Experience of Marginalization in Noncooperative Spaces: The Case of Undocumented Migrant Workers in Italy

Roya Derakhshan[1] · Rashedur Chowdhury[2]

Abstract

Undocumented migrant workers are among a group of marginalized stakeholders who are severely exploited at their workplace and across broader society. Despite recent scholarly discussions in marginalized stakeholder theory and migration studies, our understanding of how undocumented workers experience marginalization in noncooperative spaces remains very limited. In noncooperative spaces, uncooperative powerful actors deliberately thwart cooperation with local marginalized stakeholders and fail to develop supportive institutional frameworks, such as regulative and transparent governance principles. To address these issues, we conducted interviews with 47 undocumented workers and civil society workers in Italy. Our findings reveal that the marginalization experienced by undocumented workers encompasses socio-economic immobility, systemic incapability, and a sense of meaninglessness. Further, our research challenges the principles of stakeholder capitalism inherent in traditional stakeholder theory, revealing the inadequacy of conventional notions in noncooperative spaces where marginalized stakeholders deal with disempowerment and immobility. We delve into the silent and tacit collusion among uncooperative firms in these spaces, shedding light on the ways in which this problematic cooperation leads to the creation of normative harm. Moreover, we introduce the experience of meaninglessness as an internal barrier hindering migrant inclusion, underscoring the imperative need for widespread immigration reforms and normative changes to foster an environment conducive to meaningful transformations for migrants.

Introduction

Migration is one of the most widely discussed issues of our time. Reports estimate that 10–15% of all migrants are undocumented, suggesting that there are currently up to 25 million undocumented workers in the global economy (International Labour Organization, 2021; International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2022). The status of being undocumented makes migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation by employers, including through low wages,

sexual harassment, poor and unsafe working conditions, and arbitrary dismissal (Clibborn, 2015). Undocumented workers generally avoid seeking legal protections to guard against such exploitation because they are either not eligible, fear exposure to the authorities, or fear reprisals from employers. Most often, they do not access such legal supports since they are perceived as a burden to society, a perception which is fortified by the rhetoric of media, politicians, and public opinion (Amenta et al., 2021; Kerr et al., 2022). Subsequently, many of them encounter reoccurring mental and physical health issues that significantly reduce their quality of life, particularly in their workplaces, or are affected by various organizations and businesses alike (Clibborn, 2015; Guo et al., 2020). Despite these well-documented challenges, only limited attention has been paid to these in the business ethics domain (e.g., considering stakeholder theory which is concerned about stakeholders who can affect or are affected by firms) to highlight and theorize issues such as the migration crisis and the well-being of undocumented workers. This is because most businesses are mainly concerned

✉ Rashedur Chowdhury
rc22489@essex.ac.uk

Roya Derakhshan
r.derakhshan@ucl.ac.uk

1 The Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction, University College London, 1-19 Torrington Place, London WC1E 7HB, UK

2 Essex Business School, University of Essex, The Gateway Building, Southend Campus, Southend-on-Sea SS1 1LW, UK

about profit maximization which often requires exploitation of and inflicting of harm on undocumented workers.

Some of the core aspects of stakeholder theory are duty of care and protection of the rights of workers (e.g., Greenwood & Freeman, 2011). Nevertheless, stakeholder theory has its inherent limitations in addressing the issues of marginalized stakeholders who lack actual or foreseeable influence in shaping the organizational and strategic objectives of firms (e.g., Chowdhury, 2021a; Derry, 2012).

To reclaim the rights of marginalized stakeholders, a restricted stream of stakeholder literature highlights different aspects of stakeholder marginalization and harm imposed upon them by firms (e.g., Eikelenboom & Long, 2023; Maher, 2019; Mussell, 2021; Varman & Al-Amoudi, 2016). These studies so far demonstrate that marginalized stakeholders primarily come from vulnerable social identities or belong to lower social classes, before being exploited by firms (Derry, 2012; Varman & Al-Amoudi, 2016). The socio-economic condition of a broader society generally fails to provide (and prevents providing) power and voice to these stakeholders (Chowdhury, 2021b). They often find themselves in what Chowdhury (2021b, p.917) conceptualizes as noncooperative spaces.

> "Heavily manipulated and controlled by an uncooperative sociostructure where powerful actors knowingly and deliberately seek to thwart cooperation between local actors, do not cooperate with [marginalized stakeholders] or develop supportive institutional frameworks (e.g., regulative and transparent governance principles) for [marginalized stakeholders]."

Recent global challenges including rapid global inequality (Piketty, 2014), expansion of forced migration (Schaubroeck et al., 2022), and increased environmental disasters (Maher et al., 2021) increasingly position marginalized individuals or groups in noncooperative spaces where (in)visible harm is imposed by firms and broader society (Chowdhury et al., 2024; Derry, 2012). Individuals or groups who are marginalized in the stakeholder network, and are embedded in a noncooperative space, may experience complex and profound levels of marginalization that we did not see before. Despite its contribution to underlining the rights of marginalized stakeholders, traditional stakeholder theory does not adequately address multiple and (indirectly) interconnected marginalization of stakeholders who have been forced to migrate due to volatility in global politics and economies and climate disasters. This means that, even though we know that marginalization exists, our scholarly understanding of marginalization lacks nuances about the experience of marginalization as it unfolds at the intersection of workplace, precarity, and noncooperative spaces.

In line with recent calls for consideration of the plight of migrants in business ethics and management studies (Guo et al., 2020; Ravenda et al., 2021), we examine the lived experiences of undocumented migrant workers in Italy to understand the experience of these individuals in the noncooperative spaces of their host country. In doing so, we explore elements and processes that perpetuate marginalization of these workers when they engage with firms and societies. We selected Italy as the empirical context of our research because evidence suggests that undocumented migrants in Italy experience harmful exploitative conditions both in the workplace and in broader society (Amenta et al., 2021; Castelli Gattinara, 2017; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017Triandafyllidou, 2018).

Our research on the experiences of undocumented workers in noncooperative spaces offers three major theoretical contributions. *First*, our study rigorously critiques the principles of stakeholder capitalism (Freeman, 2018; Freeman et al., 2007), highlighting fundamental flaws in the interpretation and conceptualization of marginalized stakeholders within noncooperative spaces. Conventional stakeholder literature portrays businesses as cooperative value creation entities (e.g., Freeman et al., 2021). However, our research reveals that marginalized stakeholders are mostly disempowered and excluded from these processes. The silence and tacit collusion of powerful actors perpetuate this marginalization process, preventing these stakeholders from engaging in meaningful collaboration and value creation. This results in reduced self-esteem and poorer societal integration among marginalized groups, challenging the traditional stakeholder theory, which posits that firms create sustained value through voluntary collaboration (Freeman et al., 2007, 2021). Thus, we suggest that the concept of value creation in its current version is inherently flawed, as it consistently and structurally favors just powerful actors and their approaches, allowing them to maximize the profit by neutralizing any potential status quo. At the same time, this process marginalizes vulnerable stakeholders in the extreme. While employing the notion of value creation serves as a compelling incentive to encourage firms in their stakeholder engagement activities, it is imperative and worthwhile to highlight the harms stemming from various institutional practices of businesses and other powerful actors involved in such processes.

Second, we challenge the idea of consent in stakeholder theory (e.g., Freeman, 2018; Freeman et al., 2007). We argue that exploitative firms' ability to gain consent from undocumented workers to entering into working relationships is influenced by broader norms in noncooperative spaces. Undocumented workers, coercively (yet fully informed) sign contracts with firms because they are aware that, due to the similarity in the behavior of many firms, they would not have access to more decent work options. From this perspective, we conceptualize normative harm as the harm ingrained in the relationship between multiple firms and marginalized

stakeholders. In noncooperative spaces, normative harm significantly constrains the spectrum of behaviors exhibited by different firms, thereby limiting the range of options available to marginalized stakeholders. Subsequently, we posit that the nature of cooperation and emergent competition among the firms—praised in stakeholder capitalism—vary and have diverse impacts on different stakeholders. Specifically, marginalized stakeholders are adversely harmed in such a manipulative setting. From a practical perspective, our research speaks to firms' responsibility regarding global challenges (Böhm et al., 2022; Young, 2004) and suggests that responsible firms need to engage in collective efforts with other exploitative firms to transform the socio-economic structures that silently collude to perpetuate the marginalization of stakeholders.

Third, by considering migrants' marginalization as a process enacted within and through social, legal, and political structures, our research suggests that relying on, encouraging, and enabling migrants' agentic activities to align with the conditions of workplaces and broader societies (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; Nardon et al., 2021; Wehrle et al., 2018) not only fails to prevent their marginalization but may exacerbate it. We note the determinant role of *meaninglessness* as a barrier to the inclusion of migrants in the context of their host country. We suggest that firms and other powerful actors must not expect migrant workers to abandon their aims, skills, and expertise to fit into the (exploitative) routine formation and dissemination of organizations and broader societies. This, in effect, underscores a need for immigration reforms that encompass normative changes in societal, legal, and business contexts to replace the existing harmful structures. More importantly, these reforms must create an environment that accommodates migrants and fosters meaningful transformations through enabling them to exercise their talents, skills, and experiences to achieve structural and agential development.

Theoretical Context

Studies on Marginalized Stakeholders and Implications for Noncooperative Spaces

Studies on marginalized stakeholders in business ethics and management literatures mostly include local communities of extractive industries in the Global South (Derakhshan, 2022; Maher, 2019; Maher et al., 2021) and low-tier labor working in hazardous conditions (Chowdhury, 2017). These studies find that firms either completely overlook the interests of marginalized stakeholders or position them as illegitimate and in conflict with powerful stakeholders to grab resources or fulfill their own interests.

Nevertheless, recent discourse on marginalized stakeholders yields more effective discussion highlighting the neglect of marginalized stakeholders in various settings (e.g., Alm & Guttormsen, 2021; Bondy & Charles, 2020; Derry, 2012; Eikelenboom & Long, 2023; Maher, 2019; Varman & Al-Amoudi, 2016). These studies challenge the foundational premises of stakeholder theory which require extensive revision to (re)consider marginalized stakeholders. Some scholars, for instance, question the inquiry of "Who and What Really Counts" as a stakeholder (Mitchell et al., 1997). They argue that due to the lack of employee rights and protections in marginalized work environments (Derry, 2012), or the absence of significant legal recourse (Gibson, 2017), individuals or groups that are not identified as (legitimate) stakeholders can easily suffer severe harm from the activities of firms. Thus, it is important to recognize the necessity to study marginalized stakeholders.

Another critique targeting stakeholder theory is the consistently positive stance it takes regarding businesses (Harrison & Wicks, 2021). A large body of stakeholder literature embraces diverse aspects of business and management and provides guidance on how firms and their managers can move from "not doing good" to "doing good" (i.e., Freeman et al., 2007). While embracing these positive stances regarding diverse stakeholder groups, traditional stakeholder scholarship does not adequately explain how firms (un)consciously participate in "doing harm" to some of their stakeholders (Mattingly, 2017). Stakeholder theory also barely provides guidance on how to effectively prevent harm to marginalized stakeholders. Consequently, stakeholder scholars posit that the theory that "moves people by virtue of its emotional resonance" (Laplume et al., 2008, p.1153), ironically appears mute regarding the catastrophes that are collapsing the world—and marginalized stakeholders have been buried under its rubble (Chowdhury, 2021c). Therefore, we require a marginalized stakeholder theory which can question and raise concerns regarding stakeholders who are continuously disempowered and that address the harmful activities of firms in this regard.

Furthermore, a core idea of stakeholder literature lies on a premise that firms can generate more value when their interactions with various stakeholder groups are guided by ethical principles such as fairness and inclusiveness (Freeman, 1984; Jones et al., 2018). For instance, the concept of stakeholder capitalism, as discussed in stakeholder scholarship (Freeman, 2018; Freeman et al., 2007), suggests that the presence of multiple firms can stimulate competition among them and their stakeholders, ultimately leading to the creation of heightened levels of value. However, scholars focusing on marginalized stakeholders consistently argue that these practices often favor "stakeholders who are already somewhat powerful within organizational settings, while those who are less powerful continue to be marginalized

and routinely ignored" (Bondy & Charles, 2020, p. 67). This critique highlights the potential limitations and unintended consequences of stakeholder capitalism in perpetuating existing power imbalances within organizational structures.

From this standpoint, proponents of marginalized stakeholder theory propose a redefinition of firms and stakeholders as interlinked networks. Instead of viewing the firm as a distinct entity in relation to stakeholders, they advocate conceiving the firm as comprised of stakeholders (Bondy & Charles, 2020; Greenwood & Mir, 2018). Embracing this perspective would entail integrating the objectives of marginalized stakeholders into the firm's standardized value creation processes. Further, adopting this viewpoint challenges the long-standing critique asserting that acknowledging responsibilities to stakeholders weakens corporate purpose and fragments accountability (Sternberg, 2019). Such criticism becomes untenable when the firm and its stakeholders are perceived as inseparable, highlighting the interconnected nature of their dynamic relationship.

Studies also suggest that marginalized stakeholders' participation in organizational decision-making at the board level needs to be supported by wider social institutions (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009). In order for marginalized and vulnerable stakeholders to exercise their rights, firms need to be subject to a variety of regimes of accountability. Nevertheless, several studies have demonstrated that states and other powerful actors and institutions often fail to protect marginalized stakeholders (Derakhshan, 2022; Fudge, 2018), or even thwart cooperation among stakeholders (Chowdhury, 2017). In other words, sometimes, stakeholders are in marginalized positions in their relationship with the firm but, due to their embeddedness in noncooperative space (Chowdhury, 2021b), they do not have access to other appropriate resources, powerful actors, or a supportive institutional framework. Embeddedness of marginalized stakeholders in noncooperative spaces raises questions about their experience of marginalization; it also raises questions about the role of firms in such conditions, which are not sufficiently addressed in stakeholder literature.

The conditions created by these global challenges (e.g., colonialism and climate disasters), on the one hand, reshape the power relations and agency of marginalized stakeholders (Chowdhury, 2021b; Piketty, 2014); on the other hand, they redefine the responsibility of powerful actors in the surrounding space (Jensen & Sandström, 2011). Among all these issues, migration is one of the most urgent since poor people often lack the basic infrastructure to protect their dignities and rights when they encounter either environmental catastrophe or human-made disasters and are forced to migrate to developed countries in search of better living conditions and work-related opportunities. There has been a noticeable rise in international migrations in recent years, driven by factors such as demographic shifts

and skilled labor shortages in the interconnected global economy and labor market (Al Ariss & Syed, 2011; Guo & Al Ariss, 2015). Even though developed countries could be the safest places for work and employment, it appears that immigrants—especially undocumented workers—encounter hostility and noncooperation both in workplaces and societies when they try to integrate.

Undocumented Workers in Noncooperative Spaces

Given the prevalence of the migration phenomenon—the UN (2020) estimates that migrant workers stand at 281 million—it is not surprising that, in recent years, migration has captured the attention of numerous researchers across various disciplines in the social sciences (e.g., Bærenholdt, 2013; Brickell et al., 2011; Favell, 2016; Urry, 2007). These emerging works on migration lead researchers in migration studies, as well as scholars in business ethics and management disciplines, to actively contribute to the ongoing debates surrounding migration. Specifically, the extensive literature on migration thoroughly explores the dynamics influencing the inclusion or marginalization of migrants in their host countries (Gericke et al., 2018; Platt et al., 2022), the profound impact of socio-economic contexts on various aspects of migrants' lived experiences (Ortensi & Ambrosetti, 2022), and the efficiency and effectiveness of different types of support that these individuals may receive in the host country (Derakhshan et al., 2024; Kangas-Müller et al., 2023).

Researchers in the management discipline who study migrant workers primarily emphasize the significance of employment as a crucial factor in achieving the successful integration of migrants in host countries (Markaki & Longhi, 2013). Management scholars direct their attention to the employment status of migrant workers and the conditions they experience in the workplace, considering these two aspects as key focal points (e.g., Chowdhury, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d; Guo et al., 2020; Schaubroeck et al., 2022). Within this research stream, there has been a specific focus on talented and skilled migrants who relocate from their home countries in pursuit of better career opportunities (e.g., Loacker & Śliwa, 2016). This research explores the dynamics surrounding the global career moves of these migrants (Al Ariss et al., 2012) and investigates their entrepreneurial activities in host countries (Dutta et al., 2021). Moreover, researchers examine how skilled migrants mobilize their social and economic capital to realize their aspirations (Ram et al., 2017).

Regarding refugees or undocumented migrants, research predominantly delves into the challenging aspects of their workplace experiences, highlighting their marginalization in the forms of exclusion and discrimination (Campion, 2018; Hesse et al., 2019) and the presence of exploitative

conditions in the workplace (Knappert et al., 2018). This body of research consistently illustrates that employers frequently exclude undocumented migrants from the workplace (Wehrle et al., 2018) and tend to rationalize the unequal treatment of these workers (Knappert et al., 2018).

However, despite the valuable insights that management literature offers on the marginalization of undocumented workers, these studies often exist within the confines of a dyadic relationship between firms and workers. Examining marginalization in isolation from the broader context— which includes socio-economic conditions, different firms, influential actors, and the larger society—is insufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of how marginalization occurs and is experienced by these vulnerable individuals. Indeed, examinations of the situations of undocumented workers indicate that they find themselves in environments that closely resemble noncooperative spaces, as various powerful actors collectively contribute to the marginalization of these workers (Chowdhury, 2021a).

For instance, the general populations of countries hosting undocumented migrants are skeptical about whether their country should accept the arrival of undocumented migrants, and many want their country's borders to be closed to them (Drozdzewski & Matusz, 2021). Increasingly, people are less convinced that undocumented migrants coming to their countries are genuine or do not want to steal their jobs (IPSOS, 2019). Undocumented migrants are viewed as a burden by governments as well; governments around the world are intensifying implementation of anti-immigration policies. Recent examples of such policies comprise Hungary, pursuing a "zero-refugee policy" (Scott, 2020). The Italian radical right deputy prime minister promoting "Italy for Italians" while prohibiting the rescue of drowning migrants from the Mediterranean Sea (Öner, 2022). The Trump administration imposing travel bans on refugees from several Muslim-majority nations (Shear Kanno Youngs, 2019). The UK's Conservative government has proposed a populist policy for the detention of undocumented migrants in Rwanda. Moreover, supporting institutions and organizations such as NGOs are also seen to undermine the voices of undocumented migrants and exclude them from the dominant discourse and institutions (Chowdhury, 2021b; Martínez Lucio & Connolly, 2010), resulting in their further disempowerment (Nardon et al., 2021).

When marginalization occurs within noncooperative spaces, there is a need to study it not only within the isolated context of workplace marginalization but as a process conducted by various components of this structure, unfolding in different spaces and interactions, and shaping the lived experience of marginalized stakeholders. Therefore, while existing literature primarily focuses on the employment of undocumented migrants in the economy of their host countries to uncover the reasons behind their workplace

marginalization (Borjas, 2017; Cappelen & Muriaas, 2018; Ravenda et al., 2021), we propose broadening the focus from the dyadic relationship between worker and firms to viewing the worker as embedded in noncooperative spaces and experiencing marginalization as the essence of their life. Hence, we posit that, at the intersection of the marginalized stakeholder literature and migration studies, expanding the view from the workplace to the broader social space will bring more nuances to our limited knowledge of the marginalization experience of these stakeholders in their workplace. Subsequently, we pose a crucial research question: *How do migrant workers experience marginalization which (re)occurs due to powerful actors' and firms' actions in noncooperative spaces?*

Methods

Research Context

Due to Italy's geographical position and ties with countries situated along the most populated migration route, the Mediterranean Sea, Italy, receives a significant share of undocumented migrants who arrive in Europe (Ortensi & Ambrosetti, 2022). After 2015, Italy experienced a large increase in the number of arrivals using the Mediterranean route (Stocchiero, 2017). From January to September 2022 alone, more than 60,000 migrants arrived by sea to Italy (Varella, 2021). Against the so-called migrant crisis, Italian politicians (Amenta et al., 2021), media (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017), and public (Triandafyllidou, 2018) vehemently expressed severe anxiety regarding the negative impact of arrival of these migrants on the socio-economic, cultural, and security of the country (Castelli Gattinara, 2017). Political interventions proved to be worsening the condition of undocumented migrants, while several reports issued by public and private institutions demonstrate that many undocumented workers in Italy are victims of slavery or different forms of labor exploitation (e.g., Migration Foundation of Italian Catholic Church, 2020; Piemonte Research Institute of Socioeconomics, 2021; United Nations Migration Italy, 2021).

Against this backdrop, we chose to investigate the lived experience of undocumented migrant workers that marginalized them in Italian societies. We conducted an exploratory interpretive study encompassing several aspects of the lived experience of these marginalized stakeholders. That is because mainstream stakeholder literature often adopts a lens of powerful actors (e.g., government agencies and firms) to study marginalized stakeholders (Miles, 2017), rather than the lens of marginalized stakeholders to narrate and conceptualize their working conditions and general situatedness in noncooperative spaces. In other words, our

research aims to give a voice to the marginalized individual where that voice did not exist before.

Data Collection

Qualitative research helps "in providing rich descriptions of complex phenomena" that are impossible to understand or highlight through quantitative research and is suitable for "giving voice to those whose views are rarely heard" (Sofaer, 1999, p. 1101). In particular, the issue of researching undocumented workers has its own biases as societies often see such workers as cheap labor or an uneducated population. We conducted interviews, often multiple rounds, when necessary, to develop a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of undocumented workers in the context of uncertain legal and social recognition. Therefore, through a qualitative approach, we set out to highlight the lived experience of undocumented workers in depth. Accordingly, we gathered data from three sources to achieve a robust grounding of issues. The first source was semi-structured interviews (Adams, 2015) with undocumented migrants and civil society workers (the members of diverse private or state-funded organizations supporting and protecting migrants, and assisting them in securing initial care, training, and education). Our second source of data was reports issued by international and Italian authorities. Finally, we carried out non-participant observation at parks, in Milan city center, in the refugee camps, and within the migrants' neighborhood. In these spaces, we sat for a few hours observing interactions among undocumented individuals, such as how they socialized, communicated with each other, and shared resources (e.g., meals, clothes, the internet, and shelter). We also walked around, listening to conversations and taking notes on their activities, which provided insights into their community practices and social networks. Often, we initiated informal conversations with migrants to gain a deeper understanding of their contexts and experiences.

We collected data from March 2021 until August 2022. The lead author conducted five pilot interviews with undocumented workers and civil society workers from her personal network (friends and acquaintances who are undocumented workers or civil society workers) prior to the immersion into the field. These pilot interviewees were conducted to identify questions that could "specifically…be insightful, comprehensive, articulate and/or honest" (Robinson, 2014, p.35). The clarity of interview questions was essential for reliable data, and one of the challenges was to effectively address issues such as whether the questions were clear, unbiased, and suitable for research objectives. Therefore, during the pilot interviews and through discussions with the pilot interviewees, we collected feedback about the clarity of the questions, and, after refining them, we finalized the interview guide and used it for all other interviews.

The lead author conducted a total of 42 interviews with undocumented migrants who had experience of working in Italy. In addition, five interviews were carried out with civil society workers (Table 1). The lead author, who lives in Italy, conducted all interviews to ensure consistency in questioning, approach, and style throughout the data collection process (Kong & Ramia, 2010). Personal contacts and the snowball technique (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and visiting refugee camps in Milan and its suburbs helped the lead author to identify interviewees.

Considering the vulnerable condition of undocumented migrants, we made extra effort to build trust between the interviewees and the lead author, as well as to ensure their ethical protection (Shaw et al., 2020). Several casual talks between interviewees and the lead author took place before the formal interviews to clarify the purpose of the research, the data-gathering and analysis processes, and the final research outcome. The lead author explained why the interview needed to be recorded; also, when necessary, clarification was given that the recording device is simply a voice recorder and no picture of the interviewees' faces would be captured. We assured the interviewees that they could interrupt or terminate the interview at any time, and that their anonymity and welfare would be protected. Even after providing clear explanations about the purpose and conditions of their participation, in some cases, potential interviewees declined to participate. In a few cases, before the formal interviews, interviewees emphasized which topics should be avoided during the interview (e.g., religion, family conditions, reason for fleeing from country of origin, and salary). On one occasion, an interviewee terminated the interview after a few questions meaning that we had clearly communicated the rights of the interviewees prior to interview. Each formal interview was 25–120 min in length, digitally recorded, and then transcribed. Considering the vulnerable condition of undocumented migrants, we decided to allow them to choose the location and timing for the interview.

In addition to the interviews, we collected relevant documents, including several reports issued by international and Italian authorities such as the United Nations Migration (IOM-UN Migration), Human Rights Watch, the Italian Association of Legal Studies for Migration, and the Migration Foundation of the Italian Catholic Church. These documents were retrieved through searching for relevant institutions and organizations dealing with the migration affairs, as well as searching the internet in Italian and English. These reports were not systematically analyzed in later steps; however, they were used to gain a better understanding of the socio-economic approach of the broader society toward undocumented migrants and the challenges they face when on their path to secure documentation and settle in Italy.

Non-participant observations allowed us to understand the context and dynamics of the experience of life and

Table 1 List of interviewees

No	Nationality	Role	Length
1	Italian	CSW*	55
2	Egyptian	UW**	120
3	Iranian	UW	85
4	Afghan	UW	65
5	Venezuelan	UW	60
6	Italian	CSW	85
7	Libyan	UW	65
8	Pakistani	UW	75
9	Gambian	UW	60
10	Indian	UW	50
11	Italian	CSW	60
12	Ghanaian	UW	55
13	Afghan	UW	65
14	Nigerian	UW	55
15	Italian	CSW	70
16	Iranian	UW	95
17	Iranian	UW	55
18	Italian	CSW	60
19	Afghan	UW/CM***	30
20	Cameroonian	UW	65
21	Gambian	UW	35
22	Ugandan	UW	45
23	Ghanaian	UW/CM	50
24	Gambian	UW	60
25	Gambian	UW	25
26	Liberian	UW	30
27	Somalian	UW	25
28	Ethiopian	UW	25
29	Ghanaian	UW	40
30	Malian	UW/CM	60
31	Cameroonian	UW	35
32	Nigerian	UW	60
33	Gambian	UW	60
34	Iranian	UW	90
35	Indian	UW	45
36	Nigerian	UW	65
37	Nigerian	UW	80
38	Ghanaian	UW	40
39	Afghan	UW	60
40	Libyan	UW/CM	75
41	Pakistani	UW	50
42	Somalian	UW	35
43	Somalian	UW	40
44	Egyptian	UW	50
45	Malian	UW	60
46	Cameroonian	UW	40
47	Nigerian	UW	45

Civil Society Worker

**Undocumented Worker

***Cultural Mediator

socialization of undocumented migrants outside their workplace (Mulhall, 2003). Further, these observations helped us to engage in reflexive practices, acknowledging our own biases and preconceptions (e.g., the level of skills and expertise of undocumented migrants, patterns of behavior, interactions, and relationships among undocumented workers and with the larger society) (Chowdhury, 2023). Reflecting on our own positionality—that is, our Middle Eastern and Asian backgrounds—helped in interpreting observations and ensuring a more nuanced analysis of the overall lived experience of undocumented workers.

Data Analysis

Although both authors are researchers of color and deeply concerned about social categorizations that they closely observe in their birthplace (obviously in different forms compared to undocumented migrants in Italy), we do not claim to *champion* the struggle of undocumented workers. We do not claim that we hold a full understanding of the lived experience of undocumented workers or that we have liberated ourselves fully from the privileges and complicities that underpin being documented and being academics in Europe. This is because, from the perspective of positionality (Cruz, 2014), we think that we are unable to interpret some of the emotional aspects shared among undocumented workers which are difficult to realize from an interview or from observation. In other words, there were subliminal nuances which an outsider would find difficult to observe (Katz, 1993). From this perspective, our intention is to align with the suffering of undocumented workers and challenge the biases that govern our understanding of stakeholder capitalism; a major barrier to developing marginalized stakeholder theory.

During our fieldwork, we noticed that most of the interviewees experience stressful and exploitative conditions at their workplaces and in broader society. We realized that most of our interviewees had been experiencing an existential vacuum and felt completely demoralized. This was despite the fact that these interviewees abandoned their home countries with hopes and aspirations for a better life in Europe.

Our observations also revealed that undocumented migrants had been going through a personal experience of not coping and not knowing what to do in work and life. This led them to feel low self-efficacy and low self-esteem. This observation directed us to explore the potential underpinning mechanisms of marginalization and, after analyzing the data, we found that at least three mechanisms shaped the experience of marginalization of undocumented migrants: socioeconomic immobility, systemic incapability, and meaninglessness (see Fig. 1).
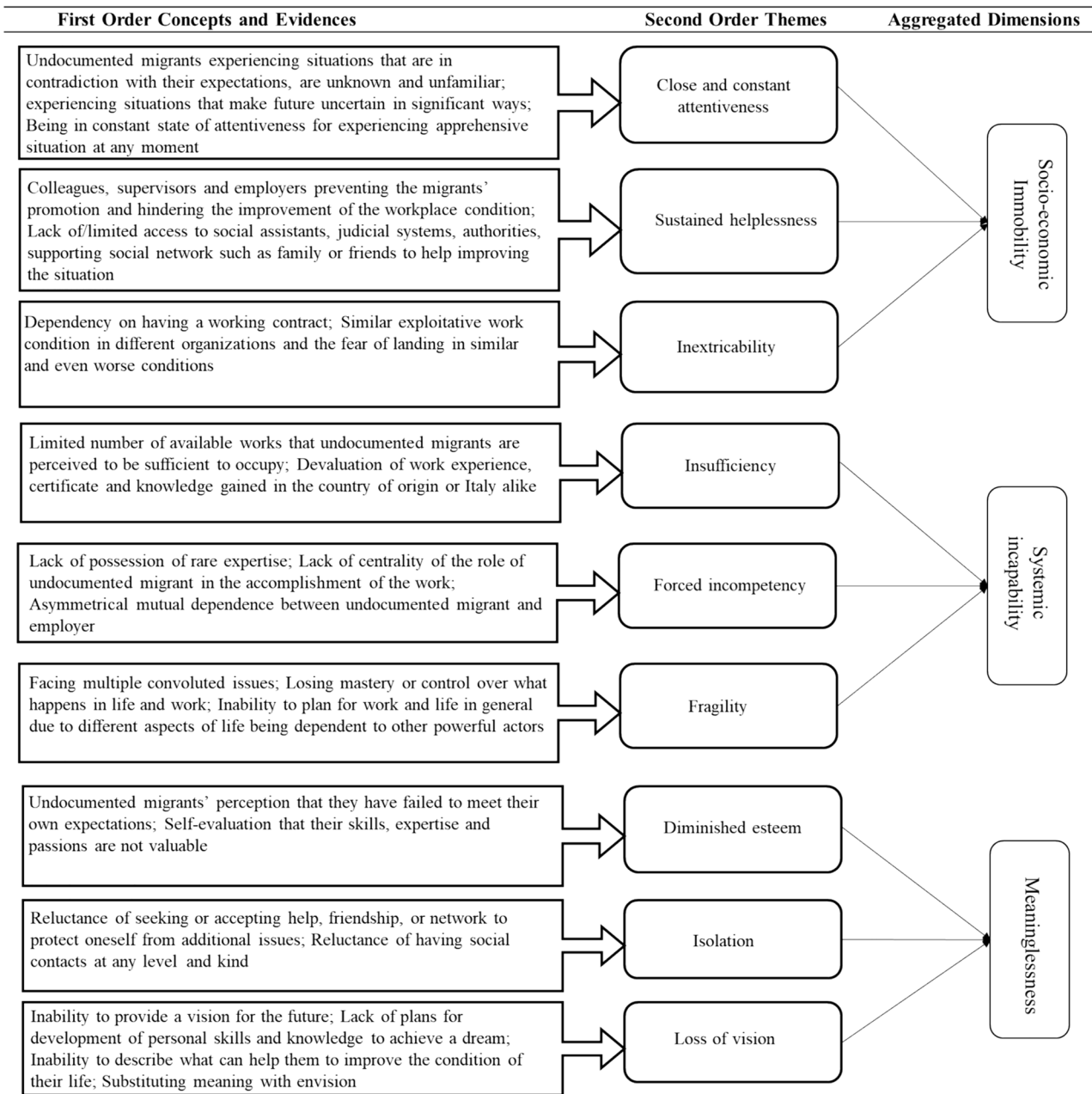
First Order Concepts and Evidences	Second Order Themes	Aggregated Dimensions

Undocumented migrants experiencing situations that are in contradiction with their expectations, are unknown and unfamiliar; experiencing situations that make future uncertain in significant ways; Being in constant state of attentiveness for experiencing apprehensive situation at any moment → **Close and constant attentiveness**

Colleagues, supervisors and employers preventing the migrants' promotion and hindering the improvement of the workplace condition; Lack of/limited access to social assistants, judicial systems, authorities, supporting social network such as family or friends to help improving the situation → **Sustained helplessness**

Dependency on having a working contract; Similar exploitative work condition in different organizations and the fear of landing in similar and even worse conditions → **Inextricability**

→ **Socio-economic Immobility**

Limited number of available works that undocumented migrants are perceived to be sufficient to occupy; Devaluation of work experience, certificate and knowledge gained in the country of origin or Italy alike → **Insufficiency**

Lack of possession of rare expertise; Lack of centrality of the role of undocumented migrant in the accomplishment of the work; Asymmetrical mutual dependence between undocumented migrant and employer → **Forced incompetency**

Facing multiple convoluted issues; Losing mastery or control over what happens in life and work; Inability to plan for work and life in general due to different aspects of life being dependent to other powerful actors → **Fragility**

→ **Systemic incapability**

Undocumented migrants' perception that they have failed to meet their own expectations; Self-evaluation that their skills, expertise and passions are not valuable → **Diminished esteem**

Reluctance of seeking or accepting help, friendship, or network to protect oneself from additional issues; Reluctance of having social contacts at any level and kind → **Isolation**

Inability to provide a vision for the future; Lack of plans for development of personal skills and knowledge to achieve a dream; Inability to describe what can help them to improve the condition of their life; Substituting meaning with envision → **Loss of vision**

→ **Meaninglessness**

Fig. 1 First-order concepts and evidence, second-order themes, and aggregated dimensions

Our interpretive approach involved an iterative process of simultaneously collecting data, analyzing the data, and seeking new interviewees based on new aspects revealed by prior interviewees. Therefore, along the way, our sampling moved from purposive to theoretical. This transition meant that, while we initially selected interviewees purposively through the criterion of being undocumented workers, as we delved deeper into the data analysis, we began selecting new interviewees based on the emerging themes, concepts, and theoretical ideas that surfaced from the initial interviews. This approach allowed us to explore these emerging themes more deeply and to ensure that we captured a diverse range of perspectives and experiences related to the evolving theoretical framework of our study.

The above process continued until no additional themes emerged, and we reached theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) after 40 interviews. We analyzed the data using conventional thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Both authors collectively developed the coding scheme through an iterative process, and the lead author coded all the data with periodic consultation with the other author. The codes, themes, and constructs presented in the

paper result from an iterative data analysis process. The complete dataset was read several times in the first stage to develop familiarity and a deeper understanding of the emerging themes. In the second stage, we sought to understand the working conditions of undocumented workers.

We began our analysis by identifying relevant concepts in the data and grouping them into categories (open coding). This resulted in the development of first-order codes (Van Maanen, 1979) (i.e., terms and language adequate at the level of meaning of the interviewees) such as 'Asymmetrical mutual dependence between undocumented migrant and employer'; 'Devaluation of work experience, certificate and knowledge gained in the country of origin or Italy alike'; and 'Reluctance to have social contacts at any level and kind.'

Thereafter, through an interactive process and multiple discussions, we engaged in axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), wherein we searched for relationships between and among these categories and assembled them into higher-order themes by determining how they fit together into a bigger picture. We then developed theoretical constructs signifying the mechanisms resulting in the demoralization experienced by undocumented migrants through an iterative process of grouping second-order themes. In order to mitigate the possibility of problems associated with retrospective accounts, we ensured that we only made statements of findings if we corroborated a given finding across multiple interviewees. Representative quotes, therefore, represent only corroborated findings. Tables 2, 3, and 4 illustrate additional quotes for the emerged themes.

We define *socio-economic immobility* as the processes that render undocumented migrants immobile due to their impeded work experience in unacceptable workplace conditions. *Systemic incapability* entails the processes that make undocumented migrants (feel) incompetent and that entrap them in marginalized positions in the workplace and society. Finally, we define *meaninglessness* as the outcome of

Table 2 Themes and representative quotes relevant to socio-economic immobility

Second-order themes	Representative quotes from the interviews
Close and constant attentiveness	We deliver payment sheets to people's homes. Utility bills, traffic tickets, things like this. Usually when you receive such a paper you get mad, you know? You get mad with the person that is delivering that paper. Then the person who receives this ticket starts to attack me out of their anger for the paper I delivered for them. They see a black person is delivering that paper, and maybe they think to themselves, 'This one doesn't speak Italian. He is not white. I can be aggressive, be offensive to him.' You know? (Interviewee 5)
	I told my boss that I need a [work] contract to bring to the [immigration] police to renew my residence permit. He told me 'Sure! I'll give you one before your appointment.' I started working and I worked for him for three months, but no contract. I asked several times, and he never gave me a contract. (Interviewee 21)
	Sometimes when I'm in a bus or in a café, people use their hands to cover their nose and go sit further and say 'Puzza!' (She stinks!). That's we Africans stink. It's not true but, also, I don't think it's correct to behave like this. (Interviewee 15)
	I buy the ticket and ask the driver 'do you go to [name of the town]?' He responds, 'No I don't go. You should take the next bus.' I see the bus leaves the station and the next bus arrives and I ask the same question to the next driver. He says, 'No it was the one that just left the station.' This was repeated four times with the same driver. I'm the passenger and I must buy the ticket. You're the driver, and you must just check the ticket and take me with you. I think he does this because I'm Black. (Interviewee 23)
Sustained helplessness	Unfortunately, I cannot make any Italian friends. It's because of my living status here… The Italian people should be open to foreigners. They should have something to learn from immigrants too. We're living in their country. Okay, we're foreigners. But we're living in their country… It's a very sensitive and a hard topic for me. I feel very alone. (Interviewee 8)
	I don't want to push everything about the color of a person, but then I think the managers in my company are more connected to people of Europe than that of Africa. Yeah, I think I did very well at my workplace, but my managers have always been discriminatory. I mean there's a lot of problems there. (Interviewee 46)
	They [managers and supervisors at warehouse] don't have time for you. They don't have time to hear you, to ask you 'what's your problem; what do you need; how do you feel about your work here?' All they say is you do the work and go back home. (Interviewee 38)
Inextricability	[I give this advice to my friends] to keep working, to keep the kind of the job that they're doing, and to understand that even if you don't like your job, you just have to keep along with it. Because for migrants, it's not like that we have too many options (Interviewee 9)
	The problem is that sometimes you manage to find a job so at least you can start working. But the salary is low. It's not enough. You work many hours but the payment is very little, and at the same time they don't treat you well. But you don't have any other options. You just accept whatever you get because it's the only way that you can be independent. If you keep looking for a job that is decent, you end up sleeping on the street. (Interviewee 31)
	This is not the job I want to have. But you must have work. I mean you get whatever they give you. Even if the payment is little and it is difficult… If I complain about the condition, they'll tell me 'OK! Leave this job and go home.' But I shut up because I need this job and there are not many options. (Interviewee 46)

Table 3 Themes and representative quotes relevant to systemic incapability

Second-order themes	Representative quotes from the interviews
Inadequacy	I've applied many times for jobs, but to be honest many times I don't get a response. Even my CV is good. I have a lot of experience with companies. But the main point is that when they look at the CV, they find out you worked in Africa. You worked in Uganda, in Egypt, but not much in Europe. They just ignore it. (Interviewee 42)
	I studied for three years to get certificate in construction. But I was not able to find a job in the construction sector. Now I'm working on a farm to pack fruit and vegetables. I think what I'm doing is not at all at the level of construction. But it is what it is! (Interviewee 36)
	I'll not be having a qualification in Italy. These are the low jobs I'm going to have at most, like in a warehouse, on a farm. It's even difficult to find a job in a retail shop. Because maybe they recruit well-built guys for security in shopping centers. I'm short and not huge. I cannot even qualify to do that. (Interviewee 32)
Forced incompetency	When you're hired to work on a farm, you need to behave like a dog. It means when your boss tells you 'wake up,' you wake up. If he says 'sleep,' you sleep. If you want to rebel and explain your position, they catch you… You don't have anything to say, if they say, 'today your work finishes at 8 at night,' you say 'OK!' Because they've decided. They're all the same. It's the same behavior repeating everywhere. (Interviewee 19)
	The job I do doesn't actually need any skills. Because it's cleaning and most of the other things inside the hotel, the serving and all those things. You don't need skills for those things because you see how they do it and they tell you, 'This is the way you do it,' and you just do it. (Interviewee 9)
	I really want to be part of the Italian economy. I really want to work and use my skills. But unfortunately, I'm always left out. I give my whole heart to work. I wake up at 3:00 am to take a shower and go to work. I leave my home at 5:00 and I arrive at work at 7:00. For me if there is anything that I expect in return, it's just the financial security. I do all of these because I want to be sure that I'll be paid and I'll have a contract also after this one. But my contracts are never renewed, and I'm always just living in extreme anxiety. (Interviewee 43)
Fragility	When my problem is to find a place to sleep, and I don't have money in my hand, I must think about the money to pay for my food and electricity, I cannot think about school (Italian course). I've to concentrate and my mind is full of these issues. When I receive enough money for a house and food, then I've a free mind and I can think about school. (Interviewee 32)
	Any migrant you see, they have a family to support. When I say family we have, I talk about brother, sister, somebody else have child. You've your mother, you've your father; that is your family. Now when you leave all of them, you know they don't live well and, in your mind, you say 'ah I'm going to find the life to help them to feel well.' You say, 'ah today I get my rice, I'll eat my rice.' But you also think in your mind, that 'I'm eating my rice, I don't know if my family back home are eating a little piece of bread.' You're the son of your family and when you accept that kind of [exploitative] work, it's because you think about all the persons you left behind at home. That's why they accept this kind of [exploitative] treatment." (Interviewee 18)
	I'm very tired. I'm tired of every day waking up at 4:00 am to go to work with the thought that what'll happen when the contract is finished. You've to be worried about work. I also should find a new home and it's very difficult because people don't trust me and no one rents me a home because they think I might not be able to pay the rent. The life of a migrant is very difficult. I am 28 years old, but I feel so old that I already want to get retired. (Interviewee 6)

processes which result in undocumented migrants considering that they have no meaning, purpose, or value in work as well as life, leading to a sense of existential despair that surfaced through the analysis of our data.

Findings

Socio-Economic Immobility

Inattentiveness

We found that majority of undocumented migrants we observed and interviewed had strong beliefs and understandings about how things must work in the world. This idea of how the world should work creates a robust structure for predicting and expecting how others would behave during interactions with them. Nonetheless, in the reality of their life, the behavior of powerful actors inside the noncooperative

spaces of workplaces and wider societies repeatedly contradicted such expectations. A food delivery rider highlights this contradiction:

> "When I deliver an order, I think as if I deliver this to myself. But when I ring the customer's bell, they pick up and say, 'fifth floor'. There's no lift. I climb five floors and deliver the food. They don't say 'hi'. They don't say 'thank you'. They don't also tip me. This is the behavior I see in response to my effort for delivering the food as best as I can." (Interviewee 2)

For undocumented migrants the experience of behavior that was in contradiction with their expectations was not limited to their workplace. In their interactions with most of the powerful actors and entities in the noncooperative spaces, most of interviewees mentioned that they frequently experienced unexpected, humiliating, and exploitative behaviors. Our analysis revealed that the repetition of this experience resulted in the development of this

Table 4 Themes and representative quotes relevant to meaninglessness

Second-order themes	Representative quotes from the interviews
Diminished esteem	I don't see myself as someone fantastic or someone intelligent or someone at all. That's why I just have to keep moving with time and whatever happens. I don't think my skills are good, or that I've something special by which I can work in good jobs. I just keep what I'm doing now without thinking about I'm someone and I can do something. (Interviewee 27)
	In the head of a young boy in Africa, Europe is very different. I came here [in Europe] with that idea in my mind. When I arrived here, after many years of studying and working, I think I've failed in achieving all the ideas I had in my mind. It's not going to happen. I'll stay here in this small town with this less than normal job. (Interviewee 22)
	I came here with the idea of becoming a professional soccer player. Now I'm a food delivery rider. How difficult it is to be a soccer player here in Italy is beyond your imagination. I'm now too old to start again to follow this dream so I've abandoned that. It's gone. (Interviewee 33)
	I realized that the theater is not going to take me anyway. Although I've the passion, I've the skills, I've the enthusiasm, anywhere I go they always used to give me compliments, 'You'll become somebody great in the future', I'm not given the chance. I don't think about it anymore. (Interviewee 12)
Isolation	I'm a simple person. I don't go to a café or I don't walk around the city. When I come back from work, I just go home and stay there. The moment you start making friends with others is the moment the problems arrive. You mix with them and their problems come to you. (Interviewee 23)
	I don't ask for help from anyone. But I also don't help other people unless they ask me. 'Can you help me with this?' 'OK! I don't care.' I'm a simple person. I don't want to make any problems or get involved in problems by mixing with other people. (Interviewee 27)
	If one of my colleagues has an issue at work or complains about something to the supervisor, it's his problem, it's not my problem. Because I don't want to create a problem for myself. (Interviewee 31)
Loss of vision	"My big dream is to help poor people you know, like orphans. That's my dream to support people who don't have any support. With money. With a job. With a place to live and maybe food and education." (Interviewee 45)
	"My dream job? I cannot see that for now because I don't know how my future will be. Maybe I can't see it. I'll do this [job] right now and when the time comes, I'll change my job. You cannot plan your dreams…" (Interviewee 25)
	"I want to do two things. First, I want to open a home here to help the refugee people and show them how to start their life from zero. Helping others to learn how this life is…. Second project, I want to open a home in my country for the guys who don't have a mother and father, and to help them until they're 18 years old because that was my life back home. Because I was without a mother. My mother left…she was never with me. I don't have a sister; I don't have a brother. I feel the people and I want to open a home in Libya." (Interviewee 7)

understanding in undocumented workers that what would be experienced in the future is completely uncertain, but most probably, it would be humiliating, oppressive, and exploitative. Subsequently, these interviewees told us that they constantly lived in a state of heightened expectation of challenging conditions such as non-renewal of the contract despite being promised this, lack of payment next month, ambivalence and maltreatment by the supervisor or employer, or being derogated in the public spaces. This state of attentiveness shaped an important part of the lived experience of our interviewees and is depicted in the words of one of our interviewees who described the *'zigzagged'* behavior of his employer:

> "Some days are good, but then some days he arrives in the morning and starts shouting at me. It's like you're angry with someone else, but then come and shout at your worker… you can never tell how he would behave." (Interviewee 8)

The enduring and consistent nature of this distressing experience led our interviewees to feel *'fearful'* and *'unsafe.'* As we explain in the next sections, these feelings, in turn, prompted them to willingly restrict their interactions as a means of self-protection, thus experience being further marginalized at workplaces and broader societies.

Sustained Helplessness

We observed that many of our interviewees experienced *sustained helplessness.* Our analysis suggests that this experience was caused due to two main reasons. *First*, uncooperative powerful actors of noncooperative spaces, such as employers, supervisors, and colleagues, deliberately prevented the migrants' promotion and hindered improvement of the workplace conditions. Most of our interviewees explained that their relationships with the individual actors at the workplace and in society were driven by unbalanced power dynamics. They explained that they were not only distant from sources of power such as employers, but also intermediaries such as supervisors or colleagues might stand between them and the sources of power. For example, one interviewee explained that, according to the norms of their workplace, after five years of working in their role, they should have received a promotion to become a supervisor. Yet they added that they did not see that coming because this norm applied to them differently:

"To receive a promotion, your supervisor should praise you when the owner of the construction company comes to check the [construction] site. He should say 'this guy knows what he's doing and is mastering all the skills'. But my supervisor never says such a thing. I'll never get a promotion." (Interviewee 12)

This was also a particular challenge for black or brown undocumented migrants, since this unbalanced dynamic of power was further fueled by racism:

"In [furniture chain store] I first had the contract of the simple worker in the warehouse. Then out of my curiosity, over time I learned how to work with the management system of the warehouse. I talked to my supervisor and asked her if next time she would give me the contract of [operating] that system. When the manager came to the warehouse, she told him 'No he doesn't know how to work with this'. She cannot say 'All black guys! You're fired', but from what I understood she can make others believe that a black person cannot do a higher job." (Interviewee 32)

Second, we also observed that the socio-economic structures of the noncooperative spaces limited or even thwarted the access of most of our interviewees to supporting organizations and institutions such as civil society workers, judicial systems, and authorities to help improve the situation. Among the obstacles created by socio-economic structures to sustain the helplessness of undocumented migrants were complex and unclear administrative processes and inadequate power of supportive actors, specifically to the powerful uncooperative actors such as employers.

Most of our interviewees mentioned that despite the fact that on several occasions they were in desperate need for help from civil society workers, they did not have the exact information about the administrative processes they needed to go through to access them. Moreover, the support from these associations was usually limited to providing temporary accommodation in shelters, accompanying the undocumented migrants to administrative offices, or providing them with interpretation services when needed. Nonetheless, when it came to more profound issues such as finding a home to rent, or improvements in exploitative work conditions, these associations did not have the resources, networks, or power to be sufficiently effective.

Our data also demonstrated that among all individuals we interviewed, none had ever referred to legal authorities for contestation about their workplace conditions. It was widely claimed by our interviewees that filing an official grievance about the workplace conditions would result in them losing their job, and stifling access to any other work in the future. One undocumented migrant who, at the time of the interview, was an interpreter in a refugee camp in the south of Italy explained how due to its spill over influence, filing a grievance to improve working conditions could backfire to deteriorate the life conditions of undocumented migrants:

"Yes of course you can go to the police [to file a grievance], but you do it only when you're sure you don't want to work anymore. Here, if you work on farmland and complain about the work to the police, no other farmer will ever hire you because they stress, 'this guy is going to make trouble.'" (Interviewee 30)

In sum, we find that most undocumented workers grapple with pervasive marginalization as they face an overwhelming absence of support and encounter numerous barriers both within and outside the workplace. The combination of limited access to improvement opportunities, promotions, information, advice, and consultation further exacerbates their vulnerable conditions within noncooperative spaces in which they are intricately embedded.

Inextricability

Our analysis posits that the experience of inextricability of undocumented workers occurred due to two main obstacles that these individuals encounter. *First,* the renewal of residence document of undocumented migrants in Italy was directly linked to having a working contract. After the introduction of the 'Immigration and Security Decree' that abolished humanitarian protection for residence permits in 2018 (European Council for Refugee and Exile, 2019), most migrants entering Italy without a valid visa became completely dependent on having a working contract to renew their residence permit. That is, those individuals who are not eligible for refugee status must provide a working contract to the immigration police to prove the necessity of their stay in Italy. This dependency created one of the obstacles preventing undocumented migrants from extricating themselves from exploitative and oppressive workplace conditions.

The *second* obstacle was created by the similarity in the behavior of powerful uncooperative actors, which resulted in the understanding among some of our interviewees that, *"it does not matter how many times I change my job, I only land in the same exploitative condition or in a job that is even worse than what I currently have"* (Interviewee 32). Such understanding garnered from experiencing the same exploitative condition in different firms or observing what was happening to other undocumented migrants, could appear in the form of fear of being in conditions that were even worse than the current exploitative one. This fear prevented most of our interviewees from attempting to move to other firms and, thus, made them immobile.

Interestingly, we found a few undocumented migrants who were not exploited. However, they were not really satisfied with the overall condition of their work as they shared

the same fear which made them immobile in a similar way. For example, one undocumented worker with a certificate in plumbing, who during the time of the interview was working as a janitor in a hospital, described the exceptionally good behavior shown by his colleagues: *"Ambulance drivers, administration staff and even nurses are very kind to me. Some days I receive four different offers of coffee* (an expression of respect and affection in Italian culture)" (Interviewee 45). They then added that, despite such decent experiences at the workplace, the work was not compatible with plumbing skills and was also a health danger. Nevertheless, there was fear that a change to more compatible work would lead to exploitative conditions, like those experienced by other undocumented migrants in Italy:

I prefer to work as a plumber. This job is difficult. Even during COVID I had to disinfect the ambulances. It's dangerous. But you know what? I don't know how, but I think I live in another Italy [because of the good behavior I experience at work]. The life of migrants in Italy is not like this. All my friends have very bad experiences. They're treated very badly by their colleagues and bosses. I want to be a plumber but a part of me also wants to stay with these nice people in this 'other' Italy. (Interviewee 45)

Our analysis shows that a significant aspect of marginalization experienced by our interviewees is the immobility resulting from the socio-economic conditions within noncooperative spaces. The deliberate imposition of attentiveness, sustained helplessness, and inextricability by various powerful actors in this noncooperative spaces constructs a lived experience for undocumented workers, consistently subjecting them to marginalization across various facets of their lives.

Systemic Incapability

Inadequacy

The first manifestation of inadequacy appeared at the *society level*, where, societies believed that only a few roles and positions that undocumented migrants were allowed to occupy. Also, physically tiring and low-paid work at remote locations made undocumented migrants invisible (types of work they were allowed to do). A civil society worker highlights:

"There's a clear understanding about jobs that Italians do, and jobs that [undocumented] migrants are allowed to do. If you search the entire Italy, you cannot find even one Italian who's working on a farm under the sun in the summer. In the same way, you cannot find a [undocumented] migrant who's working in the post

office. Maybe they work inside the warehouse of the post office, but never inside the office itself." (Interviewee 15)

The second manifestation of inadequacy appeared at the *firm level,* in the form of firms devaluating degrees, experience, and undocumented migrants' training achieved outside Italy. The civil society workers who participated in this study explained that, to spur undocumented migrants to find a job, they usually questioned them about their field of expertise. But it was usually quite unlikely that employers could be persuaded that undocumented migrants were able to work in their field of expertise. One of the civil society workers elucidates the perception of inadequacy:

"Employers usually believe that the job they [undocumented migrants] did in the original country is different. In Italy they must use different machines, and also techniques are different. If you've an experience in your country, it doesn't mean that you can do the same work in Italy. When it comes to manual jobs, it's better if they've [undocumented migrants] a certificate gained in Italy to show to the employer that they're familiar with how this job is done in Italy." (Interviewee 6)

Accordingly, some of the undocumented migrants told us that they had attempted to obtain professional certification in Italy with the hope that it would make them eligible for higher-level work positions. However, despite receiving the certificates, the majority of our interviewees were not able to fulfill their aspiration of finding a job in their area of expertise, for the simple reason that it was perceived to be outside the predefined roles those undocumented migrants were allowed and considered capable of occupying.

Our findings indicated a shared common understanding among the majority of undocumented migrants we interviewed about the restricted number of positions that they could occupy. An interviewee who had a degree in accounting from Egypt is indicative of such widespread understanding:

"Listen! I know that I'm not going to work in a bank. I'm not going to work in a tourist agency. I'm not even going to work as a supermarket cashier. At best I'm going to work in a supermarket warehouse because as [an undocumented] migrant this is the only unskilled job you're going to have… So there's no way I'm going to work in [an Italian Bank] as an accountant. No, for them, my accounting certificate is just a piece of paper." (Interviewee 2)

Hence, a critical dimension of the marginalization experienced by undocumented workers was the cultivation of an understanding that deems them insufficient for certain

activities, consequently perpetuating their further marginalization in various aspects.

Forced Incompetency

Due to the perception of inadequacy of undocumented migrants, and regardless of their skills, education, and proficiency, the majority of our interviewees worked in low-tier positions. Since promotion was generally unachievable for them, our interviewees mentioned that they were constantly kept in low positions in their workplace without an opportunity of advancing their rare expertise and skillsets. Therefore, while their expertise and knowledge were negated by uncooperative powerful actors of noncooperative spaces, they were also forced to remain in positions that failed to advance them.

As a result of being forced to occupy only unskilled positions, our interviewees explained that their roles in the accomplishment of the work in the organization was not central. While they were highly dependent on their employer for residence permits and salary, the employer was not mutually dependent on them. Due to this asymmetrical mutual dependence, they were often on the verge of being replaced with other unskilled workers. The following quote from one undocumented worker is indicative of the vulnerability many undocumented migrants experience in firms where they worked:

> "I work for 16 hours per day, and they pay me only for 8 hours. All 16 hours standing on my feet in the farmhouse. But if I tell them to pay me overtime or reduce my working time, they'll tell me the road is open. I can leave the job and tomorrow someone else will come and do it." (Interviewee 26)

In sum, another facet of the marginalization experience manifests through uncooperative actors within the noncooperative spaces, consistently and forcefully obstruct the progress of undocumented workers and perpetuate their marginalization.

Fragility

Our analysis suggests that the experience of fragility in our interviewees was the result of the overall condition of their life in Italy. On the one side, they had to confront several complex and interconnected problems. On the other side, socio-economic structures and powerful actors in this noncooperative spaces inhibited fulfillment of their capacity, limiting their access to opportunities and, overall, thwarted their efforts for solving these issues. This situation resulted in experiencing being fragile against the magnitude of problems faced at workplace and beyond. One interviewee narrated a stressful period of two years during which she

was on the verge of being deported from Italy. Her sentences describing that period encapsulate the essence of fragility experienced by many undocumented migrants we interviewed:

> "I was paralyzed. I've two university degrees. I had done everything needed to build a decent life here. But then I felt I was paralyzed by the migration police that wanted to deport me back. My boss didn't want to renew my working contract because my residence permit was expired, and as a single woman I had to pay my bills. Suddenly there were too many issues locked to each other and they were all out of my hands." (Interviewee 34)

In addition to confronting the waves of convoluted issues, the complete lack of control over what happens in work and life also contributed to the fragility of our interviewees. Our interviewees mentioned that barely any decisions about work and life were made by them, as there was always another more powerful and usually uncooperative actor (an employer, a supervisor, the migration police) that would make the most important decisions for what would happen in the life of these individuals. Our interviewees explained that they usually lacked mastery over their work and life in general.

Because of the lack of control over their life, the experience shared by many of our interviewees was their inability to put in place a plan for their life. They rather followed what more powerful others in their life would decide:

> "I think there's not much I can do about the future. I just pray for good things to come my way that I meet relevant people who'll come my way tomorrow." (Interviewee 26)

Meaninglessness

Diminished Esteem

The first element of meaninglessness, *diminished esteem*, was strongly felt by almost all undocumented migrants who participated in our research. Diminished esteem entails undocumented migrants' self-perception of failure in achieving their goals, as well as devaluation of their own knowledge, interests, and expertise. Our interviewees explained that they had abandoned their homeland with ambitious plans, aspirations, and ideas for having a prosperous life in Italy. Many of them mentioned that they had intentions to study, work, and earn money, follow their passions, support their family members back home, and build a decent life in Italy. Nonetheless, they expressed that after years of struggling to achieve the minimum necessities of life, they had failed in achieving their goals after migration. They

described their current conditions as way beneath their self-set expectations:

> "I left Pakistan to stand for my family. To support my father as his first son. I studied business analysis and I must be able to run huge businesses. But what I'm doing is completely opposite to that. I'm a [food delivery] driver. All you need is a bike, a bag and a cellphone to navigate the addresses… I cannot even support myself, let alone my family." (Interviewee 8)

Remarkably, we found that not only did society and firms devaluate the work experience, knowledge, and expertise of undocumented migrants but also this perception was internalized by our interviewees as, in similar ways, they also downgraded the value of their own skills, expertise and passion. Some of our interviews described the certificates they obtained as a *'useless piece of paper.'* This was particularly the case for expertise and passion that did not provide them with paid work. An interviewee who had studied English Literature in Afghanistan and worked as an electricity technician in Italy elucidates this internalized devaluation of expertise:

> "I want to be honest with you. I was passionate about English literature and translation, and I was a top student in Afghanistan. But if this passion isn't feeding the stomach of my family, then it's better to forget about it." (Interviewee 13)

Isolation

The second element of the experience of meaninglessness implied our interviewees' tendency to avoid contacts and reject help from others. Paradoxically, these individuals were inclined to remain isolated as they were hesitant about extending their social network and asking for help.

Frequently our interviewees mentioned that they preferred to limit their interactions with broader society. A possible reason for this tendency was their perception of a lack of mutual understanding with any potential contact. Moreover, they mentioned that, unless extremely necessary, they avoided being outside and mixing with other people. This was due to protecting themselves from potential issues that could endanger their already vulnerable condition. As our findings suggest, not only in wider society, but also in the workplace, our interviewees attempted to limit unnecessary interactions with colleagues and supervisors to avoid issues targeted at them:

> "I go to work, I focus, I do my work, and after my work I go home… I don't go to work to make conversation or anything like that, I never focus on them [my colleagues], I just focus on my work." (Interviewee 25)

The tendency of isolation of undocumented migrants suggests that rather than actively resisting or confronting the marginalization imposed by uncooperative actors in the host country, undocumented migrants seem to choose self-marginalization as a strategy to shield themselves from further harm.

Loss of Vision

Our findings highlighted the inability of our interviewees in depicting a realistic imagination about their short-term future, coupled with describing very unfeasible aspirations for the long-term future. Our interviewees explained that they live their life *'day by day'* and that they were not able to explain what their future would look like in a few years:

> "For now, I just take my life step by step, but what I do, every day [is that] today I go through today, and tomorrow I go through tomorrow. Now you ask me about my future, I don't know." (Interviewee 37)

We also found a very similar pattern among our interviewees when describing their dream job:

> "My dream job? I cannot see that for now because I don't know how my future will be. Maybe I cannot see it. I'll do this [job] right now and when the time comes, I'll change my job. You cannot plan your dreams." (Interviewee 21)

In contradiction to their difficulties in describing the future, many of our interviewees envisioned exaggerated futures for themselves. Some of the interviewees envisioned themselves in extremely high positions: "*I want to become a music superstar*"; "*I will open a business to trade cars to Africa*"; and "*I want to be an influencer in the US*". Some of the interviewees even envisioned extended social networks such as establishing associations to open orphanages, agreeing on partnerships with others to open chain restaurants in Italy, or creating groups to develop content for social media. We perceive such expressions as exaggerated because attaining these positions they described, demanded substantial skills, support and help, which our interviewees evidently lacked at their current situations.

Discussion and Conclusion

Experience of Marginalization in Noncooperative Spaces

In our study, we shift away from the conventional approach of isolating stakeholders within their stakeholder networks (Bondy & Charles, 2020; Wicks et al., 1994) and extend our focus to the experience of marginalization influenced

by powerful actors such as government agencies, NGOs, and firms, as well as institutional structures within a noncooperative space. This approach helps us to develop marginalized stakeholder theory and bring nuances into migration studies.

Marginalized stakeholder theory (e.g., Chowdhury, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d) is concerned with various aspects of marginalization; that is, when firms seize or exploit resources (e.g., socio-economic, intellectual, political, environmental, and cultural) that belong to their vulnerable stakeholders, or inflict harm on stakeholders who are essentially power and resource deprived (Derry, 2012). This behavior allows firms to bolster legitimacy, maximize profits, and maintain the status quo at the expense of stakeholder well-being (Gardberg & Newburry, 2013). Consequently, in current investigations into marginalized stakeholders, the condition of being marginalized is predominantly conceptualized as a status, mainly—or exclusively—manifested in the interactions between firms and their stakeholders. In doing so, scholars study initiatives—primarily led by firms, or cooperative actors such as NGOs and supporting groups—to free individuals or groups from marginalization (Chowdhury, 2021c; Eikelenboom & Long, 2023), assist them in their inclusion (Platt et al., 2022), or explore why such efforts often fail to extricate marginalized stakeholders from their disempowered positions (Moog et al., 2015; Platt et al., 2022).

Our findings cast light on the vulnerability of stakeholders and how they navigate noncooperative spaces while, most often, they remain marginalized even though they may try to resist marginalization. Consequently, we conceptualize marginalization, not as a static status which is imposed on stakeholders or inherent in them, but as a recurring experience unfolding across various aspects of undocumented migrants' lives within noncooperative spaces. The contributions of numerous powerful actors in the noncooperative spaces facilitate and perpetuate this experience of marginalization, allowing uncooperative socio-structures to continuously dominate marginalized stakeholders.

Further, our research findings unveil that, even in the absence of any formal alliances or cohesive relationships, various uncooperative actors, and structures within noncooperative spaces tend to mirror each other as their exploitative and discriminatory treatment of marginalized stakeholders contaminates many firms. This reveals a nuanced form of tacit collusion among the powerful actors within noncooperative spaces, working collectively to perpetuate the process of the marginalization of stakeholders.

It is particularly crucial to highlight the influence of this type of tacit collusion of firms on the experience of marginalization of undocumented workers since extant literature typically focuses on stakeholders engaged in some form of economic or social relationship with firms (Freeman, 1984). However, in the distinct setting of our study, undocumented

workers not even engaged in direct contracts with firms experienced extreme levels of marginalization, influenced by the collective contributions of uncooperative firms in shaping detrimental structures. This heightened degree of marginalization might not (re)occur if their exploitation was limited to a single firm rather than to the collective actions of firms in the noncooperative spaces.

Nevertheless, while we conceptualize marginalization in noncooperative spaces as an experience shaped by the collective impact of various powerful actors, we assign significant responsibility to firms concerning undocumented workers. We argue that firms, which are considered to be central actors in the network of stakeholders (Freeman & Liedtka, 1997; Phillips et al., 2003), cannot escape their responsibilities toward marginalized stakeholders. This is because firms have the power to balance the dichotomy between moral and instrumental responsibility toward their stakeholders (Trevino & Nelson, 2021). We advance this argument and suggest that, due to this high level of agency, rather than diverting their responsibilities to other powerful actors (NGOs, state, other legal and social organizations) firms ought to consider themselves as a key responsible actor who can reverse the stakeholders' experience of marginalization. That being the case, interested and highly responsible firms must be aware of the conditions of the surrounding space and identify its marginalization processes (e.g., stereotyping, prejudices, and biases that fortify marginalization). From this perspective, one of the most important steps that responsible firms can take is to channel their resources and tailor their value creation processes to create new pathways for the engagement of marginalized stakeholders (Chowdhury et al., 2024). In doing so, firms can actively combat marginalization processes that are interwoven into the fabric of the noncooperative spaces.

Our research expands the conceptual boundaries of marginalization, moving beyond the conventional understanding centered on firms' exploitation of stakeholders and their resources or the perception of stakeholders as inherently resource and power deprived (Alm & Guttormsen, 2021; Chowdhury, 2021a, 2021b; Derakhshan, 2022; Derry, 2012). A group of undocumented workers that we studied were highly skilled in their fields of expertise; yet no firm was willing to recruit them on that basis, and they experienced high levels of marginalization. Based on this empirical evidence, we conceptualize a broader perspective of marginalization. This perspective involves the active rejection, by firms and other powerful actors within noncooperative spaces, of the skills and resources that stakeholders possess.

This nuanced expansion gains particular significance when applied to the context of undocumented migrant workers, refugees, and asylum seekers. This is because, in contrast to skilled migrants, extant literature often introduces these groups as individuals lacking essential skills and

resources and, thus, deemed in need of constant support and assistance (Dykstra-DeVette & Canary, 2019; Nardon et al., 2021; Platt et al., 2022). Alternatively, they are considered to possess skills but are required to 'adjust' and 'adapt' to the host country's conditions and employment expectations (Campion, 2018). This process often involves several agentic efforts employed by them to cope with the downward transition of their career and role (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; Nardon et al., 2021; Wehrle et al., 2018). Our study contends that anticipating undocumented workers to conform to new conditions, without acknowledging their credentials and experiences, results in the creation of a distinct typology of marginalized stakeholders who, despite having resources (talents, skills and experiences), endure severe experiences of marginalization.

Theoretical Contributions

We make unique contributions both to marginalized stakeholder theory and migration studies. *First*, our study raises concerns regarding the principles of stakeholder capitalism (Freeman, 2018; Freeman et al., 2007), and suggests their serious faults in interpreting, recognizing, and conceptualizing marginalized stakeholders in noncooperative spaces. Stakeholder literature frequently alludes that "business is primarily a story of cooperation, as well as competition" (Freeman, 2018, p.13). In doing so, stakeholder discussions conceptualize businesses and organizations as value creation machines: firms cooperate with their stakeholders and involve them in their value creation processes and, in the presence of diverse firms in an environment, compete with other firms to continuously create heightened value for themselves and their respective stakeholders. Conventional stakeholder literature even introduces the concept of value creation as an incentive to persuade firms to get on board by showing better behavior toward their stakeholders (Freeman,

2023). By studying the experience of marginalization in noncooperative spaces, our study unveils overlooked dimensions in this conceptualization of value creation with and for stakeholders.

We highlight the processes that enable and perpetuate the experience of marginalization of undocumented workers in noncooperative spaces (Fig. 2). Silence and tacit collusion among various powerful actors occur when they actively and complicitly act against or (seemingly) remain ignorant about the interests of marginalized stakeholders, as well as the conditions of their surrounding spaces. We argue that stakeholders (re)enter noncooperative spaces with specific resources (talents, skills, and experiences) that they are willing to share and develop further through engagement in value creation processes with firms. However, rather than providing them with adequate opportunities and support for collaboration, marginalized stakeholders are systematically disempowered in these spaces. In this process, marginalized stakeholders often find themselves immobilized due to the structural settings of noncooperative spaces because the uncooperative behavior of the powerful actors in these spaces provides barely any opportunity for marginalized stakeholders to engage in creativity or innovative value for businesses or societies. Through their enduring vulnerable experience, marginalized stakeholders perceive that they fail to meet their own life expectations as their esteem diminishes over time. Therefore, they tend to isolate themselves from the wider society, and integration into corporate and societal cultures becomes nonexistence. They lose their vision about what they want to do with their life and how to pursue a productive future which could bring well-being or prosperities for their immediate communities.

This means that, unlike what is suggested by traditional stakeholder theory (Freeman et al., 2021), firms are often unable to play their desired economic and ethical roles in a system of voluntary value creation and trade where they

Fig. 2 Experience of marginalization of marginalized stakeholders in noncooperative spaces
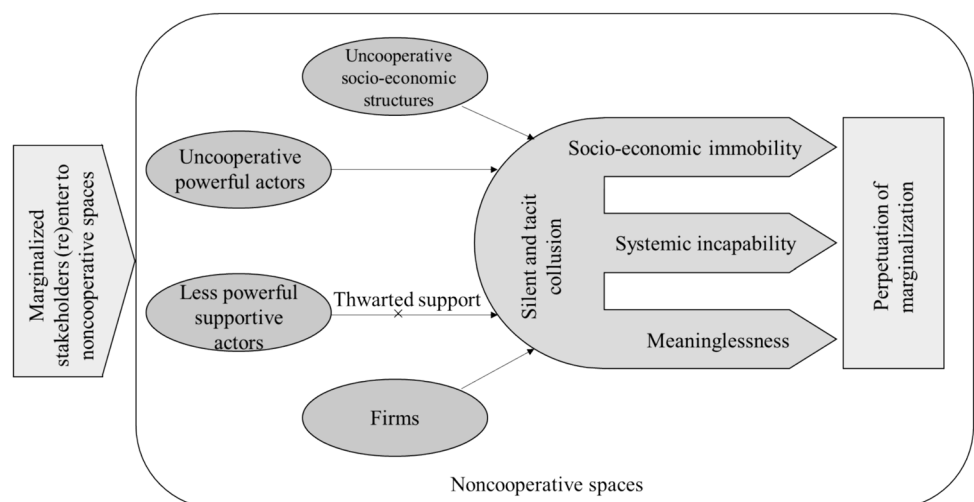
can provide opportunities for stakeholders. In such a system, value as a social phenomenon is not always "created, traded, and sustained" (Freeman et al., 2007, p.311) because marginalized stakeholders lack the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities to accomplish a joint collaboration with different parties. Even when a value is created, it is contingent upon an exploitative or humiliating structure that facilitates collaboration solely for the benefit of uncooperative actors, often at the expense of demoralizing marginalized stakeholders in the extreme. Therefore, the concept of value creation and its sustainability, in its current version, is inherently flawed, as it structurally favors powerful actors, but also further marginalizes vulnerable stakeholders. While employing the notion of value creation can serve as a compelling incentive to encourage firms in their stakeholder engagement activities, it is imperative and worthwhile to highlight the harms stemming from various institutional practices of business and other powerful actors involved in such processes.

Second, we argue that, when multiple uncooperative firms exist in noncooperative spaces, their silence and tacit collusion may, more often than not, lead marginalized stakeholders to consent to enter harmful relationships with firms, as they perceive no alternative means of survival in such a landscape. In other words, although stakeholders (e.g., workers) are not directly coerced to provide such consent (Van Buren, 2001), their marginalized position and the absence of choice forces them to enter harmful relationships with firms.

A facet of stakeholder theory often views the relationship between firms and stakeholders through a binary lens of consent and non-consent (e.g., Freeman, 2018; Freeman, et al., 2007). However, our study suggests that the consent of undocumented workers to enter into exploitative relationships with the firm goes beyond the dyadic relationship with that firm and extends into intricate, context-dependent connections shaped by the norms governing interactions across various noncooperative spaces. Undocumented workers, coercively yet fully informed, signed a contract with a firm because they were aware that, due to the similarity in the behavior of firms, they would not have access to more decent work options.

Accordingly, within the realm of noncooperative spaces, we conceptualize *normative harm* as the harm ingrained in the relationship between multiple firms and marginalized stakeholders. Normative harm significantly constrains the spectrum of behaviors exhibited by different firms, thereby limiting the range of options available to marginalized stakeholders. Thus, we posit that the nature of cooperation and emergent competition among the firms, praised in stakeholder capitalism, can vary and have diverse impacts on different stakeholders; and, in particular, marginalized stakeholders may be severely harmed in such a setting. Whereas the principles of stakeholder capitalism may garner values for many stakeholders, our study shows the voice

of the overlooked and neglected stakeholders who, due to the competition and cooperation of firms, are marginalized even further.

That is why, in the case of groups or individuals embedded in noncooperative spaces, or exploited individuals, the fundamental principles of stakeholder capitalism are insufficient to explain the situation and there is an urgent need to move toward marginalized stakeholder theory that can factor in ethical principles such as fairness and inclusiveness in an authentic manner so that vulnerable stakeholders retain their dignities and rights.

From a practical perspective, we posit that, although many firms would claim to care about their stakeholders (Greenwood & Freeman, 2011) and to be committed to non-discriminatory practices, in order to live up to those standards and those claimed values, responsible firms need to adopt more informed and innovative steps to involve marginalized stakeholders as both structural and agential development (Chowdhury et al., 2024). This speaks to firms' responsibility in regard to global challenges (Böhm et al., 2022)—that is, firms ought to "recognize that their actions contribute along with those of others to this injustice, and take responsibility for altering the processes to avoid or reduce injustice" (Young, 2004, p.379). In doing so, responsible firms need to engage in collective efforts with other firms to transform the approach of the exploitative firms as well as the socio-economic structures that silently collude to perpetuate the marginalization of stakeholders. By enhancing the principles of marginalized stakeholder theory, firms may channel their resources and tailor their structural and agential development to new pathways for creating meaningful contributions with marginalized stakeholders. Through such accommodative processes, firms can actively combat normative harm. When multiple firms collaborate in designing and implementing value creation processes that reverse the marginalization of stakeholders, they can even collectively transform the norms that are encoded into firms' and (marginalized) stakeholders' relationships in diverse settings.

Third, this study makes a significant contribution to migration literature. Previous works concerning migrants in management studies and beyond have often zoomed in on specific dimensions of the environment surrounding (undocumented) migrants, investigating the impacts of dimensions such as workplace experience (Gericke et al., 2018; Platt et al., 2022), society (Dahinden, 2016), or political and legal structures (Geddes et al., 2020; Menjívar & Abrego, 2012) on migrants' lives. A comprehensive approach of our study illuminates the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by undocumented migrants, exploring how these dimensions are interconnected and contribute to the development of harmful structures which systematically perpetuate the marginalization of undocumented workers.

In particular, we note the determinant role of *meaninglessness* as a barrier to the inclusion of migrants in the context of their host country. Extant research on the empowerment of migrants emphasizes the imperative role of supporting structures (e.g., education, social capital, entrepreneurial opportunities, and welfare system) provided by powerful actors such as states, NGOs, international associations (Alloush et al., 2017; Kangas-Müller et al., 2023), and firms (Chowdhury et al., 2024). Research suggests that, through these supporting structures, knowledge, expertise, information, and appropriate resources can be shared with migrants, providing opportunities for them to participate in economic activities and self-development to enhance their position (Chowdhury et al., 2024). To be fully realized, these opportunities require engagement and input from migrants (Papineau & Kiely, 1996; Roseland, 2012). However, these processes often constrain the sense of the self of the migrants (Derakhshan et al., 2024; Ortlieb et al., 2021). Our research reveals that undocumented workers who have lost their vision, hope, and agency because of arriving at a meaningless status are not motivated to engage, provide input, and cooperate with firm-imposed value creation processes. Hence, firms and other powerful actors must not expect migrant workers to abandon their aims, skills, and expertise in order to fit into the routine formation and dissemination of organizations and broader societies.

From this perspective, our conceptualization adds a dimension that can be inclusive of migrants. Whereas, so far, extant literature mainly focuses on external barriers hindering the migrant's inclusion (e.g., accessibility, uncertainty and disagreement, organizational policy and governance, means and conditions of communication), we introduce the experience of *meaninglessness* as an internal barrier that hinders the prospect of freeing migrants breaking free from their marginalized position.

Therefore, our research underscores a need for immigration reforms that encompass normative changes in societal, legal, and business contexts to replace the harmful structures (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009). More importantly, these reforms must create an environment that accommodates migrants and fosters meaningful transformations through enabling them to exercise their talents, skills, and experiences to achieve structural and agential development. In such an inclusive system, the role of firms is to be more proactive about creating novel economic activities and entrepreneurial possibilities that can incorporate marginalized stakeholders' aspirations, skills, and expertise as input in firms' value creation processes (Chowdhury et al., 2024).

Future Directions

Our study unveils crucial avenues for future research. First, we exhibit how multiple uncooperative actors in noncooperative spaces collaborate and produce normative harm. There is a need to delve deeper into the mechanisms through which these harmful norms are disseminated in noncooperative spaces. Research suggests that norms are often deeply interwoven into the fabric of the society and used by firms (e.g., Dubreuil et al., 2023; Varman et al., 2021). Understanding the intricate processes behind the formation and propagation of such norms can provide valuable insights into effective intervention points. An interesting angle of investigation could be the role of firms in creating and developing such norms, rather than just borrowing them from the society.

Second, whereas our study explored the collective influence of firms in constructing and developing normative harm, future studies should explore how, in a similarly collective manner, firms and other powerful actors can actively work toward dismantling this normative harm. Studies often consider the role of individual actors such as firms, governmental agencies, and NGOs in mitigating such harm and marginalization (e.g., Guo et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2010). Yet there is space for investigating potential strategies, collaborative efforts, and the impacts of collective initiatives on dismantling the harmful structures prevalent in noncooperative spaces and beyond.

Finally, whereas our study has made significant strides in examining the marginalization experience of undocumented migrants within noncooperative spaces, it is important to acknowledge a limitation. Our focus primarily centered on the perspective of the marginalized stakeholders. Future studies can expand on this research by investigating how (un)cooperative actors perceive and respond to such experiences. Exploring the attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes of these actors will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play within noncooperative spaces and contribute to the development of more nuanced interventions aimed at eliminating marginalization.

Declarations

References

Adams, W. C. (2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews. In K. E. Newcomer, H. P. Hatry, & J. S. Wholey (Eds.), *Handbook of practical program evaluation* (pp. 492–505). UK: Wiley.

Al Ariss, A., Koall, I., Özbilgin, M., & Suutari, V. (2012). Careers of skilled migrants: Towards a theoretical and methodological expansion. *Journal of Management Development, 31*(2), 92–101.

Al Ariss, A., & Syed, J. (2011). Capital mobilization of skilled migrants: A relational perspective. *British Journal of Management, 22*(2), 286–304.

Alloush, M., Taylor, J. E., Gupta, A., Valdes, R. I. R., & Gonzalez-Estrada, E. (2017). Economic life in refugee camps. *World Development, 95*, 334–347.

Alm, K., & Guttormsen, D. S. (2021). Enabling the voices of marginalized groups of people in theoretical business ethics research. *Journal of Business Ethics, 182*, 303.

Amenta, C., Di Betta, P., & Ferrara, C. (2021). The migrant crisis in the Mediterranean Sea: Empirical evidence on policy interventions. *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences, 78*, 101038.

Bærenholdt, J. O. (2013). Governmobility: The powers of mobility. *Mobilities, 8*(1), 20–34.

Böhm, S., Carrington, M., Cornelius, N., de Bruin, B., Greenwood, M., Hassan, L., & Shaw, D. (2022). Ethics at the centre of global and local challenges: Thoughts on the future of business ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics, 180*(3), 835–861.

Bondy, K., & Charles, A. (2020). Mitigating stakeholder marginalisation with the relational self. *Journal of Business Ethics, 165*(1), 67–82.

Borjas, G. J. (2017). The labor supply of undocumented immigrants. *Labour Economics, 46*, 1–13.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

Brickell, K., & Datta, A. (Eds.). (2011). *Translocal geographies*. UK: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Campion, E. D. (2018). The career adaptive refugee: Exploring the structural and personal barriers to refugee resettlement. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 105*, 6–16.

Cappelen, C., & Muriaas, R. L. (2018). Polish labour migrants and undeclared work in Norway. *Scandinavian Political Studies, 41*(2), 167–187.

Castelli Gattinara, P. (2017). The 'refugee crisis' in Italy as a crisis of legitimacy. *Contemporary Italian Politics, 9*(3), 318–331.

Chouliaraki, L., & Stolic, T. (2017). Rethinking media responsibility in the refugee 'crisis': A visual typology of European news. *Media, Culture & Society, 39*(8), 1162–1177.

Chowdhury, R. (2017). The Rana Plaza disaster and the complicit behavior of elite NGOs. *Organization, 24*(6), 938–949.

Chowdhury, R. (2021a). Critical essay (In)sensitive violence, development, and the smell of the soil: Strategic decision-making of what? *Human Relations, 74*(1), 131–152.

Chowdhury, R. (2021b). The mobilization of noncooperative spaces: Reflections from Rohingya refugee camps. *Journal of Management Studies, 58*(3), 914–921.

Chowdhury, R. (2021c). From black pain to Rhodes must fall: A rejectionist perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics, 170*, 287–311.

Chowdhury, R. (2021d). Self-representation of marginalized groups: A new way of thinking through W. E. B. Du Bois. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 31*(4), 524–548.

Chowdhury, R. (2023). Misrepresentation of marginalized groups: A critique of epistemic neocolonialism. *Journal of Business Ethics, 186*(3), 553–570.

Chowdhury, R., Sarasvathy, S. D., & Freeman, R. E. (2024). Toward a theory of marginalized stakeholder-centric entrepreneurship. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 34*(1), 1–34.

Clibborn, S. (2015). Why undocumented immigrant workers should have workplace rights. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review, 26*(3), 465–473.

Cruz, J. (2014). Memories of trauma and organizing: Market women's susu groups in postconflict Liberia. *Organization, 21*(4), 447–462.

Dahinden, J. (2016). A plea for the 'de-migranticization'of research on migration and integration. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 39*(13), 2207–2225.

Derakhshan, R. (2022). Building projects on the local communities' planet: studying organizations' care-giving approaches. *Journal of Business Ethics*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-020-04636-9

Derakhshan, R., Soundararajan, V., Agarwal, P., & Crane, A. (2024). Coping with personhood limbo: Personhood anchoring work among undocumented workers in Italy. *Human Relations*. https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267241228763

Derry, R. (2012). Reclaiming marginalized stakeholders. *Journal of Business Ethics, 111*(2), 253–264.

Drozdzewski, D., & Matusz, P. (2021). Operationalising memory and identity politics to influence public opinion of refugees: A snapshot from Poland. *Political Geography, 86*, 102366.

Dubreuil, C., Dion, D., & Borraz, S. (2023). For the love of the game: Moral ambivalence and justification work in consuming violence. *Journal of Business Ethics, 186*(3), 675–694.

Dutta, A., Gandhi, S., & Green, R. K. (2021). Distant shocks, migration, and housing supply in India. Migration, and Housing Supply in India. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3820187

Dykstra-DeVette, T. A., & Canary, H. E. (2019). Crystalline empowerment: Negotiating tensions in refugee resettlement. *Organization Studies, 40*(3), 323–342.

Eggenhofer-Rehart, P. M., Latzke, M., Pernkopf, K., Zellhofer, D., Mayrhofer, W., & Steyrer, J. (2018). Refugees' career capital welcome? Afghan and Syrian refugee job seekers in Austria. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 105*, 31–45.

Eikelenboom, M., & Long, T. B. (2023). Breaking the cycle of marginalization: How to involve local communities in multi-stakeholder initiatives? *Journal of Business Ethics, 186*(1), 31–62.

Favell, A. (2016). *Philosophies of integration: Immigration and the idea of citizenship in France and Britain*. Cham: Springer.

Freeman, R. E. (2023). Managing for stakeholders: Trade-offs or value creation. In R. Edward Freeman's Selected Works on Stakeholder Theory and Business Ethics (pp. 295–299). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Freeman, E., & Liedtka, J. (1997). Stakeholder capitalism and the value chain. *European Management Journal, 15*(3), 286–296.

Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Freeman, R. E. (2018). The "business sucks" story. *Humanistic Management Journal, 3*, 9–16.

Freeman, R. E., Dmytriyev, S. D., & Phillips, R. A. (2021). Stakeholder theory and the resource-based view of the firm. *Journal of Management, 47*(7), 1757–1770.

Freeman, R. E., Martin, K., & Parmar, B. (2007). Stakeholder capitalism. *Journal of Business Ethics, 74*(4), 303–314.

Fudge, J. (2018). Illegal working, migrants and labour exploitation in the UK. *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies, 38*(3), 557–584.

Gardberg, N. A., & Newburry, W. (2013). Who boycotts whom? Marginalization, company knowledge, and strategic issues. *Business & Society, 52*(2), 318–357.

Geddes, A., Hadj-Abdou, L., & Brumat, L. (2020). *Migration and mobility in the European Union*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Gericke, D., Burmeister, A., Löwe, J., Deller, J., & Pundt, L. (2018). How do refugees use their social capital for successful labor market integration? An exploratory analysis in Germany. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 105*, 46–61.

Gibson, K. (2017). Regarding marginal stakeholders. In: David M. Wasieleski, James Weber (Ed.) Stakeholder Management (Vol. 1, pp. 189–213). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research. Routledge.

Greenwood, M., & Freeman, R. E. (2011). Ethics and HRM: The contribution of stakeholder theory. *Business & Professional Ethics Journal, 30*, 269–292.

Greenwood, M., & Mir, R. (2018). Critical management studies and stakeholder theory: Possibilities for a critical stakeholder theory. *SSRN Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3234947

Guo, C., & Al Ariss, A. (2015). Human resource management of international migrants: Current theories and future research. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 26*(10), 1287–1297.

Guo, G. C., Al Ariss, A., & Brewster, C. (2020). Understanding the global refugee crisis: Managerial consequences and policy implications. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 34*(4), 531–545.

Harrison, J. S., & Wicks, A. C. (2021). Harmful stakeholder strategies. *Journal of Business Ethics, 169*(3), 405–419.

Hesse, A., Kreutzer, K., & Diehl, M. R. (2019). Dynamics of institutional logics in a cross-sector social partnership: The case of refugee integration in Germany. *Journal of Business Ethics, 159*, 679–704.

International Labour Organization (2021). ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers Results and Methodology (Third Edition). Available at https://bit.ly/3HWw1C1

International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2022). *UN world migration report 2022*.

IPSOS. (2019). World Refugee Day. Global Attitudes towards Refugees. https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2019-06/World-Refugee-Day-2019-Ipsos.pdf

Jensen, T., & Sandström, J. (2011). Stakeholder theory and globalization: The challenges of power and responsibility. *Organization Studies, 32*(4), 473–488.

Jones, T. M., Harrison, J. S., & Felps, W. (2018). How applying instrumental stakeholder theory can provide sustainable competitive advantage. *Academy of Management Review, 43*(3), 371–391.

Kangas-Müller, L., Eräranta, K., & Moisander, J. (2023). Doing inclusion as counter-conduct: Navigating the paradoxes of organizing for refugee and migrant inclusion. *Human Relations*, 00187267221145399.

Katz, R. (1993). *The straight path: A story of healing and transformation in Fiji*. Boston: Addison-Wesley Publications.

Kerr, R., Robinson, S., & Śliwa, M. (2022). Organising populism: From symbolic power to symbolic violence. *Human Relations*, 00187267221129181

Khan, R., & F., Westwood, R., & Boje, D. M. (2010). 'I feel like a foreign agent': NGOs and corporate social responsibility interventions into Third World child labor. *Human Relations, 63*(9), 1417–1438.

Knappert, L., Kornau, A., & Figengül, M. (2018). Refugees' exclusion at work and the intersection with gender: Insights from the Turkish-Syrian border. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 105*, 62–82.

Kong, E., & Ramia, G. (2010). A qualitative analysis of intellectual capital in social service non-profit organisations: A

theory–practice divide. *Journal of Management & Organization, 16*(5), 656–676.

Laplume, A. O., Sonpar, K., & Litz, R. A. (2008). Stakeholder theory: Reviewing a theory that moves us. *Journal of Management, 34*(6), 1152–1189.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.

Loacker, B., & Śliwa, M. (2016). Moving to stay in the same place?'Academics and theatrical artists as exemplars of the 'mobile middle. *Organization, 23*(5), 657–679.

Maher, R. (2019). Squeezing psychological freedom in corporate–community engagement. *Journal of Business Ethics, 160*(4), 1047–1066.

Maher, R., Monciardini, D., & Böhm, S. (2021). Torn between legal claiming and privatized remedy: Rights mobilization against gold mining in Chile. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 31*(1), 37–74.

Markaki, Y., & Longhi, S. (2013). What determines attitudes to immigration in European countries? An analysis at the regional level. *Migration Studies, 1*(3), 311–337.

Martínez Lucio, M., & Connolly, H. (2010). Contextualizing voice and stakeholders: Researching employment relations, immigration and trade unions. *Journal of Business Ethics, 97*(1), 19–29.

Menjívar, C., & Abrego, L. (2012). Legal violence: Immigration law and the lives of Central American immigrants. *American Journal of Sociology, 117*(5), 000–000.

Migration Foundation of Italian Catholic Church, (2020). XXIX Rapporto Immigrazione Caritas e Migrantes 2020. "Conoscere per comprendere". https://www.migrantes.it/xxix-rapporto-immigrazione-caritas-e-migrantes-2020-conoscere-per-comprendere/

Miles, S. (2017). Stakeholder theory classification: A theoretical and empirical evaluation of definitions. *Journal of Business Ethics, 142*, 437–459.

Mitchell, R. K., Agle, B. R., & Wood, D. J. (1997). Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: Defining the principle of who and what really counts. *Academy of Management Review, 22*(4), 853–886.

Moog, S., Spicer, A., & Böhm, S. (2015). The politics of multi-stakeholder initiatives: The crisis of the Forest Stewardship Council. *Journal of Business Ethics, 128*(3), 469–493.

Mulhall, A. (2003). In the field: Notes on observation in qualitative research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 41*(3), 306–313.

Mussell, H. (2021). The silenced and unsought beneficiary: Investigating epistemic injustice in the fiduciary. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 31*(4), 549–571.

Nardon, L., Zhang, H., Szkudlarek, B., & Gulanowski, D. (2021). Identity work in refugee workforce integration: The role of newcomer support organizations. *Human Relations, 74*(12), 1994–2020.

Öner, S. (2022). 'Europe'of populist radical right and the case of Lega of Salvini: Pioneer of a 'Parochial Europe'? *European Politics and Society, 23*(1), 62–77.

Ortensi, L. E., & Ambrosetti, E. (2022). Even worse than the undocumented? Assessing the refugees' integration in the labour market of Lombardy (Italy) in 2001–2014. *International Migration, 60*(3), 20–37.

Ortlieb, R., Glauninger, E., & Weiss, S. (2021). Organizational inclusion and identity regulation: How inclusive organizations form 'Good', 'Glorious' and 'Grateful'refugees. *Organization, 28*(2), 266–288.

Papineau, D., & Kiely, M. C. (1996). Participatory evaluation in a community organization: Fostering stakeholder empowerment and utilization. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 19*(1), 79–93.

Phillips, R., Freeman, R. E., & Wicks, A. C. (2003). What stakeholder theory is not. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 13*(4), 479–502.

Piemonte Research Institute of Socioeconomics, (2021). Rifugiati Al Lavoro Quali Reti? Quali Politiche? https://www.byterfly.eu/islandora/object/librib:1210348/datastream/PDF/content/librib_1210348.pdf

L'Ires Piemonte (2021), Rifugiati al lavoro, Quali Reti? Quali Politiche? (Fondo Asilo, migrazione e Integrazione (FAMI) 2014–2020), Available at https://bit.ly/3CxZMIh

Piketty, T. (2014). Capital in the twenty-first century. In T. Piketty (Ed.), *Capital in the twenty-first century* (pp. 471–492). USA: Harvard University Press.

Platt, L., Polavieja, J., & Radl, J. (2022). Which integration policies work? The heterogeneous impact of national institutions on immigrants' labor market attainment in Europe. *International Migration Review, 56*(2), 344–375.

Ram, M., Jones, T., & Villares-Varela, M. (2017). Migrant entrepreneurship: Reflections on research and practice. *International Small Business Journal, 35*(1), 3–18.

Ravenda, D., Valencia-Silva, M. M., Argiles-Bosch, J. M., & García-Blandón, J. (2021). The effects of immigration on labour tax avoidance: An empirical spatial analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics, 170*(3), 471–496.

Robinson, O. C. (2014). Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 11*(1), 25–41.

Roseland, M. (2012). Toward sustainable communities: Solutions for citizens and their governments. New Society Publishers.

Schaubroeck, J. M., Demirtas, O., Peng, A. C., & Pei, D. (2022). "I" Am Affirmed, but Are "We"? social identity processes influencing refugees' work initiative and community embeddedness. *Academy of Management Journal, 65*(2), 403–426.

Scott, J. W. (2020). Hungarian border politics as an anti-politics of the European Union. *Geopolitics, 25*(3), 658–677.

Shaw, R. M., Howe, J., Beazer, J., & Carr, T. (2020). Ethics and positionality in qualitative research with vulnerable and marginal groups. *Qualitative Research, 20*(3), 277–293.

Shear & Kanno Youngs, (2019). Trump Administration to Push for Tougher Asylum Rules. The New York Times.

Sofaer, S. (1999). Qualitative methods: What are they and why use them? *Health Services Research, 34*(5 Pt 2), 1101.

Sternberg, E. (2019). The defects of stakeholder theory1. In Corporate governance (pp. 391–400). Gower.

Stocchiero, A. (2017). The Public Debate on the Italian Isolation in the European Union Migration Crisis. The Migrant Crisis: European Perspectives and National Discourses. Zürich: Lit Verlag, 169–191.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research techniques*. USA: Sage.

Trevino, L. K., & Nelson, K. A. (2021). *Managing business ethics: Straight talk about how to do it right*. UK: John Wiley & Sons.

Triandafyllidou, A. (Ed.). (2018). *Handbook of migration and globalisation*. UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

UNHCR, (2018). Global Compact on Refugees. United Nation. https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4

Urry, J. (2007). Mobilities. Polity.

Van Buren, H., & Greenwood, M. (2009). Stakeholder voice: A problem, a solution, and a challenge for managers and academics. *Philosophy of Management, 8*(3), 15–23.

Van Buren, H. J., III. (2001). If fairness is the problem, is consent the solution? Integrating ISCT and stakeholder theory. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 11*, 481–499.

Van Maanen, J. (1979). Qualitative methodology. *Administrative Science Quarterly Ithaca, NY, 24*(4), 519–671.

Varella, S. (2021, June 10). Migrant arrivals in Italy 2014–2021, Statista. Available at https://www.statista.com/statistics/623514/migrant-arrivals-to-italy/

Varman, R., & Al-Amoudi, I. (2016). Accumulation through derealization: How corporate violence remains unchecked. *Human Relations, 69*(10), 1909–1935.

Varman, R., Skålén, P., Belk, R. W., & Chaudhuri, H. R. (2021). Normative violence in domestic service: A study of exploitation, status, and grievability. *Journal of Business Ethics, 171*, 645–665.

Wehrle, K., Klehe, U. C., Kira, M., & Zikic, J. (2018). Can I come as I am? Refugees' vocational identity threats, coping, and growth. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 105*, 83–101.

Wicks, A. C., Gilbert, D. R., Jr., & Freeman, R. E. (1994). A feminist reinterpretation of the stakeholder concept. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 4*, 475–497.

Young, I. M. (2004). Responsibility and global labor justice. *The Journal of Political Philosophy, 12*(4), 365–388.