**The rise of right-wing populism and the changing politics of agriculture and migration in rural Italy in the long 2010s**

Abstract

In Italy, the rise of right-wing populism assumed new dimensions with the national elections of March 2018 and the subsequent formation of a coalitional government supported by the two populist protest parties emerged as winners from the ballots. The new government, hegemonized by the increasingly popular right-wing coalition partner (the League), embraced a nationalist rhetoric centred on the protection of the excellences of “Made in Italy” food and launched a repressive reform of migration policies with potentially far-reaching implications for migrant agricultural workers and the sectors of Italian agriculture highly dependent upon their labour.

This paper provides an analysis of the rural roots and dimensions of the rise of right-wing populism in Italy. It specifically explores the changing politics of agriculture and migration associated with it and its implications for farmers and farm workers in southern Italian coastal agricultural areas. Tracing the genealogy of the policies and discourses promoted in these fields by the new government in its first months of life, we argue that these represent the last episode of the longer-term emergence of a new populist politics of agriculture and migration occurred in the context of the long transition to a corporate-environmental food regime and the profound restructuring of Italian agri-food sector that characterised it. Exploring in depth the policies and discourses promoted by the subsequent governments in power in the 2010s in response to the twin crises in agriculture and migration, we contend that the currently dominant strand of right-wing populism promotes a re-articulation of previous discourses and flash out continuities and changes characterising the emerging politics of the new government vis-à-vis its predecessors. We conclude our analysis considering the potential implications of this new politics for farmers and farm workers and the future prospects of an alternative, emancipatory politics based on the alliance between these two classes of agrarian labour.

Short Biographies of the Authors

**Giulio Iocco** is a PhD student in Politics, Culture and Development at the Department of Political and Social Sciences and a fellow of the Centre for Rural Development Studies of the University of Calabria. Since 2014, he participated in research projects on the political economy of small-scale farming and precarious farm labour in North Africa and the politics of rural social protests in the region. Since 2016, he started to research also on the political economy of the migrant farm labour question and rural politics in southern Europe, focusing on emerging political responses from below to the rural social crisis. His PhD research explores the politics of the greening of intensive agriculture in the Mediterranean region and its implications for the labour question. He is a member of the Italian radical workers’ political network “Fuori Mercato” (“Outside the market”).

**Martina Lo Cascio** holds a PhD in Social and Psychological Sciences (University of Palermo). She is a Research Fellow at the University of Bergamo with a research project on ‘“The supermarket revolution” and agricultural production in Italy: private standards and representation of food’. Her research focuses on migrant labour in intensive agricultural production in Southern Italy. During her PhD, she conducted an ethnographic research on olive chains in Western Sicily, focusing on seasonal workers' and producers' representations of the chains and of their own conditions. She is one of the founders and members of “ContadinAzioni” a political group promoting projects of “food self-production against all exploitation”, part of radical Italian network of “Fuori Mercato” (“Out of the market”). She is also a member of the Associazione Rurale Italiana (Italian Rural Association). In 2016, she became a member of the working group on Agricultural workers and migrants of the European Coordination of Via Campesina. For ARI and the French Peasant Confederation, she conducted a short research project on European large-scale retailers and the new generation of labour certification they use.

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