are already well known by locals and who are trusted by Ragusan employers:

Yes, we get along very well. In fact, I can’t imagine what will happen when he leaves… It will be difficult to find a similar person. Because in this group of Indians… they have been here for quite some time already, we know them very well, [name of worker], the Indians of [name of two employers]…. for example, the one who arrived last year is his brother… (Interview S.27.12.10)

Employers’ and workers’ prior experiences and mutual track record normally constitute the baseline for the assessment of potential recruits referred by workers, on the part of employers, and for the assessment of the posts referred, on the part of workers. Referrals presuppose the existence of trust among the parties involved to operate. It seems thus relevant to understand when and how trust becomes manifest.

Several workers claimed proudly that they were able to negotiate certain things or obtain favors from their employers owing to the good and relatively long relationships they had with them, or simply because employers ‘know them’. Trust building implies coexistence, contact and communication, which is certainly facilitated by proximity, especially in live-in jobs such as eldercare and farm work as practiced in Ragusa. Cohabitation facilitates interaction and personal exchanges that foster trust, as one worker noted, “only then you can say that you know what that means [trust], then you know if the person is brava [good]” (Interview R.21.12.10). However, proximity is not the single determinant in trust building processes. Sometimes trust ‘sparks’ set off a good commencement in the employment relationship:

You can tell when someone’s good only when you know the person… when you spend time together at home, when you talk…. Sometimes it takes just a glance; like, I see you, we exchange regards, like a boy and a girl, we like each other, that’s also possible between two people. When I first arrived to her place [talking about the employer], I noticed she had good eyes for me. (Interview R.21.12.10)

Interview data illustrate how recruitment involves placing trust in another person. So as migrant workers recommend one another on the basis of trust, employers also turn to workers and other employers to ask for recommendations:

Question: How did you meet these workers?
Employer: Well… the first Indian who came here was brought by a friend of mine. He owns a cattle farm too, and he told us ‘listen, there’s a guy who just arrived from
Rome...’ My friend picked him up... The rest of the workers came afterwards, through this first guy. (Interview R.23.8.11)

Question: How did you meet her?

Employer: We were introduced by the son of the lady with whom she worked before... she had returned to Romania... we needed a caregiver for my parents-in-law and our friend spoke well about her, he’s a close friend of the family... and if he spoke well about her it means that... so he contacted her and she came back to Ragusa. (Interview N.26.8.11)

Sometimes the credibility of the sources is based on the nature of the relationship between the person requesting information (the trustor) and the informant (the trustee). In other cases, trustees are simply considered as reliable sources of information or having a good position to assess the candidates (e.g. owing to their experience):

Question: How did you meet the employee?

Employer: ...We approached [name of worker] [...] Well, no, we consulted first a friend, he’s the owner of other farms and he has Indian workers... he knows them. We had troubles with our worker, a Romanian guy... My friend spoke very well about him [current employee], we wanted an Indian, and so we asked my friend Giovanni... (Interview S.27.12.10)

Therefore, even candidates not directly known by the employers may be granted the employers’ favor because they have been referred by a trusted intermediary. Employees who mobilize their extended trans-territorial networks may also refer people with whom they do not have a direct relationship, by virtue of the intercession of a trusted third party. Adriana, for example, explained that her mother-in-law was the first in her family to go to Ragusa, to replace the daughter of a friend of hers. She did not know the daughter directly; she had spent some time with the mother of that woman in a hospital in Romania and became friends with her. In this case, despite the fact that the substitute and the worker to be replaced in Ragusa did not know each other, the recommendation was mediated by a third person, who was a trusted source for both the worker and the substitute.

The question remains what motivates workers or employers to place their trust in their informants. Tilly (2007) affirms that trust networks rely on strong ties. Building on Granovetter’s (1973) teachings, Faist asserts that (1997: 199) strong ties are characterized by direct, durable transactions that entail obligations and emotions, whereas weak ties are defined by indirect relationships. Seemingly, in Ragusa both strong and weak ties shape trust in recruitment mediation. Employers and workers normally consider intermediaries trusted sources; otherwise their opinion would not be taken into account. The credibility of informants is certainly assessed against the backdrop of good relationships, but people may also trust persons whom they meet through casual encounters, or of whom they expect a predictable behavior given the trustee's membership in a specific reference group of informants. Trust is therefore associated with the trustors’ expectations. A migrant worker and his employer, interviewed separately, justified their engagement in an employment relationship by the fact that they ‘knew each other’. But they did not maintain strong ties. They had developed mutual expectations based on their prior encounters. They had met because the worker used to spend some evenings on the farm of his current employer and had offered him once his services.

When weak ties characterize relations, trust does not seem to be a determining factor to consolidate the employment relationship. Weak ties combine with expectations generated by the kind of (biased) information that informants (workers or employers)
provide, as well as expectations based on employers’ representations of foreign workers and vice versa, which are likely to influence hiring decisions. Waldinger aptly argues that migrant workers’ recommendations function particularly well “when the boss thinks that birds of a feather flock together, and likes the birds he currently has” (2003: 350). Employers may expect that the members of a given social group behave in a similar way, including the members of a family, of a particular community or a country, or people who profess a certain religion. A care worker, for example mentioned that her employer was likely to hire “only Polish” or “only my relatives” because she expected them to behave as she did (Interview R.21.12.10).

The former suggests that weak ties and expectations combined may intervene in recruitment mediation. Some of the outcomes of these systems of referrals are discussed below.

The outcomes of network-mediated recruitment

A major outcome of network-mediated recruitment practices is that they reduce, to a certain extent, the potential uncertainties and reservations that employers and workers may have prior to engaging in a new employment relationship. Waldinger argues that network recruitment improves the quality and quantity of information available to both employers and workers sets common understandings that shape the employment relationships (1997: 1). Networks contain also candidate-screening mechanisms that benefit employers. Sassen notes that “… [e]mployees are likely to know their employer’s preferences and will channel what they consider to be appropriate members of their networks into any job openings that arise at their workplace” (1995: 110). In eldercare for example, owing to the nature of the jobs, employers are compelled, perhaps even more than in the agricultural sector, to rely on referrals, as it is difficult to assess the workers’ interpersonal skills and dispositions.

The screening and pre-selection of new workers is further facilitated by the fact that workers, employers, and their respective contacts constitute relatively sealed networks. For example, an Indian worker was fired, according to the employer, because the person was not willing to work with cows. In order to find a substitute, interestingly, the employer turned to the Indian community, even when she associated the reluctance of her former employee to work with cows with his ethnicity. This is partly explained by the fact that turning to a different community implies the pre-existence of contacts or social ties with the members of that community, which the employer in my example may not have had. The employer in question entrusted an Indian worker with the task of screening, within his own community, the candidates capable of satisfying the requirements for the vacant post. To hire migrant workers “I rely on my intuition, and of course on them [workers]; they know each other better”, she argues (Interview C.11.5.09).

Besides pre-screening, employers delegate other responsibilities to migrant workers, such as the provision of on-the-job training to new recruits; especially when language or social aspects (including gender) impose actual or perceived communication barriers with workers. A female employer who has recruited three male workers admitted that she felt that her role as an authority and a woman made workers uncomfortable. She delegates, therefore, candidate screening and on-the-job training responsibilities to the senior workers (Interview R.23.8.11).
Enforceable trust makes more effective the screening and on-the-job-training apparatus (Sassen 1995). Although strong ties not always justify referrals, it is unlikely that employees recommend just anyone. Self-interest and prestige may intervene in migrant workers' screening processes:

Question: If a friend of yours wanted to come and do the same job that you do, what would be your advice?

Employee: First of all, it must be someone whom I trust enough to bring her here; I must trust her... it must be someone that I can vouch for. (Interview G.4.1.11)

Question: What would be your advice for a person who wants to come here and do the same job than you do?

Employee: In my town I know few people I trust, like to bring them here, or to recommend them to my employer. Whenever I had to return, for example, I called my daughter, because I know my daughter is good, she does it with her heart... (Interview R.21.12.10)

In short, network-mediated procedures allow employers to get information on candidates, and to reduce the cost of advertising vacancies, with a potential guarantee of satisfaction. Network-mediated recruitment is likely to reduce the uncertainties inherent in engaging in a new employment relationship for workers as well, especially for care workers. In domestic service, subjectivity plays a major role (perhaps more than in agriculture) in the assessment of potential employers and job descriptions. The probability of finding a 'good' or a 'bad' employer is equally high. Indeed, care workers tend to recommend one another what are perceived as good jobs. Ludwika, for example, was encouraged by a friend of hers who assured her that “all the families are good in Ragusa”, even if Ludwika did not speak Italian fluently and was scared, she argues, she decided to venture out. “I'm not scared, not anymore; these Italians are good, the families, the job...” she says (Interview M.4.1.11).

The former shows how imperfect information, based on the judgments of trusted sources, shapes migration decisions and effectively reduces the anxieties associated with the new employment relationship. The actual appraisal of employers comes at a later stage:

My sister told me ‘come, it’s not like you think, you had a bad experience in the north, but here’s different’. She told me that she had already met my employer and his family; she said they were good people... she insisted: ‘first come and see by yourself... if you don’t like it or if it’s not good enough for you, then you go back home, basta, no one can oblige you to stay’. When I arrived they asked me how long I wanted to stay, I said ‘I don’t know’. First we need to see how we find with each other... and then three, four, five months, one year passed. It’s been three years since I’m here. (Interview V.3.1.11)

Besides channeling information and reducing uncertainty, networks act as normative structures, sometimes to the advantage of employers. They impose obligations to their members that influence the outcomes of their mediation. Enforceable trust, for example, may compel the members of a household, a network or a migrant group to take jobs that are not necessarily attractive, or to maintain an employment relationship, sometimes jeopardizing their opportunities for upward mobility, as in the case of Samia. Samia is a part-time cleaner. She lives in the countryside, in a house that belongs to her father’s employer. She would have preferred to live in the city. She is an IT expert, but has never sought for job opportunities outside domestic service or, for that matter, another employer in the sector. She is deeply grateful to her father’s employer who applied for her work permit, and has let her live in a house of his property. She has not envisaged quitting her job and affirms that her employer is good; they have never had an argument.
Samia’s obligations towards her father and the father’s employer have led her to remain in the domestic sector despite her qualifications.

Another outcome of network-mediated recruitment refers to the fact that vacancies are taken out of the market, eliminating potential competition among workers from different networks. Outsiders to each particular employer-worker network are effectively excluded from circles of trust and referral systems. Waldinger (1997, 2003) describes this as “social closure”. He applies the concept specifically to the analysis of the functioning of ethnic migrant networks, which can be extended to other social groups. He argues that migrant networks not only put pressure on employers to hire people from a limited pool of candidates, but they can also act as filters of candidates of diverse ethnic origins.

Although a different kind of study with a specific focus on hiring networks would be needed to yield further evidence as far as the situation in Ragusa is concerned, there are indications that employers and workers of specific migrant groups constitute relatively sealed hiring networks in both eldercare and agriculture. The following interview quotes illustrate this point:

Employer: When she went back to Romania, she recommended three substitutes, all of them Romanian [mentions the names]. They all came thanks to Daciana... they are all Romanian because it’s her who put me in touch with these persons. Also because it’s difficult to hire people who have not been recommended... (Interview N.26.8.11)

Employer: We trust in people we know... they are perhaps relatives or friends of the workers who are already employed here... Why do we trust them? Because a worker who is here can give indications to the others about the firm... the person [new recruit] needs to understand where he’s going to arrive... I’m talking about my firm, I don’t know about the rest... In fact, I have never hired a Romanian; I have never had other workers than Tunisians. In my firm there are only and exclusively Tunisians... (Interview F.26.8.11)

These examples further show that ethnicity is often essentialized, and that it may influence employers’ preferences. Employer’s preferences are not always based on direct or prior experiences or contacts with specific groups, but may be a by-product of the closed circles of trust they constitute with workers.

Overall, network mediation has the potential to reduce the costs and uncertainties related to the recruitment process (both material and non-material), offering information, pre-screening and training of candidates, and reducing competition among candidates from different migrant groups, which is seemingly a side-effect of the closure (and solidarity) of the employer-worker networks. On this basis, network-mediated recruitment ties to migration management technology of governing migrant labor and its optimization at the micro-level, with some advantages for employers. In what follows, other kinds of network-mediated recruitment are discussed.

The two sides of network-mediated recruitment: solidarity vs profit

Migration is selective. It is facilitated by the accumulation of various resources: financial, social, informational, and cultural, which can be accessed through membership in social networks. While early studies on migrant networks emphasized cohesion, affective ties and solidarity as key characteristics of migrant communities (Choldin 1973, Massey et al. 1993), it is now recognized that power relations affect social networks and that the distribution of resources among the members of a network can result both from altruism
and self-interest. Networks impose obligations to their members. As Portes notes, the “resources acquired through social capital often carry the expectation of reciprocity at some point in the future” (1995: 12), although the conditions, the nature (material and non-material rewards) and timeline of repayment may not be strictly fixed. My data suggest that in Ragusa the two sides of social capital, solidarity and self-interest co-exist within migrant networks. An example of the intersection of solidarity and economic concerns was provided by an employer:

When they arrive in Italy, migrants are hosted by a relative, a colleague, a friend, a co-national. What can the host offer? ‘Listen, I’ll check with my boss, perhaps he needs more help, and he may hire you’, or ‘you can stay here for a week, I’ll make some calls…, let’s see if we can find you a job’. Once this chapter is over, if the migrant has not managed to find a job… he leaves Ragusa and moves north… For the host, housing a newcomer represents a cost… He must support himself and the other; the host logically thinks ‘if I make thirty euros a day and I spend ten for food, it’s okay for four days, a week, not twenty days!’ (Interview L.11.5.09)

48 This is not to say that genuine solidarity does not exist, but it seems to manifest under specific circumstances. Although, the employer cited below essentializes social capital as if it was a fixed property of certain communities or groups, the example illustrates how solidarity functions within some networks:

Employer: They are well organized… In Terracina there’s a small tribe [laughs], a community. They all know each other; whenever they need anything they rely on one another. Last month, this worker had a small accident. He fell and got injured. Within two hours, the entire community had learned the news …e-v-e-r-y-o-n-e called him, all his friends…

Question: So they are friends, not relatives?

Employer: Most of them are friends, not family. They really have a strong sense of solidarity; even if they don’t know each other they help one another. This is typical of them [Indians]. (Interview R.23.811)

49 It is important to emphasize the distinction that Coleman (1988) and Portes (1995) drew between what social capital is, and what it does. Social capital is a function of social structures that enables individuals to realize their interests. Its utilization depends upon the capacity of individuals to access certain resources as members of those social structures. This capacity is constrained by the characteristics of the networks themselves, and by the individuals’ position within them, as it affects the degree of access to, and control over the resources of the network.

50 The assumption that relations within migration networks are symmetrical has been increasingly scrutinized (Krissman 2005, Elrick and Lewandowska 2008). Institutional approaches to international migration not only admit that migrant networks are embedded in power relations (Goss and Lindquist 1995), but also extend the concept of network to that of migrant institutions to account for the different actors, rules and structures organizing labor migration (e.g. employers, private recruitment agencies, illegal employment brokers). Viewed thus, migration appears as the product of the strategic actions of knowledgeable individuals within the migrant institution. From such a perspective, one may admit that self-interest can underlie the practices of agents operating at different levels (i.e. from the provision of services by smugglers, to donor schemes for migration-related initiatives).

51 A good example of the participation of self-interested agents in recruitment processes in southern Italy’s agricultural sector is the so-called caporalato (see also Reyneri 1998, Mingione and Quassoli 2000). This system involves the control and distribution of (mostly
irregular) jobs by informal recruiters, who may be Italian citizens or migrant workers themselves. The recruitment of Indian farm workers in Ragusa is sometimes mediated by such a kind of organization. Questioned about the channels through which he found his current job in Ragusa, a worker explained that he was first sent to Latina (near Rome), where there is a large Indian community. He then called a friend, who in turn referred him to “the guy in charge” to be transferred to Ragusa (Interview M.14.5.09). Another worker explained he was “told to come to this place” by a “friend who is always helping us” (Interview F.11.5.09). An employer provided further details about how the system operates:

They all know each other; there’s a guy, a friend that places everyone by turns. He’s like the boss of the zone, the one who rotates them...

Do you know what the caporalato is? There’s this guy in [name of town], the caporale... he offers accommodation, and food... No; maybe only accommodation. Each guy [worker] gives him five euros per working day; he’s Indian... In fact, four years ago there were lots of workers who circulated through that house, they arrived in large numbers every week... [...] If they come here is because a friend has sent them to this place; then there’s the focal point of the zone, I don’t know whether to call him caporale. Anyways, there’s someone in charge, who manages irregular workers... because... no one had a passport when they got here, no one. Someone gets a monthly fraction... In my opinion it’s like this, because it’s strange that nobody has a passport, either they ‘lost’ it or they ‘left’ it with a friend... Is it possible that it happens to everyone? It can happen to one or two, but everyone? [...] It’s not that they leave the passport, but their passports are confiscated... (Interview S.14.5.09)

As Krissman notes, recruiters are just one among many actors who can make profit from migrants (2005: 21). In fact, it is not uncommon that family members, friends or acquaintances that act as recruitment intermediaries charge migrant workers for their services. There are various kinds of financial transactions associated with recruitment mediation that assimilate the later to a ‘migration industry’. Building on Mahler’s (1995) insights, in her study of Filipina domestic workers in Rome, Salazar Parreñas (2001) found that their segregation from the mainstream society intensified a desire to accelerate the accumulation of savings, and put pressure on them to produce surplus income. However, their segregation confined the sources of profit to the community. In a similar vein, some migrant workers in Ragusa may generate surplus income turning their fellow co-nationals into sources of profit, by commodifying services, or favors including recruitment mediation. ‘Taxation’ for the provision of certain brokerage services is a common practice among family members. A male worker explained he had to pay a ‘tax’ to his relatives back in India, who had pooled money (12,000 euros) to “send him to Italy” (Interview K.27.12.10).

That relatives pool resources to help a member of the household accomplish a migration project is not new. What is interesting is that those practices are often assimilated to gifts, and that repayment is not generally assumed to take the form of a financial compensation. It may also involve non-material rewards such as recognition or other favors. The above example, instead, emphasizes the commercial nature of some forms of reciprocity. There are indications that family taxation is also a common practice among other migrant communities of the Indian subcontinent in Italy. Pathirage and Collyer (2011) found that migrants who act as sponsors in Italy may sell visas to their relatives.
They offer the example of a young Sri Lankan who paid his uncle a considerable sum for undertaking the bureaucratic procedures to obtain a visa for him.

Some care workers also reported commercial transactions associated with migration and recruitment. Tatiana, for example, came to Ragusa in 2005, ‘brought by a friend’. Her friend looked after an old lady until her husband found a job in the greenhouses and they had to move to the countryside. Tatiana took the woman’s job. “Clearly, I had to pay for the post, you had to pay”, she explains using a sarcastic tone: “if you want a job as a caregiver, you have to reimburse the one that gets you the job; that’s how it works”. When I asked whether there were standardized fees associated with job referrals, Tatiana and her husband explained: “it depends on how much the person that you will replace asks for”. Tatiana paid 200 euros, but she knew people who paid up to 500 euros, depending on the “length of employment and the length of stay, which can go up to five or six months, or a year...” Other people, they told me, paid “on a daily basis, 50 euros, 100 euros, or according to one’s income”. Other care workers reported similar monetary transactions in order to secure a job and accommodation upon arrival in Ragusa. These practices, according to the press, are found also in Romanian-run civil society and faith-based organizations (Brunetto 2010).

No Polish respondent reported to have paid for her post. Nevertheless, I met a woman who acted as a focal point, and who offers accommodation and rotates jobs, as she claims, among her newly arrived co-nationals. “Her system”, as she puts it, is the following: “When there is a vacancy a Polish woman calls me: ‘Listen, I want to go there.’ Then they wait; I tell them: ‘No, no, wait one more week’. That’s my system.” I interviewed her first at her employers’ place, and she invited me to meet her later on in her own flat. She is a live-in worker, so she does not actually reside in that apartment; she houses newcomers there. The apartment is small but has three rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom that her “tenants” share.

Reciprocity can take multiple forms besides monetary compensation. When reciprocity expectations (material or non-material) are not met, defaulters may be sanctioned (through criticism, gossip, etc.) or shunned. Moreover, the commodification of favors that are expected to be provided free of cost, out of solidarity within the network, or situations that are perceived as abusive (e.g. charging high fees, or failing to return a favor) can engender contradictory feelings and thorny friendships. Indeed, I could perceive a sense of alienation when respondents described how they were increasingly cautious when engaging in any kind of relationship with their co-nationals. An Indian worker who had been a victim of a scam initiated by a ‘friend’ who promised him a job, contradicted himself when he was explaining how he met this person who, in the end, turned out not to be his friend. Later in the conversation, he acknowledged the fact that he was lonely, or at least felt that way:

Employee: I met my friend in Terracina.
Question: Your friend, the one who got you the job?
Employee: No; no friend, cosi, cosi friend [more or less friend].
Question: Do you have other friends here?
Employee: In Ragusa? No, not any friends. [...] [In] Ragusa [I have] no friends, not anybody, no family members... me, if[m] alone... no new friends. (Interview A.23.8.11)

Other workers said they were reluctant to establish strong ties with the members of their respective communities. Many care workers prefer to spend their free afternoons alone. It was not uncommon to hear, from my interlocutors, that people “make trouble”, they
“talk behind your back”, “they talk too much”, “they’re bad”, “they are jealous”, or “they gossip about the families: ‘Have you seen what your Madame has done?’, ‘the other did this, the other did that…” Farm workers seem to share these views, one worker claimed he “never hang out with my fellow countrymen” because he had had “many bad experiences... When you give them a hand... they are not grateful”, he argued. (Interview A.12.5.09)

Overall, while developing friendships and maintaining social ties with the larger community of co-nationals is desirable (e.g. to have access to information), weak ties seem to be preferred over strong ties. Mirroring the findings of Salazar Parreñas (2001) concerning the experience of Filipina domestic workers in Rome, my data suggest that in Ragusa, the commodification of favors generates a sense of alienation, regardless of the composition, density, or strength of the social ties that bind network members together. The former points to the importance of uncovering the different facets of the mobilization of social capital in the study of migrants’ labor market incorporation.

Chapter conclusion: Social capital and labor market segmentation

Social networks and the mobilization of social capital play an important role in migrants’ incorporation into the Ragusan labor market. Besides perpetuating labor migration flows to Ragusa, networks play a key role in recruitment mediation and influence migrants’ labor market outcomes by shaping their job search paths (through a system of recommendations and rotation), and providing job seekers with place-based-knowledge. In so doing, they influence migration decisions, as well as migrants’ assessment of the vacant posts in the receiving area.

Evidence from Ragusa also confirms that networks shape migrants’ labor market outcomes, effectively channeling them to specific, gendered positions (eldercare female-dominated and farm male-dominated jobs). However, the links between the composition of women’s and men’s networks and their gendered labor market outcomes are less obvious. Sassen argues that women’s networks tend to involve more relatives than co-workers (1995: 103) and that this explains some of the disadvantages women face (e.g. lower wages) as a result of network-mediated recruitment. My data are insufficient to advance a conclusion in this regard, which points to a potential area for future research. Employers’ hiring decisions, instead, do contribute to the reproduction of the sexual division of labor in Ragusa (see Chapter 4).

Overall, network-mediated recruitment demonstrates that economic transactions, such as the establishment of an employment relationship, are embedded in social structures. Trust and expectations are the two factors that underlie the operation of the systems of referrals and rotation that enable migrant workers to secure a job before or upon arrival in Ragusa. The former questions the assumption that labor demand and supply meet freely in the labor market. Network-mediated recruitment reduces competition among candidates for specific jobs, by taking job vacancies out of the market, and effectively excluding outsiders from recruitment processes managed by relatively sealed networks of employers and migrant workers from specific groups.

Additionally, some shared outcomes of network-mediated recruitment for care and farm migrant workers, include the fact that rotation systems mobilize migrants (and non-
migrants) both in Italy and in distant countries, confirming that care and farm workers currently employed in Ragusa tend to move within local, yet trans-territorial, labor markets. Rotation creates opportunities to detach temporarily from the receiving context. Consequently, rotation may enable migrants to build resilience towards hard working conditions over long, but discontinued periods of time. This can be said to contribute to the continuous replenishment of migrant labor stocks in agriculture and domestic service and to its optimization.

Also, migration decisions and job assessments often take place within a context of imperfect information (or rather, place-based-knowledge). Place-based-knowledge reduces the range of jobs available to migrants, resulting in their clustering in specific low-wage, low-status occupations. Ironically, migrants’ accumulation goals may influence the breadth of information they have access to (e.g. limited to income regardless of job descriptions, the characteristics of the workplace, and so on), and on which they base their migration and employment decisions.

Moreover, network-mediated recruitment functions thanks to the trust built-in employer-worker relationships, as well as in the relationships employers and migrant workers maintain with their respective contacts. Network-mediated recruitment has thus the potential to reduce the uncertainties inherent in the commencement of a new employment relationship for employers and workers. Mutual expectations can have a similar effect than trust in reducing the anxieties and reservations employers and workers may have prior to establishing an employment relationship.

Finally, migrant networks are embedded in power relations that enable and constrain migrant workers’ ability to mobilize social capital depending on their position. Also, solidarity or altruism, and self-interest or accumulation goals co-exist and manifest, for example in the many forms that reciprocity can take within the networks. Leveraging on social capital for recruitment purposes may have different implications for migrant workers. For instance, the commodification of services or favors may be perceived by underprivileged network members as unacceptable. This can engender a sense of alienation and lead to the strengthening of weak ties within different migrant communities.

I conclude from these insights that network-mediated recruitment favors, perhaps inadvertently, the emergence of a self-recruiting, self-training and self-disciplining (by means of enforceable trust) migrant labor supply. Such an optimization of recruitment and of migrant labor seems to be consistent with neoliberalism as a technology of governing migration, or with the migration management approach. I do not wish to imply, however, that employers and migrant workers are fully subjected to these techniques. As knowledgeable agents they may reproduce or contest optimization processes as discussed in the following.
NOTES

1. The role of networks both in perpetuating migration flows, and shaping migrants’ incorporation within host societies has been extensively discussed in migration literature since the early 1980s. Migrant networks influence the structure, composition and direction of migration flows and migrants’ incorporation in receiving contexts, including by mediating recruitment through the provision of information and shaping newcomers’ job search paths (Gurak and Caces 1992, Massey et al. 1993, Castles and Miller 2009, Goss and Lindquist 1995, Faist 1997, Sassen 1995).

2. Bourdieu defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group” (1986: 248). Coleman (1988) believes that social capital is an important resource of social structures that enables actors to achieve their interests. Portes concurs that social capital is “the capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures” (1995: 12).

3. Rational choice theory pays special attention to the risk-taking attitude of individuals. Its basic premise is that when a person can choose between at least two courses of action, she is likely to favor the one for which perceived gains are greater (Appelrouth and Edles 2012, chapter 11, Exchange and rational choice theories, James S. Coleman, pp. 444-452).

4. I use the word circles to emphasize the fact that employers and workers (of specific nationality and gender) tend to form relatively sealed networks.

5. Building on structuration theory, Goss and Lindquist define an international migration institution as “a relatively permanent feature of social life that results from the regularization of social interaction for the purposes of overseas employment and which in turn regulates interaction and structures access to overseas employment through the operation of institutional rules and resources. It is usually a complex institution consisting of knowledgeable individuals and the agents of organizations (from migrant associations to multinational corporations [MNCs]) and other institutions (from kinship to the state).” (1995: 336)
Chapter 4. Employer-worker relationships: buying “personhood”

1 The employment relationships of foreign farm and care workers in Ragusa are complex and asymmetrical. Such relations depend on the definition and continuous negotiation of the respective social positions, and boundaries between employers and workers, along the lines of class, ethnicity, nationality, and gender. Although employment relationships involve a commercial transaction (the exchange of labor against wages), the human dimension of such transaction renders more complex the negotiation of social positions. Indeed, employers’ practices intervene in the processes of subjectification that influence migrant workers’ occupational and class position.

2 A few theoretical considerations underlying this analysis deserve to be briefly introduced. A social position is “defined at the intersection of axes of signification, domination and legitimation”, which entail the specification of “identities” within a network of social relations (Giddens 1984: 83). This definition presupposes the existence power imbalances between employers and workers. The definition of social positions also entails identity construction processes. Identity is here conceived of as a social construction that is both relational (grounded in social interaction or interpersonal relations), and contextual (situated in time and space). Identity is socially constructed and constantly negotiated rather than ‘contained’ within or passively assumed by social groups or persons (Barth 1969, Rummens 2003, Wimmer 2007).

3 I rely on concepts originating in theories related to intersectionality and on the construction of difference (boundary work) to explore the ways in which employers and migrant workers negotiate their respective identities and positions. In ethnic studies, intersectionality has shed light on the multiple and overlapping factors (e.g. age, gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, religion, nationality, language) that intervene in the construction of identity and diversity (see Donaldson and Jedwab 2003). In addition, the concept of ‘boundary work’, in cultural sociology, has been useful to examine identity construction and identification and, in the literature concerning domestic service, to explore the construction of difference along the lines of gender and ethnicity in the employment relations of migrant domestic workers (see Lutz 2011 and 2008). Based on the concept of boundary work, Lan (2003) elaborated a typology of the strategies that employers and Filipino domestic workers in Taiwan deploy to negotiate socio-categorical
boundaries (class, ethnicity, nationality), as well as socio-spatial boundaries (separating public and private spheres in private homes). I use Lan’s typology to explore the boundary work strategies that Ragusan employers and migrant workers employ when negotiating social status in their daily interaction.

Finally, this research attempts a systematic comparison of the processes of subject-making of care and farm migrant workers in Ragusa and how these agents shape such processes. The comparison builds on a major characteristic of farm and eldercare work in Ragusa: the conflation of the private sphere of the home and the public sphere of the workplace. The vast majority of the workers interviewed dwell in their employers’ homes or on the farms. Although farm workers may not share the same private (home) space with employers, as they usually lodge in separate facilities, they establish personalized, intimate and emotionally charged employment relationships, similar to those that characterize the live-in modality of domestic service.

In what follows, I examine how employers’ preferences and hiring decisions shape the construction of migrant workers’ occupational status. I then examine the strategies of boundary work deployed by employers in the daily negotiation of their social position vis-à-vis migrant workers. The negotiation of employers’ and workers’ identities and status reveals the micro-politics of the employment of eldercare and agricultural migrant workers and the mechanisms that operate in the construction of these emblematic figures of migration.

Skillful and manageable: marketable talents and hiring decisions

The incorporation of migrant workers into the receiving labor markets is a fundamental step in the construction of their occupational and class identities, as occupational hierarchies are associated with notions of prestige and social status. In the human capital approach labor market outcomes are associated with the natural aptitudes and the (formal) competencies of workers. The economic sociology of immigration emphasizes instead the structuration of labor markets and the role of social networks in shaping migrants’ labor market outcomes. By and large, agency is not sufficiently integrated into these explanations.

Employers contribute to constructing the occupational identities of migrant workers as well. For instance, employers resort to both market criteria (skills and competencies) and social criteria (ethnicity, gender) in the construction of the work ethics and the identities of migrant workers, including their ‘suitability’ to perform agricultural and eldercare jobs, and their ‘manageability’. These practices shape their hiring decisions, notwithstanding migrant workers’ qualifications or prior work experience, as discussed below.

Language, skill, love: marketable talent in farm and eldercare jobs

Employers’ preferences tend to shape the selection criteria justifying their hiring decisions. What do employers look for? My data suggest that in low-status occupations, such as farm work and eldercare, marketable talents may involve a mix of technical and social competencies, which are not always tangible or easily measured. Questioned about
the competencies required to perform farm and care jobs, employers in Ragusa often prioritized a range of interpersonal or social skills and practical know-how over workers’ professional qualifications. Employers tend to seek for a combination of hard and soft skills, or what Jenkins (1986) called functional (job-specific), suitability and acceptability (non-job-specific) criteria. Broadly defined, hard skills include technical and administrative knowledge that is normally observable and quantifiable; soft skills refer instead to a person’s interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence, which are more difficult to assess.

Regardless of the sector of employment, Italian or Sicilian language proficiency, and according to the discourse of employers, practical know-how, suitability, ‘love’ for the job, and ‘availability’ seem to be the main marketable talents of migrant workers who incorporate into farm work and eldercare in Ragusa.

Most employers underlined the importance of Italian language proficiency and job-specific know-how. Being able to communicate with the worker is the first condition to establish an employment relationship. Language may also be used as a factor of discrimination. A care worker argued that some employers either refuse to hire workers who do not have a good command of Italian, or that employers may use this criterion to hold wages down (Interview R.21.12.10). This was confirmed by other interlocutors. Migrant workers are aware of the importance of acquiring an acceptable level of Italian language proficiency, not only to communicate but also to advance their occupational and social status. As one worker noted: “...we need to understand the language, and then we can find a better job, better status, and we understand the legislation.... If we don’t know the legislation we can’t fight for better pay”. (Interview F.11.5.09)

Besides Italian language skills, many workers and employers emphasized the importance of a good command of the Sicilian dialect as, regardless of the sector of employment, most employers use the Sicilian dialect as their first language (some elderly, in fact, speak only Sicilian dialect). As a result, many farm and care workers in my sample expressed themselves in a mix of Italian and Sicilian dialect.

Concerning marketable skills in eldercare, these include cooking, cleaning, tidying, washing, ironing, sewing skills, as well as organizational skills (managing the household, buying groceries, organizing meals). Many elderly employers stressed migrant workers’ ability to cook as an important selection criterion. They seemed to be especially satisfied when workers had demonstrated an ability to cook Sicilian or Italian dishes or were willing to adapt to their taste. Workers confirmed the importance of their organizational and cooking skills, or their ability to meet the employers’ dietary requirements as criteria that influence employers’ hiring decisions, besides a wide range of interpersonal skills. The literature on domestic labor has long indicated that this is a ‘labor of love’. Lutz aptly observes that: “Arlie Hochschild (1995) and Joan Tronto (2008) understand care work in its full breath as consisting of caring ‘knowledge, action and feelings’ and thus comprising different (informal) activities ranging from comforting someone to feeding and bodily care” (2011: 6; see also Anderson 2000, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, Vandelac et al. 1988). The following quotes illustrate the complex mix of soft skills that care workers are expected to display:

Question: What would be the main requirements for this job?

Employer: Well, about the personality, first and foremost, I would hire someone who’s nice, not mute, not silent, she must be like a member of the family, not a stranger who is in my house, I don’t like that. In fact, before [name of employee] I had
another one, but I was so badly disappointed... We fired her. She stayed with us for three months, but she was dull, arrogant. Instead with this one I get along well, because she’s sociable and pleasant, we talk. [...] (Interview M.21.12.2010)

Employer: [...] My mother-in-law gets along well with [employee]; she has accepted her. Apart from that, she’s really competent, she’s trustworthy [...] she knows how to take my mother-in-law; she knows what her needs are.

Question: What do you expect from a worker?

Employer: Reliability, that’s essential; regardless of the nationality [...] It all depends on her personality, because this is an extremely ticklish job.

Question: How do you know if a person is reliable?

Employer: With my parents-in-law, [...] I realized that she was reliable because in the beginning I visited them regularly and I noticed that they were always calm, not anxious, they were clean, fed... she called me to ask small things, which made me think that she cared for them [...] My trust in her was reinforced by those details [...]. She managed to enter their [elderly] world gradually, she never pretended that they adapt to her; she never caused trouble. She simply tried to put order in the pre-existing rules in the family. (Interview N.26.8.11)

In the examples above and in most interviews, the employers emphasized the importance of empathy, trustworthiness, reliability, adaptability, and sympathy as essential skills to be able to provide eldercare. In the first case the employer constructed the figure of the ‘good worker’, nice, sociable, talkative, and pleasant, in opposition to the ‘bad’ worker (silent, dull, and arrogant). In both cases ‘getting along well’ with the worker was a crucial factor in a good employment relationship. In the second case, the employer highlighted the workers’ ability to understand ‘the order of things’, as well as her willingness to adapt to the pre-existing rules as a proof of her diligence. Additionally, a few employers praised the religious attitude displayed by some employees. In sum, as Gutiérrez-Rodríguez asserts, “[d]omestic work, as affective labor, thus, always engages with the production of well-being, livability, amiability and comfort” (2010: 4).

The construction of domestic and care workers’ own work ethics is seemingly aligned with employers’ expectations. Most workers emphasized the importance of their emotional intelligence and soft skills, such as patience, calm, sympathy, using a low voice tone or nice words, being flexible, joyful, and deferential, ‘warm’, ‘sweet’, hardworking, and ready to adapt to employers’ preferences. A care worker constructed her professionalism around her sense of altruism claiming that she “has a heart”, as opposed to “someone who cares only about money” (Interview R.21.12.10). Another caregiver built her work ethics around her ability to socialize, to “familiarize herself with the atmosphere” (Interview R1.1.3.11). A part-time housecleaner mentioned that a crucial requirement in her job is to avoid “touching the things of the employers” or causing them “nuisance”. She constructed her professionalism by highlighting her emotional intelligence and honesty: being “warm, not cold, and correct, because in many houses people leave money or valuable things intentionally, to test you” (Interview G.4.1.11). Yet another worker stressed the importance of ‘feelings’ in eldercare: “this job is about being capable of living together [...] You’re together 24 hours; it’s a way of living; it involves feelings, sympathy for one another” (Interview R.21.12.10). Most care workers who consider that they have a good job are reluctant to change employers, because of the uncertainties and efforts inherent in rebuilding such complex relationships.

Employers in the agricultural sector construct migrant workers’ occupational identities and work ethics based on criteria that involve practical know-how and interpersonal skills, like their counterparts in the domestic sector. Most employers underlined the
importance of both job-specific know-how and interpersonal skills as requirements to undertake farm jobs. Technical expertise shapes hiring decisions owing to the nature of the main chores involved in farm jobs (e.g. manual or industrial milking, the operation of agricultural machines, etc.). Yet, socially constructed criteria are equally important in recruitment processes and can even justify wage disparities among workers:

Employer: Everything depends on what they're able to do. Their qualifications count. This guy, for example, he has a driver's license, he learned Italian in four weeks [...]. And he's reliable... he can work with the computer, he's extremely competent. We have 120-130 cows, he knows them all, he doesn't even need to see the collar to recognize them; he could recognize them by looking at the udder... Question: Is there a difference between his salary and the salary of other employees?
Employer: Yes, yes; because he's reliable. For example, when the supplier of the fodder comes, he supervises everything. I can also leave him a check; he's trustworthy. The other guy, he's a bit older; he's really nice and respectful, but he's not flexible. He doesn't speak Italian, and he does nothing to learn the language. The other one [...] he arrived recently... but can't pronounce a word in Italian. In my opinion, he's young. The first time I took him to the supermarket [gives directions], well, have you seen a kid that goes for the first time to a funfair? Well, he was marveled...He's not competent... A person like him, who is not reliable, can do nothing but menial work. (Interview R.23.8.11)

The owner of a dairy factory provides another example. She hired a worker who was recommended to her by a former employee, but subsequently fired him because of his ‘apathy’ and ‘unsuitability’ for the job:

Maria! We had lots of troubles; we couldn't understand each other! Believe me, he was driving me mad! [...] I really tried to be patient, but he couldn't understand how to make the cheese! After fifteen days he had been here he didn't change his attitude, like 'okay, I'll try to learn'; not at all! [...] I thought what on earth am I doing? I'm paying him to do the job I'm doing myself? Understanding the language is important, but it's not only about the language, is about being pragmatic, [...] he was hopeless... simply not suitable for this job... (Interview C.11.5.09)

Employers are aware of the demanding nature of agricultural work and many portray it as a 'special' kind of job, constructing the image of the suitable worker by naturalizing a person's inclination or predisposition to perform agricultural work. A person's suitability is often assessed both in technical terms (e.g. the level of technical knowledge a worker has about milking) and in more abstract terms (e.g. being passionate about the animals, having a “natural” aptitude to work with animals):

Question: Are there any specific requirements to perform this job?
Employer: Well, first and foremost, you must be calm. You have to be passionate about the animals, because if you don't like them you can't do this kind of job [...] When I'm about to hire someone, I take the person to the milking room, if she's going to be hired for milking. Then I explain her tasks related to the preparation of the cows for milking, and the post-milking; I immediately notice whether a person is suitable or not to do this.
Question: How do you identify a suitable person?
Employer: Basically, I can tell if someone is suitable or not if we start having problems with the animals, mastitis, or if the animals get nervous, because animals feel it...If the person does her work with pleasure the attitude of the animals changes radically. (Interview R.23.8.11)

Employer: All people have individual talents, there are people who are suitable and people who are not suitable to perform certain jobs, within one week you can tell who's suitable and who's not, within one week you can recognize a good worker
and a worker who's not as good. You notice immediately if the person is capable of doing this kind of job or not. (Interview F.26.8.11)

18 As in eldercare, employers stressed the fact that farm work requires 'love'. The term love, as employed by many farm supervisors in my sample, implies different things; from willingness to accept low wages, to coping with hard working conditions or with the lack of independence inherent in live-in farm work:

This kind of job, either you love it, or you hate it and you simply don't do it. Those who focus on the financial side of the job should leave and seek for better-paid jobs; construction, for example, is well-paid [...]. You must feel like you fit in this work context. There are people who think 'I work eight hours straight and then I want to forget about work, I want to detach myself from that role, I want to go out with my friends, I want to be free'. It's a personal choice. And it's the same for us employers and for the workers. Why did I choose to do this job? Because it suits my personality [...] I would become nuts if I worked every day for eight hours in an office; here under the sun or the rain I'm happy, and it's the same, I think, for employees. (Interview L.11.5.09)

Question: Are there any specific requirements to perform this job?
Employer: You must have some basic knowledge, that is, you must love this job, this is important in any job, but this job is special, so you must show a certain predisposition for this kind of job [...]. That's it. The main requirement is to love this job [...]. A raise, for example, depends on the worker's constancy and professionalism, it depends on how reliable the person is.

Question: Could you explain 'professionalism'?
Employer: Professionalism, I don't know, here we milk, it's about how you do it, the quality of your work... some people think that zootechny is not, let's say, professional, but there's a lot of professionalism involved in this job, especially for certain tasks such as milking or feeding the animals. You have to know when to stop the milking machine, how to milk the cows; you need to organize the meals of the animals... (Interview C.11.5.09)

19 In the example above, the term 'professionalism' refers both to technical knowledge and to such things as reliability, a natural 'predisposition' to undertake agricultural work, and 'love' for this kind of job.

20 Availability and adaptability are also part of the qualities that, according to employers, are required to perform agricultural work. Again, these terms imply different things, such as responsibility or the willingness to work overtime or at night, as illustrated below:

Question: Are there any specific requirements to perform this job?
Employer: They should adapt to the dynamics of the farm. For example, if a calf is born during the night [name of employee] he doesn't get up to go check if everything's all right. I insist, this is a special kind of job...

Question: And what do you expect from a worker?
Employer: They should have some basic knowledge, but not everyone does [...] he had never touched a cow before, he had buffaloes, but he had never worked with cows; he lacks experience because the technology we use here is different. They don't have experience. [...] Sometimes they don't like to assume more responsibility. [...] - um - sometimes [pause] it's not even a matter of money. They have a working schedule; if there's anything important to do within that schedule, they do it. But they don't get up at night. At night, they sleep. [About employee] He's a good worker, but sometimes he's a bit distracted, I can complain of the fact that they're not diligent. This irritates me, because they're dealing with living creatures, a distraction can cause serious problems. (Interview S.14.5.09)
In the example above, the employer highlights the importance of prior experience, technical knowledge, diligence and flexibility as important requirements to perform agricultural work. However, the term responsibility implies an expected availability on the part of the workers to work overtime or at night. The employer further uses specific cultural codes in constructing workers’ identity and professionalism. He stressed the fact that the (Indian) worker had no prior experience working with cows, and created a boundary between a civilized Us and a primitive They by relating the workers’ lack of experience to a disparity in the farming technologies used in Ragusa and in the (underdeveloped) sending area. In the following example, another employer creates social boundaries along ethnic and technical lines, denoting the low-status position reserved to foreign workers in Ragusa:

I think here at the farm, we're obliged to continue hiring third country nationals to work with the animals. And I insist: I really like how Indians work and I'll continue hiring and regularizing Indians. In the fields, the situation is more complicated because they need to use the tractor. Ragusans have a driver's license, and they know how to operate a specific kind of equipment. As you have seen, it's not that easy [driving a tractor]. [...] I don't dare to assign such a task to a person who... I mean, I'm not saying that the person [foreign worker] is not competent, but they don't live in this reality, because there [country of origin] they don't have the same technology. (Interview R.23.8.11)

Many cattle farms have diversified their activities including in the dairy industry. The production of cheese requires specific technical knowledge. In Ragusa, dairymen are trained in the traditional production of some types of handmade cheese commercialized under controlled production labels. The owner of a farm mentioned that she would soon open a cheese factory. She currently employs three Indians who look after the cattle. When I asked her whether she envisaged hiring Indian personnel in the cheese factory, she explained that Indian workers do not have the necessary expertise to carry out the type of tasks that Ragusan dairymen perform. She plans to hire Ragusan dairymen, and eventually affiliate an Indian assistant. Such a constitution of migrant workers as ‘inexpert’ and ‘uncivilized’ others directly affects migrants’ occupational and social standing in Ragusa, narrowing their opportunities to fill higher positions in the local occupational hierarchy. In fact, Indian workers in particular are mostly entrusted with menial work and tasks related to animal care (see next section).

The ‘availability’ of workers is also directly associated with the live-in condition. This is a central quality used by most employers, regardless of the sector of employment, to craft the image of the good worker. Because elderly employers are sometimes dependent on care workers even to satisfy their basic needs, the availability of workers is essential in this sector. Similarly, live-in farm workers, who look after the animals, are expected to be permanently on call. Foreign workers’ perceived or actual availability constitutes an important reason why employers prefer to hire migrant workers rather than local workers both in agriculture and eldercare. The confluence of home and workplace leads employers to assume or to expect a greater commitment or dedication to work on the part of workers. In my sample, the term ‘availability’ was employed by farm supervisors and domestic employers in multiple contexts, from assumptions regarding workers’ greater dedication to work as a result of their family situation, to willingness to live in the countryside or to work round the clock:

Question: Why do you prefer foreign workers?
Employer: For two reasons. First, the local labor force is not attracted towards these jobs. Second, for an economic reason. You save when you hire foreigners. But their devotion to work is also greater. Because they’re single, and because they live here on the farm, even if they rest three hours every morning, they’re always available. (Interview L.11.5.09)

Question: Why did you hire them [foreign workers]?

Employer: Because in agriculture, and more precisely in zootechny, the worker must live in the countryside, with us, we live in the countryside. Zootechny requires –um– [pause] the employees must live on the farms because the animals require to be constantly attended, day and night. (Interview C.26.12.10)

Farm work entails special working hours. You get up early in the morning, even if you have some breaks during the day, there are no fixed rest days, no Sundays, no Easter, no Christmas... this is a limitation [for local workers]. (Interview S.14.5.09)

Ragusan workers are seasonal; not like third country nationals […]. I recruit [Ragusans] during sowing and harvest time […]. Third country workers, the Indian, they work 365 days a year, even if they rotate, because normally one goes back home, and they take turns. But it’s them who look after the animals, and the animals don’t go on holidays. (Interview R.23.8.11)

Thus far, the examination of employers’ preferences and hiring decisions indicates that they not only ‘purchase’ labor power but also ‘personhood’, as aptly argued by Anderson (2000, 2006) in her analyses of domestic service. In the following, I explore how employers’ hiring decisions also contribute to creating and maintaining sectorial ethnic hierarchies in the local labor market.

**Essentializing suitability and manageability**

There is an increasingly multi-national or ethnic labor pool in Ragusa, where the agricultural and care sector are gendered and segmented along nationality and ethnic lines. The essentialization of workers’ competencies and the construction of boundaries along ethnic, nationality or gender divides on the part of employers shape the occupational and social positions of migrant workers and contribute to reproducing the local labor market segmentation. Some of these ‘suitability’ markers relate to workers’ manageability, efficiency or reliability, revealing employers’ managerial or control concerns.

While employers minimized or denied the importance of gender, nationality or ethnicity in their hiring decisions, as they described their experiences with workers from different migrant communities, some othering practices surfaced their discourse. Most employers in the agricultural sector expressed a clear preference for hiring Indian nationals. It also became evident that Romanian nationals, regardless of the sector of employment, are discriminated against.

Regarding the construction of Indian workers’ suitability for agricultural work, many employers essentialized the (‘natural’) predisposition of Indian nationals for animal care, in particular to work with cows. A number of employers ascribed what were perceived as positive traits to male Indian workers in the construction of their work ethics and professional identity. For example, one employer essentialized Indian workers’ professionalism given their “exceptional culture of respect for the animals”, honesty and patience, in opposition to the frivolity ascribed to other workers (Tunisians):

Employer: Indians are more reliable […] they’re calm, quiet, honest […] and they have an exceptional culture of respect for the animals. It’s really amazing.
Question: Could you explain further? Are there workers who do not have the same characteristics?
Employer: Before them [Indians] we had one Tunisian and one Albanian. The Tunisian was born here [...]. He was competent. But the cultural differences are obvious. Indians, if they have to give therapy to the cows they do it patiently. Today I brought the medicines. He stays there [uses a low tone to indicate that the worker spends long time with the cow]. Instead, the Tunisian gave the injection and left. [...] I insist, to work with the animals, Indians are simply the best! (Interview R.23.8.11)

This example further shows that perceived or actual docility (being calm, quiet) is a desirable trait on the basis of which the employer was led to qualify Indian workers as reliable. It suggests that the essentialization of certain professional traits is linked to employers’ managerial concerns. Shih (2002), for example, explored how ethnicity and gender influence employers’ perceptions concerning the manageability of African American and immigrant Latino low-skilled workers in Los Angeles. The author argues that in the secondary tier of the labor market, and in the absence of the economic and social incentives such as those that characterize the primary sector, control is normally ensured through the establishment of hierarchy, direct personal supervision and strict control measures. As such, the workers’ perceived or actual manageability becomes a central concern for employers. My own data suggest that foreigners in general are perceived as more deferential than local workers. Potentially biased by my own otherness, an employer expressed her satisfaction with foreign workers, arguing that “we” are less impetuous than native-born Ragusan workers, she noted: “...I feel more comfortable, honestly, with foreigners... Because you are better [più bravi] I mean, you can't say many things to a Ragusan because they get angry, however foreigners... you are better educated. (Interview C.11.5.09, emphasis added.)

Additionally, my data show that manageability concerns associated with the construction of the work ethics of different migrant collectivities foster the creation of social boundaries along ethnic and national divides that shape the ethnic division of labor in the agricultural sector in Ragusa. For example, Romanian workers (both men and women) are often portrayed as ‘aggressive’, ‘trouble makers’, ‘difficult to deal with’, ‘drunkards’ and ‘dangerous’ (see also Chapter 5). Also, employers generally described Romanians, Tunisians and Albanians as having ‘hot blood’, and being impulsive. Conversely, Indian workers are collectively characterized as ‘calm’, ‘patient’, ‘quiet’, ‘slow’, ‘caring’ and ‘committed’. Thus, in comparison to Indian workers, other groups are perceived as less manageable, reinforcing the social mechanisms whereby Indian workers are kept in the lowest rungs of the farming occupational hierarchy.

Employers further celebrated other characteristics of Indian workers such as the habit of saving, and a sense of solidarity, as a proof of their diligence and responsibility, in opposition to the recklessness, the sense of anomie, distrust and rivalry ascribed to other migrant communities as illustrated below:

Tunisians have different goals, they want to stay here but they spend all their money; Tunisians and Romanians. I don't know one single Tunisian who has made a fortune here, neither a Romanian nor an Albanian. Romanians, if they earn a thousand they spend a thousand. All of them are like that, all of them. They [Indian] are not. They manage to save also because of their culture and eating habits, because they don't eat meat. They spend maximum 100 euros a month to eat, sometimes even less. (Interview R.23.8.11)
When Indians are in trouble, they help each other. Romanians, they kill each other!
Not everyone, of course. Romanians might have friends and relatives here, but they
don’t trust [one another] they don’t help each other, not at all. (Interview R.23.8.11)

Overall, Tunisian and Albanian male migrant workers seem to have gradually advanced
their social position in the receiving context and along the occupational ladder, and are
successfully moving out of the farms and abandoning ‘dirty’ and physically demanding
jobs, as one employer observed:

Look, Tunisians and Albanians no longer have a good reputation here. Slowly, slowly they… [pause] First of all, they no longer want to work with the animals. Tunisians have moved to the greenhouses and to the construction sector, because they know that they’ll work for seven hours, and that when they finish they can take a shower and leave. (Interview R.23.8.11)

Indian workers are increasingly replacing Tunisians in the lowest-ranked positions of the
farming sector. While this can be explained through the longstanding migration history
of those particular communities, as well as the expansion of their networks, the
subjectification processes that confine Indian workers to marginal positions should not
be overlooked.

Another interesting finding relates to the fact that, regardless of the sector of
employment, employers often portray Romanian workers negatively. The negative
representation of the Romanian community in Ragusa is reinforced by the burden of a
negative track record, word-of-mouth mechanisms, and a negative representation of this
community in the mass media (see Chapter 5):

Last year we had a Romanian [woman] but we weren’t happy with her, we had two
or three Romanians. It’s their behavior… they drink… all these things. We had this
bad experience, only with Romanians. For them it’s normal to drink and work, they
say it’s normal, but do you think is normal? [ironic tone] When they have to go to
work they can’t even step out of bed. She [former Romanian employee] drank during
her working hours. […] They have this bad habit [pause]; these [Indian employees]
don’t drink. Not even Albanians. They [Indians] are very calm. Albanians steal, most
of the time […] With them [Indians] that has never happened. Sometimes I leave
them stuff on purpose to see how they react, to make sure I can trust them. I’m
really fine. (Interview C.11.5.09)

In the above example, interestingly, the employer drew a comparison between former
(Romanian) employees and the current (Indian) employees in order to highlight the work
ethics of Indian nationals (e.g. being calm and reliable). The following example further
shows how rumors exacerbate the negative perceptions locals have about Romanian
workers:

Employer: I know about Romanians who abuse […]. They have robbed the houses.
Question: How do you know?
Employer: It’s true! It happened to a close friend of mine: when her mother-in-law
died the house was completely empty! It also happened to the friend of my cousin. [Whispering] Do you see this house? The elderly who lived there was paralyzed. He told his son several times that the caregiver enjoyed la bella vita at night. The son did nothing; he thought his father made up this story. But one day one of his
friends told him he had spent the night at his father’s place [laughs]… Then obviously he took action […]. He found out that the lady effectively worked during
the day and during the night [laughs], and when his father died, they found lots of
bottles of strong alcoholic drinks, cigarettes and everything else. […] I swear! It’s
not a ‘metropolitan legend’, I’m not making it up! Among Romanians, which are
those whom I know better, there are of course people like her [employee], who are
reliable... I can affirm that she’s an angel, but I can also tell you that... I’ve heard all kinds of stories. (Interview N.26.8.11)

35 Romanian nationals’ reputation in Ragusa is considerably damaged. This is further aggravated by the way in which Romanians are portrayed in the local and national press. In my sample, all Romanian respondents were aware of these negative stereotypes. A Romanian care worker expressed her discomfort with tears in eyes:

“What really hurts me... is that they generalize and condemn all of us, why do they criticize all Romanians? ...because you find good and bad people everywhere, but one person screws up and they judge us all” (Interview R1.3.1.11).

36 In all appearances, Indian workers are conceived of as the ideal-type suitable and manageable worker, and Romanian nationals as the opposite. While employers do not recognize Indian workers as equals, they still place them, collectively, in a higher position than other migrant groups. The various markers used to construct Indian workers’ professionalism, perhaps inadvertently, confine them to the lowest occupational ranks in the agricultural sector, while other, seemingly less manageable workers achieve a better occupational and social standing in Ragusa. According to Cohen, resistance shapes the continuous replenishment of helot labor and “propels the perpetual search for a cohort of replacement helots” (Cohen 2006: 60-61). In this case, the perceived or actual unmanageability collectively ascribed to some migrant communities (e.g. Albanians, Tunisians) simultaneously, facilitates the upward mobility of some workers, and reinforces the negative representation of others (e.g. Romanians). Despite belonging to the European common space and having access to the European labor market, Romanian nationals are not only disadvantaged because they do not conform to Ragusan employers’ morality, manageability or suitability criteria, but also because the mass media have contributed to constructing them as ‘shameful others’.

Gendering migrant recruitment

37 Gender criteria also influence employers’ hiring decisions. Socially constructed ideas about what appropriate female and male jobs are shape the division of labor and migrants’ labor market outcomes. Although gender structures can be challenged in interpersonal relations, farm and care workers in Ragusa tend to corroborate the functionality criteria used by employers in the definition of their gender-suitability to perform either agricultural or domestic jobs.

38 In zootechny, employers tend to justify the recruitment of male migrant workers through gendered functional criteria (e.g. physical strength associated with masculinity). Most employers highlighted the fact that agricultural work is physically demanding; a view shared by most male workers. While some workers emphasized that modern technology facilitated their job, they also admitted that physical strength was necessary to carry out certain tasks manually, described as heavy, hard or dangerous for women (e.g. pushing a barrow with a hundred kilos of fodder, carrying 20 liters of milk in a bucket, being in direct contact with the animals because “they get angry” or because of “dust and allergies”). Milking and horticulture, not requiring physical strength, are perceived as suitable for women. Indeed, an employer claimed that women “are more diligent” and “they would be better at milking because of women’s nature, they’re more vigilant”. Yet, the same employer argued that he is reluctant to hire women because pregnant women represent a big responsibility (e.g. in terms of insurance and potential accidents) that he
is seemingly not ready to assume, and because women have “limitations”: “It’s not a matter of machismo or anything like that, but what if she slips... There’s also the breast-feeding... If she’s breast-feeding and she has to milk the cows what does she do? Does she leave the child?” (Interview S.14.5.09). Another employer claimed: “On the farm, with the animals, there are always men”. She does not believe that women would not be able to carry out farming tasks, and yet, she has never sought to hire female workers (Interview C.11.5.09).

Besides functional criteria, local gendered morality structures, shape employers’ hiring decisions, as shown below:

In this job you need to hire men. First because the working hours are heavy... You need men to work with the animals because sometimes you need strength to carry out certain tasks. ... A woman could work in the milking room... But I can't hire women or otherwise I shouldn’t hire the [male] Indians, you know what I mean? Even if I hire an Indian woman, for example, if she’s the wife of one of my employees I can’t make her work with a different man, do you see what I mean? Besides, I don’t have the appropriate facilities to house women... (Interview R.23.8.11)

The employer cited above is a woman; however, the following quote shows that men have similar ‘moral’ reservations about hiring women in the agricultural sector:

Question: Do you think it makes a difference to hire men or women?
Employer: I've actually never had a female employee here on the farm [pause] because I have never felt the need, because there has been no opportunity to hire a woman, and because I think we’re not mature enough, us, employers, but also... when you put women together with foreign workers there are always problems. That’s for sure [...] Because of the difference of sexes, certain situations emerge...
Question: Could you explain?
Employer: I mean, uncomfortable situations arise [women would be disturbed] by Tunisians, of that I’m sure, almost certain. [...]. With Maghrebis, my experience tells me that I can't leave a woman milking and a Moroccan or a Tunisian feeding the animals and go home as if nothing would happen [ironic]; in 90 percent of the cases there’s trouble. (Interview L.11.5.09)

Some employers further explained their hiring decisions in terms of the limited availability of female labor supply in the zootechnical sector. Nonetheless, it is clear from the preceding examples that hiring women in the zootechnical sector is a source of anxiety for employers because of functional and moral concerns.

Gender structures also affect the division of tasks between female and male workers on the farms. For example, employers reproduce the sexual division of work allocating men productive tasks and women reproductive tasks, as in the example below, where the employers’ construction of gender roles is imposed on workers:

No, it’s not about having a driver’s license, it’s about independency [...] It’s not about the driver’s license, it’s about being able to operate the engine, which means being independent; because he feeds the animals with the tractor. Her husband feeds the animals in the morning while she milks the cows. In the sowing time, he goes to the fields to plow; when she finishes milking the cows she goes back home [...]. She must be attentive to the working schedule of her husband because the land where he works is faraway; [...] he comes back late at night. They can’t switch jobs, I mean, she cannot come back late at night; who would take care of the children? [...] But these people still believe in the family. Imagine what would happen if she left the children unattended! (Interview C.26.12.10)
Some gender constructions may be challenged in daily work routines. A female employer, who owns a farm and a rural touristic compound, stressed how much she appreciated the fact that a male Indian worker can perform such tasks as making the beds and cleaning the rooms. However, the man’s ability to carry out feminine work was perceived as somewhat incompatible with his masculinity. In contrast, a female employer has some difficulties in exercising her authority and in establishing a good communication with the male workers on the farm; she perceived her management role as undermining men’s traditional position of authority and as a source of anxiety for some workers:

Employer: It’s difficult to manage everything. It’s even harder for me than for my husband because I’m a woman. The eldest worker suffers. When I’m alone with him I can notice that his culture dictates that he should keep distance with women. He had an accident [...] he had three stitches in one ear [...] The nurse told me, ‘listen, in a few days you can remove the stitch’. I couldn’t approach him, I waited... I could see his distress. It’s their culture [...] he would never stay in a room with both of us [women]. (Interview R.23.8.11)

In the care sector, the construction of the gendered suitability of workers is more evident. Not only employers expressed a preference for hiring women to undertake eldercare, but many female workers are also reluctant to accept posts involving providing care to elderly dependent men. Transgressing the local gender codes is a source of anxiety for employers and workers alike. One employer emphasized her preference for hiring women by ascribing them an inherent reliability and trustworthiness:

Employer: It’s us, Italians, who do not want to hire men [as caregivers].
Question: Could you explain why?
Employer: It’s a difficult question because you can’t have a man locked 24 hours in the house... you must be with him 24 hours, you can’t have a man locked in [pause] [...]. I don’t know, perhaps if he looks after a man that’s okay... it’s easier to accept women. Now we know more or less who they are, we know them a little bit better, some information has been spread around, in short, we’re happy with women. (Interview M.21.12.10)

Workers are aware of the reluctance of employers to hire men as care givers. Interestingly, most workers view the feminization of care jobs as a comparative advantage that effectively eliminates the competition with male workers for these posts. Some workers observed: “cleaning their bottoms and all that stuff is for a woman, not a man; a man would say ‘ah! It stinks! He doesn’t touch the diapers” (Interview R.21.12.10); “[a woman is more suitable] because it’s about playing the role of a housewife; how could a man do domestic work?” (Interview R2.3.1.11); “men don’t know how to care for people and they don’t know how to do housework (Interview V.3.1.11)”.

Finally, family status intersects with gender and moral considerations in interesting ways in further shaping employers’ hiring decisions. Many farm supervisors expressed a preference for hiring ‘family men’. To the extent that employers construct masculinity around criteria such as independence, carelessness, frivolity and recklessness, their preference to recruit family men is built exactly on the opposite characteristics that they ascribe to married men who have children; namely, dependency, affection, and responsibility. These characteristics turn family men into reliable workers. In the care sector, family status combines with moral considerations that lead employers to perceive young, single female workers as sexually available. There are indications that domestic workers are exposed to sexual harassment (Cole and Booth 2007), although in my study I found that mature migrant women are less likely to be (or are not at all) exposed to this experience. Only one case of harassment was indirectly reported by a female employer,
she noted “It’s not uncommon that some people think that the care worker who looks after your grandmother, your mother, can go to bed with you just because she’s by herself.” (Interview N.26.8.11)

Overall, it seems that the construction of gendered work ethics effectively channels male and female migrant workers to what are perceived as appropriate male- and female-jobs respectively. Although local gender ideologies may be challenged in daily interaction, the gendered functional criteria used by employers in their hiring decisions, and workers' corroboration of employers’ preferences, lead them to jointly reproduce the local gendered labor market segregation. In what follows I discuss how employers and workers negotiate their respective social positions in their daily interaction.

**Building and negotiating status and identity in the home-workplace**

Employers constantly negotiate their (class and ethnic) status and superior moral standing vis-à-vis migrant workers in the intimate sphere of the home and workplace. Despite involving a commercial transaction, live-in farm and care work allow for the development of mutual dependence, personal intimacy, and emotionally charged employment relationships, which render complex the negotiation of the respective status of employers and migrant workers.

Scholarship on domestic labor has shed light on the interactive frameworks through which employers and workers negotiate their respective social positions in the private domain of the household (Constable 1997, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, Lan 2003, Lutz 2008 and 2011, Young 1987). The concept of *boundary work* is increasingly employed in this literature to explore the processes of subjectification of (migrant) domestic workers (Lutz 2008, Lan 2003). In cultural sociology, boundary work refers to “the strategies, principles, and practices we use to create, maintain, and modify cultural categories” (Nippert-Eng in Lan, 2003: 526). I build on these insights to better understand the employment relationships of migrant farm and care workers in Ragusa.

My analyses are based on Lan’s (2003) typology of employers’ boundary work: distant hierarchy, maternalism, personalism and business relationships.\(^9\) **Distant hierarchy** entails highlighting both class or ethnic divides and family boundaries (e.g. controlling of the use of home space). **Maternalism** entails emphasizing class and ethnic divides and simultaneously downplaying family boundaries by developing intimate or personalized relationships with (domestic) workers.\(^1\) **Personalism** entails downplaying class and ethnic hierarchies and family boundaries by establishing personal ties, for example, by assimilating workers to family members. Finally, **business relationships** imply downplaying ethnic or class hierarchies and stressing family boundaries. A business-like relationship in Lan’s typology ensures respect for the worker’s private time and space, by minimizing personal interaction and emphasizing the commercial aspects of the employment relationship. Lan recognizes that these categories overlap, forming a continuum rather than disconnected realities. My findings are in line with Lan’s insights, especially
concerning two strategies of boundary work that employers use in negotiating their social position in Ragusa: maternalism and personalism.

In this section I discuss the issue of privacy and intimacy in the employment relationships of care and farm workers in Ragusa, highlighting the similarities. Building on Lan's typology, I identify how personalism and maternalism intervene in migrant workers' subjectification and I complement this typology by exploring the construction of moral boundaries by employers.

Privacy and intimacy

During my fieldwork, after conducting a few interviews with agricultural employers, I started having the impression that the context in which those interviews took place was hardly different from the one in which I met care workers and their employers. Most of the interviews with care workers took place at the employers' home. Likewise, most interviews with farm workers and their employers took place at their workplace, which was also their home. On most farms there are small apartments destined to house foreign workers. These facilities are usually located only a few meters away from the employers' homes. This situation made me aware of the similarities between the situation of live-in farm and care migrant workers in Ragusa.

During the conversations with workers, employers demonstrated curiosity, and on some occasions invited themselves to participate in the interviews, or interrupted the conversations to make a remark or to offer us coffee or water. These interventions were facilitated precisely by the confluence of home and workplace. The interactions between employers and workers during the interviews further revealed that privacy is "a right unequally distributed" along class lines (Lan 2003: 528), as employers normally have more control over their privacy, than workers.

In one occasion, I was invited to conduct an interview with a care worker in the house of her employer. We sat in the living room and the employer went to the kitchen. Since the apartment was small, the employer was able to listen in. Noticing that the worker had mentioned that she was retired, the employer interrupted our conversation denying the former, in an attempt to ‘protect’ the worker from disclosing sensitive information that could compromise the workers’ entitlement to retirement benefits in the country of origin. Other remarks made by employers were motivated by self-interest. For example, during a conversation with a farm worker, I asked about the woman’s leisure activities. Noting that the worker claimed that she had no leisure time, the employer intervened to dictate the correct answer adding: “I go out to the market to buy groceries... the groceries...” The worker then corrected herself: “Ah! yes, yes, there’s a market; I also go to Modica to visit my brother sometimes, and my cousins too.” (Interview M.26.12.10)

Moreover, an employer’s friend, who was present during this interview, asked the worker if she planned to have more children; before she could answer, her employer revealed some details of her private life:

Employer: That’s exactly what I was thinking the other day; she had a delay, a delay [...]
Employee: [...] First I quit smoking, then I ate a lot and I gained weight [...] I got scared when I saw that I was delayed, one day, two days and nothing, I started to... Employer: To feel bad, so one day she jumps in with a tissue in her hand: ‘What am I going to do?’ I said ‘Don’t worry, you have the kid and I’ll raise him, I’ll raise him',

Employer: That’s exactly what I was thinking the other day; she had a delay, a delay [...]
Employee: [...] First I quit smoking, then I ate a lot and I gained weight [...] I got scared when I saw that I was delayed, one day, two days and nothing, I started to... Employer: To feel bad, so one day she jumps in with a tissue in her hand: ‘What am I going to do?’ I said ‘Don’t worry, you have the kid and I’ll raise him, I’ll raise him',
and she said 'No! Let’s go to the doctor now!' [...] We went to my doctor, who’s also her doctor [...]. (Interview M.26.12.10)

On another occasion, an employer revealed sensitive personal details about the workers’ private life, which made the worker cry. Once I finished the interview, the employer apologized, explaining that normally the woman was “pretty open to talk about those things, I don’t know why she reacted in this way this time” (Interview N.26.8.11). Similarly, a farm worker told me that his wife was sad because one of his daughters was still in India, and because they were living precariously in a small apartment in the farm compound. Interestingly, the man specified that his employer was aware of this situation, observing: “he [employer] knows everything, because he lives here” (Interview I.12.5.09). A female employer revealed that the 59-year old care worker was dating a Ragusan man. The employer said she was glad that the worker trusted her enough to talk about her private life. Later on, during a private conversation with the employer, she further revealed personal details about the employee’s routine when she prepares to meet her boyfriend: “she monopolizes the bathroom for hours, she takes a shower, dresses up, puts make up on...” (Interview M.21.12.10). As Lan (2003: 527) observes: “The boundary work in domestic employment relationships is situated in the domestic politics of food, space and privacy.” By complaining about the use of the house space (e.g. the bathroom) the employer cited above illustrates how some workers may challenge, sometimes inadvertently, an employer’s status. These examples also demonstrate the complexity and high degree of personal intimacy that characterize the employment relationships that care and farm migrant workers maintain in Ragusa.

The uneven distribution of privacy between employers and workers in the home-workplace is also illustrated in cases where workers have little privacy during their leisure time. For example, because of the spatial isolation of the farms, the range of leisure activities to which farm workers are likely to have access is limited. Most get together in the evenings on one farm to drink, chat and relax, which may be either tolerated or criticized by employers. In her study of the employment relationships of migrant domestic workers in Taiwan, Lan (2003: 539) found that public space, ironically, provides Filipino domestic workers with more privacy, enabling them to display an “offstage identity”. In contrast, in the private sphere of homes they “act as maids” in front of their employers. A similar behavior has been reported in other studies on domestic workers’ subjectification (Constable 1997). Unlike the domestic workers in those studies, live-in farm workers in Ragusa, seem to have more difficulties in passing from front (the worker role) to backstage.

In sum, proximity between employers and employees, both in eldercare and farm work, may lead to foster a sense of personal intimacy in the employment relations. Privacy refers to the degree of accessibility to the private zones of the homes, as well as to the exchange of private information between employers and workers (Lan 2003). The conflation of the house and the workplace in live-in eldercare and farm work facilitates the mutual invasion of the employers’ and workers’ private zones. However, privacy is unevenly distributed; employers seem to have more opportunities for intrusion on the private lives of live-in migrant workers. Employers may also instrumentally establish personal ties with employees for different reasons, as discussed below.
Personalism: Only business?

According to Lan (2003), personalism has three main functions: to minimize the employers’ class guilt, to confirm their middle-class identity, or to ease the discomfort of the confluence of private and public spheres (Lan 2003: 536). Personalism often materializes through the assimilation of workers to family members. This is common practice among employers in my sample. For example, when I asked Gianni, a farm supervisor, what he thought about emphasizing the hierarchy by maintaining distance in an employment relationship, he downplayed the hierarchy and emphasized instead the quasi-familial nature of the employment relations he maintains with employees. I was surprised to hear this, as this is the kind of reply that I expected from elderly employers, rather than from the owner of a farm:

This is a job that requires collaboration. You create quasi-familial relationships, affective ties, like extended family relations; because they’re alone here, you have the kind of situations where, for example, they ask you: ‘Could you wash up my clothes please?’ Or when you prepare a meal, it’s like: ‘Here you are, eat too’; this kind of thing. (Interview L.11.5.09)

All employers except for one stressed the quasi-familial employment relationships they maintained with farm workers. In the care sector in Ragusa, female employers tend to assimilate workers to their sisters; for their part, workers frequently use the Italian term “mamma” to refer to their elderly female employers.

Assimilating the worker to a family member helps reducing some of the anxieties provoked by the presence of a ‘stranger’ at home. Some elderly also reduce distance in search for company. Workers may embrace personalism to ease their own alienation or non-belonging to the community. A care worker mentioned that whenever she felt sad or nostalgic about her own family, she tried to relax and sought the company of the employer because “when I’m with the people of the family I’m calm, I feel good.” (Interview V.26.8.11) A farm worker claimed that his employers were good because they cared about him. Questioned about the reasons that led him to think that, he specified: “whenever I have a problem, my Madame stands by me.” (Interview A.23.811)

Reducing distance and class (and ethnic) hierarchies has different implications for migrant workers. For example, moral considerations may deter some workers from pursuing mobility strategies, such as abandoning the jobs on the farms to move north in search for better opportunities once their migratory status is regularized. A farm worker, for instance, constructed his superior moral standing in comparison to other workers observing that: “they [employers] applied for my permit, and then what? I’m currently waiting for my permit to be released, but once I have the permit in my hands I won’t leave, that’s not acceptable” (Interview K.27.12.10). Interviewed separately, the employer praised the worker, specifying that “he did not wait to get the permit to escape. He’s really considerate... he goes beyond the call of duty, and he managed to become a member of our family.” (Interview S.27.12.10)

Sometimes, the commercial dimension of the employment relationship overrides such fictive family ties. In the care sector the employment relationship is inherently tied to the life cycle. This ‘labor of love’ entails the development of affective ties between employers and employees. Many workers expressed their sadness vis-à-vis the death of their former employers. Nevertheless, when an employment relationship is terminated, following the
employer’s death, as self-enterprising subjects, workers need to secure another job. Another example of how market concerns may override the human dimension of employment was given by an employer. She observed that a worker had assessed the vacancy at her home, to look after her ill husband, in economic terms. The candidate had declined the post arguing that the health condition of the man was too deteriorated to make the trip to Ragusa profitable. This example shows that sometimes, the provision of paid care may be seen by both employers and workers as a full commercial activity, where both the caregiver and the employer become replaceable, regardless of the affective ties that may exist between them.

63 The boundaries between personalism and market rationality (pure business relationship) are difficult to establish, although the two extremes are impossible in reality. While most employers in Ragusa claim to reduce distance, they clearly have an idea of their own limits. For instance, and employer voiced surprise when I asked whether the workers received any kind of additional compensation such as gifts or assistance. Positioning him in a business relationship where his obligations are stipulated in a contract he replied that his 'personal surplus' consisted in driving employees to the closest supermarket as they did not have a car. Questioned about the importance of maintaining distance with employees he observed: “I think it should be balanced. Not like, because he's [dark] or because I'm dark...no, not this; but it remains a labor relationship... Even if there's friendship, it’s always relative.” (Interview S.14.5.09) Another employer specified that distancing is selective; she did not keep distance from Indian workers, arguing that she had never had problems with them (Interview C.11.5.09). Another employer adopted a contradictory discourse using both terms “sister” and “la signora” (the lady) to refer to the worker, revealing the limits of the myth of being like family:

Employer: Mrs. [name of employee] lives here, just to give you an example, at noon, we’ve been together [it was a holiday, usually celebrated in family]. We've been with her, with her family, we had lunch together.
Question: Do you usually have lunch together?
Employer: No, everyone minds his own business. She has her own apartment, with a bathroom, a kitchen, everything. She has her own hens, they are hers... This morning I went to ask her for eggs [laughs]. 'Listen, do you want some chocolate?' I had a basket of ricotta cheese and I had made some sweets... We’re like sisters.
(Interview C.26.12.10)

64 Yet another employer explained how the fact of maintaining distance with workers was triggered by a bad experience her family had with one worker. A worker who was drunk had assaulted her mother with a knife. The employer admitted being more cautious at present (Interview R.23.8.11).

65 According to Lan, employers minimize distance and personalize relationships in exchange for workers' labor surplus, which can range from overtime to emotional work. This has been referred to as "instrumental personalism" (Lan 2003: 536). Employers may deploy "strategic personalism" in order to ensure a certain level of quality in the services provided by workers. The owner of a farm, for example, believes that a familial relationship will enhance the trust that workers may place in employers, she noted: “Distance is necessary.... But the more distance you create, the worse it is. If you help them, if you seek to establish a familial relationship, they may hide less things from you.” (Interview R.23.8.11)

66 Self-interest and productivity concerns on the part of employers may also underpin the adoption of strategies aimed at reducing family boundaries and ethnic or class
hierarchies. The employer cited below depicts the employment relationship in market terms, explaining her different kinds of investments in creating a good relationship with the worker, as well as the expected returns:

I think that if a person is living in my house, I’d like that person to become part of my family. It’s not only about altruism, it’s also about egoism, in the sense that, if you pay a good salary to the person, it’s not only because you feel affection for her; it’s also because when you make her feel good, you create the conditions for her to give you the maximum. In my opinion, it’s not only altruism, but also profit. […] There are more altruistic people, who emphasize that aspect, and there are people who have a different character and they prefer to maintain distance. In terms of productivity, you never know whether one attitude or the other will work in your favor. Sometimes people who keep distance obtain greater returns because the [care worker] fears losing the job. With [name of employee] we have a familial relationship. She has no problem to ask me: ‘Listen, I need to refill my cell phone’; ‘Listen, my daughter is getting married and I need four days off to go to Turkey’. I paid her trip; she didn’t expect us to pay for the trip. But what can you do? You help her, because you realize she’s not been her daughter in many years, you are aware of the fact that they had some problems, etc. You help her. She wanted to make her daughter a gift, so what do you do? Do you make her spend money when you know she’s building a house and that her son is really ill? You don’t make her spend money! […] I’m fine with this situation. But in my opinion, productivity is not positively correlated to the degree of inclusion in the family [...]. With some workers it’s necessary to maintain distance; because there are people who take advantage [...]. There are people who come here with the sole and unique purpose of making money. So you can find a person like [name of employee] or you can be unlucky and come across persons who want to take advantage [...]. In every situation there are advantages and disadvantages. (Interview N.26.8.11)

The former reveals that the employer deploys personalism both to alleviate class guilt and to enhance the care worker’s productivity. The example also points to a few disadvantages of personalism (e.g. the material costs associated with her investment in building a good relationship with the employer or non-material costs such as the concession of holidays). The employer is also aware of the fact that personalism may also be embraced and instrumentalized by workers to obtain material and non-material rewards from employers, for example, by eliciting class guilt (Lan 2003, Salazar Parreñas 2001). Personalism overlaps with strategies whereby employers seek to affirm their superior standing, as discussed below.

Maternalism, moral boundaries and ‘good employers’

A relatively different dimension of personalism has been identified through the concept of maternalism. Maternalism entails downplaying the commercial dimension of the employment relationship and simultaneously emphasizing the class or ethnic hierarchies and familial inclusion (Lan 2003). Anderson (2000: 144) describes maternalism as an asymmetric feminized relationship whereby care for (i.e. protection of) the employee undermines her dignity as an adult worker. In reality, the boundaries between maternalism and personalism are elastic. Following Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001), Lan suggests that personalism is a two-way asymmetrical relationship, whereas maternalism is mostly defined by unilateral action, often materialized in the practice of gift-giving (Lan 2003: 534), which the author conceived of as an unilateral action that allows employers to affirm status, provoking mixed feelings in workers such as gratitude, dependence, and sometimes humiliation.
It is not uncommon that employers give food, second-hand clothes and even animals to farm workers. Lan (2003) and others (e.g. Piette 2000) have documented ways in which food management becomes an important class marker in the organization of difference in the home-workplace. Employers often keep leftovers for agricultural workers, especially during special meals such as those of Easter and Christmas. Such gestures of generosity and charity contribute to constructing the identity of the ‘good employer’, and to affirming employers’ moral standing. The owner of a farm, for instance, affirmed her superior moral standing by highlighting her benevolence towards employers, giving them clothes, thus preventing them from having to spend money:

I try to avoid making them spend money in clothes. They accept second-hand clothes; we collect them, me and my relatives and my friends [...]. During winter we organize ourselves... we collect sweaters, socks [...]. We give everything to Indians [...]. We give them the work-clothes, but we also give them clothes to go out. I mean, I seek not to make them spend money in these things. This is why, obviously, they don't go window-shopping, because they don't need to buy any clothes. (Interview R.23.8.11)

Employers are aware of the asymmetrical relationships they maintain with workers. In the following example, not only does the employer reduce class boundaries and alleviate her class guilt through personalism (thereby permitting the worker to carry out certain tasks that would otherwise be out of bounds), but she also reduces family boundaries by allowing the worker to participate in family events while sparing no expense and invoking maternalism in the form of gift-giving. The employer also affirms her superior moral standing in comparison to other employers, despite denying this fact:

We all save for [name of employee]; we collect stuff... Sometimes we also buy stuff, we go to the supermarket ourselves because we don't want her to make any effort because of her back problem [...]; she doesn't make any effort [...]. She sends all the money she earns to Romania. Here she doesn't spend any money. We also collect clothes for her son. We have sent at least one package every month [...] every time she goes to Romania she leaves everything there to her sister, to the neighbor, etc. She comes back with her empty bags and we start all over again [...]. My niece got married and she needed a cocktail dress, and where do you get it? You buy it. And you buy her matching shoes as well. She came to the wedding with us, because for us, they're part of the family. At least, I was raised like this... [...] I know some families where the badante is a second-class person. And I'm not telling you this to show off: “Oh, look at my family, how good we are.” (Interview N.26.8.11)

While gift-giving and maternalism can denote employers’ genuine commitment to ensuring the employees’ well-being, some of these practices may heighten the structural asymmetries of the employment relationship. One example is the practice of providing employees accommodation free of cost (accomodato) in order to help them save money. This arrangement is often formalized through an official contract and declared at the local registry. As mentioned earlier, most employers have built housing infrastructure on the farms, reserved for foreign workers. This practice serves to declare workers’ residence and facilitates the administrative procedures related to the release or renewal of their residence and work permits. Interestingly, despite the contractual nature of this practice, many employers and workers themselves perceive this as a favor which allows affirming employers’ moral standing. Along these lines, the owner of a farm constructed her superior moral standing by mentioning that she had allowed a couple of workers to dwell in a house built for the workers, even when they no longer worked for her, as a proof of her benevolence. She further qualified her benevolence as a “weakness”: “We
didn’t tie the house to a work contract; we offered them the house, without a lease contract, nothing. We’re weak.” (Interview G.4.1.11)

Accommodation is not the only kind of favor that employers use to affirm their moral standing. Contributing to employees’ expenses (besides salary), making payment advances, buying them cigarettes or telephone cards, or lending them money are all examples of gift-giving practices. On two occasions in my sample, gift-giving went beyond the above-mentioned ‘generic’ displays of generosity. In one case, employers had helped the worker pay for a private daycare for her daughter (the same that the grandchildren of the employers attended). They also lent her money to buy a car and paid for her driving lessons. Such favors served to reinforce the workers’ loyalty, who claimed: “I’m not attracted towards other sectors; I’m used to my program. Besides, I will never leave these people, because when I needed a hand they helped me. And if they ever need my help, I cannot refuse, is not fair.” (Interview G.4.1.11) Helping workers’ children is a common display of benevolence used by many employers. One employer, for instance, described how the entire family was helping the worker’s child, who had some difficulties at school, by driving the child to school, feeding him and paying for private lessons (Interview C.26.12.10).

Besides maternalism, employers may also affirm their status by creating moral boundaries that separate them from workers, either based on self-assessments of their behavior (e.g. treating workers in a respectful manner), or by highlighting practices that they perceive as immoral, which confirm workers’ inferior standing. One employer, for instance, constructed the identity of the ‘good employer’ by emphasizing her compassion towards workers. Her discourse further reveals how market calculations underpin her engagement in ‘emotional work’, and how strategic personalism is employed to increase the workers’ productivity:

This boy, God knows what he has seen in his life! His mother died when he was a child [...] , he was raised by the grandmother [...] , he grew up without a paternal figure [...] ; he was traumatized [...]. We [employers] must analyze the people, you know. There are employers who are arrogant, they pretend to be important, “You, do this, do that...” and there you go, the worker is not productive. It doesn’t pay you to treat them like that, and they don’t feel like staying with you for long time [...]. Perhaps you find a good worker but he doesn’t feel like staying [...] . Foreigners -- not only Romanian -- many faced serious difficulties during their childhood... God knows what they have seen! All these traumas, all these scars -- who can heal them? [...] there are some employers who (I saw on TV) beat them or extort them, like: “I won’t pay you if you don’t...” [...] but I think this doesn’t happen here in Ragusa. (Interview C.26.12.10)

Other employers affirm their moral standing by disapproving the workers’ behavior. One employer, for example created a moral boundary between the moral Us (Ragusan) and immoral They, around workers’ drinking habits. She mentioned that she prefers to hire foreign farm workers who have a family, because single men are inclined to drink, she noted: “...unfortunately, they have a completely different culture from ours, they get drunk very easily [...] All of them. Tunisians, Albanians, Romanians, even Indians, even Indians!” (Interview R.23.8.11). Another employer condemned the immoral behavior of a care worker who, at age 50, is dating a Ragusan man who is twenty years younger. She also built a collective immoral identity of care workers by ascribing them other negative traits:

Employer: [...] They leave Romania for twenty days! It’s like they come here on holidays! [...] The younger ones escape almost as soon as they arrive here... [...]
don't tell me about badanti [caregivers]. Then this 50-year-old woman seduced a 30-year-old boy [...]. She was out of her mind! You should have seen my mother... [makes a gesture indicating disapproval]

Employers’ friend: But, how did it work? She went to his place or...?
Employer: Um, that’s the point... [laughs]
Employer’s friend: They... [had sex] here; in your house?
Employer: [laughs] She got him in through the back door[...]
Anyways, I don’t trust them [...]. They do whatever they want; now they give old people the drops [medication to sleep], poor elderly! [...] But it’s our fault, we’re ignorant, we treat them well. (Interview C.26.12.10)

Finally, moral boundaries may also be constructed through concerns intended to highlight the employer’s superior moral standing (e.g. kindness, pity), in contrast with the workers’ disloyal behavior. The employer cited below at length creates such opposition by condemning workers’ disloyal conduct and the use of legal means of resistance, which entails a transgression of the informal arrangements that structure the local labor market. This example also shows how in agriculture, as in eldercare, employment relationships are emotionally charged:

I’m not one of those who discriminates foreigners [...]; for me everyone’s the same, I could wash the feet of this person or the other, trust me. Then you find people... what do they have in their hearts? They’re evil inside, but... you’ve got to help them, because you have a heart. [...] we had a Tunisian boy... he went on holidays to Tunisia and broke up with the girl [...]. My husband told him: “It’s ok, you’ll find another girl.” [...] He got married and he got her pregnant [...]. My husband prepared a mini-apartment for them, with a bedroom, a kitchen and bathroom [...] [I] did everything for her [...]; they returned to Tunisia. When they came back: ‘Signora I want to work.’ [sarcastic tone] We had the cheese factory so we helped them [...]; my nephews [...] found a daycare for the child [...]. Three days after -- these are things you never forget! -- they told me: “We found a house in Ragusa.” Okay [pause ]; after three days they told me “We will no longer work with you, it’s too much work.” [pause] I received a letter from the trade union [the workers had filed a legal complaint for long hours of work]. My husband had lent them money for the wedding, we gave them so much love! I’m not saying this because I want their love. Everything I do, I offer it to Jesus Christ, in heaven [...]. I don’t need a ‘thank you’ [...] but if you wanted something, why did you go to the trade union? Do you see what I mean? I think is a matter of character... (Interview C.26.12.10)

Chapter conclusion: Live-in jobs and local techniques of optimization

The examination of how employers’ hiring decisions and practices affect the construction of migrant workers’ identity and social standing reveals that their suitability for eldercare and farm work is constructed by ascribing them ‘marketable talents’ that involve technical knowledge, practical know-how, language proficiency, ‘love’ for the job, and a range of behaviors that denote emotional intelligence. The intersection of job-specific and non-job-specific criteria in the construction of migrants’ work ethics and social positions points to similar subjectification processes of farm and care migrant workers. To some extent, the marginal positions filled by migrants are also regarded by employers as ‘labors of love’ as some main chores are directly related to the act of caring (for human beings and for animals). In conclusion, as Rollins (1985: 156) has argued, employers extract more than labor; following Anderson (2000), I might say that employers in Ragusa purchase not only labor power but also migrants’ personhood.
Moreover, the identification of similar employment relations in two distinct sectors of the Ragusan labor market reveal the analytical value of the two emblematic figures of migration in my study.

Migrant workers' positioning in the local occupational and social hierarchies is further shaped by social boundaries created by employers along the lines of ethnicity, class, gender and morality. These boundaries are constantly negotiated in the private sphere of the home-workplace. By essentializing some of the qualities that define the work ethics of 'good workers' (e.g. deference, reliability, manageability, solidarity), employers create ethno-national hierarchies that differentiate productive and manageable workers (e.g. Indian nationals), from unmanageable and shameful others (e.g. Romanians). Employers further employ gendered functionality criteria (physical and attitudinal characteristics) to naturalize workers' suitability to perform feminized or masculinized jobs. Migrant workers do not always passively identify with or internalize such stereotypes (this is further discussed in Chapter 5). Interestingly, the workers interviewed in Ragusa did not overtly challenge the construction of their work ethics or the sexual division of labor. These findings may constitute a small contribution to the recent debates over the inclusion of a gender perspective in migration studies: they confirm that local gender structures and employers' and workers' subjectivity shape labor market outcomes for migrants.

Regarding migration management, the shared live-in condition of farm and care workers provides opportunities for close supervision and for the deployment of techniques of optimization and control. However, the live-in condition renders migrant workers “intimate Others” (Lan 2003), complicating the negotiation of social boundaries. Employers resort, indeed, to different forms of boundary work to negotiate their respective class, gender, ethnic and moral standing. Using Lan’s (2003) typology of employers’ boundary work, I identified several ways in which employers participate in the subjectification of care and farm migrant workers: intruding workers’ privacy, using strategic personalism and maternalism, and creating moral boundaries that separate them from workers. Employers may use personalism or maternalism instrumentally, for example, to enhance workers' productivity, dependency, and loyalty. Employers may also affirm their superior moral standing through practices such as gift-giving and by asserting their own morality and benevolence in relation to foreign workers.

Overall, the analysis of the micro-politics of migrants' employment relationships reveals that intimacy and the de-regulation of home-workplace in migrants' live-in farm and care jobs is consistent with contemporary migration management trends. In these occupations, the confluence of home and workplace provides multiple opportunities for deploying local techniques -- or “forms of power” according to Foucault (1982) -- aimed at optimizing low-wage workers, which allow for the reproduction of global structural inequalities. The identification of such contextualized practices of optimization sheds greater light onto the ways in which the larger processes of marginalization of care and farm migrant workers are reproduced on a daily basis.
NOTES

1. Anderson (2000) argues that paid domestic work involves the commodification of workers' personal identity or personhood, which can be bought and sold for a wage, similar to labor power.

2. To refer to the processes through which one becomes a subject, I use the terms “subjectification” and “subject-making” interchangeably.

3. I use the terms identity and social position interchangeably.

4. Rummens suggests that social interaction compels actors to engage in determining the similarities and differences that exist between Self and Other (2003: 11) using multiple identity criteria. Furthermore, Rummens defines identity negotiation as “the political nature of personal and social identification of self and/or other between or among, and by or within groups, via the interactions of individuals (Rummens 2000). Identities can be ascribed, achieved or simply assumed by individuals and collectivities. Socially ascribed identities may not always correspond to the individual’s self-definition. This reveals the power dynamics inherent in identification processes (Rummens 1993, 2003: 22). Research on identity negotiation focuses on issues of identity ascription, contention, categorization and labeling, intersecting identities, and the determination of group membership and boundaries.

5. The human capital theory has been quite influential in migration studies. It makes a distinction between low ability and high ability workers, whose migration outcomes (or returns from migration) depend on their individual characteristics and abilities (e.g. education, ambition, intelligence, learning speed, decision-making proficiency, entrepreneurial skills, aggressiveness, tenacity, health). The favorable selectivity of migrants is explained through the favorable selectivity of the supply (e.g. high ability migrants); see Chiswick, 2008.

6. About half of the migrant workers interviewed hold a high school diploma in such areas as commerce, accountancy, teaching, and informatics. Only one out of the three workers who attended a higher education institution graduated. Other workers completed or attended some level of secondary education, and a few completed a cycle of primary education. Before coming to Ragusa, most women used to work in factories (of garments and shoes); a few were clerks in state-run firms or offices (postal services, railways). Most men in my sample were farmers or had prior experience in agriculture.

7. Jenkins studied the systematic discrimination of black workers in recruitment processes in the public, manufacturing and retailing sectors in the United Kingdom. He argued that direct discrimination and notions of acceptability and suitability as well as ethnic stereotypes determined the structural disadvantages of those workers. He divided the selection criteria into “functionally specific”, thus educational qualifications, training or physique that relate to job performance and competence, and “functionally non specific”, concerning the organizational context, or the criteria of suitability and of acceptability (Jenkins 1986: 46-47). Although Jenkins draws a distinction between suitability and acceptability criteria, he specifies that this distinction is analytical as both categories usually overlap. Overall, functional criteria tend to be more visible and measurable than suitability or acceptability criteria. Furthermore, for Jenkins the notion of acceptability is directly related to the managerial function of the employers, or their concern for maintaining control.

8. The national press has reported cases of death due to alcohol intoxication of Romanian women in Palermo who mainly worked as care givers for the elderly (La Repubblica, Cronaca 2007a and
Other newspapers have reported cases of extortion, and the more common practice of forged travel and work documents.

9. Migration scholars have increasingly added a gender dimension to their analyses. In the mid-1970s, studies focused on gender “roles” assigned to men and women in different societies and in different realms (e.g. the public and private spheres). Gender was seen as a polar social construction. There has been a shift in the study of “gender” in migration studies from a dearth of research on women in migration to taking women as the primary object of study since the 1970s (Mahler and Pessar 2006). Nevertheless, since the 1980s there seems to be a consensus about the conceptualization of gender as relational, situational and performative. Gender is understood as a “subjective process” rather than a given or assigned status (Donato et al. 2006: 5). On this basis, this section explores the gendered nature of migrant recruitment, an important topic in the international migration research agenda (Mahler and Pessar 2006).

10. Lan elaborated such a typology on the basis of the analysis of three structural factors of the employment relationships in domestic service: “class positioning”, “job assignment” (the ratio of care work to housework involved in the job content) and “time-space setting” of the employment (the space that employers and employees share in the private homes, and the amount of time they spend together) (2003: 527). Building on Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001), Lan further argues that the extent to which care work is involved in the job content increases the likelihood of developing a sense of personal intimacy.

11. The term “maternalism” appeared in early domestic labor literature, dating back to Judith Rollins’s (1985) analysis of the interaction between employers and domestic workers in the United States, which built on Goffman’s teachings. Judith Rollins conceives “maternalism” as follows: “The maternalism dynamic is based in the assumption of a superordinate-subordinate relationship. While maternalism may protect and nurture, it also degrades and insults” (1985: 186). Moreover, precisely on the subject of gift-giving Bourdieu notes that “[g]enerous exchange tends towards overwhelming generosity; the greatest gift is at the same time the gift most likely to throw its recipient into dishonor by prohibiting any counter-gift.” (1997: 14)

12. Following Bourdieu, personalism could also be seen as a mechanism whereby the dominant class exercises domination. Bourdieu notes that “they have to work directly, daily, personally, to produce and reproduce conditions of domination...” (1977: 190). To this end, they resort to elementary forms of domination or the direct domination of one person by another; “[t]hey cannot appropriate labour, services, goods, homage, and respect of others without ‘winning’ them personally, ‘tying’ them – in short, creating a bond between persons.” (Bourdieu 1977: 190) Obligation, gratitude, respect, and loyalty are some examples of the outcomes of these modes of domination.

13. As Wimmer notes, “[e]thnic boundaries result from actions of individuals on both sides of the boundary and from their interactions across the boundary” (Wimmer 2007: 14, emphasis in original). Andreas Wimmer introduced the boundary-making paradigm in migration studies, calling for the de-ethnicization of migration (2007, 2008). Building on the work of Barth (1969) and others, Wimmer argues that ethnic groups are “the result of a reversible social process of boundary making”. He further contends that “[...] actors mark ethnic boundaries with cultural diacritica they perceive as relevant...” and that ethnic groups result from acts of social distancing and closure vis-à-vis other groups (2007: 13-14). Under this perspective, therefore, ethnicity is not a fixed property contained in individuals or social groups, but a social construction. Wimmer believes that migration scholars should not take ethnicity for granted and should focus on the processes of formation and transformation of ethnic groups as the product of boundary-making. Such a perspective, he argues, would allow migration scholars to think of “assimilation” and “integration” processes as reversible and power-driven and not as the result of overcoming cultural difference and social distance.
Chapter 5. The contradictions of self-enterprising migrant worker subjects

1 Migrant agricultural and care workers share similar conditions of work and social positions in the receiving labor market. The construction of their shared condition as low-wage laborers involves parallel processes of subject formation (or subjectification) and identity construction. The study of migration as a process of subject formation is not new. Here it serves to articulate the subject level of analysis to respond to the question about what the parallel experiences of migrant farm and care workers in Ragusa imply about current processes of neoliberal restructuring, including the perception of self.

2 I explore two aspects of the subjectification of migrant care and farm workers in Ragusa: a) the emergence of contradictory class positions -- building on Salazar Parreñas (2001) -- linked to their conflicting self-improvement aspirations and the low-status reserved for the jobs they perform in the receiving context; b) the negotiation of their subordinate status in the receiving society, through specific practices (or ‘response tactics’) to maintain their dignity.

3 I rely on Aihwa Ong’s (2006) Foucauldian reading of neoliberalism as a technology of governing to explore migrant workers’ subjectivity, to the extent that it entails “the government of free individuals who are then induced to self-manage according to market principles of discipline, efficiency, and competitiveness” (2006: 4). Migrant workers could be seen as self-enterprising subjects and migration as part of the process of constitution of self, guided by particular values and goals (e.g. accumulating capital, building an identity as consumer).

4 Concomitantly, while migration enables many low-wage workers to realize their self-improvement aspirations, it exposes them to multiple forms of exclusion from the benefits of capitalist development, or in Ong’s terms, to “exceptions” to neoliberalism (e.g. the exclusion from the living standards created by market-driven policies; 2006: 4-5, 21). As knowledgeable subjects, migrant care and farm workers are aware of their subordinate status. However, according to Giddens, “[p]ower relations are always two-way; that is to say, however subordinate an actor may be in a social relationship, the very
fact of involvement in that relationship gives him or her a certain amount of power over the other (1979: 6). Indeed, migrant workers participate actively in the construction and negotiation of their own identities and social positions in their everyday interaction with employers.

5 The concept of the duality of structure is helpful to understand migrants’ practices as simultaneously enabled and constrained by the various axes of domination that intervene in their constitution as low-status workers in eldercare and farm work. The question then arises as to what extent these workers challenge the structures of inequality that intervene in their constitution as low-wage laborers. Building on Butler’s elaboration on the Foucauldian subject, Salazar Parreñas (2001) admits that while the enactment of power involves a shift from being the object to becoming the subject of power, agency is conditioned. The subject remains tied to the external forces that enable and simultaneously constrain agency.

6 In what follows I explore how migrant agency intervenes in the construction of farm and care workers’ occupational and class identities and positioning in the receiving society, including constraints related to: a) the exceptions to neoliberalism that deny them other identities than that of low-wage laborers; b) the structurally asymmetrical employment relationships they maintain. I start by examining migrants’ subjectivities and the meanings of their migration projects. Then I identify some specific forms of exclusion that confirm migrants’ subordinate position in the receiving context, generating contradictions between their self-improvement aspirations and their low-status condition in Ragusa. Finally, I identify some of the ways in which migrant workers negotiate their status and maintain their dignity.

**Neoliberalism as a technology of governing, migration and subjectification**

7 Ong conceives the neoliberal subject, in her analysis of neoliberalism as a technology of governing, as of a “self-enterprising citizen-subject who is obligated to become an ‘entrepreneur of himself or herself’” (2006: 14). This concept is quite interesting for migration studies, especially in the linkages between migration management discourses and practice and neoliberalism as a technology of governing migration. In Ong’s view, neoliberalism as a technology of governing, entails the construction of self-enterprising subjects that embrace a certain “ethics”, a “practice of the self, or normative techniques in self-care for attaining a particular mode of being” (Ong 2006: 21-22). This practice of self may be consistent with the (market) principles underpinning this particular way of governing individuals and populations, but several ethical regimes can coexist.

8 Migration could be seen as part of practice of the self; as an aspect of self-engineering to attain a particular lifestyle. Migrants’ self-improvement practices can relate to capital accumulation, which as part of migrants’ perception and construction of self; but they are not limited to it. It is my contention that the analysis of migration projects can shed light on the factors that shape migrants’ subjectivity and self-enterprising endeavors, as well as the construction of different social positions (e.g. in the contexts of origin and reception). In this section I explore migration as part of migrant workers’ self-improvement practices.
“Just like a dream!” Migrant workers’ self-improvement aspirations

As stated above, international migration can be seen as one among many other self-improvement practices. Migration decisions and projects, even when they entail calculation (Harris and Todaro 1970, Borjas 1989), often occur in a context of imperfect information, and are influenced by the larger social structures in which migrants participate, as well as by imagination as social practice. Questioned about the meanings of their migration projects, many of my interlocutors emphasized the economic motivations underlying their decisions to come to Ragusa. Two of the most exemplary responses, given by a care worker and a farm worker, respectively, summarize the views of many of their colleagues:

Question: I’d like to know what it meant for you to come here.
Employee: Money, money, money. (Interview B.6.1.11)

Question: ... And what did it mean for you to come to Ragusa?
Employee: Well, it’s better life. Better life.
Question: Could you explain?
Employee: We are much better here [than] in India.
Question: In what sense better?
Employee: Like, here we earn money and everyday [we’re] working, time flies, [...] just like a dream!
[Continued]
Question: ... would you like to do something else?
Employee: But earn the money is the thing, [laughs] but earn money is the only thing in the planet! When we [get] the money, slowly, slowly... life is building [up], then we like it here, yes [...] we [would] move for a good job, I mean a job paying better money [...]; [we want] more and more, mind is always thinking like that [laughs]. (Interview F.11.5.09)

The second example illustrates how some workers conceive the material gains they yield from mobility as of means for attaining a particular mode of being. Other workers build their migration projects based on fantasy (e.g. “we dream of improving our lives, dreams which we can’t realize in Romania”); on curiosity or on the desire to improve their financial and social status (e.g. paying a mortgage, building or repairing the house, acquiring symbols of status such as big cars).

The wage disparities that exist between the sending and the receiving ends motivate some migration decisions. But rather than engaging in meticulous calculations my interlocutors relied on place-based-knowledge gathered through their relatives or acquaintances (see Chapter 3).

Self-improvement projects are complex and can hardly be reduced to accumulation goals. They are shaped by migrants’ specific structural location, as well as factors such as gender, age and class. This is often overlooked in migration scholarship, perhaps because of the established image of the young male (and more recently female) economic migrant (see Castles and Miller 2009: 33). Some of my interlocutors embraced that image, for example, when explaining how they plan to use their savings: “... we’re always saving money, buying the television, buying the... DVD” (Interview F.11.5.09); “... I’m always thinking of getting better quality things, always... next year I hope we can buy other things, like cars. [...] I have a car, but it’s old... (Interview A.12.5.09).

Nevertheless, my data indicate that migrants’ priorities and practices of self-improvement go beyond capital accumulation and that they change, for example, with
In Ragusa the ‘female migrant granny’ is replacing the archetypical figure of the young migrant in the care sector. Many care workers interviewed in Ragusa are aged 50 and over. The majority have adult children, some of whom are migrant workers themselves. Most women are retired and receive a pension in their country of origin; they are not always the main breadwinner. Many of these women came to Ragusa hoping to earn enough money to buy or renovate a house, to help their children to complete a cycle of tertiary education, to support their husbands or adult children who are unemployed, to afford medical treatments, or simply to gain supplementary income to make gifts to their relatives. Lidia for example, is a 59-year-old married woman who came to Ragusa to support her youngest, 20-year-old son, who is unemployed. She thinks that it is her duty as a mother to provide for him. Her role as a mother underlies her accumulation goals. Conversely, Urszula is a 59-year-old woman who is already retired and receives a pension in her country of origin. She is divorced and has a partner in Ragusa. Urszula did not prioritize her family obligations in her migration project. Questioned about her motivations to come to Ragusa, she clarified: “I like to work. In Poland there are jobs for retired persons but they are not well paid. I could work in a big supermarket like Lidl, like ARD, but I wouldn’t make as much money as I make here”. She also mentioned loneliness (a feeling shared by other care workers in my sample) as a factor influencing her decision to migrate: “I thought, ‘if I’m alone, why shouldn’t I come here?’ I wanted to try. When I saw that people here liked me, I thought: ‘Why should I leave?’ This is also a way of living my life.” (Interview R.21.12.10) Urszula does not remit cash; she says she is happy to help “when my children need money for important things, not for living”. She also enjoys sending gifts to her grandchildren and buying “beautiful things for the house”.

The construction of self is indeed related to the multiple positions that migrant workers occupy in the countries of origin and destination. The examples above further suggest that there is still much to uncover about how migration affects the life cycle and vice versa; how welfare systems affect and are affected by the migration of senior women or men; how these migrations affect the composition of transnational households in adulthood; or how they differ from the migration cycles and trajectories of younger migrants, to name but a few topics.

Furthermore, accumulation projects tend to be shaped by factors such as the social status reserved to migrants in the receiving context. Kearney noted that in the era of globalization, “time compression results from the imperative in capitalism to constantly shorten the average turnover time between investment and the taking of profit” (1995: 551). In the migration projects of my interlocutors, such time compression sometimes materializes in a desire to maximize the economic returns as quickly as possible, especially when the jobs are daunting and unattractive. One worker noted: “When the job is really awful, dirty, not nice, then the only thing you care about is your income. When the person spends two months here, all she wants is the money and arrivederci, bye!” (Interview B.6.1.11). Despite planning short stays, many workers are compelled to extend the duration of their stay in Ragusa, or to return there frequently, as owing to their low-paid and low-status jobs their accumulation goals may remain continuously unmet. Most care workers consider themselves temporary migrants, regardless of the cyclic nature of their visits to Ragusa. So do Indian and Tunisian farm workers; however, they tend to formulate long-term self-improvement projects (some wish to bring their families or secure their entitlement to retirement benefits in Ragusa).
Piore further argued that “[t]he temporary character of the migration flow appears to create a sharp distinction between works, on the one hand, and the social identity of the worker, on the other” (1979: 54). On this basis, it could be argued that perceiving the low-wage laborer condition in Ragusa as temporary may allow some workers to cope with their hard conditions of work, and to picture the employment relationship in commercial terms, to protect themselves from strategic personalism deployed by employers (see Chapter 4). However, my data suggest that it is very unlikely that migrant workers (including ‘temporary target earners’) can fully detach themselves from class hierarchies, and conceal the subordinate position in the receiving society (this is further discussed below).

Furthermore, although migrants’ projects seem to be, at first glance, built on accumulation concerns, my interview data show that multiple considerations (beyond self-improvement) underlie such projects. Accumulation goals can co-exist with such considerations as a sense of duty, migrants’ affection for employers, or simply their vocation to undertake a specific job:

**Question:** What did it mean for you to come here?

**Employee:** Well, as I said, in India, I can’t work as a farmer, and I don’t like any other job... (Interview I.12.5.09)

You know, if you only want to count your money, this job becomes unbearable, for your body and for your mind. If you don’t enjoy helping people, you can’t resist for a long time, three or four months, maximum. I like to help. (Interview B.6.1.11)

When I wake up, I don’t think this is a job, I always think this is my life; this is the way I want to live... I’m not here for the money. This is a way of living. (Interview R.21.12.10)

In sum, migrant workers in Ragusa can be seen as self-enterprising subjects to the extent their migration projects are linked to specific accumulation goals. Ironically, through their labor, migrants contribute to reproducing the larger structural conditions of inequality underlying their migration projects. In addition, self-improvement projects may be achieved at the expense of assuming a subordinate position in the receiving context, and the consequent exposure to multiple forms of exclusion or “exceptions to neoliberalism”.

**Exceptions to neoliberalism**

Migrant agricultural and care workers not only perform difficult jobs, but in the eyes of others, and sometimes their own, they also perform two of the lowest-ranked occupations in the receiving society. In their daily experiences, they are constantly reminded of their subordinate condition as low-wage laborers, foreigners, imperfect parents or consumers. Migrants in low-status occupations may experience contradictions between their self-improvement projects and the subordinate status conferred to them in the receiving context. Two major sources of frustration that emerged from the interview data relate to the characteristics of their jobs, and the various forms of exclusion that they experience. Workers cope with these contradictions in several ways.

Central to the migration experience of care and farm workers in Ragusa is thus the conflicting construction of the self, the self-enterprising endeavor, and the confinement to low-status occupations, such as eldercare and farm work, where the conditions of work are far from ideal. Indeed, many care workers used the term ‘sacrifice’ to describe their migration experience. This kind of frustration experienced by (Filipina) domestic workers
with high levels of formal education, who have difficulty in accepting the low status ascribed to them as domestic workers was defined by Salazar Parreñas as "contradictory class mobility"; which is, according to the author, the "central dislocation that defines [migrant] domestic work" (2001: 150).

21 Similar to Filipina domestic workers interviewed by Salazar Parreñas, highly educated farm and care workers in Ragusa experience "contradictory class mobility". However, my data suggest that men and women with lower levels of formal instruction also experience frustration with regards to the mismatch between their self-improvement projects and their subordinate position in the receiving society. This leads me to believe that class contradiction is less associated with the level of education than it is with a high level of inconsistency between workers' low status position and their self-improvement projects, whatever the later may be. The following examples illustrate both arguments.

22 An agricultural worker, who used to be a high school teacher, was rather surprised and upset at my question regarding his decision to accept employment at a cattle farm in Ragusa; his attitude demonstrated how he experiences the class paradox:

   Question: You said you were a teacher [...]. Why did you decide to take up this job?
   Employee: Say again?
   Question: Why did you accept this job?
   Employee: What do you want to know? [...] We said already that we're working for the money, for a better life; 'cause in India we don't get that much earning. (Interview F.11.5.09)

23 Likewise, when I asked the only care worker with a university degree in my sample what her main tasks were, she avoided my question and instead emphasized her material gains:

   Question: Could you describe a normal working day? What are your main tasks?
   Employee: Money [laughs], my tasks are not important, money is. It's normal, I think, that's why I came here; otherwise, I could have stayed there, but I couldn't save any money, wages are lower in my country. (Interview A.27.12.10)

24 Migrants with low levels of formal education face similar difficulties in accepting the low-status conferred to them on the basis of their occupation. This is especially true for some agricultural workers. The fact of doing 'dirty work' often transpired in their discourse. Mehdi, for instance, admitted: "I had to do this, because I have not much schooling, you know..." Jamal claimed "I have been working in agriculture for twenty years, it's not a big thing I know, but I can't complain, unfortunately, there's nothing else I can do". Another farm worker suggested that employment in the manufacturing sector is more respectable. He experiences a decline of status associated with the characteristics of his job and the fact of moving from an urban ('civilized') to a rural ('primitive') context:

   Employee: I don't like this work [laughs], [I'll work] four months and then [I'd] like to do factory work.
   Question: What's the problem with this job?
   Employee: Um... I'm already staying in India in the city, not do[ing] farm work, not doing farm work, I don't like farm... [...] For 17 years I stayed in city, I don't like cows, vitello [calf]...This work is, um... I'm not thinking this work is dirty, no. No, I think [that] any work is good. [This] work is not dirty [...] But is very is very hard work, [...] if [you] don't like this kind of work, [you'd better do something else]. (Interview Ch.11.5.09)

25 Care workers have similar difficulties in accepting their low occupational status. In an attempt to maintain her dignity, the care worker cited below drew a boundary between a civilized here (Italy) and a primitive there (Romania):
In Romania no one respects this job, I’m sure about that. When you go back there and you talk about your job people laugh at you. They think it’s something to be ashamed of. I don’t think so, I feel like here I’m respected for what I do; not only by them [employers], but in general [...]. Instead people there are really backwards; they can’t understand that the elderly need assistance. [...] I think people are different here, they are respectful, even when they speak, they think differently; we’re backwards in that sense. [...] In Romania people think that caring for two elderly and changing their diapers is shameful, is shameful to change diapers in Romania! People laugh at you, because “It really went downhill for you! You change diapers.” I don’t feel like that, I’m being helpful. It’s a job, there’s nothing to be ashamed of. (Interview V.3.1.11)

In sum, regardless of their level of formal instruction, most migrants exhibit a conflicting perception of self, and experience contradictory class positions that emerge from the inconsistencies between their aspirations as self-entreprising subjects, and their condition as low-wage, low-status laborers in the receiving context.

The various forms of exclusion to which migrant workers are exposed in Ragusa contribute to heightening such contradictions. As argued in Chapter 4, migrant workers’ formal qualifications rarely enable them to occupy higher positions in the receiving occupational hierarchy. Moreover, while migrants may succeed in improving their financial status in the context of origin, in the receiving context they may be denied a different status and identity than that of low-wage laborer. This is particularly evident in the difficulties some migrant workers face, for example, in reuniting with their families.

Indeed, one of the prices that low-status migrant workers pay for embarking on migration as a self-improvement project, is the “the pain of family separation” (Salazar Parreñas 2001). Most care and farm workers in my sample experience this contradiction and cope with it in different ways, from ‘keeping their minds busy’, to highlighting their material gains, to denying their feelings, to downplaying their subordinate condition to concentrate in their relatives’ pressing needs:

Employee: In India I didn’t work like this, with cows, milk. This is the first time I work like this, in Italy. No problem [...] I like mungire [milking], and cow, beautiful cow! No problem lavoro [work]; I like to work, always, no problem. And no remember India, during lavoro [work] time. I’m sad, I feel sad [when] I remember my mamma, and my sister, and my family, my nephew, and... I call every day. I buy a card and call every day.
[continued]

Question: Would you like to do any other job?

Employee: Any job is fine. I work in the stalla [cowshed] always. [I] don’t want to leave. Any job is fine. Me, I came to Italia to work, I need money. Any job is fine. [It] Doesn’t matter, [...] I think it’s just lavoro [work] and I can help my family [I] they need money. (Interview A.23.8.11)

To be eligible for family reunification, migrant workers are required to provide proof of their means of subsistence (which should suffice to provide for their dependents), and demonstrate the availability of suitable housing. As such, migrant farm and care workers are required to demonstrate their worthiness as laborers and self-entreprising subjects to invite their families to join them in Ragusa. None of the care workers in my sample applied for family reunification, which can be explained by the fact that the majority has adult children who cannot benefit from such a scheme. Unlike care workers, many live-in farm workers in Ragusa have applied for family reunification permits for their spouses and small children. However, only a few of them can meet the conditions for their relatives to become eligible for family reunification, as illustrated below:
To bring my wife here, I... I’m thinking about it, but I need to demonstrate that my income is good, I need a high income to provide her with the necessary comfort. I need to demonstrate they will have a nice house; some of these things are obligatory [...]. You can only bring your family here and have your children with you when you have a house, a car, and you can provide for them, that’s how it is.

(Interview A.11.5.09)

As you can see, this is not a good house for my daughter, [...] I need to find another job, my boss agrees with me on this. The house is small and he can’t pay me more.

(Interview I.12.5.09)

The estimated cost of raising a child in Italy, for example, is 9,000 euros a year (Caritas 2010: 4), which is about nine times the highest monthly salary reported by farm workers in my study. Also, as illustrated in Figure 6, many live-in farm workers have difficulty in demonstrating the availability of adequate housing for their dependents. As such, migration policies directly affect farm workers’ family life, not only disregarding the responsibility and the costs associated with the reproduction of the needed low-wage workers (Salazar Parreñas 2001: 107), but also suggesting that migrant workers’ families are conceived of as obstacles to the optimization of their labor power (Ong 2006).

Furthermore, we can say that migrant workers experience different but interconnected forms of structural violence across various dimensions of their lives, from the opportunities for family life to their conditions of employment. Bourdieu claimed that the essence of neoliberalism is comparable to a “Darwinian world” characterized by structural violence in the form of insecurity, stress and the permanent threat of unemployment at all levels of the hierarchy. One example of such threat was provided by Jamal, who has been working for twenty years for the same employer. His employer rents the land where Jamal currently works, but can no longer afford it. Jamal is compelled to find a new job. He would like to stay in Italy to enjoy his share of retirement funds, but has sent two of his four children back to Tunisia, because, he argues, “I don’t know where I’m going to end...” (Interview A.12.5.09), denoting the uncertainties to which all workers, and especially migrant workers are exposed.

Overall, it can be argued that the mismatch between migrants’ self-improvement projects, and the low status associated with their occupational standing in Ragusa generates frustrations and sometimes hinders the construction of other identities (e.g. as parents) than that of the low-wage laborer. Other forms of exclusion that migrant workers experience in Ragusa are associated with their live-in condition.

“The dearest word to all peoples is freedom!” Spatial and symbolic isolation

Migrants may experience different forms of spatial and symbolic isolation as a result of the live-in condition, which may limit their opportunities for socialization, or exclude them from the public space. Some examples of these forms of isolation are discussed in the following.

Most workers in my study have limited leisure time. Live-in care workers have two free afternoons a week (normally from 14h to 19h). The majority spends these afternoons walking around the city, gathering in a park to chat, or window-shopping. They rarely buy anything, as they prefer to remit their earnings in full to their families (denoting their acknowledgment of their status as low-wage laborers and imperfect consumers in the host society). Unlike farm workers, who live in the countryside, caregivers are in an
urban setting and sometimes appropriate the benches of a public park where they chat, exchange news about their country of origin, read magazines in their native languages, and exchange information about vacant posts. Some women also attend religious services catering for these specific groups of devotees, in perfect accordance with their working schedules. These activities, however, do not seem to alleviate the sense of isolation that many of them experience. Eldercare is psychologically demanding, as some care workers observed: “many people have psychological problems because it’s a hard job; you need contact; you need to speak, for your mental health” (Interview B.6.1.11). The sense of isolation is aggravated when their independence as adults is undermined by the employers’ techniques of control, as the following quote illustrates:

Woman 1: If you want to work here, you must understand that you have no freedom at all; if I want to go out at night I can’t. I have to always ask permission, like: “Can I go out tonight?”, like a child does with the mother [laughs]. And you ask permission for everything: “Can I do this, can I do that?” Do you see what I mean?

Woman 2: It’s awful! Sometimes I want to quit, I say to myself that I can’t continue like this.

Woman 1: Let me tell you something, the dearest word to all peoples in the world is freedom! (Interview R2.3.1.11)

Although the live-in modality allows many care workers to accomplish their savings projects, most of them are aware of the lack of independence and privacy inherent in this condition, as well as of the different kinds of symbolic isolation they experience. Besides the potential language barriers that may exist between employers and workers, many care for elderly who are too ill or too weak to get out of bed or even speak. This imposes on them a tacit form of isolation because they have limited opportunities to socialize with their employers, let alone the mainstream population.

Moreover, none of the workers in my study was formally trained a geriatric nurse or had previously worked with the elderly. In fact, the majority experience anxiety when they take up care jobs for the first time. Some women qualified their job as dangerous, aware of the fact that they were ill prepared to deal with complex situations that may arise while caring for an elderly person: “If anything happens, what are we supposed to do?” (Interview B.6.1.11) “We’re responsible for anything happens to them [elderly]” (Interview I.22.8.11). One care worker noted that she is constantly monitoring the person’s breath. Another worker qualified her job as stressful because she needed to monitor constantly the actions of her employers:

It’s a huge responsibility! I worked with two elderly, they were both ill. You know, it’s completely different when the person thinks and when she doesn’t think. You tell them to do something, you lose them from sight two minutes and they go straight to the door, they’re constantly trying to go out. First I didn’t know what to do [...]. I didn’t even speak Italian. It was stressful. My boss was difficult [...]. I was permanently stressed out; I was afraid that something was going to happen to them. Just imagine, I arrived on a Saturday; Monday morning Mr. [name of employer] had an ischemic crisis and I started to cry because I didn’t know what to do. I thought he was dead! [...] Then, little by little I got used to it, but I was afraid because I didn’t know how the elderly are. (Interview V.3.1.11)

Care workers have few opportunities to socialize, including conversing with a healthy adult person. This is another source of stress for many. The ‘tactics’ some workers use to assist some seriously ill elderly reveal other kinds of symbolic isolation. A care worker observed that caring for an elderly was comparable to caring for a child: “It’s like with the children, you need so much patience! You tell them please do this, they [say] “No!”,
they do some other thing” (Interview V.3.1.11). Another worker uses ‘tricks’ to convince her employer to eat: “I tell her lies [laughs] like, if she doesn't eat I say I'll call the ambulance” (Interview T.24.8.11). In fact, it is not uncommon to hear care workers say that the main requirement to perform their job is to be mentally strong:

It’s really hard, because you work with the elderly ... you’re always at home; you go out on Tuesdays but... it’s hard because you work with an ill person, and if you’re not strong enough here [points to her head] then you will need a psychologist later on. You must be healthy, you cannot be ill, because it’s hard work; for the mind, I mean physically and mentally. (Interview I.22.8.11)

Intimacy, and more concretely bodily contact, seems to add to the sources of stress of some women who look after dependent elderly men. Lidia, for example, referred: “This was the first time I was with the man and I had to change his diaper; I had never done that before, I had never put a diaper to an old man! […] but I got used to it”. Another worker remembered that on her first day at work she was standing by the bed of the employer, with a diaper in her hands, and she felt sorry for herself. Most care workers in my sample reported similar experiences.

In sum, care workers who normally live in the city, in principle, have more opportunities to establish contact with the mainstream population (including neighbors, clerks, members of religious congregations, etc.). However, their daily routine imposes on them symbolic forms of isolation. Not surprisingly, many caregivers assimilate the home-workplace to a prison. This is not to suggest that none of the women in my sample enjoy their work. However, they all emphasized the difficulties that characterize their jobs, and the majority insisted on the importance of maintaining their privacy and having the opportunity to talk about their problems to preserve their mental health.

Migrant live-in farm workers are subjected to similar forms of isolation. Farm workers’ spatial isolation is a result of the geographic location of their home-workplace. Most of the farms I visited are scattered and are accessible only by secondary roads; they are not within walking distance from the main urban centers of the province. Public transportation in the rural areas surrounding Ragusa is scarce. Therefore, the location of the farms effectively renders farm workers ‘invisible’ and heightens the spatial and social distance that separates them from the (native-born or migrant) urban population. In fact, it is not uncommon that farm workers remain at the farms, including during their leisure time, unless they have ‘important things to do’, as they argued, such as renewing their residence permit, buying groceries, or visiting friends. Questioned about their leisure activities, some workers bluntly noted: “this work is life, I work, that’s what I do” (Interview Ch.11.5.09); “I have no free day, every day lavoro [I work]; every day work, no holiday” (Interview A.23.8.11); “I’m always here at the farm, unless my boss asks me to go to the city to do paperwork or to do something for him” (Interview A.12.5.09); “I’m always here, I don’t go out, except for important things like going to the supermarket” (Interview I.12.5.09).

Most farm workers in my sample did not have specific days of rest. Many workers claimed that they are exhausted by the end of the day and, as self-disciplining subjects, they may restrict their leisure activities. Some workers reported to be permanently on call. Nevertheless, all rest for two to three hours every morning. Interestingly, the majority assimilated their leisure time to the time they spend in the markets or in the supermarkets. The former indicates that the spatial isolation of the home-workplace affects the range of the leisure activities they are likely to have access to. In addition it is
worth mentioning that most workers depend on their employers to travel relatively short distances to buy groceries. Itinerant informal retailers also reach out to these clients and visit the farms every eight to ten days.

No farm worker except one in my sample owned a private car. Because of the spatial isolation of the farms and the distances separating the farms from the urban centers, many workers associated the lack of a private vehicle with a sense of dependency. When I interviewed Sanjeev, for example, he needed to find someone who could take his wife, who was pregnant, to the closest hospital for a blood test. Stela relies on her employers to drive her children to school every morning. Lalit relies on his employer to be able to get the telephone cards he uses to call his family. While employers may be happy to do such ‘favors’, this may actually heighten workers’ sense of dependency and isolation.

Many migrant farm workers experience other forms of symbolic isolation. This is especially true for Indian nationals who do not have a good command of the Italian language and who receive mentoring from their peers. Indeed, their opportunities to improve their Italian language proficiency, and for socializing with native-born Ragusans in the workplace and beyond are limited. The majority of Indian nationals in my sample reported not to have met many Italians. Conversely, Tunisian workers are less exposed to this kind of symbolic isolation thanks to their good command of Italian or Sicilian, and their firmly established social networks in Ragusa.

Thus far, it can be argued that migrant farm and care workers’ different degrees of spatial and symbolic isolation affect not only their identity construction but also the way in which they relate to their employers, and to other migrant groups. This is further discussed below.

Response tactics

Migrant workers participate actively in the construction of their identity and in the processes of subject formation; either by negotiating or contesting their subordinate status in their daily interaction with employers, as well as with other migrant groups.

Some scholars such as Salazar Parreñas (2001) qualify migrants’ resistance tactics as “immediate struggles” (borrowing this notion from Foucault’); others such as Lan (2003) see them as “boundary work”.

I build on the insights both authors to identify the strategies deployed by migrant workers to cope with their contradictory class positions and to negotiate their social standing vis-à-vis their employers and other migrants. Salazar Parreñas identified various strategies employed by of Filipina domestic workers in Rome and Los Angeles to cope with their “contradictory class mobility”: highlighting the financial status achieved through migration; the “fantasy of reversal”, which entails stressing the privileges gained through migration in comparison to poorer women in the country of origin; embracing the racialization of domestic workers and placing themselves in a higher status; and instrumentalizing the personalism and intimacy inherent in their employment relations, and resorting to emotional displays to manipulate the employers.

Similarly, Lan (2003) elaborated a typology of boundary work deployed by foreign domestic workers in Taiwan to negotiate their positions vis-à-vis their employers, which comprises: a) seeking patronage or manipulating personalism, for example, using emotional displays (Salazar Parreñas 2001), or deliberately eliciting class guilt in their employers to
gain material and non-material rewards (e.g. advance their status in the family, ease the workload); b) *keeping distance* from employers to protect their privacy, or avoid engaging in additional emotional work, and to define the frontiers between family and non-family; c) dissociating the work identity from other dimensions of identity; and d) *highlighting status similarity* resorting to principles of equality and mutuality or challenging employers. Lan argued that workers usually wait for the employer’s first move to deploy their own boundary work. However, my data indicate that migrant workers’ strategies can be deployed spontaneously to negotiate or contest their social standing in relation to their employers, as well as in relation to the larger receiving community (i.e. to other migrant groups), and in the transnational contexts in which they participate.

In what follows I identify some of these tactics deployed by migrant workers in Ragusa either to alleviate their class contradictions or to negotiate their status, and complete Salazar Parreñas’ and Lan’s insights through the identification of strategies of *equalization, strategic professionalism* and *cosmopolitanism*, and *class reversal*.

### Dirtiness vs dignity: contesting class

Workers and employers are normally aware of the mutual perceptions of one another. This surfaced in most interviews. As an example, questioned about the reasons why migrant workers come to Ragusa, the owner of a farm drew an Us/They boundary based on the wage differentials between Ragusa and the sending area, arguing: “I mean, here in just one month they make the equivalent of four or five months of work there” (Interview S.14.5.09). One of his workers, aware of the employers’ perceptions, was quick to retort: “Italians, for example, Mr. [name of employer] thinks that if a person comes here is because she’s starving. They think that we’re all starving in India; they think that anyone who comes here is starving. But it’s not like that... We’re not starving. There are problems, yes. As I have said already, my problem is that I can’t be a farmer there.” (Interview I.12.5.09)

Migrant workers are also fully aware of the subordinate position they occupy as low-status workers in Ragusa. To alleviate the contradictions generated by the inconsistency between their self-improvement projects, their low occupational status or their ‘invisibility’ many workers resort to highlighting the positive aspects of their job. One worker, for example claimed that he enjoys working on the farm because it feels like he’s at home; owing to the fact that he lives on the farm he has many opportunities to take short breaks during the day (Interview F.11.5.09). Another worker claimed that he prefers to live in the countryside that in an urban context because, he argued “I love the countryside, because of the fresh air, and nature, it’s beautiful! Instead in the city you hear all the time the ‘beep, beep, beep, ruuummmm’. Uh! It’s a mess! [...] (Interview A.12.5.09) Yet another worker highlighted the positive aspects of his job to play down his invisibility:

*Question: Do you think people appreciate your work?*
*Employee: But people don’t see me, they don’t see an important job, what they see is a dirty job. Do you understand? That’s what they see, they think that way. I see it differently [...] you can see things however you like [...] I can’t complain [...] since I was a child, I’ve always loved the countryside, I like the countryside very much, it’s not that I... [...] It’s my choice; since I was a child I have this passion for nature.*

Workers may also contest their subordinate status by minimizing class hierarchies. In the following example, a care worker downplays caregivers’ low occupational status in
Ragusa and highlights the improvement of their financial and material status in the sending context:

Question: Do you think your work is appreciated?
Employee: Some say this is a bad job, a dirty job, they don’t respect you […]. When I arrived in Pozzallo, people thought that us, Polish, are poor, because we do this job. They can’t believe that a person who owns a pretty house and who is retired likes to work; they ask me all the time why I do this job, why I clean the bottoms of the elderly if I have money. You know what? Many Polish women live in big houses with big gardens. They work here for four months and they save all their money for when they go back to Poland […] they don’t spend a single euro here, apart from the money for the trip, because they want to return to Poland with their pockets full of money! (Interview R.21.12.10)

Besides emphasizing the material returns of migration, migrant workers may question their subordinate status by separating their work and day-off identities. Tariq, who is 22 years old, works on a cattle farm. He is aware of his contradictory class position in Ragusa and in Tunis. When he is in Tunis, he places himself at a higher status than his friends: “they’re my age, but they don’t have what I have”, he argues. Tariq also thinks that his friends envy his financial status, commenting: “You’re so rich!” Nevertheless, he is also aware of his social standing as a farm worker in Ragusa: “I always tell my friends: ‘Look, it’s not easy, I get up at four in the morning, sometimes I even have cow dung in my boots’; I tell them, but they don’t believe me”. Tariq claims he is not ashamed of his job. Most importantly, he separates his work identity from other identities, as many of his colleagues do:

When I work I might be dirty. But when I finish and I go out: off-road vehicle, suit jacket and tie! But of course you can’t wear a suit and a tie at work […]. But when I finish I take a shower and I put on my good clothes. […] I love this job! I make money and I like what I do, if I work in the middle of shit I don’t care.

One care worker, on the contrary, explained how her perceptions about her occupational status and her aspirations have changed over the years. While she asserted not being ashamed of caring for the elderly, she recognized that when she was younger she was more concerned about her social standing. However, she argues, her perceptions have changed:

When I have to clean up an elderly person who is ill, I have no problems. I’m happy, it’s not that I’m being forced to do this, I don’t think like “mamma mia! How did I end up doing this, me, who worked in the railway company in Poland?” No, I see this differently. (Interview R.21.12.10)

In sum, many care and farm migrant workers in Ragusa may conceal their low-status condition in Ragusa by highlighting the positive aspects of their jobs, emphasizing their material gains or dissociating their work identity from other identities. In addition, some workers resorted to tactics that I refer to as equalization, strategic professionalism and cosmopolitanism, and class reversal in order to negotiate their subordinate status and maintain their dignity.

Equalization, a tactic deployed (only) by farm workers in Ragusa, entails the denial of the class hierarchy. This involves embracing the symbolic position of Ragusa (and of its native-born population) as located at the southern end of the North-South developing divide. By emphasizing the fact that Ragusa is primarily a rural area, and by embracing the stereotype of the rural native-born population of Ragusa, or the fact that employers are also farmers, migrant farm workers are able to situate themselves in a similar or superior status than that of their employers:
Question: How do you think people view your job?
Employee: Good [...] Normal, normal, because we’re all the same here, the boss and the workers we all do the same thing. We’re all the same, all the same. (Interview A.15.5.09)
I have never been ashamed of my job [...] because Ragusa is an agricultural zone, everyone does the same... Ragusans, 100 percent of them are agricultural workers. Maybe now there are not many farmers, but there are still many farms, so this job is normal here. If we go somewhere else, let’s say to the north, to Milan, working with the cows may seem strange because there are more construction workers there. Here instead you have farms, so it’s normal. (Interview A.12.5.09)

Strategic professionalism and cosmopolitanism refer to some tactics employed by migrant workers to maintain their dignity by emphasizing their level of education, linguistic or professional (job-specific) skills and ‘cosmopolitanism’. These strategies allow them to question the low-skilled label often ascribed to their jobs. Some farm workers, for example, emphasized functional job-specific skills (holding a driver’s license, being able to drive a tractor or to operate specific equipment), as well as their language proficiency and technical knowledge (e.g. knowledge of medical terminology or veterinarian techniques):

In this job it’s really important that you know how to milk the cows, it’s even better if you can drive a tractor, and milk the cows. If you don’t know how to milk the cows, well, they get mastitis, and then you need to give them the medicines, which are really expensive. An injection costs about 100 euros, 50 euros. But you must learn the language first. Because you work in Sicily, you need to speak Sicilian. I know how to speak English too [...]. (Interview I.12.5.09)
There are lots of things you need to know, you must be always alert... sometimes, for example, you need to know what to do if a cow is dying, if it has the pressure too high or too low... you must know how and for how long you can milk the cow, milking it for a long time can cause mastitis; and then you’ll need antibiotics... [...] you need to know lots of things [...] when the cow has crooked legs, lots of things... In the beginning when I came here I didn’t know how to milk a cow, then little by little I learned how to do it, they told me about the fodder [...] then helping a cow in labor is really difficult; the veterinarian comes only when there’s a Caesarian, we call him, otherwise we do it ourselves. (Interview A.12.5.09)

Similarly, care workers stressed their formal training and educational achievements to contest their low occupational and social standing:

I have a Master's. I completed three years of higher education [...] I graduated in Psychology and then I studied two more years in Craiova, human resource management. I completed five years of higher education in total [...]. I’m not using it; this job doesn’t allow me to use that knowledge. But it’s okay, I don’t feel bad because I’m doing this job; as long as I make money, any job is fine. (Interview A.27.12.10)
I’m a high school graduate, I’m specialized in economic affairs, I’m an economist, but I didn’t go to the university, I mean, I graduated from high school and I have a technical diploma. My friends, some of whom I met at school [...] they tell me: “Why do you do that job?”, or: “You don’t deserve that kind of job.” [...] But for me it’s not a big deal. (Interview R.21.12.10)

In addition, migrant workers may contest their subordinate positions by stressing their cosmopolitanism. Cohen (2006) uses the concept of everyday cosmopolitanism to refer to a range of “subtle forms of transnationalism” enacted by a wide range of actors, including migrant workers (as opposed to nation-states or multinational corporations). According to Cohen, cosmopolitanism entails a subject-level articulation of “complex affiliations, meaningful attachments and manifold allegiances to issues, people, places and traditions”
He argues that “functional” cosmopolitanism has become a matter of survival for labor migrants (Cohen 2006: 190), to the extent that it includes abilities and knowledge such as foreign language skills, knowledge of exchange rates and migration policies, familiarity with other cultures and the development of contacts in other countries (Cohen 2006 and 2008). In Cohen’s view, migration turns ordinary people more cosmopolitan “not in the sense of a louche playboy, a rentier, or a debonair, rootless, stateless member of the elite, but in a more prosaic sense. Cosmopolites can also be of working-class origin” (Cohen 2006: 193, emphasis added). In the following example, an agricultural worker emphasizes his “functional cosmopolitanism”, including his ability to speak two languages, and his familiarity with two distinct migration systems. The words in italics were pronounced in English, although the interview was held in Italian. By switching codes, in fact, this worker further highlighted his language skills during our conversation:

Employee: I’m a farmer. But I have studied, twelve years. Then I went to the university, I was enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts, you know? Only fifteen days […]. My father said that I had studied enough and that it was already okay, that it was time to find a job. I went to Arab, UAE, United Arab Emirates, you know? I worked there for nine years, I was a driver, I drove a mechanical digger. I had a very good job, very good job.

Question: You said before that there were some differences in terms of salaries; that Italians have a higher income? Do Italians perform different tasks?

Employee: No, no, the work is the same, the work is the same, I milk the cows, they milk the cows, I drive the tractor, and they drive the tractor… I think sometimes I’m better at driving the tractor because I worked for nine or ten years in Arab, I drove a big excavator. I have an Arab driver’s license. This license is extremely difficult to get […] it’s not like here. There they’re really strict.

Question: In your opinion, what are the requirements to do this job?

Employee: Well, when I met my boss he asked me to move the [hay] ball, the ball, do you understand? “Okay, he said, put the ball in there, go ahead”, and he realized I could drive the tractor. Now the two brothers [employers] say I do my job very well, they say: “You’re better than us”, because I worked ten years doing this, I worked in UAE, in Arab. (Interview 12.5.09)

In this example the worker also negotiates his social standing by drawing a boundary between Italy and the UAE, placing the later in a higher position, and stressing the value of the job-specific skills gained during his sojourn in that country or the stricter system for the delivery of licenses. This allows him to place himself in a similar (even superior position) to that of his employers in the current context of reception. This kind of practice could be referred to as class reversal. The construction of a “cosmopolitan self” further allowed the worker cited above to discursively change positions with the employers, affirming that they recognize he does things better than them. Class reversal is also frequently deployed by care workers. One care worker, for example, stressed her sense of taste and her multiple travel experiences in order to draw a comparison between herself and the employer who was present during the interview. During a private conversation that I had later on with this worker, she told me that she had deliberately mentioned her travel experiences to make her employer aware of her high social standing in Poland, which she considered to be comparable to that of her employer’s in Ragusa. She noted:

“I’m someone who likes elegance, I have taste; like [name of employer]. When I was in Poland I went to museums. I’ve been to many countries, Russia, Ukraine, Germany… in Austria I went to all the museums, I visited every single palace. I’m someone who likes beauty, who likes beautiful things.” (Interview R.21.12.10)
Some workers use class reversal and take the place of the employers in practice or discursively. In the following examples the workers took the role of the employer by stressing their level of responsibility or of knowledge on a specific job-related matter:

Question: Why do you think that they hired you?
Employee: Because I worked in the UAE, and because here I’m responsible for everything, is all my responsibility. I’m the boss here. Mr. [name of employer] doesn’t come here during the week...I have everything under control, everything. If I need fodder or anything I call him. But I’m responsible for all the work. (Interview I.12.5.09)

Employee: I like this job; okay, it’s expensive, you have high operating costs. For example, if you have an inspection... well, in the last inspection we had the guy was very picky about the taxes, they also checked out all the cows, the udder... stupid things; the medicines, things like that.
Question: But, when you talk about the high operating costs and the expenses, you mean that the owner of the farm has to pay for this, don’t you?
Employee: Yes, you see, the liter of milk now costs 32 cents, fodder 34 cents, how are you supposed to cover the operating cost? You think: “These cows cost me a lot”. Actually, you raise them, but they are never ready on time. You have to calculate all costs, for example, let’s say a cow eats fifteen kilos of fodder, you have to add up the medicines, the milking... there are 45 cows [...] Then when you sell the milk, you deliver but they pay after one month... this business is not convenient. (Interview, A.12.5.09)

Other care workers take over the management of household including items that denote status (e.g. food), and confront their employers or use class reversal to assume their authoritative role through concrete subversive acts. In the example below a care worker affirms her authority over household organization:

I was really brave; I didn’t even speak Italian at the time. I threw away some rotten potatoes, and I noticed that the signora became nervous, because I threw those
rotten potatoes away. But I didn’t understand what she said; she frowned; she was really angry at me, she said some bad words, and I said: “Okay, if you don’t want me here, I’ll pack my things and I’ll leave! I’m going back to Poland, just give me five minutes, I swear I’m leaving!” and she said “Oh, no, calm down, calm down.” Then I took the dictionary and I told her: “Excuse me; in my home I never throw anything away unless it’s rotten; but when the onions or the potatoes stink because they’re rotten you must throw them away!” I worked with her for two years! When I left she said: “If you can’t come back, please send your daughter, no one else!” (Interview R.21.12.10)

Finally, some workers emphasize their high financial and material status in the country of origin to cope with their contradictory low-standing the context of reception, as shown below:

I built a beautiful house in India... I still need a lot of money for the house, because the works are not yet finished, they have put the bricks. I have to call the designer, you see, I have the drawings here. Now when you see the drawings of my house you’ll ask me: “How can you live here, in this apartment?” Because, as you will see, my house is really big, it’s like the houses here, and it has everything... (Interview I.12.5.09)

While the worker cited above stressed his high status in the country of origin, he recognized the fact that his living conditions in Italy were precarious. The former illustrates the transnational character of migrants’ identity construction practices. One agricultural worker, for example, made a comparison between his situation in Ragusa and his in his country of origin: “In Italy I work, do you see what I mean? I’m poor in India but I become rich here”. Such an appraisal of transnational living is always present in the practices of identity construction of care and farm workers in Ragusa. To illustrate his material achievements, this same worker clarified: “I’m building a big, big house in India with five rooms, three big bedrooms, like the houses in Italy, with bathroom, kitchen, everything.” (Interview M.23.8.11)

Similarly, many care workers seized every occasion to draw a comparison between their status and that of their employers, whenever the later were present in the interviews. A care worker drew comparisons between her house in Romania and the employer’s house. She described in detail the furniture, the kind of decoration she had chosen, the size of the garden, etc. Another worker seized the opportunity to show me pictures of her house, and pointed out the various fine items she had bought during her trips to different European capitals. Few workers confronted their employers openly, as in the case below:

When you work with the elderly what’s the first thing they think? That we’re thieves! When I started in this job, the woman I worked for had a big closet where she kept the sheets, blankets, towels, etc. Every week we took out all that stuff... she counted the all sheets, all the blankets, the pillowcases... Once she said: “Where’s my pillowcase?” I told her: “You must have put it in a different place.” And once I told her: “Excuse me, my house is just as pretty as yours. No, I have prettier things!” I have a beautiful house; I’ve bought many things, a big lamp, many things in silver, I’ve bought many fine and expensive things. (Interview R.21.12.10)

In sum, the strategies that migrant farm and care workers deploy in order to negotiate or contest their subordinate standing in Ragusa, indicate that they participate actively in the construction of a complex self. Indeed, they deploy several strategies to cope with the potential contradictions they experience, between their self-improvement aspirations and the low status ascribed to them in the receiving context. These response tactics have an immediate effect (like the strategies deployed by Filipina domestic workers interviewed by Salazar Parreñas 2001), which has limited potential to change their
structural position as low-wage laborers. Moreover, these acts of subversion are not limited to the creation of boundaries vis-à-vis employers, but extend to the creation of alternative boundaries to differentiate themselves from other migrant workers or groups in Ragusa. The former may, ironically, contribute to reproducing the prevailing class and ethnic hierarchies in the local labor market, as discussed below.

**Othering strategies**

As part of their self-engineering, and in order to maintain their dignity or enhance their individual or collective social positions in the receiving context, migrant agricultural and care workers may resort to creating social boundaries in relation to other migrant workers or migrant groups. These ‘othering’ practices rely on a careful selection of the markers of difference that are emphasized depending on specific circumstances, for example in the daily interaction with employers in the home-workplace, or in the public sphere. These practices make part of migrants’ constitution of the self. By deploying such strategies, migrant workers in Ragusa affirm their individual or collective superior social and moral standing, in order to alleviate discursively the threat of competition in the local labor market.

One example of how othering practices operate was given by a farm worker who simultaneously denounced the negative way in which migrant workers are portrayed by the mass media, and emphasized his superior moral standing: “[On TV] they say that foreign workers fight against each other, and that they beat the employers; but I have never beaten anyone and no one has ever beaten me.” (Interview A.15.5.09) One care worker, instead, drew a boundary between the civilized Me, and a primitive They, referring to her fellow co-nationals as ‘peasants’, embracing a marker of difference previously used by her employer during our conversation: “Many Polish who come here don’t know how to behave because they’re peasants.” (Interview R.21.12.10) Yet another farm worker underlined how as part of the construction of his professional identity he carefully chooses his friends (mostly Italians), avoiding his fellow countrymen. In this manner, he sought to build an image of the ‘good worker’ and to gain the employer’s respect (Interview A.11.5.09). The migratory status may also serve as a marker of difference, allowing documented workers to emphasize their superior standing in relation to undocumented newcomers:

Now it’s only illegal migrants who land on the coast; they take our money... I came across one of them, he arrived two months ago. I asked him: “How’s it going, how do you like Italy so far?” [ironic tone] He was illegal... I think in the future, perhaps in 2015 or 2016 we’ll be in trouble. Nowadays even Italians who finish their studies struggle to find a job. But, you know what? Those illegal migrants, they immediately find a job when they get here, and you wanna know why? Because the boss tells them: “How much do you want?” and they say: “200 euros.” I earn a thousand euros. Of course, I’m going to get kicked out if an illegal arrives here and asks for 200 euros! I’m being really serious! In fact I think it’s the fault of the Italian government; if they fired at the ships, then those illegal workers wouldn’t be able to land. But the mafia is also involved, so... (Interview A.12.5.09)

Competition is certainly exacerbated when migrants’ wages are compromised. Many agricultural and care workers reported that Romanian nationals have the lowest wages in both sectors. In the agricultural sector, various workers (both Tunisians and Indians) suspect that Romanian workers accept wages as low as 400 euros, compared to their average 750 euros monthly salaries. In the care sector, a Romanian housecleaner
observed that her ‘marketing’ strategy consists in charging lower fees than other workers (i.e. she asks for five euros an hour, instead of the average of eight euros an hour) to keep her client base. The perceived or actual availability of such a cheap labor force is a source of tension among the various migrant communities that co-exist in Ragusa. Competition may lead workers to embrace certain stereotypes and some criteria used by employers to justify their hiring decisions, including the essentialization of the manageability of workers, in order to advance their individual or collective professional and moral standing. The following quote captures how a care worker, for example, embraces personalism. Not only does she minimize the commercial aspects of the employment relationship, but she also emphasizes Polish workers’ professionalism and moral standing by deploying the work ethics of Romanian and Ukrainian personnel:

We’re really different from the women from Romania and Ukraine. I know many people who like to change their job every two months. Ukrainians, they do that. They find a job, they work for a short period of time, and they take the money and leave. Polish instead are affectionate, and they are attached to their employers. Because we have such feelings we can’t just take the money, and then pack our things immediately after that. Once I worked with a family for one month. A Romanian girl came to replace me. The girl arrived at 11am, at 3pm she had vanished. [...] This would have never had happened had she been a Polish woman. (Interview R.21.12.10)

Migrants may also create boundaries along ethnic lines to differentiate themselves, individually or collectively, from other migrant groups and advance their social standing, which may contribute to reproducing the existing ethnic hierarchies among migrant populations in the receiving area. Questioned about the reasons why she thought she had been hired by her current employers, one care worker built her professional identity along religious and ethnic lines, and claimed that “[m]any employers like Polish, not Romanians, because of the Pope, and because Romanians are dirty, Polish are cleaner; the Italians want to marry the Polish women.” (Interview B.6.1.11) Another care worker observed: “The families prefer to hire Polish; they don’t want to hire Romanian or Ukrainian women, because Romanians are too loud, it seems that they’re always yelling at people.” (Interview K.1.03.12) In the example below, the worker affirms her superior moral standing using the Catholic religion as a marker of difference and a marketable quality:

The Pope was still alive when I arrived in Ragusa, the Pope Giovanni; and that’s why the people here like us, they have a positive feeling for us. I went to the shop one day and the clerk told me: “I know Pope Wojtyła, I know Pope Wojtyła”, and that’s why our first contact with the people in Ragusa is good; they have good feelings for our nation [...]. Maybe it’s because people feel safe around us, they feel sympathy for us. Most families have a good opinion of Polish women, they prefer to hire Polish women [...]. For them, when you’re Polish you’re more than just a badante [care worker]. (Interview R.21.12.10)

Likewise, farm workers, especially Indian nationals, embrace the ‘hardworking’ stereotype ascribed to them by employers, and also the essentialization of their manageability. In an attempt to advance their status in the receiving context, they may inadvertently contribute to reproducing the ethnic hierarchies that organize the zootechnical labor market in Ragusa, as the examples below illustrate:

Generally speaking, people say that Indians are good workers. Not like Arabs who come here and do this or that... or fake their documents like Tunisians, [we’re] not like them. There are bad workers too. But, have you ever heard that an Indian is a thief or anything like that? No. People think that you work well and they pay you.
You have to be patient and save money, and slowly, slowly you become rich. You shouldn’t try to become rich overnight and earn 5000 euros, it’s not like that.

(Interview K.27.12.10)

Question: You just said that there are differences between workers, could you explain further?

Employee: But I’m sure you have also heard about that. You know about this too. When I watched TV last night, I always watch the news, I’ve been here for three years, so I understand what they say on the news like Berlusconi, and Prodi and this and that... but whenever they talk about thieves I’ve always heard that the thieves are Romanian, they behave badly at work; I also heard that a woman was walking and was harassed, you must have also seen this, or that they always get into fights. Ten days ago they said that two Romanian children got in a fight at school, and one of them had a knife, just ten days ago… I saw it on TV [...] but I have never heard, in the four years that I’ve been here, I’ve never heard that an Indian did something wrong. They’re not thieves.

(Interview I.12.5.09)

The stereotypes ascribed to Indian workers in the local labor market are not only disseminated among employers but also among workers from different migrant groups, as illustrated below:

Employee: Italy is a mess now! You hear all the time about sexual crimes, robberies, murders, only these things. I hang out with Italians, but that’s what you hear in the news! Only these things. The only racial group that has not caused trouble in Italy are the Indians. That’s such a calm race, you know? Instead, Romanians and Polish, they kill each other.

Question: Have you met any Indians or how do you…?

Employee: Yes, I know them. The Indians of [name of employer] they’re really nice, whenever you talk to them they have a smile on their face, they’re… Okay, they might not speak perfect Italian, but that’s fine, no one is born knowing everything, but they’re making progress and they understand. You know what, even when they see you at distance they smile at you, they’re joyful people.

(Interview A.12.5.09)

Migrant workers may also embrace the negative stereotypes disseminated by the mass media to advance their professional and moral standing in Ragusa. According to a recent study conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Romanian nationals are amongst the most discriminated minority groups in Italy. Anti-Romanian demonstrations took place in Italy in 2007-2008, in the aftermath of the accession of Romania to the European Union. Many migrant workers in Ragusa embrace the negative stereotypes ascribed to Romanian nationals by the mass media (e.g. their ‘dangerousness’), to advance their own standing. Some care and farm workers reported that they avoided interacting with Romanian nationals or limited their interaction to a simple exchange of greetings. Thus, the negative perception of Romanian nationals is simultaneously reinforced by the negative images disseminated by the mass media and by employers’ and workers’ othering practices:

Male employee: I’m not really friends with them [Romanians], I only greet them, like “ciao, how are you?” and that’s it [...]. I’ve seen on the telefilm that they’ve done something wrong, so I just hang out with the people I know well. (Interview 1.12.5.09)

Female employee: I’m afraid of Romanians, I don’t know why...

Question: Have you ever had a negative experience, why are you afraid?

Female employee: No, but I’ve seen on TV that... they were talking about Romanians, they behave badly. I’m scared. (Interview Z.27.12.10)

Male employee: I don’t know any Romanians, but a friend of mine told me that they stop you and they ask you: “What time is it?” and you say: “Five.” and if they get angry -- pam! -- they hit you, they start a fight, they don’t care, they think they’re the strongest, you can’t tell them anything ...

(Interview A.12.5.09)
Romanian nationals are fully aware of such negative stereotypes. Interestingly, in the course of my research, instead of challenging such stereotypes, most of my interlocutors emphasized their superior individual moral standing drawing boundaries between themselves and ‘other Romanians’, as the care worker cited below does, using religion as a marker of difference:

I always pray, always, we pray together at home, with my mother-in-law. Here I go to the church too with mamma and papa [employers] [...] In Romania there are bad people, men and women... there are many men and women who are not calm, they drink beer, they smoke, they have affairs, their parents are divorced... My family goes to church; we’re part of a good group, a group that doesn’t smoke, they don’t have affairs... you know, a group of educated people, church people, educated people. (Interview V.26.8.11)

A married couple of Romanian workers, who used to work together on a cattle farm, emphasized their superior moral standing in relation to their (Romanian) co-workers condemning their behavior:

There were other Romanians on the farm, who misbehaved... Once we brought a bottle of grappa [liquor] from Romania, and these Romanians who were in the farm drank the whole bottle of grappa! They smoked and every time there were troubles they always said it was our fault. Because we didn't want to get in trouble we decided to quit. We were nine Romanians in total. We all lived there, we had separate bedrooms, but they came into my bedroom and took my cigarettes and the grappa without permission. So we thought it was better to leave to avoid getting in trouble. But we stayed friends with Mrs. [name of employer]. I referred to her many badanti [caregivers] from Romania and we’re still in touch. (Interview I.22.8.11)

Romanian workers almost invariably expressed their discomfort, pain, or embarrassment regarding their negative image in Ragusa. Most of them attempted to maintain their dignity by empathizing with the mainstream local population. However, all Romanian nationals I interviewed deplored the generalizations and judgmental attitude towards them. One care worker perfectly captured this point: “In your study, you have to specify that you’ve talked to some Romanian women [...] Maybe, with all the things you have [interview data] you tell them that we're not all the same, [...] if that changes the opinion of one single person, then the effort is worth it.”

Finally, as self-enterprising subjects willing to build a good image in the host society, few workers deployed othering strategies in relation to the Ragusan native-born population. In the very few occasions in which migrant workers expressed their perceptions of the local population, the only markers of difference they used referred to mafia stereotypes and a ‘conservative’ mentality.

Chapter conclusion: Exceptions to neoliberalism and their interstices

In the above discussion, three processes of migrant workers’ subjectification have transpired: the construction self-improvement projects; the deployment strategies aimed at advancing their standing or at contesting their subordinate positions; and the construction of boundaries, or the deployment of othering practices vis-à-vis employers and other migrant workers or groups. Capital accumulation embedded in migration as a self-improvement project denotes that neoliberalism as an ethos of self-governing pervades migrants’ construction of self. But the construction of self can in no way be
reduced to maximization goals. Migration self-improvement projects are indeed shaped by numerous factors such as gender, age and even the work of imagination.

Migrants’ aspirations of self-improvement are, however, contradicted by the low status conferred onto their occupations and the various forms of exclusion that they may experience in the receiving context. The different forms of spatial and symbolic isolation that farm and care migrant workers experience in Ragusa stem largely from their condition as live-in workers. While, in principle, care workers have more opportunities than farm workers to access and appropriate the public space, they may be exposed to various degrees of symbolic isolation associated with the nature of their jobs. Unlike care workers, live-in farm workers are effectively rendered invisible through spatial isolation. Their spatial isolation aggravates their sense of dependency, as they may need to rely on their employers to be able to carry out routine activities such as buying groceries or driving their children to school. Their status of low-wage laborers further hinders their ability to apply for family reunification.

In order to contest or negotiate their subordinate status, migrant workers deploy various strategies that can be regarded as practices of identity construction. Migrant care and farm workers in Ragusa may highlight the positive aspects of their jobs, and dissociate their occupational identity from other dimensions of the self to maintain dignity. Likewise, when negotiating their social position in relation to employers, migrant workers may minimize or deny class hierarchies, highlight their professionalism and cosmopolitanism, or criticize the employer’s behavior and embrace the stereotypes ascribed to the Ragusan-native born population and the symbolic position of Ragusa as a rural backwater in southern Italy to place employers in a subordinate position. These subversive acts reveal the interstices of the axes of domination to which migrant workers are subjected, and which they are able to manipulate.

Finally, one could also argue that market forces may shape the way in which migrants relate to one another, individually and collectively. In particular, labor market competition may encourage migrant workers to embrace some stereotypes and criteria used by employers (e.g. the essentialization of suitability and manageability) and by the mass media in order to build their identity as ‘worthy laborers’ and emphasize their superior work ethics and moral standing to distance themselves from other migrant workers or groups. These othering practices may contribute to reproducing the local and sectorial ethnic hierarchies in agriculture and domestic service.

In conclusion I would say that twentieth-first century care and farm migrant workers are active, self-enterprising and self-disciplining agents, rather than objects, of the neoliberal restructuring processes. Nevertheless, their structural position as low-wage laborers in the context of reception limits the effects of their acts of subversion, which are unlikely to challenge the larger structures of inequality that shape their subjectification.
NOTES

1. For Foucault, the word “subject” has two meanings: “subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” (1982: 781).

2. Lan (2003) explores the construction and negotiation of social boundaries between Taiwanese employers and Filipina domestic workers in private homes, using the concept of boundary work. Salazar Parreñas (2001) investigates the multiple subject-positions of Filipina domestic workers, or their multiple “dislocations”, in Los Angeles and Rome, which stem “from their structural location as racialized women, low-wage workers, highly educated women from the Philippines, and members of the secondary tier of the transnational workforce in global restructuring” (2001: 31). Building on Foucault, Constable (1997) examines construction of the social identities of foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong, the modes of discipline adopted by their employers, and the ways in which migrant workers experience and negotiate some stereotypes on a daily basis.


4. It is worth clarifying that Ong uses the term ethics (2006: 21-22, emphasis added) “...in the ancient Greco-Roman sense of a practice of the self, or normative techniques in self-care for attaining a particular mode of being. An ethical regime can therefore be constructed as a style of living guided by given values for constituting oneself in line with a particular ethical goal.” Furthermore, Ong asserts that “neoliberalism, as an ethos of self-governing, encounters and articulates other ethical regimes in particular contexts” (2006: 9). Thus, it is possible that accumulation goals co-exist with other ethical regimes.

5. For Appadurai, imagination, understood as a culturally organized practice and a central element of agency, plays an important role in the constitution of the self. According to Appadurai, the electronic mass media and migration have a joint effect on “the work of the imagination as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity” (1996: 3). Both offer resources for the construction of imagined selves. The work of imagination further facilitates the dissemination of ideas, consumerist lifestyles and values, which are always reinterpreted at the subject- and local levels. Appadurai further argues that “fantasy is now a social practice, it enters, in a host of ways, into the fabrication of social lives for many people in many societies... Thus the biographies of ordinary people are constructions (or fabrications) in which the imagination plays an important role” (1996: 54).


7. Foucault (1982: 780) referred to immediate struggles as those in which “people criticize instances of power which are the closest to them, those which exercise their action on individuals. They do not look for the "chief enemy" but for the immediate enemy. Nor do they expect to find a solution to their problem at a future date (that is, liberations, revolutions, end of class struggle).”

8. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) conducted a European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS) in 2009. The survey contained questions on perceptions of various types of discrimination faced by foreigners in their countries of residence, including awareness of rights, experiences of discrimination or crime related to a minority background, questions related to law enforcement, customs and border control and discriminatory practices by authorities. The survey results indicate that in Italy 77 percent of
Romanian respondents considered that discrimination on the basis of “ethnic” or “immigrant origin” was very, or fairly widespread. While pointing to the need to interpret survey data cautiously, the report stresses the fact that findings reflect the extent to which minorities in the EU perceive themselves as vulnerable to discrimination on the basis of their ethnic/immigrant status (EU-FRA 2009, online).
Today there is hardly any locality untouched by globalization and migration. Although the term “globalization” may seem rather vague to some, for migrant workers, it acquires meaning in their everyday lives. In fact, migrants’ mobility prospects are embedded in larger social structures that bridge different localities across the globe. Migration routes may be determined by historical, cultural, economic, social and political linkages between those localities, but also by migrant institutions, targeted services and industries, as well as by the mass media and the work of imagination. Some of these bridged localities constitute specific migration systems. The contemporary organization of the neoliberal global economy that promotes privatization, de-regulation and liberalization affects all the localities connected in any given system. Because those systems are embedded in power and economic structural imbalances, some localities yield more benefits than others from the circulation and transfer of labor and other resources within the system. However, all the hubs of a system, whether in a more privileged or disadvantaged position, remain subjected to the neoliberal restructuring of the economy and face differing, yet shared pressures imposed by that process. At the subject-level, despite the various opportunities and resources engendered through mobility, low-wage migrant workers are often reminded that movement is a stratifying factor of our contemporary societies, and that not everyone is entitled to enjoy the benefits of capital accumulation.

In my research, I set out to gain a better understanding of the ways in which the neoliberal restructuring processes shape the constitution of a specific low-status workforce. I have argued that care and farm migrant workers in Ragusa share much more than their condition as low-wage laborers. I have analyzed their processes of subjectification as they enter a particular nation-state and labor market, as they relate to specific social networks, as they cope with their conditions of work, and as they negotiate with their employers their social positions and identities in the receiving context.

First, I situated my understanding of the experiences of migrant farm and care workers within the context of the structural forces that underlie contemporary labor migration flows to Ragusa, linking it to specific migrant-sending localities. Second, I have traced the constitution of farm and care migrant workers as they navigate two institutions that shape their labor market outcomes and social standing in Ragusa: the receiving state and...
social networks. Third, I situated migrant workers’ subjectification processes in their relations with their employers.

Methodologically, the choice of taking care and farm migrant workers as analytical units has proven to be useful in order to balance out the ethnic approach prevailing in the literature concerned with migrants’ incorporation. By concentrating on a bounded field-site I gained a deeper understanding of the practices and relations that develop among specific actors, especially between employers and workers. I was also able to identify some processes of subject formation at the intersections of class, gender, ethnicity, nationality and morality within a specific spatial location. In terms of theory, I benefitted from the insights of anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, as well as scholars specialized in the study of migration, globalization and domestic labor.

My findings point to various similarities between migrant farm and care workers in Ragusa, such as their shared structural position as low-wage laborers in today’s world economy. The participation of low-wage laborers, who fill low-status jobs in local labor markets, contributes to the accumulation of capital, wealth and welfare even in societies that not many see as affluent, or as deserving of the label of “global cities” such those depicted by Saskia Sassen (1991). This has called for an attempt to understand the specific structural needs that generate a demand for foreign labor in a location such as Ragusa. At the same time, it became necessary to problematize the North-South development divide in order to understand the contradictory position of the province, often portrayed as a backward area that has managed nonetheless to meet its demographic challenges and labor imbalances, and respond to the pressures of a highly competitive global economy by relying on migrant labor. Adopting a more flexible approach towards the innovative articulations of market calculations and local contexts allows us to gain a better understanding of such an apparently contradictory position.

As shown in Chapter 1, there are not necessarily strong and weak states, but rather more affluent areas and marginal areas that may be bridged through migration. This means that sending countries as a whole should not be regarded as peripheries. My research shows that specific localities share common pressures linked to the demands of the neoliberal economy, regardless of their territorial location in any given nation-state. Similarly, migrant workers’ experiences are situated within the larger framework of the global expansion of the market economy. Many farm and care workers contribute to the accumulation of wealth in distant places because a neoliberal restructuring has rendered their sources of livelihood (especially subsistence or small farming) unviable, or narrowed their employment opportunities in their usual place of residence. At the same time, migration has opened up new possibilities for these workers to deploy strategies of self-improvement and claim their share of capital accumulation, as self-enterprising subjects who have developed a neoliberal ethos along with other ethical regimes and identities.

Another dimension in which the experiences of migrant farm and care workers seem to converge relates to their entry into a local labor market and their labor market outcomes. As shown in Chapter 3, these processes are strongly influenced by their participation in networks that shape their migration trajectories and influence their job search paths and the dissemination of place-based-knowledge. Indeed, besides guiding the invisible hand of the market to match labor supply and demand, networks contribute to the constitution of a supply of self-recruiting and self-disciplining migrant labor force, reducing the material and non-material costs (and risks) of recruitment processes. Network mediation has the
potential to reduce the anxieties and reservations that employers and workers may have prior to establishing an employment relationship. Networks contain screening and enforcement mechanisms that are likely to guarantee the satisfaction of employers. At the same time, rotation mechanisms may enable workers to build resilience towards the hard conditions of work that characterize their occupations, by allowing them to temporarily detach from their subordinate positions in the receiving context. My study further confirms the findings of other scholars (e.g. Goss and Lindquist 1995 and Salazar Parreñas 2001) according to which social networks are embedded in power relations, and both solidarity and self-interest coexist within them. In fact, the intervention of (illegal) recruitment-for-profit organizations and the commodification of certain services and ‘favors’ exemplify the extent to which a market ideology pervades social relations. Ultimately, while the premise of embeddedness suggests that all economic action is socially oriented, it would be worthwhile looking at how the market ideology affects social relations influencing the formation of strong or weak ties within migrant groups. This would be an interesting area for future research.

Moreover, migrants’ labor market integration implies a relationship with the receiving state. European female care workers and non-European male farm workers relate in distinct ways to the receiving state, owing to their dissimilar positioning and political treatment as members of, or outsiders to the European common space. In stressing the similar processes of incorporation whereby employers and workers jointly interpret the administrative norms and either meet or circumvent them, I have not ignored migrants’ distinct experiences and strategies of entry, sojourn and employment, as well as the dissimilar treatment they receive as European or non-European workers. Yet, both care and farm migrant workers navigate a spectrum of regularity/irregularity and formality/informality concerning their migratory and employment status. As discussed in Chapter 2, their shifting positions in such a continuum provide them with different resources and opportunities, and may or may not enhance their bargaining power to negotiate better conditions of work and pay. The human face of migration complexifies the implementation of labor migration policy as entrusted to private enforcers such as self-disciplining employers and workers. The de-personalization of foreign labor understood simply in market terms is offset by a re-personalization of the employment relationship at the micro-level. Ultimately, the development of mutual dependencies (material or non-material), complicity and loyalty between employers and workers shows that policies addressing migration in technical terms do not fully capture the human dimension of employment relations. This raises important questions with regard to the ‘manageability’ of migration, and labor migration governance.

A neuralgic point in my study is the examination of the flexible articulations of market calculations with migration institutions, from the state to the constitution of migrant worker subjects. The analysis of these processes is particularly relevant in an era when migration has become an issue of high politics owing to economic and security concerns that call for integrated policy approaches to labor migration and international cooperation. Indeed, there seems to be a renewed interest on the part of a wide range of actors in ‘harnessing’ the benefits of migration for (economic) development, which differs little from the concerns underlying the foreign recruitment programs of the 1960s. My study problematizes political assumptions that merge the macro-economic concerns of countries of origin and destination with the micro-maximization interests of migrant workers into triple-win scenarios. This is not to say that migration does not carry any
benefits. On the contrary, the economies of sending and receiving countries would certainly suffer without the financial and social transfers rendered possible by labor migration, and many households would not be able to enjoy certain welfare standards if their members did not work abroad.

My findings indicate, however, that policy goals are not always in line with the ambitions and concrete practices of the persons whose lives they seek to optimize. Along these lines, my inquiry into the constitution of low-wage farm and domestic migrant workers opened up more questions than initially foreseen. Some obvious, and yet tricky questions include: Who manages what? At what level? And, most importantly, to what extent is labor migration actually manageable? While these are not new questions they point to interesting areas in which to pursue further empirical research to gain a deeper understanding of the implications of the flexible articulations of market and policy in the arena of international migration. Will this allow us to identify more effective policies and practices of labor migration management? This remains to be seen. It would be interesting to craft a research agenda that traces the different aspects of the effects of the market, from shaping of labor migration politics, to international migration governance processes, to the effects the former may have on specific local contexts, including on the construction and perception of self.

I have introduced neoliberalism as an analytical category in the study of labor migration politics. In the future, it would be worthwhile to attempt a broader theorization of labor migration management as a neoliberal technology of governing migration, to gain a deeper understanding of the articulation of market calculations and political migration-related concerns that seek to harness and optimize the mobility of labor, and of migrant workers. The conceptualization of labor migration management proposed in Chapter 3 is a small but compelling contribution to address recent concerns of migration scholars about the need to adopt more comprehensive approaches to analyze the flexible modes of capital accumulation and the contemporary neoliberal restructuring of space, identity formation, and society. In particular, it offers a small window to understand “the way in which the neo-liberal restructuring of specific localities shapes the way in which migrants live in a specific place” (Glick Schiller 2009: 12).

Another similarity between migrant care and farm workers relates to their shared processes of subjectification. Introducing the notion of neoliberalism as a technology of governing at the subject level of analysis, I have argued that the processes of subject-making of care and farm migrant workers include the construction of a sense of self-improvement that articulates issues such as capital accumulation in migration projects. The subject level of analysis of labor migration is a key gateway to understanding the processes that reproduce global structural inequalities including at the level of the subjectivities of migrant workers themselves. This is not to suggest that migrant workers passively internalize certain cultural forms, market or consumerist ideals. Rather, I have argued in Chapter 5 that migration projects are part of unique self-engineering processes inherent in the construction of self that depend upon many factors (class, gender, age, family status, etc.), and that the construction of a neoliberal ethos may co-exist with other ethical regimes. One of the most interesting findings of my study is that the classic representation of the young (male or female) economic migrant is being challenged by the participation of an increasing number of senior migrant women in international labor migration, mainly related to the provision of care in Ragusa. The issue of aging migrants has not been sufficiently investigated in international migration studies. My research
opens up another small window in this regard, but there is still much more to be done to understand how migration and the life cycle affect one another. For example, future research could look into the effects of the migration of senior women or men on transnational households; or focus on the linkages between aging migrant populations and the welfare systems of countries of origin and destination, for example in terms of retirement benefits. (Some interviewees in my study were entitled to retirement benefits in their countries of origin and yet migrated in order to gain supplementary income.) In short, there is a need for further empirical research to uncover the implications of the migration of more senior persons, articulating the structural, institutional and subject-level.

Finally, my research is directly concerned with issues of class and identity construction. The subject-level of analysis reveals that in pursuing their projects of capital accumulation and self-improvement, migrants may be confronted with multiple dimensions of exclusion from the benefits of capitalism (or exceptions to neoliberalism, to take up Aiwa Ong’s expression). The processes and intersecting forces that intervene in their constitution as low-wage laborers provide multiple examples. As shown in Chapter 4, employers ascribe specific criteria to foreign workers, and essentialize and gender their manageability and suitability to perform female- or male-dominated low-status jobs. Indeed, the constitution of migrant workers as low-wage laborers in the receiving society implies the construction of social boundaries along the lines of class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, etc. The implications of these practices are multiple, and they go from the reproduction of the local sexual division of labor, to the configuration of ethnic hierarchies in the agricultural and domestic sectors, to raising questions about the professionalization of care and farm jobs, as it appears that both require tangible (language proficiency, technical or practical know-how) as well as intangible emotional and interpersonal skills.

Furthermore, the conflation of home and workplace in care and farm jobs in Ragusa is a major point for comparison of the experiences and processes of subjectification of these emblematic figures of migration. Proximity with employers, isolation, lack of privacy and the strategies employers deploy to affirm their superior standing denote the multiple ways in which live-in jobs allow for the optimization of migrants as living resources. In addition, migrants may be tacitly excluded from the public space, and they may be denied a different social status (e.g. as consumer or parent) other than that of low-wage laborer in the receiving context. This is particularly evident in the difficulties that some migrants face in reuniting with their families, owing to their subordinate status in the receiving society. Migrant workers are aware of their low status in Ragusa and adopt strategies to conceal or contest it, including by denying class hierarchies, highlighting their professionalism and cosmopolitanism, underlining their material achievements, and distancing themselves from other workers. In so doing, ironically, they may embrace some stereotypes and boundary work deployed by employers and turn them into resources for redressing momentarily their subordinate position without challenging, however, the larger structures of inequality in which they remain embedded. One interesting finding shows that the market also influences the way in which different migrant groups relate to one another in a given context. Competition among migrant workers in the receiving labor market may influence the ways in which migrants try to maintain their dignity. By embracing the criteria used by their employers to build the image of the good worker they may contribute to reproducing the local sectorial ethnic
hierarchies. In addition, the construction of otherness as a strategy to contest their subordinate position may heighten distance and distrust among workers of different origins, whose constitution as low-status workers occurs, nonetheless, at the intersection of similar axes of domination. Competition among migrant workers may thus hinder the emergence of joint strategies of resistance. This is another interesting area that would deserve closer scrutiny in future studies.

In sum, my research has dealt with two emblematic figures of migration, care and farm migrant workers, offering some reflections on the shared experiences and constitution of these workers as part of a low-status local, yet global workforce that participates actively in the processes of neoliberal restructuring. Contemporary labor migration in Ragusa is not only about optimization. It is about people who sustain several globalized lives through their personhood and their work. They do so whatever the category ascribed to them: as labor power, as tools of capital accumulation, as policy targets, or as self-disciplining subjects and enforcers of migration management policy.

NOTES

1. There is a debate around three key issues of “globalization”: first, when the process began (i.e. since the beginning of human history; five hundred years ago, or in the second half of the twentieth century); second, what factors underlie its development (i.e. economic, political, cultural); and third, where the process is ultimately leading (i.e. homogenization or heterogenization) (Appelrouth and Edles 2012: 750-751). Although enriched by this discussion, I simply intend to highlight the consensus around the fact that human mobility is a key aspect of contemporary globalization. For Appadurai, for example, “ethnoscapes” (global flows of people including tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers) are an essential feature of the world. Together with electronic mass mediation migrations, ethnoscapes can create “a new sense of the global as modern and the modern as global” (Appadurai 1996: 10). For Bauman too, mobility is a key feature of globalization. Yet, as the freedom to move is a scarce, unevenly distributed commodity, for Baumann it is the main stratifying factor of postmodern times (1998: 2). For Eriksen (2007) globalization is characterized by different streams of people from diplomats to South-South migrants. Migration is a central element of transnational processes (e.g. transnational economics, minority creation, border control, long-distance nationalism), and tends to reproduce global inequalities.
Appendices

1  To zoom-in, click and open original.

Appendix I: List of Interviews

### Agricultural workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name Code</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Line-in Year</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Family status</th>
<th>Year of first arrival in Region</th>
<th>Migratory status on arrival/return interview</th>
<th>Work experience</th>
<th>Current employment</th>
<th>Prior experience in agriculture: Yes (Y)/No (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A.11.5.08</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Married - two children</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>No experience, left Tunisia at age 15</td>
<td>Zurich</td>
<td>F - family farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I.11.5.08</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Divorced - married - two children</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>Operates - implements panel industry, water</td>
<td>Zurich</td>
<td>F - family farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>C.11.5.09</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Married - two children</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Irregular</td>
<td>Driver, packer</td>
<td>Zurich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A.12.5.08</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Married - two children</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>Hire worker, carpenter</td>
<td>Zurich</td>
<td>Dairy industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I.12.5.00</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Married - two children</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Irregular</td>
<td>Farm, driver in the construction sector</td>
<td>Zurich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>W.14.5.09</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Under age 20</td>
<td>College IT</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Married - two children</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Irregular</td>
<td>Rocket IT shop, construction, farmer</td>
<td>Zurich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A.15.5.08</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Married - two children</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>Horticulture, construction worker</td>
<td>Zurich</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Domestic workers

| No. | Name-Code | Country of origin | Sex | Age | Experience in Kenya | Education | Nationality | Marital status | No. of children | Year of first arrival in Kenya | Labour condition | Educational/ training | Work experience | Current employment | Ever worked in another country? | Yes/No (Y/N) | Ever worked in another country? | Yes/No (Y/N) |
|-----|-----------|-------------------|-----|-----|---------------------|----------|-------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| 13  | E.15.3.99  | India             | F   | 33  | Yes | Educated - one child  | Diploma   | Male | Married       | One child       | 2007             | Regular             | Regular            | Housekeeper        | Domestic work     | N               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |
| 14  | R.21.3.30  | Poland            | F   | 59  | Yes | High school - technical diploma - accountant | High school - two children | Female | Married       | Two children     | 2006             | Regular             | Regular            | Housekeeper        | Domestic work     | N               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |
| 15  | R.27.3.30  | Romania           | F   | 24  | No  | Male - technical diploma - accountant | Single   | Male | Married       | Single child     | 2016             | Regular             | Regular            | Informant - housewife | Domestic work     | N               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |
| 16  | R.27.3.30  | Tunisia           | F   | 25  | No  | Male - technical diploma - accountant | Married - two children | Female | Married       | Two children     | 2007             | Regular             | Regular            | Informant - beauty salon | Cleaning          | N               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |
| 17  | R.3.1.3.11 | Romania           | F   | 39  | No  | High school - technical diploma - accountant | High school - one child | Female | Married       | One child        | 2006             | Regular             | Regular            | Informant - housekeeper | Cleaning           | N               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |
| 18  | R.3.1.3.11 | Romania           | M   | 39  | No  | High school - technical diploma - accountant | High school - one child | Male   | Married       | One child        | 2006             | Regular             | Regular            | Informant - housekeeper | Cleaning           | N               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |
| 19  | R.3.1.3.11 | Romania           | F   | 41  | Yes | High school - technical diploma - accountant | High school - one child | Female | Married       | One child        | 2006             | Regular             | Regular            | Informant - housekeeper | Cleaning           | N               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |
| 20  | W.4.7.31  | Poland            | F   | 57  | Yes | Elementary school - technical diploma - accountant | High school - one child | Female | Married       | One child        | 2007             | Regular             | Regular            | Informant - housekeeper | Cleaning           | Y               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |
| 21  | C.4.7.31  | Romania           | F   | 26  | Yes | High school - technical diploma - accountant | High school - one child | Female | Married       | One child        | 2005             | Regular             | Regular            | Informant - housekeeper | Cleaning           | N               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |
| 22  | C.5.3.30  | Poland            | F   | 59  | Yes | High school - technical diploma - accountant | High school - one child | Female | Married       | One child        | 2005             | Regular             | Regular            | Informant - housekeeper | Cleaning           | N               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |
| 23  | G.2.8.37  | Romania           | F   | 31  | Yes | High school - technical diploma - accountant | High school - one child | Female | Married       | One child        | 2005             | Regular             | Regular            | Informant - housekeeper | Cleaning           | N               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |
| 24  | G.2.8.37  | Romania           | M   | 31  | Yes | High school - technical diploma - accountant | High school - one child | Male   | Married       | One child        | 2005             | Regular             | Regular            | Informant - housekeeper | Cleaning           | N               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |
| 25  | G.2.8.37  | Romania           | F   | 31  | Yes | High school - technical diploma - accountant | High school - one child | Female | Married       | One child        | 2005             | Regular             | Regular            | Informant - housekeeper | Cleaning           | N               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |
| 26  | G.2.8.37  | Romania           | F   | 31  | Yes | High school - technical diploma - accountant | High school - one child | Female | Married       | One child        | 2005             | Regular             | Regular            | Informant - housekeeper | Cleaning           | N               | Yes/No (Y/N) | Yes/No (Y/N)          | Yes/No (Y/N) |

### Employers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name-Code</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Place of interview</th>
<th>Employer’s main activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>E.15.3.99</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Home - Workplace</td>
<td>Employer - retail industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>E.15.3.99</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Home - Workplace</td>
<td>Employer - owner of cattle farm and manager of construction factories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>C.13.3.99</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Home - Workplace</td>
<td>Employer - owner of cattle farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>C.13.3.99</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Home - Workplace</td>
<td>Employer - owner of cattle farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>C.20.3.10</td>
<td>Agriculture &amp; Domestic service</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Home - Workplace</td>
<td>Employer - owner of farm and cheese factory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>C.20.3.10</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Public space - Workplace</td>
<td>Employer - public service employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>E.15.3.99</td>
<td>Domestic service</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Home - Workplace</td>
<td>Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>F.20.8.11</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Office - Workplace</td>
<td>Employer - owner of dairy farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>F.20.8.11</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Office - Workplace</td>
<td>Employer - owner of dairy farm and cheese factory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>C.3.1.3.11</td>
<td>Domestic service</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Home - Workplace</td>
<td>Manager, horticultural firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>C.3.1.3.11</td>
<td>Domestic service</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Home - Workplace</td>
<td>Manager, horticultural firm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Additional interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name-Code</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Place of interview</th>
<th>Main activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>E.15.3.99</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Office - trade union facilities</td>
<td>Provide information and counseling and orientation services to migrant workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>E.15.3.99</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Office - trade union facilities</td>
<td>Employer - trade union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>E.15.3.99</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Office - trade union facilities</td>
<td>Employer - trade union</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *In total, 10 interviews were conducted, codes taken.

*In total, 10 interviews were conducted, codes taken.*
Appendix II: Domestic work in Italy

Domestic Workers in Italy 1999-2005 (%)

Source: INPS (2005) – Domestic Workers Observatory - www.inps.it (author’s translation)

Foreign domestic workers in Italy 1999-2005 (%) Distribution according to geographic region of origin

Source: Adapted from INPS 2005 (ISMU, with data from INPS), Statistical Data Bank – Domestic Workers Observatory - www.inps.it (author's translation)
Domestic workers by nationality and age group Year 2005 (%)

Source: INPS 2005 (ISMU, with data from INPS), Statistical Data Bank – Domestic Workers Observatory - www.inps.it (author’s translation)

Appendix III: Location maps

Figure 1: Map of Italy, location of the Province of Ragusa

Source: Norman Einstein (CC BY-SA 3.0)
Figure 2: Province of Ragusa – Research sites

Source: Sandra Paola Alvarez Tinajero & Catherine Fragnière (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Appendix IV: Images

Figure 3: Phone center – Santa Croce Camerina

Source: Sandra Paola Alvarez Tinajero (CC BY-SA 3.0)
Figure 4: Immigrant shop, Ragusa

Source: Sandra Paola Alvarez Tinajero (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Figure 5: Orthodox church, Ragusa

Source: Sandra Paola Alvarez Tinajero (CC BY-SA 3.0)
Figure 6: Apartment on a farm, Ragusa

Source: Sandra Paola Alvarez Tinajero (CC BY-SA 3.0)