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## Circular migration and misrecognition: the experience of spatial injustice of Moroccan women doing seasonal agricultural work in Huelva (Spain)

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### Abstract

*This article explores seasonal Moroccan agricultural workers' who come to the Huelva province in southern Spain in the context of temporary contracts in origin. These contracts are aimed at women with family responsibilities, mostly married women with children, who are hired to pick fruit, strawberries in particular, in precarious conditions. Yet when interviewed, some of these women explained that the worst-case scenario they could imagine would be to be denied work in Spain. This article, drawing on theories of recognition and recent work in geography, casts light on the different forms of injustice they experience, and spatial injustice in particular.*

**Key words:** circular migration, seasonal agricultural workers, recognition, injustice, contracts in origin.

"It makes me want to stop eating strawberries", said MEP H el ene Flautre after a parliamentary visit to Huelva province in June 2010<sup>1</sup>. Her target in these comments was not just the devastating environmental impact of intensive farming on the water table and the damage caused by pesticides, but foreign workers' working conditions. The newspaper *El Pa s* (13 June 2010) ran an article about the "victims of the red gold", the exploitation of Moroccan women workers in intensive greenhouse strawberry farming, hired on the basis of contracts in origin. The term 'origin' alongside 'contract' indicates that recruitment takes place in the workers' country of origin on an understanding that they will return home once their work is done (within 3 to 9 months). To make sure that they will return, it is mostly married women and mothers of young children who are hired. This system of short-term contracts clearly reeks of economic exploitation (Burchianti, 2009) partly because workers are denied equal rights with Spanish citizens and remain dependent on their employers because their work status is precarious (Moreno Nieto, 2009).

During my fieldwork, carried out in both Morocco and Spain I met many seasonal migrant women workers and witnessed the type of discrimination they face both in terms of housing and employment. But this research also enabled me to hear firsthand how their greatest fear was to be denied the right to return to Spain. The women I interviewed distinguish forms of injustice: the worst sort they are likely to encounter is spatial, the denial of their migration. As long as they are allowed to travel to Spain, they feel that they can put up with anything. They told me their work experience in Spain is crucial because it gives them independence, self-esteem and a positive identity as a working, independent, woman. Despite what we might see as domination, they still value the recognition attached to their migration. From their point of view, if one does not gain the right to return to Spain, one's qualifications as worker are questioned, which amounts to contempt on the part of employers. They refer to this situation with the Arabic word *hogra* which means both contempt and injustice, with an interesting overlap between moral spheres. Recognition or misrecognition are crucial to establish a hierarchy of what is more or less bearable, and to be shown contempt or disrespect seems paramount here. Even in situations of social and economic inequality, forms of autonomy, and a positive sense of self are likely to emerge, and space plays a role in the experience of recognition or misrecognition.

This paper looks at the levers of spatial injustice, and addresses the following question: how is autonomy asserted in the context of domination? I draw on theories of recognition which emphasize self-realization, and I analyze injustice in terms of its effects on groups and individuals. I subscribe to definitions in which the experience of injustice is the experience of misrecognition, and which construe the demand for respect as a demand for justice (Honneth, 2000; Renault, 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> From the Europe Ecologie website.

In the first section I look more closely at contracts in origin, I describe the fieldwork I conducted and suggest a working definition of spatial injustice that stems from the intersection of theories of recognition and geography literature. The second section examines the injustices regarded as bearable in a context of domination. The final section addresses the only unbearable injustice in women's view, the denial of migration to Spain.

### **I Contracts in origin and spatial injustice: context, concepts and fieldwork**

Firstly, I want to focus on the temporary contracts that underly circular migration and which unashamedly serve the interests of employers rather than those of employees. Next I provide an account of my fieldwork and the insights it provides on spatial injustice, at the intersection of theories of recognition and space.

#### **Contracts in origin or injustice made legal**

Contracts in origin which target female labour reflect the increasing feminization of cross-border migration. Whereas in the past women uprooted themselves to join their families, nowadays more and more women journey alone either through legal channels or illegally. Most migrant women are employed in the service industry, in catering or as domestic workers, or in *global care* (Falquet, 2010). This feminization of immigrant labour is particularly noticeable in Southern Europe where large numbers of women migrants from the Maghreb countries, the Philippines and Cape Verde Islands are employed (Campani, 2000).

Another element of context is the development of circular migration, seen by wealthier nations as a "solution" to permanent migration, construed as "problem". International organizations such as the ILO (International Labour Organization) or the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) extol the virtues of circular migration organized at state level as "win-win" for the countries and the migrants. The USA, Canada, Great Britain, Belgium, Ireland, Germany, Italy and Spain have followed suit by hiring a limited number of temporary migrant workers with specific skills to plug a labour gap. This selection of workers across borders leads to greater labour market segmentation according to gender, race and ethnicity. These recruitment policies frequently target women, which is justified in terms of the "promotion of women" or "co-development", but which mostly reflects the fact women are seen as "cheap submissive labour (in agriculture) to replace migrants in labour-intensive sectors in several industrialized countries" (Moreno-Fontes Chammartin, 2008). In Andalusia agricultural workers were, from the mid-90s onwards, mostly Moroccan or Sub-Saharan African men<sup>2</sup>. However, protest by these seasonal workers disgruntled with their working conditions prompted employers to start hiring women from Eastern Europe with contracts in origin. And in order to stem any permanent settlement on Spanish soil these employers opted to recruit solely women. But once their countries of origin joined the European Union these seasonal workers fled the greenhouses and fields of Huelva. The next tactic was to target Moroccan women, as part of a deal between Morocco and Spain to curb illegal immigration (Miret, 2009).

Since 2001, according to figures provided by Cartaya council, a town of 18 000 inhabitants in south-western Spain, 38 000 Moroccan seasonal women workers have been employed in the Huelva province. In 2010 this figure dropped to 4500 owing to the economic downturn. Women who are offered these contracts in origin are selected according to two criteria<sup>3</sup>: physical strength enabling them to perform agricultural work (as stipulated by their Spanish bosses) and guarantees that they will return home. This explains why employers favour married women and mothers of young children, on the assumption that mothers will not abandon their offspring. Aged between 18 and 45

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<sup>2</sup> Before strawberry farming evolved into its current intensive production mode, strawberry pickers were typically farmers' wives. Then in the mid 1980s the demand for labour increased and farmers looked further afield to Moroccan and Sub-Saharan agricultural workers.

<sup>3</sup> On the ground the preferred term is "selection" rather than "recruitment".

these women are from rural areas and must pledge to return to Morocco, a return clause that complies with EU directives and regulations (the EU sees these contracts as a way to stem illegal immigration). The Huelva province, which produces 90% of Spain's strawberry crop and makes it the third biggest producer globally, the largest in Europe, is a pilot experiment in this attempt to control migratory flows (Plewa, 2009, p. 4).

Farmers hire workers with contracts in origin because they are willing to accept low wages (37 euros per day), unlike Spanish citizens (*El País* 4 September 2008). Employers want a cheap, flexible, expanding workforce which tolerates the hardships of agricultural labour and these Moroccan women<sup>4</sup> meet all of these criteria, not by nature, contrary to widely held beliefs among employers and institutions, but because the form of contracts leaves them no option.

As hirers and firers the employers have the upper hand (Hellio, 2009) and women migrants are dependent on them to have their contracts renewed. The nine clauses in the contract (written in Spanish rather than Arabic) essentially uphold employers' rights and make abuse possible, while the employees' situation is highly precarious. Clause 2 for example, allows for overtime beyond the statutory 39-hour week by 'mutual agreement.' What hope is there for any sort of mutual agreement when we know how dependent these seasonal workers are on their employers to secure a new contract for the following year? Clause 3 allows for a temporary suspension of every clause in "exceptional circumstances", including bad weather, and the duration of "temporary" is left up to the employer's discretion.

Another rule not specifically mentioned in the contract lies at the root of many perceived injustices and sheds light on processes which force women to accept this unfair employment regime. Recruiters for the strawberry farms entice women with the promise that after four consecutive work seasons, if they are offered a one-year employment contract, they will be entitled to a work permit and Spanish residency (according to the *Ley de Extranjería* du 11/ 01/2000). The hope of this golden prospect puts migrant women at the mercy of their employers. It is, however, more of a lure than a realistic aspiration, since one-year contracts are virtually non-existent in farming where the work is seasonal. Moreover, the procedure is well-nigh inapplicable because one necessary condition is residency via registration on the local city roll (*empadronamiento*), which these Moroccan women workers are not entitled to as they are mainly housed in lodgings that do not conform to the *empadronamiento* stipulation. This form of contractual employment 'in origin', sanctioned by law, in effect denies these seasonal workers basic rights.

### Fieldwork read through the lens of spatial injustice

I carried out three fieldtrips to Morocco (Rabat, Casablanca, Kenitra and Kreda) and Spain (Cartaya). I met some key figures in Morocco, in the Spanish Embassy, and representatives from ANAPEC, the national agency for skills and employment development, which works with the Spaniards for contract in origin recruitment. I carried out thirty-four interviews, in dialectal Arabic, with Moroccan women workers. In Kenitra in the *douar* or hamlet of Kreda I spoke to former seasonal workers and carried out some observation work in their family settings. I also interviewed Moroccan women workers in Spain as well as key figures in Cartaya, a town that plays a crucial part in maintaining the local infrastructure through which contracts in origin are administered. It employs staff for this, among whom Moroccan go-betweens to supervise the workers<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> "Experience has shown that Moroccan women are sensitive and hard-working and with their slender hands that is something the strawberries really appreciate", the mayor of Cartaya told the Moroccan press who took this comment as worthy of great national pride (Infosbaldi.com 18/04/2008 see <http://www.infosbladi.com/articles>).

<sup>5</sup> In 2004 the town received 1,196 000 Euros as part of European funding of the Aeneas programme (Programme of assistance to third countries directly related to migration management) to help supervise Moroccan women migrant workers, 'an integrated ethical management system for labour migratory flows'. This programme has been extended until 2013 with a new EU grant.

The approach on injustice that I favour, in the light of this research, is inspired by thinkers who have questioned the understanding of social justice as distributive justice, and argued that it does not sufficiently take into account other negative experiences (Renault, 2004). They have criticized distributive justice theory for its emphasis on the quantitative, on goods owned, and for the implied opposition between affect and reason which forms its basis. According to Iris Young, who offers a thoughtful critique, what this theory lacks is an analysis of various forms that oppression and domination (Hancock, 2009, p. 63). She and others have suggested that a negative experience, a sense of injustice, are fruitful grounds from which one can analyze justice. This is where the idea of recognition offers a useful perspective.

One key social scientist whose work explores the concept of recognition is Axel Honneth. He argues that an individual's sense of his or her own value depends on the image others have of him or her, of his or her actions and what he or she represents. A positive sense of self is intersubjectively constituted, and is therefore intersubjectively vulnerable and in need of confirmation (recognition). Honneth on this basis establishes an interpretative grid of varied expectations in an attempt to examine different levels of self-esteem. The experience of injustice is derived from a failure to meet fundamental normative expectations. Theories of recognition allow for a definition of social injustice which relies not on a definition of justice but from a wider perspective that takes the experience of misrecognition into account (Renault, 2004). For Honneth socio-economic inequalities are also enacted in an unequal access to social esteem.

The challenge here is how to marry a geographic approach with this definition of injustice that draws on the theory of recognition. One starting point is to pay closer attention to the place of space in this theory, and to establish the relation between space and recognition, despite the fact Honneth did not initially consider material mediations in his theory (Deranty, 2005, p. 159). He has, however, reconsidered his very abstract stance and given a greater part to material aspects: "[...] Giving due respect to material aspects of recognition is vital for any analysis of social relations that views society as a network of social relationships of recognition" (2006, p.165).

When it comes to this material dimension, it seems crucial to highlight just how significant space is when thinking about social relations. "Space is [...] one of those material conditions to be taken into account if theories of recognition are to preserve their heuristic power" (Renault, Zeneidi, 2008). While Honneth (2006, p.166) makes it explicit that recognition is far more than a linguistic act or a set of behaviours, he acknowledges the place of space in relationships of recognition, but sees it as a mere container. However, in order to think of spatial injustice in a perspective that foregrounds the relation between space and recognition, space has to be seen as more than a container, and its "causal, transformative" quality has to be acknowledged (Dikeç, 2009, p.3). Space has to be thought of as moral and political, since the material outlay of space can play a major role in a sense of being treated with contempt or with due recognition: for instance, some homeless people feel that "homeless-proof" street furniture is a slight. Space that can convey misrecognition can also be claimed in a struggle for recognition: Gay Pride marches makes the issue of the invisibility of gay people manifest in public space, where sexual minorities are usually thwarted. Space plays a central role: "Space could be both a 'good thing' for politics or a 'bad thing'; that is, it could as much hinder political possibilities as it could engender them" (Dikeç, 2009, p. 2). Space is indisputably a major dimension of social injustice (Marcuse, 2009). While we have to be careful not to imply an autonomy of the spatial with respect to the social, I would suggest to define the experience of spatial injustice as a form of injustice derived from fundamental normative expectations not being fulfilled, with space playing the part of vehicle.

## **II Dominated but free, overcoming injustice through space**

Let us return to the experience of seasonal women migrant workers: I want to examine their working conditions and how they endure them. I shall look at how they are treated, as second class citizens,

in terms of housing and work, but also how they move beyond their sense of injustice by valuing their work and their personal mobility.

### **Injustice at work and at home: women as second class labourers**

The women I interviewed spoke eloquently about their poor working conditions and how this made them feel discriminated against as employees. They felt resentful about being so dependent on their employers and frustrated with the daily uncertainty they faced regarding their temporary contracts. In one farm employing 25 Moroccan female workers and twelve men from Sub-Saharan countries, two women I spoke to decried the fact that they had no idea when they would be allowed to return to Morocco. When I met them during my fieldwork (April and May 2010) they still had not been notified of a possible date even though they had arrived in October 2009.

'I thought I would go home in December, we worked so hard on the land and then the boss said, 'stay', and I don't know when I'm going back. It's not bad, I'm saving a lot of what I earn but it's tough not knowing when I'll see my two daughters again.' When I asked this woman about why her employer was not more forthcoming with her about the end date of her contract she shrugged: 'well, he's more concerned with the harvest, that's natural isn't it, he's the boss; the rest, the pickers, what does he care?' The sense of being a 'remainder', part of 'the rest', can be interpreted as a lack of recognition.

Many women also worked for weeks on end without a single day off. On this same strawberry farm many had worked non-stop since February, in other words since the beginning of the harvest and one told me how exhausted she was, how her back ached from weeks of bending and fruit-picking without a day's rest.

What she was most indignant about was not even getting a day off to celebrate the religious festival of Eid: 'so you see, we have to stop and take time off for their religious festivals yet they make us carry on working during Eid celebrations (...) We made a request, *-Jefe-* we said *-tomorrow it's a Muslim holy day, so no work, right?-* He refused.' This kind of incident reveals a sense of their Muslim culture being less well considered and inferior to Christian culture, which implies a slight to an individual who identifies with the former.

Having to comply with their employers' will and the rules they establish, adds to their sense of injustice. A woman told me about how her boss would punish her by dismissing her early after a few hours work but did not pay her for the hours worked. Another told me of yet another incident when she was prevented from working for two days after she had received a phone call during working hours. Other women mentioned being told off for arriving a minute late at the start of their shift; others told us how their boss would deduct a percentage from their wages for the time it took to carry the fruit from the strawberry beds to the lorry because the boss deemed it necessary to pay them only for the picking.

They suffer other spatial constraints as part of the housing conditions provided for in the contract procedure: they have to live on-site, on the farms or in nearby hostels managed by the local authority, and guarded day and night by security staff. Most women had accommodation on the farm, which meant they were often far from the town centre where they did their own grocery shopping (very few Moroccan women migrants had centrally located accommodation). For their shopping they relied on the weekly shuttle bus laid on by their employer, though some were not so lucky and had to walk into town.

'It's a struggle to get here (to the centre of Cartaya). It's rough on our feet, we work standing up and then we have to keep walking to get our groceries.' This meant a hike of an hour and a half, and other workers who lived even further away from the town were completely trapped there.

How did they experience and interpret these injustices? The women I interviewed were well aware of being treated like second class workers; it was obvious to them that they were treated more harshly than other strawberry pickers, Spaniards and migrants from other countries who had open ended residency permits. The only other social group worse off than the Moroccan migrants were illegal

migrants. Unlike other employees, they were expected to report for work fifteen minutes before their shift and to await a signal from their boss to sign off. 'The Spaniards, when it's time to clock off, they stop, tap their watch with their finger in front of the boss, and off they go but we stay put, we're the last to leave.'

They emphasized they had little choice, coming from poor communities in Morocco: their greatest fear was to be dismissed, not be able to return and not to have their contract renewed the following year. They told me how hope of a better future helped them to endure the hardships, which they felt they had to put up with in order to return and obtain from their boss a residency permit, which would enable them to find different jobs. What they wish for is to be able to keep working in Spain, because it compensated for everything they had to endure.

### **Overcoming injustice through work and mobility**

Women who expected to return for work the following year expressed a sense of self-esteem, which bolsters them in their daily struggle. They are attached to their job, and their lives as migrant workers, not just for economic reasons, but also because they derive pleasure and a sense of fulfilment from them. They gain a form of recognition of their own value through work and mobility, which enables them to put up with other injustices.

This positive sense of self comes in part from the fact they were selected, among thousands of applicants for these jobs, and managed to interest the bosses who carry out the recruitment procedure. They are also proud that they are able to make a valuable economic contribution to their families and children. In addition, they develop, along with work experience, a sense of being skilled for their work, and having specific qualities. For instance, one woman I spoke to for whom this was her sixth year working in this business was admired by her peers for her speed and dexterity, spoke of her sense of self-worth: 'the bosses, they appreciate me, they never shout at me, I know I'm a good worker because I work fast... they've always renewed my contract.'

The mobility they have experienced also makes them feel more worthy, as though they had been through a personal adventure. They mentioned repeatedly the pleasure they have at moving around freely, despite the difficulties mentioned above. They also speak eloquently of the pleasure of not being under men's scrutiny: one of them summarizes her stay as "no father, no brother, no husband". They gain a sense of themselves as independent women working for their living. "There's one good thing at least about Spaniards, they give you respect, they respect your rights. They pay you even though they try and diddle you, whereas us Arabs: well, you work hard and then when it comes to getting paid, the boss he pays you half what he should and then says, no, I've got no money. And if you look alright, if you're not too badly dressed, he says well you're doing alright aren't you, you don't need any extra." Some women I spoke to found temporary relief in being able to escape their traditional roles at home. "Nowadays girls' lives resemble boys' lives: they have to fight, they travel to find work and earn a living". These jobs mean some migrant women receive due recognition as the main breadwinners bringing home an income from Europe. Their menfolk are no longer the only ones who cross borders. They also gain a new sense of self from more material things associated with mobility, such as mobile phones, handbags and bank accounts. Acquired in Spain, these are part of a migrant's essential kit.

Domination doesn't necessarily prevent subjectivity formation. One of the workers captured this well, "strawberries are hard work, but freedom tastes sweet". The importance of these employment opportunities and the mobility they allow is best measured when they are withdrawn, which causes a profound sense of injustice. Christophe Dejours (1998) shows just how central employment is as a source of self-worth, self-esteem and recognition as well as a means to overcome hardship; and conversely, it can make us feel vulnerable when it no longer conforms to one's expectations. These women's expectations are not just centred on employment, but also on their access to the spaces of migration. Access to Europe is part of a construction of their selves. Space intervenes here on two levels in the process of recognition. From a legal point of view, they gained a work visa, a contract

which, though temporary, makes them fully-fledged migrant workers. They also gain a form of recognition from their employer, who will favour those among his employees who have the greatest skill. This is highly valued in Morocco where many people aspire to migrate to Europe, and it is spatial mobility, their access to European space, that grants them this recognition. This allows them to overlook the exploitation they suffer in Spain.

### **III Closure of space and the unbearable misrecognition**

The worst injustice for these women is spatial, it's the denial of access to Spain. When they met this situation, women either broke down or became angry. In the following sections, I draw on two examples to illustrate cases of women sent home to Morocco, whose contracts were not renewed; and workers who suspected their contracts would not be renewed after their relationship with their employer turned sour. In each instance, space played a key role in their sense of injustice.

#### **Women sidelined: soul-searching and suffering**

Some women I interviewed in Morocco had worked in Spain for a period lasting between one and three years, they hoped to continue to work in Spain and had become used to their existence as migrant workers. Their families appreciated their financial contribution, built houses and bought second-hand cars with their earnings. These women after many enquiries hoped to discover why they were not hired in subsequent years: rarely did they blame their former boss, instead they waited patiently wondering whether 'poor performance' was the reason why they were not hired again. Many found it difficult to question the employment regime because they retained a positive impression of their employer. Inevitably they tended to blame and torment themselves with a barrage of questions.

Some gradually developed a sense of injustice by assessing their own attitude and performance. Mostly they saw themselves as loyal employees because they met all their commitments, worked diligently and complied with the expectation to return to Morocco – they felt let down and unappreciated. One of them mentioned a worker she knew from the village they lived in who stayed on in Spain illegally, as illustrative of the unfairness: "well, you see, we met their demands, we came back, we worked really hard, we did everything expected of us and now, they won't take us back, it's unfair, it's really unbearable." This experience left many feeling sad and unworthy, their self-esteem dented.

There were worse cases in terms of damaged self-esteem among groups of women dismissed from the strawberry farms because they were pregnant or had given birth. Their employers had them escorted by Moroccan go-betweens off the farms to be handed over to a welfare organisation. Once removed from the workplace they are housed on a short-term basis prior to being formally dismissed, a procedure that closely resembles that of being deported: stripped of their official documents they are forbidden any visitors. I met four women in this situation during my fieldwork: they had no option, they told me, because in order to travel over to Spain, they had incurred heavy debts, to pay for their visas in particular. They felt humiliated, being reproached for their pregnancy, and felt their debts were not taken into account. "We get told off, so why do you come over here if you're pregnant, they want to know; we're not so fluent in Spanish but they really shout at us at social services."

These two cases give some indication of how space plays a part in the injustice the women face and how much their damaged self-esteem and suffering stems from misrecognition. Their negative experiences are rooted in spatial reality, being excluded from the workplace and the space of mobility. If being denied access to these spaces hurts so badly, it's because they are valued, not only as mere entry points to a much needed source of income and sense of independence, but as crucial to a sense of identity and autonomy. Space underlies relationships based on recognition, in this case between employers and their employees. Moreover, their employers' approval of their performance has a spatial element to it as well. Being asked to return year after year for a migrant

worker is bound to make her feel that her professional skills are recognized (to be denied this affects her perception of her own skills and identity). This spatial dimension mediates their experience of injustice and when their access to both the workplace and cross-border migration is compromised, it is clear how much recognition is tied up with space. For those who are not yet in the difficult situation of having migration prospects denied, but who fear they are threatened with it, misrecognition is met with anger.

### **Speaking out against spatial injustice**

Several women I met were very critical of their situation, and one recurrent expression in the interviews was *hogra*. They talk about *hogra* to express their outrage at being exploited and betrayed and they criticize the whole system of migration. This often comes about once their relationship with their employer has broken down, and they feel they will not be hired for another season. Many of them spoke about the diminishing numbers of migrants recruited: the official reason given by the Spanish officials was the economic downturn. They felt they had been fed lies to make them more compliant with the demands of the industry:

"Four years of work and then a residency permit. It's all a pack of lies, there's no respect, they were just toying with us", one woman told me after she fell out with her boss. "The boss called me in, asked me if I'd been considering '*hrgue*'" (Arabic word meaning literally to burn and a metaphor for staying on within EU borders as an illegal immigrant). This woman felt certain that her employer would not renew her contract leaving her especially bitter as she had worked in Spain for five years. When these women realized that they had reached the end of the road, they desperately wanted to tell me their stories and saw me, the researcher, as someone who could report on the injustice of their situation. They reinterpreted their entire trajectories in terms of broken promises and this gradually gave them a more critical viewpoint on their collective situation as groups of exploited women migrant workers. Some of their complaints were aimed at their employers: "He yells at us when we don't work hard enough... He says: I'm helping you out of dire poverty, you arrived in rags scraping the barrel and I get you over here and you don't work." This interviewee also talked about employers who sexually harassed younger women migrants.

Their anger is also directed at the Moroccan officials; one woman explained: "Morocco is sending over women like trainloads of cattle." She felt furious with the way political authorities does nothing to defend Moroccans' rights, and assist migrants:

"Thanks to M6 (Mohammed VI) who granted women equal rights and who allows women these days to emigrate to seek work (...) but what I don't understand is why don't they follow through with this measure and give us our full rights? Why don't they ensure we are issued with the official paperwork? Why don't they back us so we can get the permits? Why do they hand us over to those bosses, who make us beg for the chance to go back, to get all the legal documents we need? Why do they let us lose all dignity?"

Some women I interviewed felt not only exploited because they had adhered to the employment contract, trusted the terms and conditions, giving their all in their work; but they felt let down by the Spanish authorities who by refusing to grant them leave to stay and work in Spain, confronted them with an unbearable dilemma: to '*hrgue*', go underground and live in the shadows to earn a living as an illegal immigrant, or to go home to their former existence in Morocco. Staying in Spain means abandoning dependants, but going home would make it harder to secure a brighter future for their children and better care for elderly parents. For women with no kin this was all the more cruel because they had no relatives to ask for support and help in their responsibilities as carers: this reminds us of how torn many women still are between the ethic of care and the ethic of emancipation (Gilligan, 1986).

All of these injustices are experienced as wrongs, which Lyotard defines as being deprived of the means to testify to injustice (cited in Renault, 2004, p. 40). The main challenge for these women was how to find a place where they could voice their grievances, raise awareness, organise as a group



and resist, which is unlikely. Their precarious status as disposable workers made any effort to organise a protest or to resist unfeasible. Employers and the Spanish authorities opted for this type of contract, for circular migration, precisely because they did not want to be faced with any form of protest from foreign workers. These contracts, which migrant workers in many parts of the world are subjected to, are amongst the most deplorable for precisely this reason, that they silence workers and allow abuse, by making it impossible for them to uphold their rights (Basok, Carasco, 2010).

### **Conclusion: social and spatial justice**

The main debate in the literature on female migration has to do with disagreements about the extent to which it is a source of emancipation or of domination (Moujoud, 2008, Schmoll, 2007). My study of Moroccan seasonal workers experiencing domination and yet at the same time given access to some measure of emancipation, and self-esteem through recognition is a case in point and calls for new thinking on how oppression functions in practice. The concept of injustice rooted in recognition theories proved useful for exploring discrimination as something that does not necessarily crush individuals, who demonstrate the ability to construct themselves as subjects notwithstanding. This does not mean that these Moroccan workers submit to domination but they are involved in an on-going project to develop a positive sense of self-esteem in their employment and migration journeys. We have seen how they evolve as active mobile agents despite the restrictions they live and work under. However the employment regime and bureaucracy may thwart them they continue to circulate. In her study of *maquiladoras* work in Nicaragua, Natacha Borgeaud-Garciandía offers a sharp analysis of how subjectivity is constrained yet reinforced through relations of oppression. "The problem, for domination, is less to subdue individuals than to subdue their will and desire. And this is precisely what springs eternal with the construction of subjects: an obstinate desire to be" (2009, p. 138).

The experiences of injustice reported by migrant workers make their deep-seated desire for mobility obvious. "Part here, part there, what we want is a residency permit", this is the phrasing of these women's claim for justice. We have heard them discuss recognition as central to their experience of migration, and how situations of abuse and harassment are overcome by forms of recognition, gained through spatial mobility. Access to the space of migration is essential not only in terms of economic resources, but also in terms of identity construction. Being a worker and part of migratory flows add value to their sense of self. When they are denied access, the whole process of recognition is called into question. This case study allowed for a discussion of space in its manifold aspects, and recognition in its most material form. This is how geography may gain from engaging with theories of recognition, in terms of gaining conceptual tools, elaborating a critical perspective on certain situations, and seeing space as a means to establish more social justice.

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