

Long abstract – Monographic section

EXPLOITATION OF WORK, RIGHTS AND HEALTH IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Edited by Marco Omizzolo

Sowing exploitation reap campaigns, of awareness. The role of diasporas in countering labor exploitation.

Stefania Peca and Pierluigi Musarò

Labor exploitation affects weaker social groups most violently. Migrant people are in more danger of being exposed to exploitation due to normative, institutional, social, and cultural factors that create isolation, power inequalities, and enhanced relational poverty.

In the common perception, a migrant is a poor person coming from countries (so-called Global South), which we associate with a condition of supposed deprivation, social and political inferiority, and a need for control by the authorities of the receiving countries.

Media and public policy discourse, such as alarmistic narratives about “the others”, are responsible for this process of “migrantization”, contributing to amplify fears and discrimination in social, economical and cultural life.

When these discourses enter the field of labor, migrants are seen as objects in a complex economic system, depending on the logic of convenience in which masters rule.

In Italy foreign population is 8.5 %, of which just over 7% are people of non-EU origin, and more than 30% of them live in absolute poverty. In this scenario migrants have less possibilities to achieve a better life for them and for their families. In a sense, migration, in Italy, brings with it the risk of being exploited, and it puts people in a domination relationship.

Like immigration itself, which has been structural in Italy for at least three decades, the phenomenon of labor exploitation is also treated as an emergency, both in terms of media representations and in political and regulatory measures. But a biased and distorted representation that has invaded the *mediapolis* for years has been fuelling a dangerous gap between the statistical reality of the phenomenon and the perception of it, to the point of 'normalising' hatred against differences. Communication, in the field of migration, can change the perspective and aim at a role of *advocacy*. One of the most powerful tools to improve public communication about phenomena are media campaigns, a recent and important media genre able to inform the public, to prevent social inequalities, and to suggest more adequate behaviors. Starting from a mapping of the institutional communication campaigns about labor exploitations, recently activated in Italy by Ministries, the authors conducted two focus groups and 15 interviews with privileged witnesses active in diaspora associations in Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and Lombardy.

The aim is to investigate the effect these campaigns have on migrants, starting from the perspective of diaspora associations, seen as “mediators” and advocacy agents towards newcomers and recognizing their role as new agents of social change.

As the results show, although useful tools to fight the phenomenon, campaigns hardly go viral, also due to the temporary nature of the funding they rely on, and tend to squeeze migrant workers between “*those who made it*” and “*those who did not make it*”, or rather “*cannot make it*”, with the risk of reinforcing stigmatisation and polarising discourses on exploitation.

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In general, these campaigns struggle to represent the complexity of migration: it is necessary to talk about rights, to recognise cultural diversity in the workplace, to foster a greater relationship of trust with Institutions so that they are seen as places to turn to in order to escape from the condition of subalternity to which labor exploitation relegates migrant people.

The issue of exploitation cannot be the worker's problem: controls must be incentivized, a support mechanism must be created that is capillary and known to those who are exploited, those who work must be informed and, if foreign, oriented when arriving in the territory, but information activities must also be carried out for companies and consumers that are the other side of this system.

Well-informed consumers are the real target on which these campaigns should act, as it is only through ethical, conscious consumption that respects labor rights that the issue of labor exploitation can be tackled.

In conclusion, the diasporas declare their willingness to collaborate in the fight against exploitation, demanding constant involvement in the political and cultural processes in order to contribute to collective achievement of justice for everybody.

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