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## ”We don’t have women in boxes’

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## **Channelling seasonal mobility of female farmworkers between Morocco and Andalusia**

Emmanuelle Hellio

Listen, a typical farmer who's just completed his agricultural season, what is he doing? He puts his tools and stuff away and goes off to celebrate. He might say: 'I'm off to El Rocío'<sup>1</sup> and doesn't think about the next season. But once it starts, he just all of a sudden wants 'his women' [workers]. We have to reply: 'We don't have women in boxes!' The farmer, however, remains relaxed. He knows, every year when he needs women, he will get them. We will take care of his labour supply. (Director of International Placement, Moroccan Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Competencies (ANAPEC), 17 July 2011, Casablanca).

### **Introduction**

Women do not 'come in boxes' but they are part of a highly contained system of labour mobility that adjusts flexibly to serve industrial agriculture in the province of Huelva.<sup>2</sup> In this agricultural region of Andalusia, Spain, an intensive monoculture of strawberries began to develop in the 1980s. Today, more than 7,500 ha are under cultivation in greenhouses. The production is export orientated and capital intensive. In order to plant one hectare of strawberries, a farmer has to invest between EUR 25,000 to 30,000 for necessary materials (e.g. plastic, tubes, phytosanitary products) and labour expenses.

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1 The pilgrimage of El Rocío, a village located in the province of Huelva, is the most important in Spain. It attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims around Pentecost every year.

2 This chapter stems from my research on the mobility of Moroccan women in Andalusian strawberry farming. The fieldwork consisted of 70 interviews with workers, growers, cooperatives, union workers and members of the institutions involved in recruitment, as well as observations on farms during the strawberry seasons between 2008 and 2011 and in farm workers' families in Morocco in 2010 and 2011. In order to protect the anonymity of my informants, all names of persons and firms in this article are pseudonyms.

Labour is one of the most important factors of production, estimated to be up to 30 per cent of the total cost.<sup>3</sup> Driven by the strawberry industry, this zone of intensive monoculture has become a crossroads for international migration. There have been massive changeovers in the composition of seasonal labour over the past ten years: first North African and sub-Saharan men were recruited; then Polish and Romanian women; followed by women from Morocco. The presence of this diversified workforce is the consequence of the employers' preferences, shaped by European and national migratory policies, and business ventures linked to private initiatives and regional policy interests. It is embedded in the rearrangement of European spaces and the legal practices of the Spanish state towards undocumented migrants.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter focuses on the recruitment of female labour from Morocco for Andalusian strawberry farming. I address the interplay of coercion and control inscribed into the constantly changing recruitment mechanisms shaped by production requirements on the one hand, and the persistence of Moroccan women's interaction with agricultural production and respective labour markets translating into an unintended empowerment for some of them on the other hand. I will begin by explaining how 'contracting in the countries of origin' (*contratación en origen*) (see Lindner and Kathmann, this volume) evolved in Morocco and reveal how the flow of seasonal workers governs flexible forms of work organization. I address the gap between EU funding intentions and regional recruitment dynamics. Special attention is given to the social locations where control mechanisms are implemented – namely instrumentalizing female family attachment as a means of guaranteeing the return of workers. I will, however, demonstrate how women within these omnipresent control mechanisms seek to direct and command their mobilities and develop their own positions:

### **Morocco as a new labour pool**

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3 Interview with agricultural technicians in one of the main cooperatives of Huelva, 13 May 2011, Moguer.

4 Illegalized migrants who have been present in Spain for at least three years can obtain a one-year residence permit if they find a one-year contract.

Huelvan farmers originally hired Andalusian day labourers but began to recruit North Africans in the 1990s, predominantly men. In 1999, producers started to hire female seasonal workers through employer organizations and by means of 'origin contracts' (*contratos en origen*). Recruited for the duration of the harvest, these migrants must contractually agree to return to their home country at the end of the season. Using this new means of labour recruitment, the farmers of Huelva have hired tens of thousands of female workers in the last decade claiming that their hands are more delicate (Hellio, 2009). Origin contracting started with Poland and Romania, then expanded to Morocco. Today, it is mainly used for Morocco.<sup>5</sup> As figure 12.1 shows, Polish and Romanian workers still comprise the majority of those harvesting strawberries in Huelva but the recent entry of the two states into the EU has temporarily released seasonal workers from the obligation to apply for a work permit.<sup>6</sup> Eastern European workers are thus contracted by other means.

The recruitment of Moroccan women became widely common in 2006. The first among them, however, crossed the Mediterranean as early as 2000. While certain cooperatives of Huelva used this new opportunity to recruit a few hundred women in Poland, the family business Fresdeloc started the process in Morocco. At the time, Fresdeloc was established in Huelva but had already moved part of its production to Moulay Bouselham in Morocco at the beginning of the 1990s. It profited from the new recruitment method by transferring a few dozen seasonal workers from its Moroccan to its Spanish farms. Over the course of the following years, recruitment in Poland, then in Romania, developed exponentially in all Huelvan farms, except for the one owned by Fresdeloc: they continued preferring 'their' Moroccan workforce over Eastern European women who 'they do not know' (Martin Herrero, founder of Fresdeloc, Moguer, 25 May 2010). When Poland and

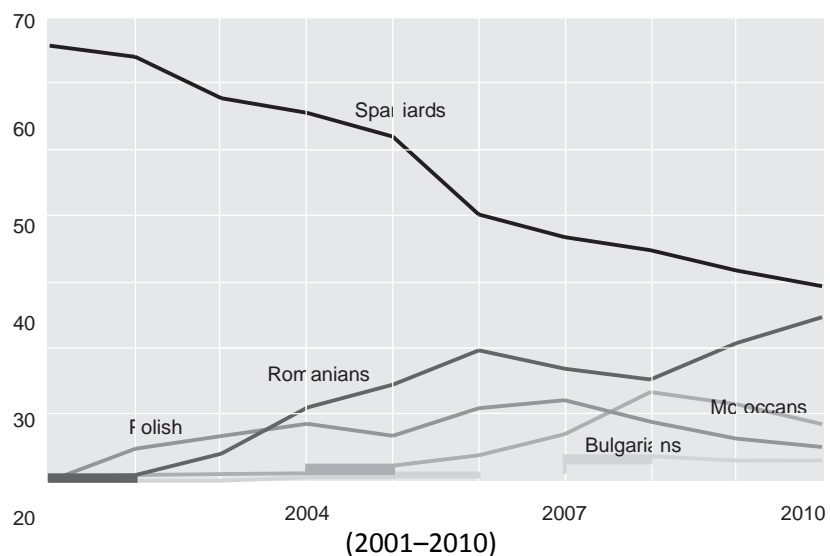
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5 Recently, bilateral agreements allowing for the contracting of migrant workers have been further expanded towards African countries with Senegal as a pilot experience.

6 As of 22 July 2011, Spain has re-enacted its moratorium on Romanian labour, which it had rescinded on 1 January 2009. As a consequence of the economic crisis, it once more requires Romanian nationals to apply for a work permit (BOE, 2011).

Romania joined the EU in 2005 and 2009 respectively, seasonal workers from those countries gained the right to legally and freely work in the entire EU.

Figure 12.1 Evolution and nationality of contracted female workers for agriculture in Huelva



Source: Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal, data obtained in 2010

Against this backdrop, in 2005, the municipality of Cartaya, one of the main strawberry-producing villages in the province of Huelva, submitted the project 'Aeneas- Cartaya: Ethical Management Project for Circular Migration' to the European Commission. Acknowledging the fact that temporary immigration was a necessity for local agriculture, but also that 'disorganized' or 'illegal' immigration created problems with the integration of the foreign population in the villages, they proposed to take a leading role in the establishment of a project to manage the flow of legal and temporary labour between the province of Huelva and Morocco. For the director of the project, this initiative follows from the assessment that Romanian workers, now members of the EU, have become too mobile:

From a mercantilist point of view, Romanians are no longer recruited. [A] contracted labourer from a non-EU source can only work in Huelva while the Romanian goes where she wants. That's why and how businesses gradually convert their labour. [I] run such a business: I had Romanians, who are EU citizens, coming to work here. In the days

following, there might be work elsewhere, in a bar for instance, and she leaves me. Not the Moroccan one, she has to work in agriculture

(Jesús Oveja, 14 May 2009, Office for Foreign and Seasonal Workers, Cartaya).

The director of the Moroccan employment agency used a similar example to describe the relative advantage of the labour he made available to employers in Huelva:

People from Eastern countries arrive individually, they sign contracts but it isn't like origin contracting, it's riskier for the employer. They're easier to cancel. Employers aren't reassured, they know that their workforce is not stable; that workers say to themselves, for example: 'when the season in Lérida begins, I'll go there and leave the farm in Huelva

(Mr Hamzani, 17 July 2011, ANAPEC, Casablanca).

The project was developed in accordance with the EU's views regarding labour migration. Since the end of the 1990s and more specifically since 2007 (EC, 2007), the European Commission, following other international organizations (Geiger and Pécoud, 2010), has promoted a policy of temporary labour migration under the heading 'win-win-win migration', which allegedly fulfils the expectations of all players involved: country of origin, host country and the foreign workers themselves. This policy was financed by the European programme Aeneas which subsidized the Cartaya project to the tune of EUR 1.4 million to develop a recruitment strategy for seasonal workers in Morocco. This change in recruitment policy led by the large employer cooperatives in collaboration with local authorities was, however, not appreciated by a number of employers who were used to Eastern European workers and refused to recruit in Morocco, categorizing the Moroccan men present in the area for more than ten years as dangerous and confrontational workers. In order to launch the recruitment drive, local authorities who had the power to approve companies' demands for foreign labour only gave their assent to requests for Romanians and Ukrainians if the employer agreed to recruit a certain quota of Moroccan women. Most of the employers finally overcame their reluctance: this was based on positive experiences with Moroccan women and the new planning constraints resulting from the new liberties of circulation granted to Romanian and Polish nationals, which

made them a lot less controllable. As of 2008, the entire strawberry sector was ready to make use of this pool of alternative labour on a large scale. Although the recruitment in Morocco operates within the legal framework of origin contracting as used to be the case with Poland and Romania, the management of the seasonal labour flows between Spain and Morocco has taken on a specific form. It was shaped by the partnership between the Municipality of Cartaya, the administrative agency for the programme on the Spanish side, and the Moroccan Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Competencies (ANAPEC, Agence nationale de promotion de l'emploi et des compétences).

### **EU funding intentions and regional realities**

Contrary to previous recruitment campaigns, which were in part subsidized by the Spanish State,<sup>7</sup> the initiators of the Aeneas-Cartaya project benefited from a much larger budget in 2006: EUR 1.6 million in subsidies intended exclusively for the management of this seasonal workforce. They could also mobilize a budget of EUR 5 million on the Moroccan side handed over to ANAPEC by the European Commission for a project entitled 'International Support for the Circulation of Persons' and aiming to promote the placement of Moroccans on the international labour market.<sup>8</sup> Whereas the project was initially aimed at qualified personnel, Moroccan officials soon realized that there was a substantial gap between the promotion of temporary migration by the EU and the reality of placement opportunities in European countries. Mr Hamzani, current Director of International Placement for ANAPEC, considers that the concession provided by this subsidy was the consequence of certain favourable economic circumstances that had already changed by the time the policy was to be implemented:

At the time of the creation of ANAPEC [in 2001], numerous reports were published which predicted substantial labour needs in Europe [...], at least that was what was announced in those reports. The Europeans hurriedly introduced programmes in order to be able to respond to those needs. Unfortunately, the following economic circumstances in Europe were not those announced in the reports. [I]t's the entire economic situation that explains

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<sup>7</sup> See the subsidy resolution of the General Direction of Immigration for the year 2007 (BOE, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> This subsidy was handed over as part of MEDA 2. This programme used to embody the financial axis of EU cooperation with Mediterranean countries within the frame of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

the different projects that were brought to life at the time. This is how this famous concept came to be that I still have a hard time understanding: circular migration?

(Director of International Placement, 16 March 2010, ANAPEC, Casablanca)

Fatima Ben Ouali, former Director of Cooperation and Development for ANAPEC, also remembers that the project had never targeted seasonal workers, even during its development:

[It] consisted of training Moroccans to go abroad. [B]ack then, the French kept their distance from the project; they were never really interested in this opportunity for recruitment. We had two or three instances of over 50 girls leaving to work [in Spain] in elderly care. But the MEDA funds were inexhaustible. It was only about a few hundred people, there wasn't enough demand. [W]hen Aeneas-Cartaya obtained a subsidy of EUR 2 million, the Spanish embassy contacted me. [W]e started to discuss the matter of seasonal workers. [I]t was truly lucky for ANAPEC because there were funds to be used. [E]ven with the seasonal workers, we had to extend for over two years in order to use up the subsidy

(Former Director of Cooperation and Development for ANAPEC, 29 July 2011, Rabat)

In 2006, Fatima Ben Ouali met the people in charge of the Aeneas-Cartaya project and both organizations signed a partnership agreement with the aim, according to the current director, to 'implement in Morocco what Aeneas-Cartaya was planning to do once the border had been crossed'. However, as early as 2003, ANAPEC had as a national employment agency already participated in the recruitment of seasonal workers for the strawberry industry, which, according to Mr Hamzani, had been gravely mismanaged:

At the time, Abbas El Fassi was Minister of Employment. He had put people from his Istiqlal Party all over the ministry. [W]hen the offer came from Spain, it wasn't handled by ANAPEC, it was the director who took it and had it handled elsewhere. [I]t was an offer for 800 people. We sent a bit of everything: it was a way to cross the Mediterranean to Europe completely safely, instead of resorting to pateras.<sup>9</sup> The women would arrive in Tarifa and cars were already waiting to take them off to Italy or France. Employers waited but nobody came. [A]fter that, the Spanish didn't want to work with them. The EU didn't want to work with that partner. [B]efore the implementation of MEDA [2] the first prerequisite was to change the management of ANAPEC. The general director, Chafik Rachid ... well, he was fired by the Europeans [laughs]

(Director of International Placement, 17 July 2011, ANAPEC, Casablanca).

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9 Dinghies used for the clandestine crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar.

On his side, the programme coordinator on the Spanish end confirms that before the implementation of the Aeneas-Cartaya project less than 10 per cent of women returned to Morocco:

An important part of this non-return happened upon arrival in Tarifa. [A] significant number left even before work started, they didn't even reach the strawberry fields, they'd get here, damn, and then whoosh; and another portion would go work, stick around for about a month and when the month was over, well ciao. So we had a meeting in order to analyse and reflect and we began looking for the causes of this flight. And at that moment, the people we had out in the field, the women, explained to us that ... how to say ... the management of ANAPEC wasn't as transparent as it should have been. [S]o given the opacity and lack of transparency of ANAPEC then, people would say 'If I'm obliged to pay an extortionate fee in order to be on that list... and in the end, I'm pretty much paying for the patera. If I have to pay for the patera, I might as well leave when I get to Tarifa'. When we detected these dysfunctions, we tried to subtly and diplomatically talk about it to ANAPEC: 'What's going on here, what can we do?' They get angry ... they manage stuff from minister to minister over there, and many heads roll

(Coordinator of Aeneas-Cartaya project, 14 May 2009, Office for foreign and seasonal workers, Cartaya).

This is the context in which the partnership between Aeneas-Cartaya and ANAPEC began in 2006, and in which the selection, recruitment and transportation procedures were established. This context appears to be the source of a certain zeal on the Moroccan side to ensure, via the selection criteria, that the workers return to Morocco at end of the season: 'We had no margin left, we couldn't afford any more foolishness,' confirmed Fatima Ben Ouali. Mr Hamzani, on his side, justifies the tightness of the selection criteria based on past mistakes: 'At the point when we took over, that's why we adopted contrary arrangements, that's why we chose women with children. We couldn't dispatch any young women. The people from the Istiqlal used to send graduates from high school and university.'

From 2006 to 2009 when selection took place the candidates would convene, generally around the month of October, in order to be selected by representatives from Huelvan employer organizations. The procedure generally took place as follows: the selected woman signed a contract with the recruiting employers' cooperative and returned home while ANAPEC took care of the application for a work visa. Whenever the campaign

began, the employer transmitted her request for seasonal workers to Cartaya, who then relayed the information to the relevant ANAPEC agency. The agency contacted the individual and arranged a departure date. The woman had to get to the port of Tangier, where she was taken into the charge of agents from ANAPEC as well as intercultural mediators hired by Aeneas- Cartaya. She received her passport with a valid visa, proceeded to cross the Strait of Gibraltar and was welcomed at the port of Tarifa by further mediators who guided her to the buses leased by employer organizations. She was then sent to her respective village and finally driven by her employer to the farm. During the season, the mediator was supposed to provide translation services between the employers and the seasonal workers in cases of incomprehension or conflict. They also should ensure communication with the hospitals in cases of workplace accidents and they should offer 'integration' training for the seasonal workers as well.

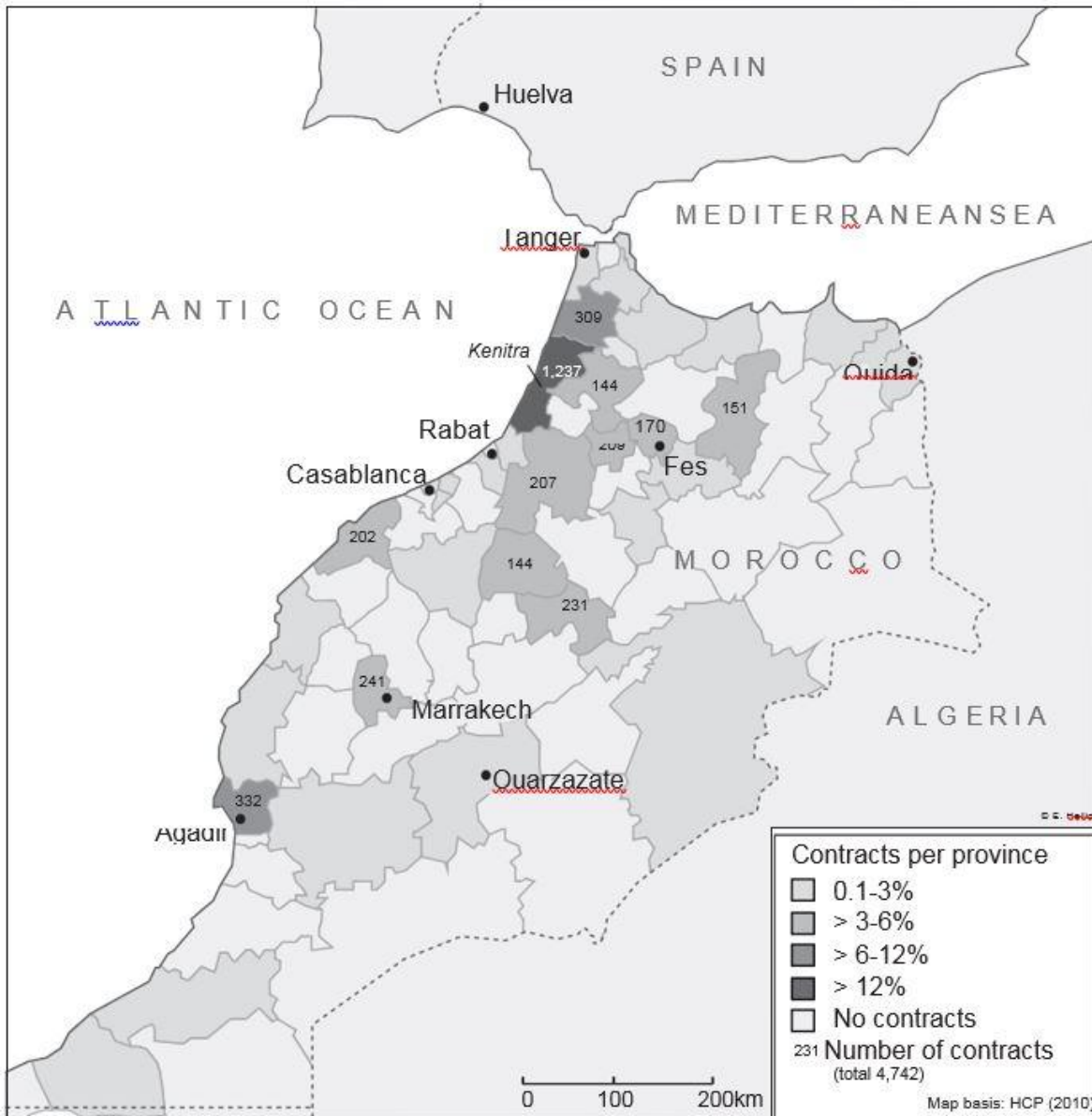
However, for the past two years, there have been no new selections. The contingent diminishes each year and only those women who have already worked a season or more are hired again. In order to understand the form recruitment practices have taken on, it is important to take a look at the intermediaries available to employers in Morocco and, among those, specifically at Fresdeloc. While ANAPEC tried to spread recruitment across all rural Morocco in 2006 at the beginning of the Aeneas-Cartaya programme, de facto recruitment has concentrated in the north-west of Morocco, particularly in the province of Kenitra (see map 12.1).

This can be explained by existing links between the producers in Huelva and those among them who were also established in Morocco. They aimed at selecting women who already had experience in harvesting strawberries. José Moreno, who used to work for Freshuelva, the cooperative that recruits the majority of seasonal workers from Morocco, remembers:

There was a lot of help from Fresdeloc, who contributed their local knowledge. Where are the labour pools? [S]ome [Fresdeloc staff] carried out the pre- selections because they knew the locals, [...] because it's easier when you know Morocco, just from looking at them you can tell who's likely to be worth it for work and who's not. [T]hey made their meeting rooms available for the selection process. [F]resdeloc was the management

centre. Moulay Bousselham is a poor rural area and Fresdeloc might have known the father, the mother, the son, sometimes we even called in people by family

(José Moreno, Fresdeloc's headquarters, 22 July 2010, Moulay Bousselham).



Map 12.1 Origin of Moroccan female workers contracted for Huelva by the recruitment agency ANAPEC and its regional offices (2010)

Source: Database established by the Aeneas-Cartaya project (2010)

The recruitment carried out by the manager of Fresdeloc Morocco during the first years for the benefit of the Spanish headquarters, apparently supplied particularly appreciated workers. This might be due to this family orientated selection where each seasonal worker must work correctly and abide by the rules established by the employer in order not to shame their relatives. This mode is far from being unfamiliar; it is also common among Moroccans contracted for agriculture in the French region of Bouches-du-Rhône (see Sippel and Gertel, this volume). But even if this recruitment mode was at the origin of the migration flow, the Aeneas-Cartaya project and its collaboration with ANAPEC introduced new forms of professional and anonymous recruitment.

### **Channelling mobility through family attachment**

The recruitment criteria established by employer organizations in partnership with Moroccan authorities aimed at providing a reliable workforce adequate for harvesting strawberries, while also ensuring that the workers returned home. In order to attain these objectives, Moroccan authorities decided to recruit married women (aged between 18 and 45) with young children under the age of 14, proved by their family records during pre-selection:

We introduced this criterion for technical reasons: some claimed that we took these women as hostages, that it was a matter of discriminatory criteria, but that's the way it is. First of all, it's an opportunity for the family because it implies a considerable redistribution. What's more, the attachment principle improves the rate at which the women return and my duty as a public service is to facilitate their return. [W]e ask a married woman to co-sign the application with her husband so as to show that the decision was taken by both of them. In 2006, we had legal complaints against women who left, who abandoned their husband, their children and effectively abandoned their lives. So the second time, in 2007, they co-signed the application so as to show that they really discussed the project with their husbands and that they're ready to support their candidacy

(Director of International Placement, 16 March 2010, ANAPEC, Casablanca).

These views demonstrate that Moroccan managers consider gender as being one of the most effective control mechanisms of the worker's mobility. They select according to the level of attachment to country and family depending on their domestic position in terms of production and reproduction. The policy of this Spanish–Moroccan collaboration

is hence to create a mobile labour force which Meillassoux<sup>10</sup> termed 'rotating migration' and which is echoed today in the international migration management spheres in the expression 'circular migration'. The model consists of a temporary relocation of these workers while they maintain their 'life center' in the homeland. This is reminiscent of the double capitalist project described by Meillassoux (1975) in *Femmes, greniers et capitaux* consisting of preserving the domestic sphere while exposing them to 'the exploitation of overwork'.

Controlled labour circulation does not stop with recruiting women with children on the basis of temporary contracts. Beginning in 2008 as a consequence of the economic crisis, the number of contracts allotted to seasonal workers from Morocco has diminished each year, shrinking from 11,000 in 2008 to 4,000 in 2011. This reduction elicited substantial concerns among the seasonal workers who feared that their contracts would not be renewed if they returned to Morocco and they started to consider staying in Spain after their contracts ended. Faced with this situation, the managers of Aeneas-Cartaya added another control mechanism. In all villages where the Moroccan women were employed, meetings were organized to discourage what the seasonal workers call *h'rague*, namely the practice of illegally remaining in Spain. In these meetings, mediators from Aeneas-Cartaya insisted that from now on, women should not remain in Spain after the end of the harvesting season, even if their visa was still valid. They were asked to return together on the same bus, claiming that otherwise they would not be back in time to register for the following year's work, which would jeopardize their return. Refuting this information, Mr Hamzani confirmed that the seasonal workers had 'the right to move about as long as they did not overstay their visa. [B]ut still, we don't want to say that too much so as to prevent "haemorrhages" that would affect the contingent so we encourage their collective return.' Fatima, a young seasonal worker, describes one of these meetings she attended in Moguer:

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<sup>10</sup> The reference to Meillassoux (1975) does not mean that I consider the Moroccan economy to be domestic in nature. However, in Morocco as anywhere else, contrary to the idea that the passing from feudalism to capitalism would inevitably reduce non-capitalist social relationships to the state of subsistence, these relations obviously remain central (Falquet, 2009).

When [...] the boss found out that there are many women who want to stay here and buy a contract,<sup>11</sup> and that there are many women who want to apply for their papers at the foreigners' registration office, the bosses informed the cooperatives that they needed to talk to the Moroccan women and set up this meeting. Each boss went in with two or three workers. They said to us: 'If you stay here, you'll have a lot of problems, if you buy a contract, you can only throw it in the bin. You don't want any money? Then buy that contract, it's not worth anything.' [T]hey told us they couldn't fix the papers, they also said that: 'If you marry a Spanish man, you can't get your papers fixed'; they closed down all the doors, you know, so that the people return home once more. They said we want 'return, return, return!'. There are women who, as soon as the meeting was over, left for Italy or for France the following morning, they said, 'They can go to hell!', you understand?

(Fatima, 28-year-old farmworker, 30 June 2010, Moguer).

This project illustrates one of the aspects of the European outsourcing policy to control the mobility of migrants. The idea of outsourcing borders as popularized in France by the association Migreurop is often used to describe the outsourcing of the mechanisms governing the fixation, detention and deportation of foreigners at the periphery of the EU. In the case of the Aeneas-Cartaya-ANAPEC project, the case of outsourcing manifests itself in a constrained circulation of foreigners for the benefit of the strawberry industry and at the lowest cost for the Spanish state. The provision of a workforce that is to return to its home country at the end of the season becomes a Moroccan challenge, as demonstrated by this conversation with an ANAPEC official:

It's ANAPEC [that chose these criteria] nobody forced us to. The Spanish never asked for women with children. [W]e know there are fixed quotas in this kind of programme, so I, on my side, have to maximize the rate of return in order to find more opportunities for next time

(Mr Hamzani, 16 March 2010, ANAPEC, Casablanca).

The outsourcing of migration policy regulation to Morocco comes hand in hand with another transfer: the shift of recruitment expenses onto public funds. Fatima Ben Ouali states: 'If we consider the situation, Andalusian employers got lucky, they were funded by

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<sup>11</sup> In Huelva, forged one-year contracts are sold for anywhere between EUR 1,000 and 1,500 by farmers or middlemen. They allow the regularization of undocumented foreigners who have been present in Spain for three years or the permanent stabilization of foreign seasonal workers.

the government, funded by the region, and funded by Morocco.’ Mr Hamzani, for his part, emphasizes that this recruitment strategy offers an opportunity for employers:

It’s a service that is there, that responds to the needs of employers. Mediation is important; otherwise, how would employers handle the ebb and flow of workers; we will always need mediation. It is appealing for the employers. Many tasks are carried out by mediators: escorting to the hospital, organizing travel, administrative work, transport, baggage. Employers would be absorbed by these tasks. If there are no mediators, it all gets done but it weighs on the business, it costs time and money. Mediation is an added value; it allows the reduction of charges and employers come off a lot better that way

(Mr Hamzani, 17 July 2011, ANAPEC, Casablanca).

### **Captivity and flexibility**

Although workers are formally in a legal situation and protected by labour legislation, it is difficult to assert their rights as any denunciation exposes them to the risk of having to return home, of not having their contract renewed or of slipping into clandestineness. Deviations and exceptions thus have become the rule, allowing the implementation of production flexibility in Huelva, which is welcome in light of the reduction of the profitability margin of strawberry farming (Berlan, 2009; Reigada Olaizola, 2009). In the case of seasonal migration from Morocco, the entire recruitment system attempts to adjust as much as possible to the producers’ needs. An official from the sub-delegation of the government of Huelva claimed, for example, that the number of contracts allotted to each employer is decided as the campaign progresses ‘according to the local weather and employment situation’ (Subdelegación del gobierno, 21 June 2010, Huelva). Even if a contract is signed in Morocco, the Spanish employer only lets the seasonal workers come depending on production needs, as testified by Houcine, a young Algerian working as an interpreter on a farm which employs Moroccan women:

The boss has a lot of work; he faxes a request to Morocco so they send people over. When there’s less work ... he doesn’t fax anything. When there are a lot of strawberries, there are a lot of people

(Houcine, undocumented farmworker, 10 March 2010, Moguer)

This vision of Morocco as a 'labour pool' or reserve quota (cupo de reserva) is shared by all the players in the system right up to the main agricultural worker unions. The regional delegate of the agricultural department of the Workers' General Union (UGT, Unión General de Trabajadores) sums up the union's opinion as follows:

The UGT's position is that Morocco is a reserve quota.

E. H.: And what does that mean exactly? That they're over there, in their country, ready to come in case they're needed.

(Regional Secretary for union action and migration, UGT, 4 May 2011, Huelva).

In 2008, more than 1,000 women were never called up for work in Spain although they had signed their contract, because in the end employers just didn't need all the workers they recruited, or because work permits had arrived too late and Romanians had been sent for instead:

There always comes a time when [the employers] don't want them anymore. For instance, we begin planning departures. The farmers are out in the field, they observe how their campaign is evolving, they increase their contingent as they go along and, eventually, they stop. I always tell them: 'At the point when you've had them sign the contract, have them come over to work, even if it means splitting the work up among them. Those who got here first, they get to rest and you have the new ones do the work.' We lived through a lot with the Spanish. [E]very year, we ask them: 'At least tell us the departure date of the women in July.' They're unable to tell us. I understand that, I know them; they're farmers, not managers in the middle of planning their campaign

(Director of International Placement, 17 July 2011, ANAPEC, Casablanca).

In practice, access to this workforce gives employers a great deal of flexibility: if it rains, the workers do not work; if the price of strawberries is not good, the team is reduced and the workers arrive gradually as the strawberry production increases. In addition, this flexibility allows farmers to only include workers who work at a rate that is profitable for the farmer. A farmer interviewed near the end of the 2011 campaign explained why some women had to stay in the houses while the rest of the team was at work:

Six women didn't work yesterday because they only picked very few crates [he shows us the slip where the number of crates picked is marked down]. This one picked 14 crates – at

least that's what the slip says, but if you have a look inside the lorry you won't find 14 crates. [He takes a calculator.] Fourteen crates: that's 70kg for EUR 0.65 a kilo for a total of EUR 45.50. This woman earns EUR 39.10 here and costs me EUR 12 in social security, [which] adds up to EUR 51.10. I also have someone tasked with irrigation and four women doing the packing inside the lorry. I consume water, phytosanitary installations ...The women who pick 22 or 23 crates earn their wages. Those who do less make me lose money

(Eduardo, farm owner, 20ha, 14 May 2011, Moguer).

### **Gender regimes**

In spite of the omnipresent control mechanisms, female migrants should not be reduced to agricultural workers without any scope for action. The question arises as to what does the entry of these migrating women into the international labour market really change? Does the gender regime on which the transfer of these women partly relies truly exist, at least in the form envisioned by employers, and is it at all efficient in controlling their mobility? It becomes evident that a gender regime is mobilized by Spanish employers as much as by Moroccan institutions in order to ensure the control of the women's mobility. Put in other terms, the way in which Spanish employers and males of higher social classes in Morocco perceive rural women make the latter into ideal candidates for temporary migration. The decision-makers imagine that the women will carry out their work and then return, as they are under the control of their spouses or because their maternal instinct, as well as domestic tasks, prevent them from unduly prolonging their absence. These representations appear in the description supplied by an employer to Reigada Olaizola (2009):

It's already been five years and every year, they come back and none of them leave; they're wonderful! Why? Because they're people who've been working ever since they were born, like those whose husbands ride the donkey and they follow, being loaded with wool, you know? And almost all of those who come are married, people who come and earn money for their children who are over there, those are people on whom you can count

(Large contractor; quoted from Reigada Olaizola, 2009, p. 264, o.t.).

Faced with such images, it is crucial to highlight the gap that exists between Spanish employers' visions or those of the Moroccan institutions on the one hand, and the reality as reflected during the interviews on the other hand. First, Morocco is not a country deadlocked in a particular gender regime (Moujoud, 2009). Furthermore, when placing the question in a historical context, it appears that these women do not all fit into the wage-earning classes by migrating to Spain. Moreover, an important part of the contingent comes from Kenitra, thus from the Gharb region, which was Morocco's cereal production heartland in colonial times, where women have been working as fellahas<sup>12</sup> under a regime of colonial exploitation since the 1930s (Le Coz, 1964; Mernissi, 1981):

Eighty to ninety per cent of the girls work just as they did before getting married. It depends on the family's economic or financial situation. There are families who get paid a bit better so they don't send their daughters to work outside but there are others who need money so it's normal for them, whether the girl or the boy goes to work, it's all the same

(Teacher in the village of Ouled Ziane, Kenitra, 24 February 2010).

Besides, most of the seasonal workers interviewed are rehired in Moroccan farms when the Spanish season ends. Hence, the colonial postcard perception offered by the aforementioned Andalusian farmer does not really correspond to the reality of the women I met in the Gharb countryside, who are often proletarianized. Correspondingly, the image that all female seasonal workers have family ties and are ideally married does not hold true: about 40 per cent of the contingent comprises women who are no longer tied to a man back home (see figure 12.2). As far as the negotiation of their departure from Morocco is concerned, many women affirm not having had too many problems in convincing their husbands or the head of their family to let them go. The men's objections, if any, do not have much to do with them going to work in Spain per se but more that the women go to work while the men don't. For many young women, be they single, widowed or divorced, the family also supports migration projects. When they

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<sup>12</sup> Fellaha is the Arabic feminine designation for peasant but it is used here to denote rural inhabitants or agricultural workers.

experience surprised reactions, a few of them might smile and say: 'Moroccans want money; the rest can be managed.' Thus, seasonal migration does not represent any radical rupture with the previous situation of women who were already working in Morocco and their mobilization by Spanish employers is met with a certain responsibility on their part as well as an agreement on the side of the families.

One cannot deny, however, that their seasonal work implies a certain reallocation of domestic tasks. Given that most seasonal workers have children under 13 years of age, their departure to Spain implies a transfer of some chores to other women of the family: Aisha's mother, for instance, complains, in front of her daughter, about the extra work that she will have to assume during the season and about the fact that Aisha left before her last son, Ali, had even learned to walk. In trying to involve me, she describes her daily work whenever her daughter leaves for Spain:

MOTHER: I sleep here, I go to Aisha's in the morning to make breakfast, then I work in the fields, I go back home to eat, I go to Aisha's a second time to make the meloui and the harcha<sup>13</sup> and then I go back home.

E. H.: That's a lot of work, isn't it?

AISHA: Just like the one working in strawberries.

MOTHER: Yeah, that's true, so pay me. If you get EUR 2,000, we'll split fifty-fifty: a thousand for you and a thousand for me.

(Aisha Manar, seasonal worker since 2008, and her mother, Douar Zaalka, Kenitra, 3 March 2010).

As far as demographic behaviour is concerned, working for many seasons in a row changes the women's behaviour. They may plan their pregnancy to minimize the risk of losing a contract, such as seen in the case of Fatiha, who is 26, already has two children and has been working in Spain seasonally for four years. When she wanted a third child, she arranged to get pregnant just before the beginning of the season so that she could have the first part of her pregnancy in Spain while still being able to work, then returned home and gave birth in the fall as soon as possible so that the child would be old enough that

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<sup>13</sup> Moroccan crepe and semolina bread.

she could leave again the following year. Such developments demonstrate a paradox also already raised by Meillassoux (1975):

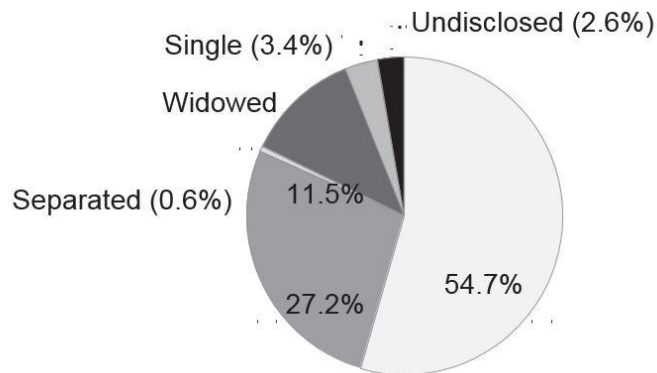


Figure 12.2 Marital status of Moroccan female seasonal workers under contract in Huelva (2010, total 4,742)

Source: Database established by the Aeneas-Cartaya project (2010)

it is their status as women and as mothers and thus their place in production and domestic reproduction relations that make these seasonal workers so attractive to employers; their wage earning, however, implies changes in the relations that make reproduction subordinate to the work contract and not vice versa.

In certain families still operating on the model of the extended family, individualization processes are put in motion. Malika, a widow of 45, had lived in her husband's parents' house from the beginning of her marriage. During the last season, she wanted to keep part of the money for her children and herself. Faced with her refusal to contribute to the extended family as before, her husband's parents, who had been looking after the children in her absence, showed her the door. She built herself a *gourbi*<sup>14</sup> using the EUR 500 she had left from the season, went back to Spain the following year and brought back EUR 1,500 with which she built permanent walls for a new house a mere 20m away from her in-laws' property. She could hardly wait for the end of the following season, which

<sup>14</sup> Gourbi is a North African term for a hut or a provisional shelter.

would allow her to build the roof. All these dynamic factors make it possible to understand the 'formal consent' shown by seasonal workers when they re-sign their contract, year after year. Thus, when Malika claims that 'Spain is nice. There's money. Not so in Morocco, you work, you eat, that's it. It's not like in Spain where you work and, if God wills it, you'll get a house; Spain is nice' (Malika Zitouni, Douar Ouled Ziane, 24 June 2011), it does not mean that she does not view the working, living and isolation conditions of the farm she works on in Huelva without any criticism; rather, in spite of these facts, she still considers that seasonal migration is objectively the best way for her to improve her situation in Morocco.

### **Outlook and perspectives**

To summarize, I want to highlight four points. Alongside international economic and financial crises and large-scale turmoil, the recruitment of seasonal workers for agriculture increasingly requires flexible strategies in order to cope with farm and production requirements. This has translated into the inclusion of the most vulnerable segments of society, namely women with little children from peripheral rural regions of the Global South, into the global labour market. I have, however, demonstrated the very ambiguity between marginal livelihoods and unintended empowerment of female seasonal workers from Morocco. The integration into labour markets restructures the most intimate space of family organization and simultaneously offers new scope for action via the access to comparatively higher cash income: timing pregnancies according to work contracts, reinterpreting and severing patriarchal family structures as well as making use of opportunities to exit the labour recruitment and domestic system by staying illegally in Europe. The political field framing labour regimes is somehow reluctant to keep pace with economic developments: while EU funding was allegedly necessary at a specific moment, the slow pace of programme implementation offered private businesses, farmers and employers the opportunity to redirect public money for their own benefit and interests. This ultimately allowed for the reduction of administrative work, services and other transaction costs on the farm. Nevertheless, growers' claims of a labour shortage are not easily heard in times of economic crisis and the number of origin contracts has been

increasingly reduced these last years. An alternative to recruiting the cheap foreign labour is to move the production south (see Sippel; Moreno Nieto, this volume), the same relocation of production sites that had once brought the strawberry from northern Europe all the way to Andalusia. One of Fresdeloc's producers sums it up:

This year we decided to develop 40 per cent of our business in Morocco because we expect that governments will completely halt the migratory flow. [I]f they tell us that the migratory flow stops, our business stops. [N]ow that our workers can no longer come to Huelva, we set off for their country'

(3 August 2011, headquarters of Fresdeloc Morocco).

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