

COVID-19, RACIAL CAPITALISM, AND UNDOCUMENTED BANGLADESHI AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN MANOLADA, GREECE

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19, Racial Capitalism, and Undocumented Bangladeshi Agricultural Workers in Manolada, Greece

This article uses the example of undocumented Bangladeshi migrants in the strawberry sector of Greece to highlight how racial capitalism heightens the health vulnerabilities of racialized low-class migrant workers and exposes them to a greater risk of COVID-19 transmission. Race-based devaluation of workers intersects with migrant illegality and culturally-specific masculine norms to normalize a discourse of healthcare “undeservingness” for undocumented racialized migrants. Unfree labor is legislated through restrictive migrant labor laws and selective detention and deportation of “illegal” migrants. Structural and systemic discriminations increase health precarities for undocumented agricultural workers.

KEYWORDS: Greece, migrant agricultural workers, COVID-19, racial capitalism, migrant illegality

IZVLEČEK

Covid-19, rasni kapitalizem in neprijavljeni kmetijski delavci iz Bangladeša v Manoladi v Grčiji

Članek na primeru neprijavljenih delavcev iz Bangladeša, ki so v Grčiji zaposleni kot obiralci jagod, prikazuje, kako rasni kapitalizem prispeva k zdravstveni ranljivosti delavcev drugih ras iz nižjih družbenih slojev in jih izpostavlja večjemu tveganju za okužbo s covidom-19. Podcenjevanje delavcev na podlagi rase sovpada z ilegalnim statusom migrantov in s kulturno specifičnimi normami moškosti, ki normalizirajo diskurz zdravstvene »nezasluženosti« neprijavljenih migrantov. Nesvobodno delo je zakonsko utemeljeno z restriktivno delovno zakonodajo za migrante in s selektivnim zapiranjem oziroma deportacijo »illegalnih« migrantov. K zdravstveni ogroženosti neprijavljenih delavcev v kmetijstvu prispevata predvsem strukturna in sistemska diskriminacija.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Grčija, migrantski delavci v kmetijstvu, Covid-19, rasni kapitalizem, ilegalni migranti

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INTRODUCTION

“Neither the *Greek Sarkar* (Greek state) nor the farmers care about our lives or health. Only our cheap labor matters.” These words spoken by an undocumented Bangladeshi strawberry picker from Manolada in Greece during the first COVID-19 lockdown exposes the stark disposability of low-class, racialized migrant workers under racial capitalism. The region of Manolada in Greece’s western Peloponnese is the hub for over 90 percent of strawberries grown in the country. The use of 10,000 to 12,000 migrant workers, the majority of whom are Bangladeshi, has propelled Greece to become the eighth biggest producer of strawberries in the world.¹

COVID-19 is called the “inequality” disease as it feeds off and intensifies existing societal inequalities of race, class, ethnicity, and gender (Oxfam 2021). In this article, I use the example of undocumented Bangladeshi men employed in the strawberry sector in Greece to illustrate how racial capitalism heightens the health vulnerabilities of racialized low-class migrant workers and exposes them to a greater risk of COVID-19 transmission. Race-based devaluation of workers intertwines with migrant illegality and culturally-specific masculine norms to normalize a discourse of health-care “undeservingness.”

BACKGROUND

In Greece, the COVID-19 lockdown, from March 2020, hit all its agriculture sectors hard as the country could not access seasonal migrant workers from neighboring Albania. Restrictions on movement prevented the travel of already present undocumented migrants from one agricultural region to another. Active lobbying by farmer cooperatives resulted in the Greek state adopting a fast-track procedure to hire “third-country citizens in an irregular situation” who were already present in the country.² It also waived visa requirements and arranged charter flights for seasonal agricultural workers coming from neighboring Albania. In April 2020, the European Commission approved one billion euros in Greek State aid directed at the Greek agricultural sector.³ In June 2020, the Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food announced further financial assistance of up to seven thousand euros for

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- 1 Workman, Daniel (2020). *Top Strawberries Exporters by Country*, <http://www.worldstopexports.com/top-strawberries-exporters-by-country/> (27 Jul. 2020).
 - 2 OECD (2020). *Managing International Migration Under COVID-19*, <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/managing-international-migration-under-covid-19-6e914d57/> (17 Jan. 2021).
 - 3 European Commission (2020). *State Aid: Commission Approves €10 Million Greek Scheme to Support Companies in the Floriculture Sector Affected by the Coronavirus Outbreak*, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_809 (1 Aug. 2020).

each farmer and fifty thousand euros for small and medium agricultural enterprises.⁴ In August 2020, recognizing that the pandemic was not easing up, Greece extended temporary residence permits of agricultural workers.⁵ In December 2020, the Greek minister of rural development and food declared the coronavirus-linked financial aid given to Greek farmers as tax-free.⁶ Despite the slew of bailouts obtained by the farmers and agricultural sector from the EU and the Greek state, to date, no state relief measures for “essential” farmworkers, the majority of whom are undocumented, have been forthcoming.

METHODS

For this article, I employ the term Manolada to describe a large area near Patras in the western Peloponnese where strawberry farming occurs. I conducted semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and fieldwork observation with Bangladeshi migrant workers in two closely located villages of Nea Manolada and Lappa in July and December of 2019. The majority of workers interviewed were below thirty years of age, undocumented, and included recent arrivals in addition to those who had been in Greece for six years or more.

Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, interviews were conducted, in July 2020, with a handful of community elders and migrant workers over WhatsApp. Zoom and email were used for interviews and follow-up with migrant rights activists and rights groups in Athens. This article also draws on online sources such as Greek language newspapers, news briefs from the Greek horticultural sector, reporting in international news channels, policy documents, and reports by UN bodies and migrant rights groups.

MIGRANT LABOR IN STRAWBERRY FARMING

Clustered in the Manolada region, Greece’s commercial strawberry farming is seasonally grown from late October to the end-May. Nea Manolada, the hub of strawberry farming, has a majority of its 700 strong population engaged in strawberry cultivation, either as independent producers or as sharecroppers. Currently, over 90

4 City Guide (2020). *Financial Support for Farmers and Agricultural Enterprises*, <http://www.odigostoupolitiki.eu/koronoios-oikonomiki-enischysi-agroton-kai-agrotikon-epicheiriseon/> (1 Aug. 2020).

5 Taxheaven (2020). *Residence permit of mobile land workers extended*, <https://www.taxheaven.gr/news/50154/parateinetai-h-adeia-paramonhs-metaklhtwn-ergatwn-ghs> (in Greek) (5 Jan. 2021).

6 Capital.Gr (2020). *Aid to Farmers for the Effects of the Coronavirus are Now Unsecured and Tax-free*, <https://www.capital.gr/oikonomia/3504485/akatasxetes-kai-aforologites-efexis-oi-enisxuseis-stous-agrotēs-gia-tis-sunepeies-tou-koronoιου> (3 Feb. 2021).

percent of the labor is provided by 10,000–12,000 undocumented Bangladeshi men. The export of over 85 percent of strawberries to markets in Russia, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, and the neighboring Eastern European countries and the revenue this generates for Greece has led to the crop being hailed as “red gold” by a former Greek prime minister, George Papandreaou (Gialis, Herod 2014).

Due to the perishability of the fruit, quickness in harvesting and quality control is critical to profit-making in this agribusiness. Profitability is ensured by the casual hiring of migrant men whose constant employability hinges on their ability to deliver fast-paced quality work. With over three-quarters of the total production cost in cultivation and harvest spent on labor, greater profits are derived from a subordinate labor force. Undocumented migrants, due to their illegality and fear of deportation, are easier to transform into unfree labor and acquiesce to depressed wages and long hours of work. A Bangladeshi plucker stated, “farming of strawberries is only possible due to migrant workers like us. . . . We are willing to bear the hardships as we lack legal status” (July 2019). The pluckers are paid a daily wage of twenty-three to twenty-five euros for an eight-hour workday, a rate that Bangladeshi workers have fought for by conducting strikes and demonstrations (Ibid.).

RACIAL CAPITALISM’S PROFIT MAKING IN GREECE

Bangladeshi strawberry farmworkers embody the violent logic of racial capitalism. Cedric Robinson, in his book *Black Marxism: The Making of a Black Radical Tradition*, argues that capitalism opportunistically preys on pre-existing societal inequalities of racism and molds it “to the political and material exigencies of the moment” to derive economic value (1983: 66). Race, as an ordering of groups of people, is used to differentiate between workers, create labor market segmentation, and justify depressed wages.

However, capitalism “cannot ensure its own continuance, its own necessities, without some other institution outside capital to enforce a common interest on capitalist society” (Barker 1978). The state emerges central in easing accumulation through policies and frameworks on labor regulation, labor (im)mobility, labor surveillance, and the thinning of labor rights (LeBaron, Phillips 2019). In the instance of migrant workforce, state-enforced border securitization measures to deter the legal entry of racialized migrants and ignoring their exploitation creates and perpetuates unfree labor.

The tacit convergence of the interests of capital and the state in the arrangement of unfree labor is evident in Manolada. Bi-lateral agreements with neighboring countries such as Albania and Bulgaria to facilitate the short-term hiring of temporary foreign agricultural workers are not enough to meet all labor demands. The gap is filled by migrants such as those from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Unable to

get asylum status or work permits, they often stay on in Greece as “illegals,” a status they define as “without papers.”

The management of citizenship through the regime of border control and potential deportability is part of the global management of the capital-labor relation (de Genova 2016). These “means of coercion ... specialized into the hands of the members of the state” (Barker 1978) allow the surplus migrant population to be concentrated in certain labor-intensive sectors such as agriculture. Deliberately constructed as relatively safe against potential deportability, it facilitates constant funneling of migrants to such sectors. As a worker explained, “it is safer to work here than in Athens. There, we stick out as outsiders. Police don’t harass you if you are working quietly for a farmer” (July 2019). The coupling of racialized bodies embodying “illegality” with potential deportability disenfranchise workers and extracts forced docility. A quote from an “illegal” Bangladeshi plucker illustrates the nexus between the Greek state and racial capitalism: “Through us, the government and the farmers earn a lot. Their interest vests on us. Otherwise, 2,000–3,000 illegal people like us can’t stay in a foreign country. They allow us to stay deliberately for their benefit” (July 2019)

The men’s economic devaluation is a corollary to their dehumanization, one that is normalized by societal discourses of racial othering, xenophobia, and Islamophobia (Petrou, Kandyliis 2016). These assist racial capitalism by creating boundaries between citizen-subjects and racialized migrants. Excluded from being part of a nation’s community, racialized foreign bodies lie outside the gambit of protections against exploitation and abuse (Ngai 2004). Criminalizing them as “illegals” rationalizes the evasion of accountability, either by the farmers or the state, for migrant labor and health rights. An undocumented Bangladeshi man who gave up plucking because of chronic back pain said: “The Greece government hesitates to give papers because the moment one gets the paper, it becomes the government responsibility to ensure we get proper salary and worker benefits such as health care. *This* isn’t to the benefit of the government or the farmer” (December 2019).

Cultural norms of masculinities also assist racial capitalism. Low-class male migrants face a double-bind in their attempts to acquire successful breadwinner masculine status through continuous employment and remittances back home (Kukreja 2020). Mediatized spectacles of detention and deportation opportunistically prey on the men’s masculine humiliation of being sent home (Kukreja 2019). A 27-year-old plucker said, “If I ask for my wage, the farmer threatens to get me arrested. It has happened with some others. Can you imagine the shame that I, as a man, will have to endure if I was deported” (July 2019). Bangladeshi men, emasculated by their illegality, “willingly” accept exploitative work arrangements: “We work with our heads bowed down. We have so much to lose.” In sum, capitalism “co-opts not only workers’ labour power but also their sense of pride and masculinity” (Maynard 1989: 169) for greater accumulation of profit.

HEALTH VULNERABILITIES OF MIGRANT WORKERS

Racial capitalism is also causally linked to migrant health inequities (Pulido 2016). Racial and ethnic minority groups are usually clustered in occupations that are prone to occupational injuries (ibid.). Undocumented migrants have high unmet health needs due to barriers such as minimal to nil health insurance in accessing health care services in a timely and comprehensive manner (Kotsila, Kallis 2019). Societal stigmatization as unhygienic, carriers of disease and as a public health risk blames the poor for their own illness without interrogating the structural and systemic barriers that create unhygienic, unsafe, and unsanitary conditions of work and housing (Xiuhtecutli, Shattuck 2020). This prejudice legitimizes the discourse of “deservingness” that classifies racialized and “illegal” migrants as “undeserving” of health entitlements (Willen 2012). While normalizing their exclusion, through state policies, from medical care, racial animus also makes frontline health providers deny them adequate medical care. It is also linked to lower trust in healthcare professionals and lower rates of healthcare utilization, thus causing reluctance or delay in seeking medical attention (Yaya et al. 2020).

With a reserve surplus of racialized, low-class labor, racial capitalism is assured of continual labor replenishment evident from quotes such as “when the worker becomes too sick, the farmer just cuts him loose,” and “we are like flies, swatted away once we become a nuisance.” In Greece, migrants employed in agriculture suffer double the rate of non-lethal accidents than native workers (Alexe et al. 2003). This high rate is attributable to employment in dangerous and high-risk jobs that do not often comply with Health and Safety regulations, increased pressure for productivity, piece-rate, work-site stress, and exposure to unhealthy and unsafe working conditions (Anastasiou et al. 2015: 228–230). Public hospitals are the only place where undocumented migrants, by paying a nominal fee, can access the public health system. Only in emergencies is health care free for them. Private doctors charge twenty to thirty euros per visit, more than a day’s wage for most workers.

HEALTH PRECARITIES IN MANOLADA

The logic of strawberry farming requires the pluckers to bend over long raised rows of strawberry plants. They do this for a continuous stretch of eight hours with just one fifteen-minute break. A plucker explained: “Whole day we have to bend and work with little rest, sometimes without any rest for seven hours in a day – which ultimately plays havoc on our health. Back pain is the most common complaint followed by kidney problems as we are not allowed to take any break for peeing” (December 2019).

Strawberry farming uses agrochemicals as soil fumigants and pesticides, including the highly toxic methyl bromide (Lopez-Aranda et al. 2016). Lack of protective equipment and almost nil training of fumigators about handling chemicals known as neurotoxins and carcinogens creates risk exposure. According to two Bangladeshi

fumigators, “while spraying the medicine in the strawberry field, no mask or gloves are given to us,” and “after the spray, the men are usually quite nauseous and have headaches” (July 2019).

With reduced time in between spraying chemicals and returning to harvesting, workers inhale chemical fumes continually while pesticide residues stick on to their hands and clothes: “our clothes, face, neck, everything is sticky with chemicals. It goes into our bodies when we eat food during our break.” Workers report a higher rate of respiratory ailments, including asthma, attributed to chemical inhalation and high humidity within the inadequately ventilated plastic greenhouses. The fungibility of labor increases health precarity. A worker stated: “If I say I am ill and cannot come to work, the farmer says, ‘no problem, I will get someone else’” (December 2019).

The living conditions worsen their health precarity. Greek farmers do not provide housing to their 10,000 odd farmhands, nor do the locals easily rent accommodations. The workers are forced to rent unused farmland and build makeshift shacks colloquially called *Barangas* (slang for the Greek word, *faranga*, or tent) out of salvaged plastic sheets, cardboard, and reeds. These overcrowded *Barangas* lack potable water, electricity, garbage disposal, or sanitation facilities. Improvised outdoor toilets consist of holes dug in the ground while bathing areas are open-air platforms. Combined, these cause adverse health outcomes such as frequent diarrhea, fever, and asthma.

BARRIERS TO HEALTH CARE ACCESS

Logistical barriers in accessing medical attention include long hours of work, lack of transport facilities, and unfamiliarity with the Greek language. Public health facilities are often shut by the time the workers get off work. Lack of transport facility to health centers, located in small towns adjacent to the farms where the men live and work, is compounded by the men’s racialized hypervisibility. Taking public transport is ruled out due to incidents of bus drivers’ refusal to allow them aboard and the racism and vigilantism of native passengers. The workers are forced to rely on a handful of regularised co-ethnics who own cars for transport to the nearest hospital in Varda, three kilometers from Nea Manolada or to Rio, located around forty kilometers away. Unfamiliarity with the Greek language forces dependence on regularised co-ethnics, fluent in Greek, to take time off work and act as translators. Often, it results in the supervisors assessing “whether the illness can be treated with simple remedies or is it serious. Taking time out costs money, and one has to be sure” (December 2019).

These logistical barriers have to be framed within discourses of illegality and racism and concerns about community surveillance and risk of detention. “I wanted to go to a doctor because of the constant headaches, but that became impossible. ... They ask for our papers. If we don’t have a work permit, they don’t check us and send us back,” stated one undocumented worker (July 2019). A 2016 study done in

Crete revealed that barriers for migrant workers in accessing General Practitioners were attributable to the consultation fee, regulation of movement, and increased surveillance of undocumented migrants (Teunissen et al. 2016: 120). The same study reported that some GPs were instructed to report undocumented migrants to the government (Ibid. 121).

As mentioned earlier, discrimination in healthcare settings often deters members of discriminated groups from seeking timely medical attention due to past experience of racist behavioral responses from medical personnel. In Greece, the consequence of racist and xenophobic public health responses toward migrant workers is to view them as undeserving of medical attention and offer a lowered quality of healthcare (Kotsila, Kallis 2019). A regularized status Bangladeshi supervisor, fluent in Greek, who often takes farmworkers to the hospital in Varda, had this to say:

Here, the health care workers such as nurses behave badly with us. By simply seeing us from a distance, they start saying, “Depon, Depon (paracetamol).” They don’t even bother to ask why we are here. They cover their nose with hands as if they are disgusted with our smell. They don’t check if we have a fever or anything. Go away, go away (waves his hand to show the dismissive gesture of nurses).

Racialized discourse of the “other” as animalistic and unhygienic justifies the diminishing of medical concern for ailing migrant workers (Xiuhtecutli, Shattuck 2020). Reluctance to access health care due to past discriminations makes the workers *choose* to become invisible to the health system, thus creating a falsity about their health status. This choice has serious consequences, especially during times of medical “crisis” such as the ongoing pandemic.

COPING WITH COVID-19 IN MANOLADA

“Infectious diseases have little respect for, and are poorly contained by, political borders and governmental mechanisms designed to enforce them” (Willen 2012: 813). COVID-19 has revealed the faultline of racial disparities that underpin capitalist growth. Structural and systemic inequalities faced by racial and ethnic minorities make them at greater risk of contracting and dying from the virus (Xiuhtecutli, Shattuck 2020). According to a study that has modeled COVID-19 infections, farmworkers are more prone than native populations to contract the virus (Purdue 2020).

In Manolada, local civic authorities, in consultation with the Bangladeshi Consulate in Greece, made public announcements and distributed informational leaflets in the Bangla language about COVID-19 restrictions.⁷ These included social

⁷ Manolada Watch (2020). *Report on the Situation at Manolada: March 2020*, Generation 2.0, <https://g2red.org/report-on-the-situation-at-manolada-march-2020/> (23 Jul. 2020).

distancing in strawberry rows, reduced numbers of workers, the use of gloves and a mask at work, limiting workers to their *barangas* after work, and prohibiting their movement in the main plaza of the villages – all guidelines with which the workers were willing to comply. In late March 2020, as work resumed after a gap of ten days, a few farmers dispensed disposable masks and gloves to small groups of workers. The rest had to purchase these from the open market at the then-going rate of one euro fifty cents each.

Despite farming resuming to near-normal levels, the restrictions on distancing resulted in reduced demand for workers. “There was constant tension – tension about contracting the disease, tension about getting some work during the season, tension about rent and food,” said a worker (July 2020). The men feared being replaced by other more desperate migrants, creating friction between them as they jostled for a smaller pool of jobs. A worker stated, “Putting aside our fears and placing faith in Allah, we went to work whenever we were asked to. We did not want to get in the bad books of either the supervisor or the farmer” (July 2020). However, the physical structure of strawberry farming, where the plants are grown in elevated rows eighteen inches apart, made social distancing difficult.

Similarly, government orders restricting the men to their cramped and overcrowded plastic hovels during off-hours, while necessary to prevent the spread of the virus, appeared counterproductive. During the first lockdown, one regularised Bangladeshi supervisor said, “we requested our men go to the farm and return straight to their *baranga* after work. Those who were not hired for the day – they had to stay inside. If any one of us had contracted corona, it would have spread like fire through the *barangas*.” In Manolada, the *barangas* are a festering ground for illnesses due to overcrowding, inadequate ventilation, shared kitchens, lack of drainage facilities, and open-air bathrooms. With no help forthcoming from any other quarter, Bangladeshi workers rallied by creating informal community support mechanisms and restrictions. “We relied on herbal remedies such as *nimbu-ada cha* (lemon-ginger tea) to ward off sore throat and colds. If someone had a fever, we’d check on them and bring painkillers from the pharmacy,” stated one plucker (July 2020).

By late December 2020, a Pakistani migrant worker from Manolada had died from the virus, and two other COVID-19 cases were confirmed from the adjoining region of Vouprasia. Local civic and health authorities embarked on mass COVID-19 testing of over six thousand Bangladeshi and Pakistani migrant men who had arrived in this region for the strawberry season. In another instance from Ierapetra in south Crete, an outbreak among Pakistani and Afghan migrant men engaged in greenhouse vegetable cultivation resulted in the quarantine of one hundred workers.⁸ Here again, the men were cramped in four rental complexes. The dependency of the local agrarian economy on the migrant workforce and the consequence of slowed

8 Efsyn.gr (2020). *Ierapetra: 100 Workers Quarantined Due to COVID-19 case in Pakistani Community*, https://www.efsyn.gr/efkriti/koinonia/272214_ierapetra-se-karantina-100-ergates-logo-kroysmatos-covid-19-stin (12 Jan. 2021).

or stalled agricultural activity due to the spread of the pandemic among the workers was summed up by a member of Ierapetra Farmers Association (EAS): “There will be a huge problem in the area if other cases are found.”⁹

The migrant workers are caught in a Catch-22 situation. In Greece, migrants and refugees are denied regular medical appointments because they lack negative COVID-19 tests.¹⁰ As the testing is unfree for them, getting one is costly, cumbersome, and time-consuming. Fear of deportation also makes them steer clear of COVID-19 tests.¹¹ A 22-year-old Bangladeshi plucker stated: “Without ‘papers,’ we have no healthcare. It is all from our pocket. If any one of us contracts ‘corona,’ all Bangladeshi workers here will be stigmatized and removed from work” (July 2020). There is also concern about increased informal surveillance by the locals. Bangladeshi men might become easy targets of nationalist anger if COVID-19 spreads in the region. Local resentment against migrant workers has begun expressing in other parts of Greece. A member of a local agricultural cooperative in the Kalamata olive oil-producing region stated, “It’s hard to trust undocumented workers. They haven’t been tested for fear of being arrested, but what if you’re infected.”¹²

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have argued that racial capitalism is inherently violent because it employs racial and other societal inequalities as pretexts to devalue workers. The codification of racialized migrant farmworkers as “essential” for local food security deliberately ignores structural and systemic oppression that inflicts continual violence such as denial of labor rights, employment benefits, social services, and free healthcare.

The pandemic has merely exposed structural and systemic precarities, institutionalized by the state through laws that undergird the lives of racialized migrant workers around the world. The Greek state is accountable for its evasion of responsibility toward migrant farmworkers. The revitalization of Greek agriculture is due to its restrictive temporary labor migration policies that transform large numbers of racialized migrants into illegality and labor docility. Ironically, while migrant workers put themselves at risk to ensure food security for host nations, they are stigmatized as public health risks. Racist and ethnocentric prejudice, one that racial capitalism seizes

9 Ibid.

10 Karnaki, Pania (2020). Hosting Migrants in a Crisis: Access to COVID-19 Healthcare Services for Migrants and Refugees in Greece, <https://eurohealthnet-magazine.eu/hosting-migrants-in-a-crisis-access-to-covid-19-health-care-services-for-migrants-and-refugees-in-greece/> (13 Jan. 2021).

11 Ibid.

12 Labor shortage makes Greek olive harvest a traditional family affair again, *Arab News*, December 21, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1780281/business-economy>.

upon to devalue labor of racial and ethnic minorities, creates a discourse of “underservingness.” This problematic discourse creates further barriers to healthcare access.

What, then, should the obligations of the Greek state be toward the migrant workers? Ismini Karydopoulou, a program officer at G2RED who has been an integral part of Manolada Watch, an activist watch group, argues that the “first important step (for the Greek state) is to design and implement a proper legal framework that will give access to a legal residence status that will recognize this community. As long as land workers are not legally recognized, any attempt to protect their rights cannot be effective and complete” (email July 2020). Till that is done, the cost of ensuring will ultimately and always be borne by low-class racialized migrant workers.

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POVZETEK

COVID-19, RASNI KAPITALIZEM IN NEPRIJAVLJENI KMETIJSKI DELAVCI IZ BANGLADEŠA V MANOLADI V GRČIJI

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Članek na primeru neprijavljenih delavcev iz Bangladeša, ki so v Manoladi v Grčiji zaposleni kot obiralci jagod, prikazuje, kako rasni kapitalizem prispeva k zdravstveni ranljivosti delavcev drugih ras iz nižjih družbenih slojev in jih izpostavlja večjemu tveganju za okužbo s koronavirusom. Več kot 90 odstotkov delovne sile v naglo rastoči panogi pridelave jagod v Grčiji predstavlja množica 10.000 do 12.000 neprijavljenih moških iz Bangladeša, ki za dolge delavnike prejemajo mizerno plačilo. Članek prikazuje, kako od države vsiljeni varnostni mejni ukrepi, ki naj bi preprečevali vstop migrantom drugih ras, hkrati pa spodbujali zatiskanje oči pred njihovim izkoriščanjem, povzročajo in ohranjajo razmere za nesvobodno delo na podlagi (ne)mobilnosti migrantov. Ob ljudeh druge rase, ki utelešajo »ilegalnost« in strah pred možnostjo izgona, delavcem odvzemajo pravice in jih disciplinirajo k prisilni pohlevnosti. Rasni kapitalizem je tudi vzročno povezan z zdravstveno nepravilnostjo do migrantov. Rasne in etnične manjšine so ponavadi zgoščene v nižnjih zaposlitvah za priseljence, v katerih so izpostavljeni poklicnim poškodbam. Zdravstveno ogroženost neprijavljenih delavcev v kmetijstvu, ki se soočajo z nevarnimi delovnimi razmerami, nehygieničnimi nastanitvami in diskriminacijo s strani zdravstvenih ustanov, strukturalna in sistemska diskriminacija še povečujeta. Podcenjevanje delavcev na podlagi rasne pripadnosti sovпада z ilegalnim statusom migrantov in s kulturno specifičnimi normami moškosti, ki normalizirajo diskurz zdravstvene »nezasluženosti« neprijavljenih migrantov. Ta diskurz njihovo izključenost iz zdravstvene oskrbe normalizira na temelju državne politike, medtem ko jim ponudniki zdravstvenih storitev to odrekajo že zaradi samega sovraštva na rasni osnovi.

V Grčiji neprijavljeni migranti do zdravstvene oskrbe lahko dostopajo le v javnih bolnišnicah, vendar le pod pogojem plačila nekega nominalnega zneska. Obiranje jagod od obiralcev zahteva delo v sklonjenem položaju; delovnik je dolg, odmori pa kratki. Obiralce pestijo kronične bolečine v hrbtu, težave z ledvicami in visoka stopnja obolevnosti zaradi okužb dihalnih organov. Življenje v plastičnih barakah brez tekoče vode, kanalizacije, odvoza smeti in stranišč še dodatno ogroža njihovo zdravje. Njihov dostop do zdravstvene pomoči preprečujejo predvsem dolg delovnik, slabe možnosti prevoza in neznanje grškega jezika. Delavci se zaradi preteklih diskriminatorskih izkušenj raje odpovedujejo zdravstveni oskrbi; za zdravstvene oblasti namerano ostajajo nevidni in se pretvarjajo, da nimajo težav, kar ima resne posledice predvsem v času zdravstvene krize, kakršna je trenutna pandemija. Medtem ko so revni bangladeški delavci v Grčiji po eni strani nepogrešljivi za oskrbo domačega prebivalstva s hrano, pa brezbrizen odnos do njihovih zdravstvenih potreb med pandemijo Covida-19 po drugi strani spodbuja strukturalno nasilje nad njimi.