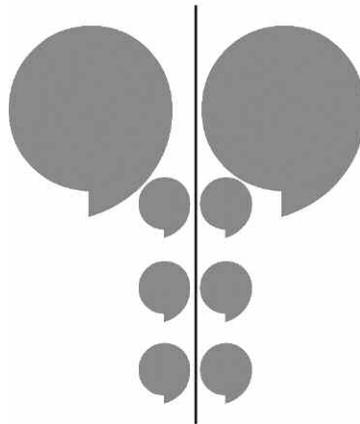


***Extended abstract***

*Gender and Precarious Work  
in Agro-Food Globalization: An Analysis  
of the Feminization of Labour in the  
Strawberry Export Sector in Morocco*



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*Highlights:*

1. The strawberry sector uses North-South and gender inequalities to obtain its profitability in global agrifood chains.
2. The Sexual Division of Labour and honour helps in understanding the social organization of work in the sector.
3. New and specific gender inequalities take place at workplaces in the strawberry sector.

*Abstract:* The main objective of this article is to analyse feminization of labour in the Moroccan strawberry sector. This export-oriented agriculture has opted for the employment of young rural women in its search for a flexible and cheap labour force to ensure its successful insertion into global agricultural chains. The main objective of this article is to understand how gender relations, articulated with North-South, class and age inequalities, shape the organization of work in this sector and how this affects women's experiences of work. Based on a qualitative research, we analyse the sexual and marital segmentation of the labour market, as well as the work experiences of farm workers, marked by labour abuses and violence. Alongside material conditions, we highlight the importance of ideological factors associated with domesticity, honour and morality, in these processes.

*Keywords:* Labour market, farm work, off-shore production, intensive agriculture, gender.

## *Extended Abstract*

The strawberries export sector has developed in Morocco in recent decades. Currently, it covers an area of 3,500 hectares along the north-west coast of the country. It is a highly technical agriculture, which produces off-season fruits for international markets. It employs a large number of workers, the vast majority of whom are women.

The development of this crop has been possible thanks to different technical innovations that allow producing off-season, exporting perishable fruits as strawberries and responding *just-in-time* to the demands of supermarkets (Friedland, 1994; Lawrence and Dixon, 2016). Similarly, its consolidation is the result of a process of production offshoring, looking for good weather conditions and reduced labour costs (Raynolds, 1994). The compression of labour costs is mainly obtained through the employment of groups in disadvantaged social positions, such as women, migrants and/or minors, who will accept jobs with low wages and few labour guarantees (Thomas, 1985; Bonnano and Cavalcanti, 2014).

In recent years, there has been an important development of labour market studies in intensive agriculture in the Mediterranean region (Gertel and Sippel, 2014; Corrado et al., 2017). However, gender relations and their articulation with the processes of productive off-shoring to the global South have received little attention. This paper looks forward to fill this gap. It aims to contribute, from a feminist perspective, to the understanding of the organisation of labour in export agriculture. The main objective is to understand how gender relations, articulated with North-South, class and age inequalities, shape the organisation of work in this sector and how this affects women's experiences of work.

The paper is based on qualitative research carried out between March 2010 and July 2012, in the Lukus irrigated perimeter. This enclave concentrates 80% of the country's strawberry and berries production. The main research techniques used were semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Fifty-five individual interviews and fifteen group interviews were carried out with 95 workers. In addition, 16 employers and some other actors related to the sector were interviewed. We also carried out observations in different workplaces and monitored the actions of local associations that were developing actions with strawberry farm workers.

Throughout this paper, we have sought to show how gender and marital status asymmetries in the local context constitute a central element in the social organisation of work in the Moroccan strawberry sector. This export-oriented agriculture has opted for the employment of young local rural women in its search for a flexible and cheap labour force to ensure its successful insertion into global agricultural chains. There is also a marital segmentation of the labour market. Younger, unmarried women work in the fields, where the pay is lower, while married women work mainly in fruit packing stations, which is more socially valued and offers better working conditions. Alongside material conditions, we highlight the importance of ideological factors associated with domesticity, honour and morality, in these processes.

Strawberry is an off-season crop that offers work several months per year. This makes these jobs attractive to young women in the area whose wages have become a significant source of income for local households. However, deregulation, low salaries and precarious conditions define work in the strawberry sector, especially in the fields. It is also characterised by a highly intensive nature of the work, under the direct control of supervisors, and the prevalence of different types of sexual violence. This includes the systematic use of insults with sexual connotations by supervisors and sexual harassment. This confirms the idea that new and specific forms of gender domination are being produced in workplaces, which intersect with other power axes existing in a hierarchized workspace.

On the other hand, but closely related, farm work receives very little social recognition in Morocco and it challenges female workers respectability. This is because farm work in industrial agriculture breaks with the sexual division of labour and space prescribed by the dominant sexual ideology. These prescriptions are related to honour, morality, and a person's reputation (Bourqia, 2000). If one does not comply with, it can be a source of shame. Along with gender, age and class positions, the lack of social recognition of their presence in a working environment outside the family network, and the unregulated day labour are all key to understanding the extent of violence and labour abuses against these workers.

In this context, women workers attach an instrumental value to their jobs and develop strategies of adjustment to the norm. Thus, single women farmworkers see their jobs as a transitory stage until marriage, and married women present them as a complementary and seasonal activity. This allows them to make their jobs socially acceptable, as their roles as mothers and wives, in present or future time, are not questioned. However, this has ambivalent effects because, although they manage to improve their respectability in the eyes of the community, their positions in the workplace are weakened. Their status as "true" workers goes unrecognized, despite their long workdays and important contribu-

tion to households economies. This inhibits the emergence of worker subjectivities, reducing their bargaining power and facilitating the acceptance of the precarious conditions. In future research, it would be interesting to analyse the effects this may have on the capacity for collective organization. Although trade union activity in the sector is weak, other forms of existing resistance need to be examined. It would also be interesting to investigate the potential reconfiguration of intra-family power relations or the incipient internal immigration to the municipalities where the fruit packing stations are concentrated.