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The real cost of a strawberry:

Female wage labor, embodied toxicity, and agrarian change in the Loukkos plain

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Abstract in Italiano

Questa tesi nasce da due mesi di ricerca sul campo a Larache e indaga i costi umani, corporei ed ecologici che rendono possibile la produzione intensiva di fragole nella pianura del Loukkos, nel nord del Marocco. Il lavoro esplora come le politiche di modernizzazione agricola legate al Plan Maroc Vert e i capitali agroindustriali spagnoli abbiano ridisegnato il territorio, trasformando una pianura storicamente legata alla sussistenza in un'enclave votata all'esportazione verso l'Europa e riducendo le comunità contadine a una riserva di manodopera precaria. Attraverso gli strumenti dell'ecologia politica e della teoria della riproduzione sociale, la ricerca mette in discussione l'idea che il lavoro salariato porti automaticamente all'emancipazione femminile. L'analisi si sofferma in particolare sul concetto di embodied toxicity, ovvero su come i pesticidi e i ritmi serrati delle serre si imprimano direttamente sulla salute delle braccianti, costrette a lavorare a mani nude per non rovinare l'aspetto estetico del frutto. A questo si sommano le dinamiche del reclutamento informale nel mouqef e viaggi quotidiani estenuanti su furgoni senza sedili, che scandiscono una vera e propria geografia dell'esaustione. Dando spazio alle storie di vita di undici lavoratrici impiegate tra campi, magazzini di confezionamento e servizi di pulizia, la tesi smentisce la narrazione patriarcale del salario femminile come semplice aiuto economico secondario. Davanti alla siccità e alla disoccupazione maschile, queste donne diventano i pilastri materiali delle loro famiglie, veri ammortizzatori viventi della crisi agraria. Lungi dall'essere vittime rassegnate, esse mettono in atto forme quotidiane di cura, solidarietà e resistenza, puntando tutto sull'istruzione delle figlie per spezzare il ciclo dello sfruttamento. Infine, lo studio allarga lo sguardo al corridoio migratorio con Huelva, mostrando come i contratti stagionali in Spagna e il confine dello Stretto formino un unico circuito transnazionale, capace di estrarre energia e salute dai corpi delle donne per sostenere i consumi alimentari europei.

Parole chiave: Antropologia del lavoro, genere e migrazioni, ecologia politica, Loukkos, Plan Maroc Vert, Huelva, riproduzione sociale, incorporazione.

Introduction

The footprint of intensive agribusiness in the plain of the Loukkos became clear upon my first arrival in the rural village of Beni Garfett with its landscape covered by greenhouses, the so-called *mer de plastique* that traps heat and humidity over the fields. Along the dirt roads, women can be seen working bent over crops from dawn to dusk or selling leftover produce by the roadside, giving a first impression of the area's agricultural workforce. Walking into the weekly souk (market) and toward the butcher's tent brought me straight into the daily atmosphere of rural life, surrounded by mud, smoke, and flies. As a young European woman traveling on my own, my presence was not discreet, making me stand out right away in a space mostly occupied by men. This positionality served as an immediate reminder that as a researcher, you are never an invisible observer and that your identity and physical presence actively shape how people perceive and interact with you in the field. Under the butcher's tent, a local woman invited me to sit down and share a meal. Over food, she began recounting her life story and explained how she had been working in the fields since childhood, waking up before dawn every day to face backbreaking labor, only to return home to hours of unpaid domestic chores. During our conversation, she offered me a piece of meat from her plate, and even though I usually avoid eating meat, I chose to accept it without hesitation. Accepting her hospitality was an important gesture of mutual respect, helping to bridge the social distance between researcher and informant. This encounter in the souk highlights the main goal of this study. While official reports often discuss Moroccan agribusiness in terms of export growth and economic modernization, they rarely capture what this system demands from the people who sustain it. By moving beyond macro-level numbers and listening

directly to workers' voices, this thesis explores how global food production depends on the daily bodily effort of rural women.

To properly understand what is happening in Beni Garfett and grasp the roots of these changes, one must first comprehend how the agriculture sector of Morocco has changed economically over the last 20 years. In 2008, the Moroccan government enacted the Plan Maroc Vert (PMV), an agricultural modernization strategy aimed at integrating Morocco into the global agricultural economy. The PMV emphasized the role of agribusiness companies and foreign investment in producing high-value export crops, such as red berries. While the government praised the results of this strategy (e.g. increase in agriculture's contribution to the GDP and increase in exports of agricultural products to Europe), this government-driven modernization has created major structural inequalities between large agribusinesses which have access to capitalized resources, and small farming villages that do not.

The Loukkos plain has turned into a major hub for this type of economic growth in northern Morocco, transforming into an intensive agribusiness enclave thanks to its mild climate, water guaranteed by the El Makhazine dam, and geographical proximity to Spain. In the past twenty years, berry crops have progressively replaced the old local crops due to the use of drip irrigation and plastic greenhouses, but this rapid agricultural growth could not survive without an abundant, low-cost workforce that is both flexible and easy to control. The “agricultural success” is a fabricated narrative and behind it all hides a system of gendered labor, as seen in the Loukkos plain where the growth of agribusiness led to the increased feminization of seasonal and temporary agricultural work. Businesses often prefer to hire women for harvesting and packing fragile produce

such as strawberries by using gendered stereotypes that portray their ability and docility as natural traits. This leads to an economic process of devaluing of female work, as the informal female workforce experiences irregular employment, receives sub-minimum wages, works long hours without any contractual rights or social safety protections. Through the analysis of this particular regional context, this thesis shows that modern export agriculture is highly profitable due to both the systematic exploitation of export agricultural workers as well as the invisibility of this female rural workforce.

To unpack the complex interplay between agrarian capitalism, gendered labor, and bodily extraction in the Loukkos plain, this thesis is structured around one central research question and three sub-questions:

Specifically: *"How is the global agro-industrial value chain embodied, negotiated, and resisted by subaltern female laborers in the Loukkos plain, and at what bodily, social, and reproductive cost is the 'cheap strawberry' produced for the European market?"*

To address this primary inquiry, the research investigates:

I. How does the technological and chemical restructuring of the agrarian landscape translate into embodied toxicity, daily physical exhaustion, and sensory discipline for female day laborers under the greenhouses?

II. How do global agribusinesses capitalize on patriarchal gender ideologies, specifically the notion of female wage work as a "secondary supplement", and in what ways do these women de facto sustain the material and biological survival of rural households in a context of agrarian crisis?

III. Beyond narratives of passive victimhood, what everyday tactics of

negotiation, silence, mutual solidarity, and spiritual aspiration do informal workers deploy to navigate extreme precarity and reclaim dignity within both the domestic and public spheres?

To analyze these dynamics, this thesis draws on three complementary theoretical frameworks. First, it applies Social Reproduction Theory to examine how global agrobusiness relies on the systematic undervaluation of female labor: by connecting paid field work with unpaid domestic chores, this approach reveals how capital extracts value from the invisible reproductive work that sustains rural households. Second, the study uses an anthropology of the body to examine how women physically experience structural exploitation. In the fields, intense fatigue and chemical exposure become embodied realities that affect the workers' health. Finally, the research engages with Feminist Political Ecology and Mediterranean agrarian literature, building on the work of scholars such as Moreno Nieto, Chadia Arab, and Stephanie Hellio. This framework helps trace how gender, rural origin, and precarity intersect to create a disciplined workforce across the supply chain.

From a methodological perspective, the empirical research presented in this thesis is the result of two months of qualitative fieldwork conducted in Northern Morocco, specifically across the Loukkos plain and the city of Larache. This field research was made possible thanks to the support of the European Union's Erasmus+ program through its International Credit Mobility (ICM) action. Conducting research directly on the ground for two months was essential for observing local agricultural dynamics firsthand and building the trust necessary to engage with local interlocutors. Conducting interviews was made possible thanks to Sana, a cleaner at the university in Larache, who kindly opened her

home for the research. Her house provided a quiet, informal space where female agricultural workers could come, speak comfortably, and share their experiences away from workplace surveillance.

To collect the material needed, I combined semi-structured interviews with informal conversations and participant observation. Paper consent forms quickly proved useless: most of the women working in the fields can't read or write, and seeing official documents would have made them anxious. I chose instead to explain everything out loud in Moroccan Darija (through Muhammed, the interpreter) and get their verbal consent, making sure they felt under no pressure. During the latest interviews, I kept my notebook out of sight on purpose since I noticed that taking notes in real time created a strange, uncomfortable distance. I simply listened, then wrote up my field journal every night back in my room. All the women's names in this thesis are pseudonyms, and company details have been anonymized to protect everyone's privacy.

To answer the research questions, the thesis is structured into four chapters, moving step by step from macroeconomic policy down to daily life on the ground and across borders.

Chapter 1 sets the broader context by examining Morocco's agricultural modernization over the past two decades. It critically assesses the Plan Maroc Vert, showing how state initiatives aimed at expanding export markets have reshaped rural labor dynamics. To explain why economic growth did not lead to women's empowerment, the chapter draws on Claudia Goldin's U-shaped curve alongside Social Reproduction Theory. It demonstrates how agribusiness modernization relies on traditional patriarchal norms to keep female rural labor cheap and informal, a dynamic clearly visible in the informal hiring sites known

as the mouqef.

Chapter 2 brings this national picture down to the regional scale of the Loukkos plain. It traces how local and Andalusian capital built a massive strawberry export enclave in northern Morocco. The chapter looks closely at how human interventions in the river basin, such as dam construction and extensive plastic greenhouses, reconfigured the local environment. It shows that this technological transformation did not just boost production; it created the physical infrastructure for intensive labor extraction, leading to environmental strain and serious physical wear on the women working inside the greenhouses.

Chapter 3 shifts the focus to the ethnographic reality in and around Larache. Based on field research, it presents the biographical testimonies of eleven women employed across strawberry fields, packaging facilities, and university cleaning jobs. this chapter explores how these women deal with insecurity across different informal sectors, manage household survival as main breadwinners, and build quiet strategies of resilience and hope for their children.

Finally, Chapter 4 expands the scope to the transnational level, following the seasonal migration route that connects the Loukkos plain to the strawberry farms of Huelva, Spain. It examines the circular recruitment system *(contratación en origen*), analyzing how official selection criteria use family ties and social status to ensure a disciplined workforce. At the same time, the chapter shows that women are not merely passive subjects of this system: they actively exercise agency, whether through contract desertion or by strategically investing their earnings to gain financial independence back home.

Chapter 1

Modern agriculture, traditional exploitation

This first chapter establishes the theoretical foundation necessary to understand female agricultural labor in Morocco. Adopting a macro-to-micro analytical approach, the chapter begins by introducing the national economic and political landscape, specifically focusing on the Green Morocco Plan (Plan Maroc Vert) and its emphasis on modern, export-oriented agriculture. It will demonstrate how this "economic miracle" has failed to foster female emancipation, utilizing Claudia Goldin's U-shaped curve to illustrate that economic growth does not automatically translate into women's empowerment. Subsequently, the analysis will explore the mechanisms of social exploitation through the lens of Social Reproduction Theory, illustrating how agribusinesses capitalize on patriarchal norms to devalue female labor. Finally, the focus will narrow to the most vulnerable demographic within this system: the women of the mouqef.

1.1 The paradox of the Plan Maroc Vert

The current configuration of Morocco's rural landscape should not be seen as a product of spontaneous evolution, but as the direct result of a specific political project aimed at repositioning the agricultural sector as the primary engine of national modernization. In 2008, the Moroccan government launched the Plan Maroc Vert to accomplish this monumental, drastic change, that was supposed to put Morocco in the spotlight among its European colleagues. The project was built around two main pillars: the first one was focused on the development of

modern agriculture, high productivity and oriented to exportation, while the second pillar was about its social counterpart, focused on fighting poverty and creating general wellness by integrating small agricultures in the bigger scene.

As shown in the official document *Bilan et Impacts, (Ministère de l'Agriculture, 2020)* in ten years, the plan managed to create 50 million working days and double both agricultural exports and the agricultural GDP. Nevertheless, these triumphant numbers fail to show the real consequences of the plan: Najib Akesbi demonstrates this in his analysis of Moroccan agricultural policy (Akesbi in Gertel & Sippel, 2014), highlighting a structural paradox that remains fully ongoing today under the current Génération Green 2020–2030 strategy: Morocco is unable to provide primary subsistence goods, as land and hydric resources are allocated to high-yield cash crops destined for international markets. To sustain this economic model focused on foreign currency profit, large exporters need to lower the only cost they have control over: the cost of labor. Ultimately, it is the unbridled expansion of the 'tomato model[1] (now applied to strawberries in the Loukkos plain) that requires drawing a vulnerable, flexible, and cheap workforce into the fields.This macroeconomic asymmetry is not merely a statistical metric, but a visible, sensory paradox experienced on the streets of Larache. As I recorded in my fieldnotes during the harvest season: ”Walking through the periphery of Larache, the structural contradiction of the PMV materializes at every corner. While refrigerated trucks bearing Andalusian logos speed toward the port of Tangier, local streets are crossed by donkey carts hauling wooden crates of

[1] The 'tomato model' refers to the intensive, export-oriented agribusiness template originally developed in the Souss-Massa region for tomato cultivation. It is characterized by heavy capital investment in greenhouses and drip irrigation, high dependency on imported inputs, monopolization of local water resources, and, crucially, reliance on a hyper-flexible, low-wage, and highly feminized workforce to minimize production costs.

rejected fruit. At a roadside stall, I bought a kilogram of bruised strawberries for less than ten dirhams. The local working class can only afford the damaged residuals of its own agricultural output.' (Fieldwork Notes, April 2026).

This 'ten-dirham paradox' illustrates how the global commodity chain operates at the local level: the fresh strawberry is constructed as a premium commodity for European consumers, while local communities bear the ecological and biological cost of its production, left with only the aesthetic rejects of their own labor. As stated by Barbesgaard and Fold in their chapter in *Seasonal Workers in Mediterranean Agriculture*, Morocco's integration into international value chains has primarily favored a small percentage of the country's economic and political elites, along with large-scale investors. Consequently, small-scale producers are systematically marginalized and excluded from the global market, as they lack the necessary capital to comply with stringent standards and compete in European markets. Therefore, rather than reducing poverty as advertised, this system will increasingly force independent smallholder farmers to become mere wage laborers, a trend that intensifies as investors acquire more land for export production. In 2005, the Moroccan government sought to address rural poverty by launching the INDH, the National Initiative for Human Development (Tribak & Rguig, 2021), which was then implemented in Pillar II within the PMV (Montanari & Bergh, 2019). The main tool chosen to emancipate women and create IGAs (Income-Generating Activities) was the creation of agricultural cooperatives, reaching a remarkable total of 10,000 in 10 years (Bilan et Impacts). However, the plan failed to emancipate women in the way it promised; rural illiterate women are completely excluded from the decision-making processes of the cooperatives, leaving only men to manage the cooperative and its related affairs

(Figures 1 and 2). The bureaucracy favors only individuals who can read and write; consequently, poor women never get the chance to build a career or to become entrepreneurs, but they are recruited merely as cheap labor, making their labor invisible. In some cases, their labor is not paid at all, since they are expected to simply "give a hand" (Montanari & Bergh, 2019; Tribak & Rguig, 2021).

2. *Are you part of the policy making process*

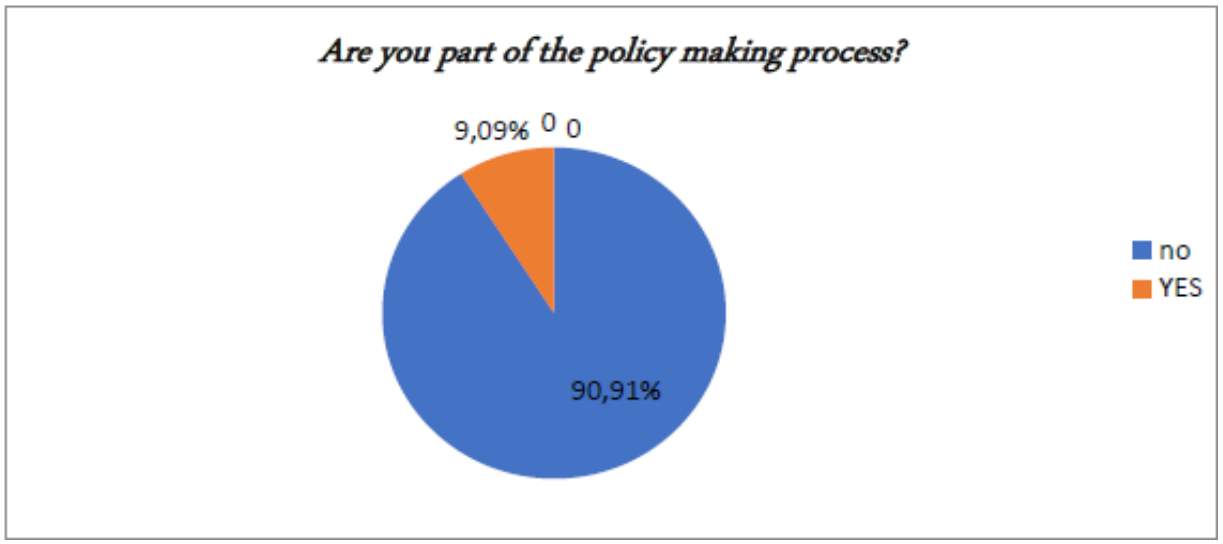

Figure 1 Female participation in the policy-making process of rural cooperatives. Source: Tribak & Rguig (2021).

3. *Who is in charge of the administrative procedures?*

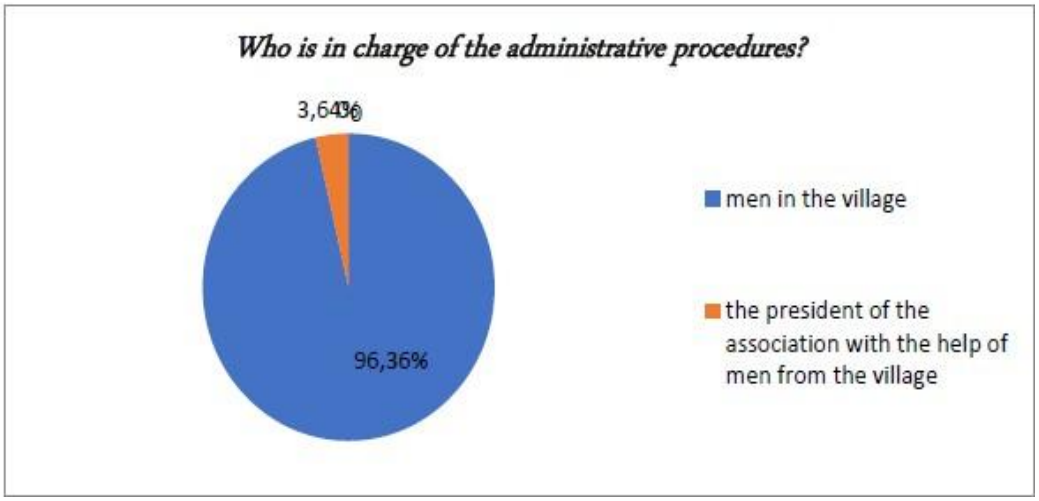

Figure 2 Actors in charge of administrative procedures in rural cooperatives. Source: Tribak & Rguig (2021).

In her doctoral thesis, Lisa Bossenbroek shares a personal anecdote that exemplifies gender norms in agricultural Morocco; during an interview with an official of the Ministry of Agriculture, to a question about female entrepreneurs in modern agriculture, he replied: "Yes, yes I know one, but she's more man than a man". This exchange clearly proves that for Moroccan institutions, agricultural success and modernity are intrinsically and biologically male attributes (Bossenbroek, 2016). The rhetoric of the PMV suggests that the agrarian transformations are happening exclusively thanks to "some audacious men", eliminating and making invisible family farms, the role of young people and especially, women's labor, exacerbating social and gender inequalities. Moreover, this model is creating a new masculinity; young men want to become "clean managers", rejecting their fathers' more traditional work as muddy farmers. In doing so, the agricultural sector undergoes a clear masculinization. Consequently, women are pushed and confined to a new domestic traditionalism, making it

difficult for them to negotiate and justify their work identity in the fields.

1.2 The U-shape exception

To better understand the complexity of female participation in the labor market, it is fundamental to consider the theoretical framework developed by Claudia Goldin, 2023 Nobel Prize laureate in Economics and a leading expert in the history of women's labor. Her pioneering research illustrates a paradox that appears to be occurring in contemporary Morocco: Goldin (1994) affirms that women's participation in the labor market does not grow linearly with economic growth. On the contrary, during the intermediate phases of economic development, their presence declines, following a "U-shaped" trajectory.

In poor and agricultural societies, women work extensively, but their labor is unremunerated and takes place within the family farm or in informal contexts. With the onset of industrialization, women exit the labor market due to the "stigma equilibrium" (Goldin, 1994); during these specific stages of development, female manual labor, whether in factories or fields, is considered degrading for both the woman and her entire family. Wage labor is perceived as proof that the husband is not earning enough to provide for his family. At this point, the family makes a "utility comparison" between the income the woman brings home and the shame and stigma associated with it. Therefore, when the male breadwinner's salary begins to increase, the family typically prefers to forgo the woman's income to "buy" the community's respect. Only in the advanced phases of development, characterized by a fertility decline, a surge in female education, and the expansion of the services sector (which carries no social stigma), do women have the

opportunity to re-enter the labor market en masse.

While the U-shape hypothesis offers a theoretical framework for female economic development, the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region represents a counter-trend, an exception to the rule. According to Verme (2016), these countries have actually overperformed in the structural prerequisites that are supposed to drive the curve back up; yet, the expected surge in female workforce numbers has not materialized. The MENA region continues to register the lowest Female Participation Rates (FPR) in the world, which is counterintuitive given its economic development. Women seem to be trapped at the bottom of the curve, making this context a privileged laboratory to test the limits of the theory and look for reasons other than GDP.

The confirmation of the counter-trend that Morocco represents comes from the research of Lopez-Acevedo et al. (2021); as can be seen in the graph below(Figure 3), in the last 20 years, the Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP) rate not only failed to grow, but declined from 26% to 22%, maintaining a remarkably wide gender gap, with a 50 percentage point difference. Another significant disparity can be observed between urban and rural areas. As explained by Verme et al. (2016), female participation seems higher in the countryside by almost 20%. However, this number is an illusion, as the women in question work unpaid and without a contract in small family farms, representing phase 1 of Goldin's curve. The key question at this point is: why do these women not enter the labor market? Economists attribute this to two main causes: marriage and education. In Morocco, it is not age that stops women, but their marital status; less than 10% of married women in urban areas work (Verme et al., 2016), proving the severe impact of

marriage on employment. Moreover, Lopez-Acevedo's research on social norms reveals a common belief that if jobs are scarce, men have more right to them, as a woman's primary role is that of mother and wife. Linked to Goldin's stigma theory, Verme proves that education in Morocco has a polarizing effect: women with higher education work in services, women with no education work because they have no choice, and women with a middle level of education are the ones who work the least. The reason for this phenomenon is the shame the family would endure if the women performed manual labor, combined with the fact that they lack the qualifications to get an office job. Ultimately, the women I worked with during my research for the present thesis are those who are too poor, uneducated, and isolated to have a choice; to survive, they are forced to accept the manual labor stigma. This structural barrier is clearly illustrated in the testimony of Katima, who recalls how patriarchal educational choices dictated her economic trajectory: “In my family, education was prioritized mainly for boys, while three daughters, including myself, did not receive formal schooling. Because of this, work in the fields became the main path available to support ourselves and survive economically.” (Katima)

Katima's narrative underscores that for illiterate rural women, entering informal wage labor is not an empowering choice at the top of an economic trajectory, but a survival mechanism at the bottom of the development curve, where manual labor represents the only alternative to absolute poverty.

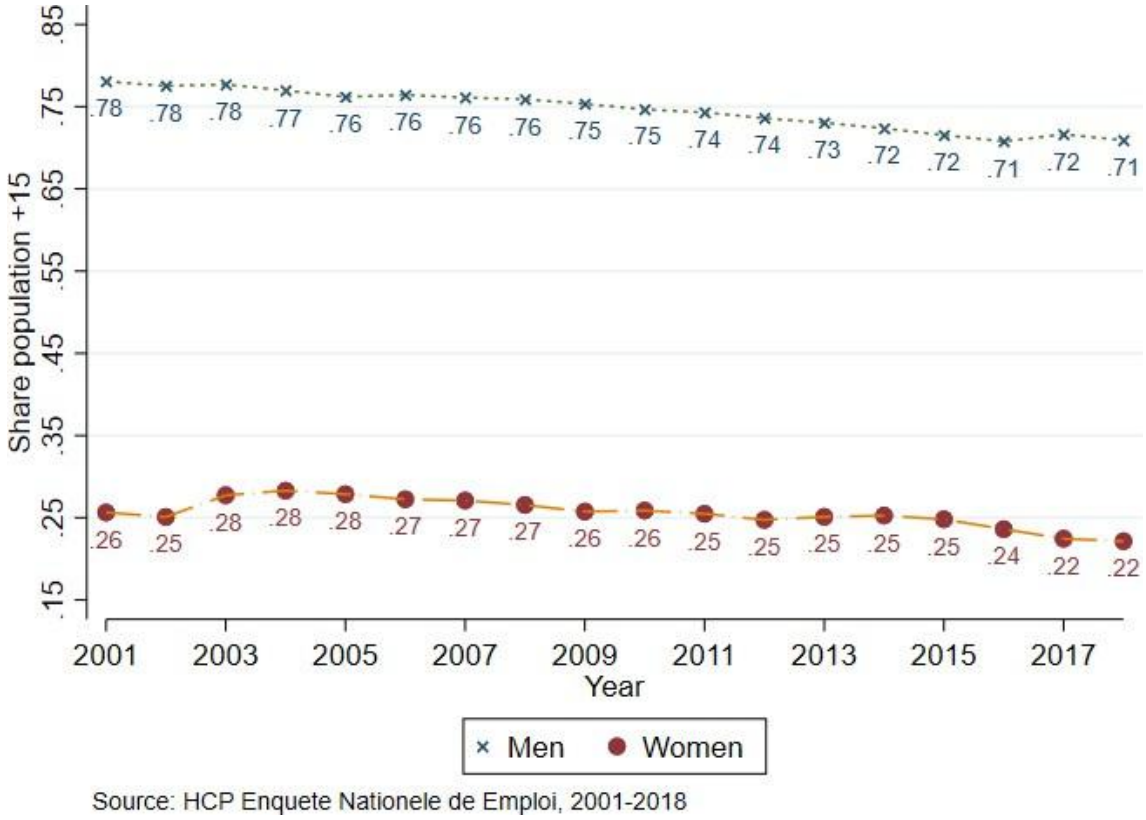

Figure 3 Trend of Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP) in Morocco. Source: Lopez-Acevedo et al. (2021).

1.3 Social reproduction and invisible labor

But how does agro-industrial capitalism profit from this vulnerability? To understand this, it is useful to consider the Social Reproduction Theory (Bossenbroek & Ftouhi, 2021). The theoretical framework came into existence thanks to the research of feminist scholars such as Tithi Bhattacharya, who explains social reproduction as the complex network that keeps generations alive (such as feeding, cleaning, and everything in between), and Nancy Fraser, who explains the contradictions that lie within it: capitalism gets unlimitedly rich by exploiting

manual labor in the fields, but also by refusing to pay for reproductive labor, like the caring of the house and children, creating a double burden for the women. Maria Mies, in her study about Indian lace makers, demonstrates that capitalism has its roots in the invisibility of rural female labor (Bossenbroek, 2016). By labeling the woman as a housewife, the system denies her productive work and marks it as an extension of domestic chores, allowing the women to not be considered real workers and consequently cutting down costs.

This theoretical model can be applied to the Moroccan rural reality. Indeed, society here still sees the man as the breadwinner, as the sole income provider; consequently, as early as the 1980s, Joekes (1985, as cited in Bossenbroek & Ftouhi, 2021) observed that female agricultural wages were degraded by employers as mere extra income, pocket money, or money "to buy lipstick", a gendered ideological trope that continues to be deployed by agribusiness managers today to legitimize depressed wages and justify pay scales as low as ninety dirhams a day. In reality, as explained by Bossenbroek and Ftouhi (2021), these women represent the de facto heads of household because of the illness, desertion, or unemployment of their male relatives. When asking Latifa, a 50-year-old woman supporting her household alone, how her salary is actually allocated, the reality of social reproduction becomes starkly clear: "There is no male provider in the household, so we depend mainly on ourselves to manage daily life and household expenses. My salary does not go to cosmetics; it goes to flour, sugar, gas cylinders, and electricity bills that I have to pay in instalments so they don't cut off the power.' (Latifa). Far from providing "lipstick money", female informal wages act as the primary biological stabilizer of impoverished households, even as employers leverage the secondary-income myth to justify pay

scales as low as ninety dirhams a day.

Nearing the core of my research, Moreno Nieto (2014), in the 16th chapter of Seasonal Workers in Mediterranean Agriculture, introduces the case of strawberry cultivation in the Loukkos river basin. Here, thanks to the PMV, around 20,000 people have been employed in recent years, 90% of whom are women. As previously mentioned, to mitigate the risks of international markets and price fluctuations, producers have a desperate need to minimize their only flexible cost: the workforce. But how do they justify hiring exclusively women? Managers maintain that female workers are biologically more suited for the job, claiming they work "with more precision and delicacy" (Bossenbroek, 2016). They argue that women possess innate attributes essential to avoid damaging extremely fragile crops, like strawberries and tomatoes, on their way to European markets. In reality, being able to rapidly harvest, select, and pack fruit without spoiling it is a technical skill that has nothing to do with gender and everything to do with practice, mostly acquired on family farms during childhood. Yet, agribusinesses "naturalize" this competence. By framing this expertise as a biological female gift, they refuse to recognize these women as qualified workers, thereby legitimizing their confinement to the lowest levels of the occupational hierarchy.

However, the rhetoric of "nimble fingers" (Elson & Pearson, 1981, as cited in Moreno Nieto, 2014) is not the only excuse used to perpetuate their exploitation. Female laborers are preferred over men because they are considered naturally more docile and less prone to unionize; in contrast, local men are viewed by international investors as too conflictual. Furthermore, women are often praised for their patience (sabr) in a twofold sense: they exhibit the physical stamina

required to pick strawberries for up to 12 hours a day, alongside the moral endurance to silently accept awful conditions, low salaries, and routine abuses. Lastly, these workers endure severe geographical isolation. By being recruited from non-irrigated villages very far from the fields, they become entirely dependent on the transportation provided by the producers, often vans where they are packed "like sardines in a tin" (Moreno Nieto, 2014), which effectively prevents them from organizing. Ultimately, the gender gap in the agricultural sector is not an accident, but the result of a deliberate structural strategy. The Green Morocco Plan and the international export market utilize and exacerbate the patriarchal inequalities already present in the region to maximize their profits.

1.4 Intersectionality and the Mouqef system

It is impossible to discuss "Moroccan women" as if they constituted a single, homogeneous group. To fully grasp who the subjects of this research are, it is essential to adopt the intersectionality paradigm, which illustrates how gender inequality intersects with various other forms of subordination, including social status, class, education level, family situation, and place of origin. Soriano Miras et al. (2014) aptly analyze this latter axis, noting that women who migrate from the hinterland (primarily comprising impoverished rural settlements) toward agro-export areas endure a higher degree of discrimination compared to native women. They constitute a "reserve army" for the export industry (Soriano Miras et al., 2014), lacking the local social networks that could provide security and guarantee fair wages.

Consequently, who exactly are the women I worked with in this thesis? They are

typical seasonal agricultural workers occupying the lowest stratum of this intersectional hierarchy; individuals who generally lack the financial backing of a husband, or who are burdened with the economic survival of their parents or unemployed spouses. A recent study corroborates this with revealing statistics: 49% of the surveyed female workers are widowed, divorced, or abandoned, and 86% are entirely illiterate (as shown in figures 4 and 5) (Jehouani & Meryem, 2023).

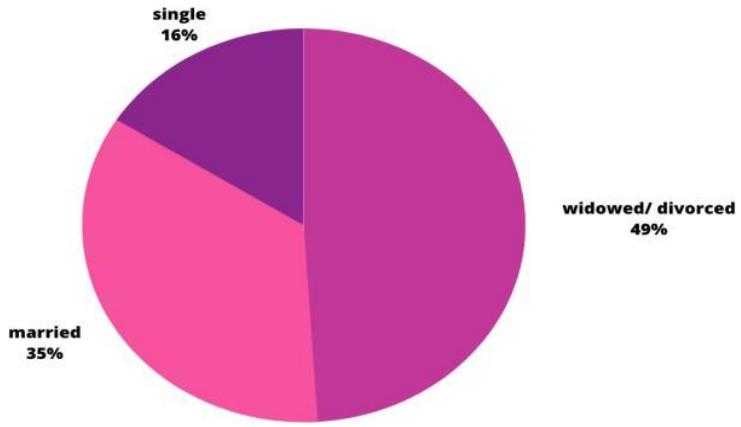

Figure 4 Marital status of female agricultural workers. Source: Jehouani & Meryem (2023).

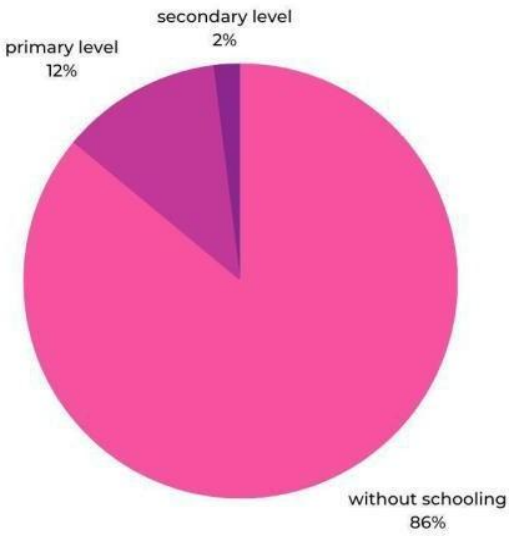

Figure 5 Educational attainment levels of female agricultural workers. Source: Jehouani & Meryem (2023).

Although agricultural labor is exceedingly demanding, Jehouani and Meryem (2023) highlight that these women have specific motives for choosing it: "They report dropping out of non-agricultural work for several reasons: low wages, continuous work that is not suitable for their family situation. Despite the difficult conditions in agriculture, female workers appreciate the flexibility that avails them of great freedom. They have the opportunity to take time off as they wish and to refuse the tasks that they deem arduous. The most important thing for these women is to work outdoors. 'We work outside, we are not locked up,' they say. Their rural background makes them prefer open spaces to enclosed areas".

These laborers typically enter the market through two distinct pathways. On the one hand, a fraction of workers hold permanent contracts (Contrat à Durée Indéterminée - CDI) on large farms, benefiting from affiliation with the National Social Security Fund (CNSS) and retirement plans (Jehouani & Meryem, 2023).

On the other hand, there is the mouqef[2]. The focus of this thesis is on this second category: informal, temporary, and ultra-vulnerable workers recruited exclusively at these informal gathering points known as mawaqef. Here, at dawn, crowds of women congregate, waiting for farmers' vans to arrive and select them for daily labor. A striking feature is that they arrive at the mouqef enveloped in thick scarves that usually reveal only their eyes, a practice that has earned them the nickname "ninjas" (Figure 6) (Bossenbroek & Ftouhi, 2021). This attire serves not only as a shield against the sun, dust, and pesticides, but also as a means to conceal their identity, maintain anonymity, and safely negotiate their presence in a male-dominated public space (Bossenbroek, 2016). Ultimately, this recruitment system dictates the daily reality of this specific demographic: no contracts, no guarantee of employment for the following day, and an absolute deprivation of social security (Bossenbroek & Ftouhi, 2021; Jehouani & Meryem, 2023).

The policy frameworks, patriarchal ideologies, and theoretical models analyzed in this chapter establish the structural architecture that keeps female agricultural labor cheap and invisible. Yet, these forces do not remain abstract ideas. They take shape on the ground, altering the physical landscape, the soil, and the daily lives of the women who sustain this export engine. To understand how these political mechanics operate in practice, the next chapter turns to the physical enclave of the Loukkos plain, examining the environmental, chemical, and spatial realities of the plastic greenhouses where this labor is extracted.

[2] In Moroccan Darija, the term mouqef (derived from the Arabic root w-q-f, meaning 'to stand' or 'to stop') literally translates to 'stopping place' or 'bus stop' (mouqef t-tobis). In informal labor contexts, it designates the roadside gathering points where day laborers wait standing at dawn for recruiters' vans. The women recruited here are colloquially 'the women of the bus stop'.

Figure 6 Female workers waiting in the mouquéf to find a job for the day. Source: Bossenbroek (2016).

Chapter 2

Anatomies of the strawberry enclave

The present thesis is the result of a two-month field research conducted in Larache, Morocco. To better understand the analysis, it is essential to provide a geographical and cultural framework of the city: Larache is the capital of the province of the same name and is situated in the northwest of the country. Its peculiarity lies in the fact that it rises on the Loukkos estuary, at the exact point where the river meets the ocean. As stated by Aziz Ballouche in his article on the geohistory of North Morocco, the Loukkos has always shaped the life of the Larache community, especially their work, through the port and the fertile lands. Thanks to the river, Larache became one of the most active agricultural zones in northern Morocco. At the same time, however, the modern control of its waters has transformed the territory: land that was previously used for grazing has been converted into modern, intensive cultivation, contributing to the development of the large industrial farms I am studying (Ballouche, 2024, p. 13).

To understand how these industrial farms work and the conditions female workers face, this second chapter maps the forces, mainly economic and ecological, that shaped the agro-industrial enclave. In the first section, the chapter traces the artificial domestication of the Loukkos water resources. Then, moving forward, it analyzes the enclave concept and, specifically, the Larache one, created by transnational Andalusian capital. Third, it explores the ecological and corporeal consequences of this model, focusing on the chemicals used in the greenhouses and the workers' health. Finally, in the fourth section, it investigates the extraction of female workers from the surrounding rural plain and the terrible logistics of their daily commute. Altogether, these sections provide the structural, meso-level context for the next and final chapter, where

individual narratives will be analyzed.

2.1 Engineering the flow of the Loukkos basin

As previously stated, Larache is situated on the Loukkos, and Ballouche's study (2013), despite being a palynological study, is useful to understand how this territory was shaped in the past and what kind of changes it has undergone over time. The environment analyzed by the author goes back, according to him, to the 15th century, when the Khlot and Tlig tribes settled in that region, a landscape which Ballouche links to these tribes' typical use of space, oriented towards extensive livestock farming combined with cereal agriculture. This kind of system persisted for centuries, even while gradually changing under the pressure of grazing and deforestation. Still, at the start of the 20th century, when colonial changes were about to upend everything, these landscapes and their productive systems were still functional: "a few douars, barely a few fields, the country is nothing but an immense pasture where flocks of sheep and cattle graze"[3] (Aubin, 1904, quoted in Ballouche, 2013, p. 78).

The drastic change came with the Spanish protectorate, starting in 1912. It was in the 1920s that the construction of hydraulic infrastructure (dams, pumping stations, and a network of canals) was set in motion. This allowed full control over the water cycle and the transformation of the landscape from extensive pasture into an irrigated agricultural perimeter (as shown in Figure 7). Decades following the restored independence, this system would be expanded by the Moroccan state through the action of the Office Régional de Mise en Valeur du Loukkos (ORMVAL). This

[3] [original: "peu de douars, à peine quelques champs, le pays n'est qu'un immense pâturage où paissent des troupeaux de moutons et de bœufs"].

phenomenon is thoroughly explained in Hrour's doctoral thesis (Hrour, 2023), where he documents how that the trajectory promoted under the Spanish protectorate was solidified into a national plan focused on the control of hydric resources by the newly independent Moroccan state. Starting from the 1970s, several dams were built in the Bas-Loukkos basin to mobilize water resources, regulate the hydrological regime, produce electricity, and protect the plain from flooding (Hrour, 2023, p. 49). The already cited ORMVAL is the entity in charge of this transformation and has an action zone of 256,000 ha, divided into two provinces, Larache and Kenitra the centerpiece of this hydraulic strategy is the Oued El Makhazine dam, built 40 km east of Larache and operating since 1978. The dam, defined as "la pièce maîtresse de l'aménagement hydro-agricole du périmètre du Loukkos" (Hrour, 2023, p. 49), the cornerstone of the entire hydro-agricultural development of the perimeter, is the largest in the basin, with a total capacity of 743 million m^3, and it does not only irrigate: it also supplies potable water to the nearby town of Ksar El Kébir and its rural neighbouring villages, produces energy, and finally protects the downstream plain from flooding.

Figure 7 Aerial photograph of the estuarine plain and meanders of the River Loukkos around Larache (1986). Source: Carmona and Ruiz (2009, p. 828)

Keeping the water upstream, however, is not enough: at the mouth of the river, on the Atlantic Ocean, a second infrastructure was built, called the "barrage de garde," which has a dual function: it maintains the hydric level needed for the functioning of the pumping stations located upstream, and it prevents the rise of seawater towards the irrigated agricultural perimeters (Hrour, 2023, p. 49). To understand how constant this control is, Kellouti (2004, pp. 3-4) explains that the guard dam stays closed for the whole duration of the irrigation campaign, and that the releases from the dam are scheduled weekly through the joint effort of three bodies (the ORMVAL, the Loukkos

Water Basin Agency, and the national electricity office), precisely to avoid any surplus water ending up in the ocean during the irrigation season.

This infrastructural transformation is better understood by looking at the sheer growth of the irrigated area itself. As shown in Figure 8, the irrigated area visibly expands across the perimeter between 1980 and 2020. This is confirmed in Figure 9, a graph showing the parallel evolution of the irrigated zones and the number of farmers in the Loukkos perimeter, the perimeter counted just 1,610 irrigated hectares in 1978, while by 2020 this figure had grown to 50,888 (Hrour, 2023, pp. 50, 54). This growth was characterized not by linearity, but by the effect of specific national plans, such as the Plan National d'Irrigation of 1993-2000 and the Plan Maroc Vert of 2008-2021.

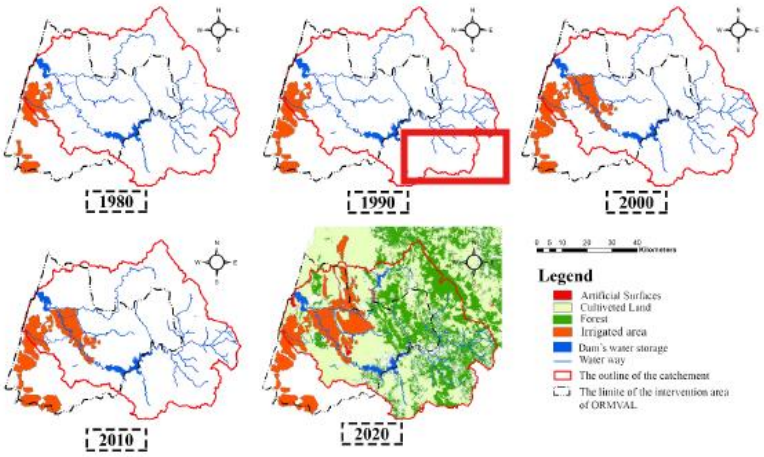

Figure 8. Evolution of irrigated land area (large-scale hydraulics, PMH, ORMVAL); the land cover map is adapted from ABHL (2018).

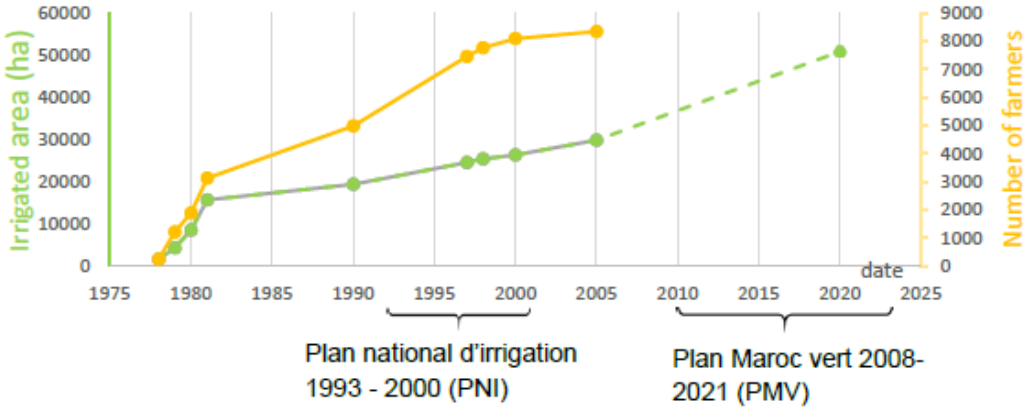

Figure 9. Evolution of the irrigated surface area and the number of farmers in the Loukkos agricultural perimeter.

Sustaining this expansion required constant technical intervention from ORMVAL, which rehabilitated adductor canals, pumping stations, and buried pipelines, while also introducing programmable automation systems and water outlets equipped with volumetric meters (Kellouti, 2004, pp. 5-6).

This level of hydraulic control, however, has had a hidden ecological cost. The Mrissa hydrometric station no longer registers a natural fluvial regime: its discharge is directly "influenced by the dam's management rules" (Hrour, 2023, p. 55). The data gathered show that, starting from the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the river's discharge at Mrissa dropped by 35 percent, a significant decline found only in the sub-basins actually affected by the presence of the dam (Hrour, 2023, p. 82). This is even more significant considering that rainfall over the same period decreased by only around 20 percent, which suggests that the decline in discharge is not attributable to climate change alone, but is largely the direct effect of a river whose regulation now depends more on the dam's management decisions than on its natural course. In conclusion, the radical hydraulic transformation and the expansion of the irrigated

perimeter have completely domesticated the Loukkos basin. This total technological control of water resources has created the perfect infrastructure to attract foreign capital, paving the way for the delocalization of intensive strawberry cultivation from Huelva to Larache.

2.2 Red gold on Moroccan soil

As mentioned at the end of the previous paragraph, the idea is that ORMVAL had prepared the ground (literally) for the exploitation carried out by foreign investors, who would go on to transform the Loukkos perimeter into a transnational productive enclave. According to Juana Moreno Nieto's (2012) study on the feminization of the labor market in the Loukkos strawberry sector, the birth of modern strawberry farming in Morocco can be traced back to 1989. That year marked the settlement, near Larache, of Alconera Maroc, a strawberry production, packaging, and export company originally from the province of Huelva, in Andalusia. According to the author, "the importance of this settlement lies less in the transfer of capital than in the 'export of a production model'" (Moreno Nieto, 2012, p. 4); indeed, Alconera reportedly facilitated Moroccan farmers' access to the inputs and technical know-how needed to begin strawberry cultivation according to the Californian model[4].

Emmanuelle Hellio's doctoral research (2014) on the seasonal migration of Moroccan women to Andalusia traces the sector's origins as well, allowing for a deeper

[4] The "Californian model" designates a capital-intensive agro-industrial framework originally developed in California for high-value horticultural crops such as strawberries. It relies on heavy technological inputs, including plastic micro-tunnels, drip irrigation, patented cultivars, and intensive chemical treatments, combined with a structural strategy of relocation known as the "flight to the south" ("fuite vers le sud"). This model shifts production perimeters toward southern regions, from Andalusia to the Loukkos plain, to exploit favorable agro-climatic conditions and to access an abundant, low-cost, and non-unionized workforce (Moreno Nieto, 2012; Hellio, 2014).

understanding of the background to this relocation from the Spanish side. Compared to Moreno Nieto, Hellio adds a relevant detail concerning the motive behind the choice to relocate: "Worried, following the previous season, by a series of general strikes that had involved every sector, some of them explicitly directed against strawberry companies, the founder of Alconeras, whom we will call Pablo, decided to travel to Morocco for a fact-finding visit aimed at better understanding a growing area he considered a 'competitor'"[5] (Hellio, 2014, pp. 106-110).

According to Hellio, the establishment of this first farm in the Larache region, this relocation, was not an isolated episode, but part of a broader movement of "flight to the south" typical of the Californian model, which had already previously shifted production areas further north, into Andalusia itself. Morocco, and above all the Larache region, offered Spanish investors a set of ideal conditions hardly matched anywhere else. Moreno Nieto (p. 4) explains that among the main reasons for this interest were the availability of low-cost labor and the proximity to the port of Tangier, which ensured efficient logistical connections for export to European markets. In addition, a combination of favorable environmental factors played a fundamental role, including a mild climate, sandy soils (r'mel) suited to the crop, and above all the availability of water made possible by the hydrological system described earlier. It is also worth mentioning a less material but nonetheless relevant factor: the legacy of Spain's colonial past in the region, which, through the spread of the Spanish language, institutional presence (consulates, schools), and economic ties between the two shores of the Mediterranean, favored the development of a particularly dense Spanish agro-

[5] [original: Inquiété la saison précédente par une succession de grèves générales qui concernaient tous les secteurs mais dont certaines avaient été explicitement dirigées contre des exploitations fraisicoles50, le fondateur d'Alconeras, que nous appellerons Pablo et qui est à l'époque en passe de devenir une des plus grandes entreprises de la province, décide de se rendre au Maroc pour une visite de reconnaissance visant à mieux connaître une zone de culture qu'il estime « concurrente »]

productive network.

The strawberry sector in Larache is hyper-polarized. Small local producers are excluded from direct export since they are unable to meet the strict quality standards required by the European market, and they end up selling their products at bargain prices on the local market. The real added value of the chain comes from processing, freezing, and export channels, which are completely controlled by foreign capital, especially Andalusian companies.

To understand how this system operates, large foreign multinational corporations engage local smallholders through asymmetrical contract farming arrangements. At the beginning of the agricultural cycle, agribusiness companies provide farmers with essential capital-intensive inputs on credit, including patented strawberry runners, plastic sheeting for micro-tunnels, drip-irrigation equipment, and specialized chemical pesticides. In exchange, local producers sign binding contracts obligating them to deliver their entire seasonal yield exclusively to the contracting company. When harvest delivery occurs, the buyer exercises total accounting control: it calculates the weekly payment based on export market valuations and directly deducts the accumulated debt for the pre-financed inputs. Because local farmers are prohibited from selling to alternative buyers on the open market, the corporation unilaterally controls both input pricing and output valuation, de facto dictating the final purchase price per kilogram. Through this mechanism of structural indebtedness and monopsonistic control, smallholders, despite owning or leasing their land, are stripped of market autonomy and transformed into "propertied laborers" or modern sharecroppers who absorb all agricultural and environmental risks while foreign capital extracts the core surplus value.

This is clearly an asymmetrical relationship. Moroccan farmers, even though they own

the land, have no real control over the prices of strawberries or their positioning in the international market. Consequently, they are transformed into "propertied laborers" or a new type of sharecroppers, whose economic survival depends entirely on the decisions of large multinational corporations.

Emmanuelle Hellio (2014, p. 114) defines this economic asymmetry as a classic enclave:

"An enclave economy is defined as an economic system where an export-oriented industry, dominated by international or non-local capital, extracts resources or products from another country. This term has been widely used to describe post-colonial dependency relations in developing countries [...] and is part of a broader theoretical framework called dependency theory."[6]

Inside this rural enclave, the distribution of wealth is highly unequal. To demonstrate how unbalanced this structure is, Hellio (2014, pp. 114-115) cites the prominent Moroccan economist Najib Akesbi, who offers a quantitative description of this agro-export model:

"...the internal valuation rate, that is to say the local value-added rate, varies from only 5 to 30% for these fruits and vegetables. Exporting a value of 100 dollars previously implies imports of 70 or 80 dollars[7]. [...] Via fruits and vegetables, Morocco exports a lot of water even though it is a locally scarce resource. [...] Moroccan agriculture

[6] [original: Une économie d'enclave est définie comme un système économique où une industrie tournée vers l'exportation et dominée par un capital international ou non-local extrait des ressources ou des produits d'un autre pays. Ce terme a été largement employé pour décrire les relations de dépendances post-coloniales dans les pays en développement, spécialement en Amérique latine et fait partie d'un positionnement théorique plus large appelé théorie de la dépendance.]

[7] This proportion highlights the low net domestic value-added characteristic of Morocco's agro-export model. To generate 100 dollars in gross export revenue, the agricultural sector must first import between 70 and 80 dollars worth of capital-intensive foreign inputs, including patented strawberry runners, plastic sheeting for greenhouses, drip-irrigation infrastructure, synthetic fertilizers, and chemical pesticides. Consequently, the apparent export boom generates minimal net foreign currency retention for the national economy, as the majority of the financial value flows back to transnational input suppliers while the local territory absorbs the environmental and labor costs.

exports 'the appetizer and the dessert' but imports the heart of its diet: dairy products, cereals."[8]

Ultimately, this deep integration into international markets does not translate into actual local development for Larache. On the contrary, it locks the territory into a subordinate, peripheral position. As Juana Moreno Nieto (2012, p. 6) argues, this system ends up reproducing historical power asymmetries from the colonial past: "This agriculture appears as a paradigmatic example of the new capitalist agriculture inserted into global production chains. It represents a break with the production modes of subsistence agriculture or agriculture destined for the domestic market present in the region, while the dependency on the foreign market that it induces restores a peripheral position that is highly reminiscent of the colonial period."

2.3 Life and extraction under the plastic sea

A fundamental scientific contribution within this framework is represented by Najoua Ellouaziri's study, "Mobilité circulaire des travailleuses rurales et autonomisation locale des femmes: Le cas de la plaine du Loukkos". The research deconstructs the causal link between women workers' seasonal mobility and the growing agro-climatic pressures. It is in this analytical context that it emerges how the rural northern Moroccan families' transition towards the salaried strawberry labor market represents

[8] [Unedited original passage: Dans cette situation, on peut se demander si la fraise, les haricots verts, le melon produits au Maroc sont vraiment des produits marocains alors que le taux de valorisation interne, c'est à dire le taux de valeur ajoutée locale varie de 5 à 30% pour ces fruits et légumes. L'exportation pour une valeur de 100 dollars a impliqué auparavant des importations de 70 ou 80 dollars (Akesbi 2012) et on retrouve les mécanismes déjà observés à Huelva mais aussi dans toutes les zones du monde où un capital étranger introduit les logiques et les modes de production de l'agrobusiness.Via les fruits et légumes, le Maroc, comme l'Andalousie d'ailleurs, exporte beaucoup d'eau alors que c'est une ressource localement rare. Le développement de ce type de cultures spéculatives crée la dépendance aux économies importatrices du produit situées plus au Nord mais également aux exportations de ces dernières. C'est ce qu'entend Najib Akesbi lorsqu'il avance qu'à travers ce système, l'agriculture marocaine exporte « l'entrée et le dessert » mais importe le coeur de son alimentation : les produits laitiers, les céréales.]

a forced adaptation to the progressive collapse of the traditional subsistence economy.

The global climate crisis acts as a powerful push factor, taking crucial water away from inland villages and undermining the ability of local families to grow their own food.. To better understand how large and rapid this environmental pressure is, it is fundamental to observe the evolution of agro-climatic indicators over the last ten years in the Loukkos basin, which are shown in the table below (figure 10). The data describe a very difficult situation for small family properties. While the 18% decrease in annual rainfall (which fell to just 530 mm in 2024), linked to a 62% increase in days registered with extreme temperatures of over 35 °C (increasing from 21 to 34 days a year), accelerated soil aridity and impoverished typical cereal and legume harvests, on the other hand, the 21% contraction in the discharge of the Loukkos River dramatically reduced the total water supply, and the intrusion of saline water has caused a 50% increase in the cultivated areas affected by salinization, which now stands at 18% of the total land.

Indicateur	2015	2024	Variation relative
Pluviométrie moyenne annuelle (mm)	650	530	−18 %
Jours > 35 °C (jours/an)	21	34	+62 %
Débit moyen du Loukkos (m³/s)	75	59	−21 %
Surfaces salinisées (% superficie cultivée)	12	18	+50 %

Figure 10. Summary evolution of agro-climatic indicators in the Loukkos basin (2015-2024). Source: Ellouaziri (2025).

This scenario completely destroys the productivity of traditional agricultural work in

the mountainous and rural hinterland, depriving the communities of their historical means of self-sufficiency. Consequently, many families see no other solution than to send their women towards wage labor in the greenhouses of Larache, not to diversify their income, but as the only option to survive in the face of the oncoming climate crisis.

This economic pressure translates into a profound transformation of the landscape. Today, anyone visiting the Loukkos plain encounters a scenery almost completely devoid of natural elements: kilometers of plastic micro- and macro-tunnels cover the fields, enabling the early growth of the fruits and decoupling their cultivation from natural seasons. Hellio (2014, p. 11) describes this view as a "mer de plastique" (a plastic sea), signifying that the industrialization of the agricultural sector has drastically altered the territory, erasing its natural landscape and replacing it with thousands of hectares of open-air factories. Underneath the plastic sheeting of these micro-tunnels, this agro-industrial infrastructure is experienced as a space of physical confinement. Field notes from the Loukkos plain describe how the air inside the tunnels quickly becomes saturated with humidity and the sharp smell of chemical pesticides. Working hunched over for hours in wet soil, women experience the spatial design of the farm directly through bodily strain and restricted movement. This physical strain is etched directly onto the landscape. Field observations along the rural tracks of the Loukkos plain record the sight of female laborers bent double in the fields from the first light of dawn. Their physical posture, folded in two for hours to harvest low-lying crops, translates the abstract demands of export efficiency into an immediate, visible geography of bodily wear.

This hyper-technological system could not be sustained without massive chemical inputs. In the fields, both employers and employees refer to this chemical mixture of

fertilizers and pesticides by a simple yet revealing name: "the liquid". In her research, Hellio interviewed an Algerian foreman who remarked on this phenomenon: "Without the liquid, the strawberry does not grow, there aren't many of them, so the bosses tear everything out and the workers are sent home"[9] (Hellio, 2014, p. 411). It is these chemicals that allow the fruit to double in size from one day to the next, creating a process of biological acceleration that makes strawberry cultivation highly profitable yet structurally unstable.

These chemicals do not merely remain on the plants; they directly impact the pickers' bodies, as these women work for hours trapped under the scorching heat of the greenhouses, breathing in the fumes of the sprayed substances and handling the treated fruits with their bare hands. Furthermore, employers routinely prioritize the flawless aesthetic appearance of the fruit over the physical health of the laborers, forcing women to remove their protective gloves so as not to bruise the delicate strawberries. As early as 2014, this severe health hazard was directly denounced by Dr. Ismaïl Tomizy, a local Arabic-speaking physician interviewed by Hellio (2014). Recent testimonies and fieldwork observations confirm that this practice remains fully ongoing today, as agribusiness managers continue to enforce glove removal to meet strict European cosmetic standards. Describing the dangerous biological consequences of working bare-handed with toxic pesticides, Dr. Tomizy states: "it is forbidden to wear gloves, the owner does not want them, he says they cause problems for the fruit. But there are good gloves that do not damage the fruit, they simply do not want to pay for them"[10] (Hellio, 2014, p. 434).

[9] [original: Sans le « liquide », la fraise ne pousse pas, il n‟y en a pas beaucoup, alors les patrons arrachent et les gens rentrent.]

[10] [original: Bien sûr, parce que c'est interdit de mettre des gants, l'exploitant ne veut pas, il dit que ça pose des problèmes au fruit. Mais il y a des bons gants qui n'abîment pas le fruit mais ils ne veulent pas payer.]

The long-term consequences are severe. Tomizy reveals that there was an explosion of skin, eye, and respiratory allergies linked to the treatment of the fruits, but above all, "a long-term accumulation of substances in the body that ends up disrupting the hormonal system of the workers [...] I see two or three a day who have thyroid problems"[11] (Hellio, 2014, p. 434). The doctor directly links these chemical exposures to female reproductive health issues, explaining that long-term accumulation of pesticide residues disrupts the hormonal and endocrine systems of the workers, causing severe thyroid disorders, menstrual irregularities, and difficulties in conceiving, highlighting that Moroccan female laborers pay the highest price, as they work twice as much as other nationalities to maximize their seasonal earnings. This systemic neglect is echoed in the field observations gathered in Larache. As noted by Amina, a strawberry worker whose trajectory is analyzed in detail in the following chapter, companies routinely offload basic hygienic costs onto the laborers, forcing them to buy their own soap to wash chemical residues off their hands at the end of the shift (Amina). This detail illustrates how agribusiness extracts maximum value while refusing to cover even the basic sanitary needs of the bodies sustaining its production.

This structural imbalance does not merely constitute theoretical data, but it materializes in the everyday urban reality of Larache. The materiality of this hyper-technological enclave exists alongside deep spatial paradoxes, meaning that while top-grade strawberries destined for European export are moved through highly modern refrigerated supply chains, the local transport of rejected fruit, namely the aesthetically imperfect strawberries sold in regional markets and roadside stalls in Larache, as well as short-distance transport along unpaved rural tracks, still relies on horse- and donkey-

[11] [original: A long terme, ça s'accumule dans le corps et ça perturbe le système hormonal. Je l'ai remarqué, certaines femmes ont des symptômes hormonaux. J'en vois deux ou trois par jour qui ont des problèmes de thyroïde.]

drawn carts. Seeing horses pulling carts and donkeys transporting strawberry boxes through the city reveals how intensive capitalism fails to modernize the rest of the territory, selectively relying on traditional and informal local arrangements. Rather than developing local infrastructure, global agribusiness extracts high-value export commodities through modern logistics, while leaving the surrounding territory dependent on informal labor recruitment and traditional animal-drawn transport for local distribution, thereby keeping regional operational costs to a minimum. This strict division between export markets and local consumption shapes the material and sensory reality of the fruit itself. While flawless, chilled strawberries are shipped to European supermarkets in sealed plastic punnets, bruised or overripe fruit enters the warm domestic spaces of Larache. Sold in thin plastic bags along the dusty roadside or carried home by workers at dusk, these rejected strawberries stain fingers red alongside residues of dry pesticides and field dirt. For the women who pick them, tasting these soft, sun-warmed rejects is often their only physical connection to the harvest, turning the fruit into a tangible condensation of their own exhaustion. This dynamic finds a material example in an episode taken from my ethnographic diary, recorded during my stay in Larache:

> *"From the very first days, I realized that the price of fruit is incredibly low. I saw this clearly when I bought a kilogram of strawberries for less than ten dirhams (less than one euro) at a roadside stall. Buying those strawberries at such a bargain price, knowing exactly why I was here doing research, made me feel deeply guilty. Those stalls represent the local market, the place where, in all probability, the rejects of that "perfect product" destined for refrigerated trucks to Europe end up. All the fatigue of*

the women I studied in books materializes and devalues in that bargain price." (Fieldwork Notes, April 2026)

This "ten-dirham" paradox clearly shows how the fruit's value is differentiated and managed within the neoliberal agricultural model. The fresh strawberry is constructed as a premium commodity destined only for European buyers who are willing to pay high prices for aesthetically flawless fruit; on the other hand, the strawberries sold on the roadsides of Larache for less than a euro represent the rejects that failed to meet the strict quality standards of European companies. Therefore, the local population finds itself able to buy and consume only the residuals of their own ecological and bodily exploitation.

This means that the cheap price is not a sign of local abundance but is actually the systematic devaluation of the labor force required to produce that fruit. The strawberry that people find at a roadside stall is the material condensation of physical exhaustion, exposure to toxic chemicals, the extreme heat faced by the workers, and their extremely low wages. Thus, Larache's roads become a silent testimony to how, in these new neoliberal enclaves, local communities bear the entire ecological and biological cost of production while receiving almost nothing in return.

2.4 The geography of exhaustion

The recruitment basin of these strawberry pickers in Larache is not located far from the city; rather, it is the plain itself. As explained by Moreno Nieto (2012, pp. 12-13), the workers mainly come from the nearby rural milieu, especially from the douars of the Loukkos plain, with Larache and Ksar El Kebir serving as urban reference poles for a minority of packing station workers (ouvrières de station). This spatial proximity

is the direct outcome of a structural transformation initiated at the beginning of the 1990s, when the Moroccan state abolished the production requirements that previously bound smallholders to subsistence agriculture. This policy paved the way for intensive strawberry cultivation, a highly labor-intensive crop characterized by extreme seasonality and a workforce composed almost exclusively of women. Consequently, the ecological and economic dynamics described in section 2.3 find their demographic translation here.

Ellouaziri (2025) documents a deficit of over 30% in rainfall and a 50% increase in salinized lands (as stated in the 2.3 paragraph), illustrating how families directly link women's wage labor to the decline of traditional agricultural income. Indeed, one of the women interviewed by Ellouaziri admits that her seasonal contract is what pays for the schooling of her children when family income falls short. This ecological and economic pressure demonstrates how the agro-industrial enclave was organized around the rural plain, transforming it from a self-sufficient agricultural zone into a constantly renewable, low-cost labor reserve.

This workforce is systematically recruited through the figure of the waqqaf[12], a transporter-gangmaster who draws labor from a fixed territory of douars, village after village, and guarantees a stable labor supply to the employers while preventing the establishment of any direct contractual or social link between the landowner and the worker.

This setup results in a highly segmented labor market structured along both gender and geographical lines: the closer a douar is to the coastal strip of fields and packing stations, the more its female population is absorbed into the seasonal agricultural cycle.

[12] Literally "the one who stops" (or "the one who stands at the mouqef"), this expression designates the informal day laborer who gathers at designated roadside stopping points at dawn, waiting to be recruited by farmers for daily agricultural labor.

Within this basin, recruitment is heavily influenced by marital status, with employers and waqqaf actively selecting unmarried, divorced, or widowed women, locally referred to as hajjalat or zoufrias[13]. From a methodological perspective, it is important to clarify that Hellio's study (2014, pp. 262–264) analyzes seasonal circular migration to Huelva rather than the domestic Larache market, meaning her contribution here serves an analogical and theoretical purpose. Nevertheless, she identifies a crucial social mechanism: women without marital ties are "freer and more constrained" ("plus libres et plus contraintes"). They are freer from immediate marital surveillance regarding their physical mobility, yet far more constrained economically because they lack family support, making them the ideal target for intense labor recruitment.

The structural importance of controlling female mobility is mirrored in the local observations of Moreno Nieto (2012, p. 14), who presents the case of Nadia, whose husband forbade her from working due to the lack of supervision during the return commute. The link between these two independent studies strengthens the theoretical validity of this analytical lens for interpreting commuting patterns in the Loukkos region. Yet, while the recruitment process explains who is selected, it does not reveal what this selection does to the physical body. Every morning and evening, women from Zouada and Ksar El Kebir are transported between their douars and the fields in vehicles completely devoid of seats and often even doors. These old trucks and open-box utility vans are locally described with terms referring to small cargo "Ape" vehicles, from which all benches have been removed to pack in as many bodies as possible.

It is at this juncture that my own ethnographic material becomes analytically vital; my

[13] In Moroccan Darija, "hajjalat" designates "women without husbands" (a slightly derogatory term for widowed or divorced women), while "zoufrias" probably derives from the French "ouvrier", indicating unattached day laborers working away from their home villages

field notes record the late afternoon arrival of these battered vans, which are invariably driven by men. What I observed on the streets of Larache, and which now takes on full analytical weight, is the profound physical state of these workers: the women packed inside these vehicles do not speak to one another, nor do they even look at each other. They appear to have no energy left except that which is strictly required to remain standing and balance themselves during the journey.

This silence is totalizing, and it is by no means a choice; it is the natural consequence of a grueling day of physical labor and hazardous transit. Moreover, this silence represents the logical destination of the structural forces that this chapter has sought to trace: the state hydraulic infrastructure that made the plain productive, the Andalusian capital that captured its surplus value, the plastic landscape and the chemical rhythms that colonized first the plant and then the picker's body, and the ten-dirham paradox that allows the local population to consume only the aesthetic rejects of their own hard labor. Ultimately, it is this exhausting daily journey that closes these women's lives each evening in a heavy, collective silence.

Behind the economic numbers and hydraulic infrastructure of the Loukkos plain are the women who work the fields every day. Understanding this system requires looking beyond macro-level data and export statistics. The next chapter moves the focus into the domestic sphere, entering the homes of eleven informal workers in Larache. Through their personal accounts, it examines how these women manage household budgets and handle seasonal precarity on daily field wages.

Chapter 3

Voices from Larache

3.1 Epistemology, positionality, and fieldwork ethics: unlearning, embodied ethnography, and relational responsibility

When I first got to Larache, I arrived during the Eid al-Adha holiday. This was the first shock I came into contact with. The city looked deserted, completely empty. No one was around and everything seemed so unfamiliar and dark, while I had expected to see the beautifully lively coastal city I had seen on the internet. I initially perceived the city as inhospitable and closed off. Moreover, in the following days, when this first discomfort went away and I started going to the faculty, I came across a linguistic problem: I was sure that, Larache being a university town, there would be the possibility to communicate in English, but the reality of Darija promptly showed me that my university bubble did not coincide with the real city. All the anthropology books I had read and the lessons I had attended seemed to have lost their significance, and I found myself in a new universe that I felt I had no tools to deal with. But as Lisa Bossenbroek said, "to learn, one has to unlearn", and I managed to understand that the condition of frustration I was feeling during those first few days was the methodological base for my research. I had to unlearn my need to control everything as a Western researcher, accepting that I was not the expert analyzing the "other", but a vulnerable individual who had to learn the local codes from scratch. Indeed, ethnographic data are not just sitting there ready to be picked up, but they are created through human interaction, uncertainty, and continuous adaptability. This need for adaptability became clear when I had my first appointments with different people. While in Europe time is chronometric and rigid, with a required sense of punctuality, Larache seemed to be the complete opposite. In Morocco, time is elastic and

relational. More than once, it happened that I had to wait for hours before the person I had an appointment with showed up. Once, I had to personally ask someone where the lady I was supposed to meet lived and knock on her door myself after two hours of waiting for her, since she did not have a cell phone. This dynamic was extremely helpful in learning how to adapt to a new culture, abandoning the clock and following the others' rhythm. In addition, I left Italy with what I now call an unfounded prejudice. I was under the impression that the rural women of Morocco were passive victims lacking agency and segregated to household silence. This could not be further from the truth. Just a few days after meeting the first women, I knew I had a misconception about them, and the hours we spent talking only made it clearer. I found women who were extremely strong, resilient, full of resources to handle family and work crises, and capable of creating various survival strategies. I would argue that my initial idea was caused by a Eurocentric and Western feminism which, when applying its parameters to Global South women, ends up stripping them of their agency, considering them as victims to be saved as opposed to women with different versions of resistance and negotiation.

I got an apartment in the Chebane neighborhood, which was a working-class, traditional one, completely unfamiliar to tourists, especially during spring, where my presence as a foreigner was an absolute rarity. Being a young, white woman alone made me scared at first: I was anxious to see how I was going to be perceived, looked at, or spoken to. To try and blend in among other people and to respect the community, I started dressing more modestly: I only ever wore long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and sometimes I covered my hair, but this mimetism was only an illusion; invisibility was not an option for me and I understood it almost immediately. Everyone in the neighborhood ended up knowing who I was, or was speculating about it, and I could feel everyone's eyes on me at all times. But as time passed, I came to the conclusion that it was not a hostile space for me. The gazes

I used to receive were more out of curiosity and interest in what I was doing there and, in fact, I never felt unsafe or harassed; on the contrary, the men of the neighborhood proved to be caring and ready to help in everyday life, when I needed help with groceries or when I accidentally got lost. The public space in Larache, especially roads and cafés, is traditionally a male-dominated space, while women's space is concentrated in the domestic sphere or in the markets. Despite this, I was not assimilable to the local social code; I did not have to adhere to the same rules as local women had to, since my identity as a European gave me a sort of immunity to typical social rules. I could enter and occupy spaces that other women would not dare to enter without being stigmatized for it, meaning that my status as a foreign researcher allowed me to cross local gender boundaries.

During my stay, I found my place of comfort in a café located right below my apartment. It was a simple café with an outdoor space where I used to sit, with tables and chairs facing the road, and the smell of mint tea mixed with smoke going everywhere. There were always football matches on the TV and old and young men watching them or talking to one another. In Morocco, cafés are not just places of consumption, but a bastion of male public space, and that is why they sit outside to observe and comment on what happens on the street. The first times I went there, I remember the sudden silence and all eyes on me, and I felt like I was doing something wrong or transgressive. At the beginning, I had a persistent fear that sooner or later somebody would ask me to leave, but I decided to test it out anyway. I chose to go back day after day at the same time to transform the event into a ritual, an ethnographic strategy. This probably made me go from a provocative woman to a European university student who works there; the routine disarmed their suspicion. Day after day, the café stopped being a threatening place and became a safe space to observe what happened around my house, to work on my research, to get a tea, to relax, and to make human connections. During my stay there, it was always

the same man who used to bring me my tea: a man living in the neighborhood, initially very reserved and formal, who day by day began observing my work. He was fundamental for me: his explicit acceptance of me worked as an entrance permit that allowed me to be there while feeling safe. With time, he began trying to talk to me, and with the Arabic I had learned, I managed to respond to him, creating a two-month-long connection that made me feel like I belonged there. He saw me working without breaks and brought me more tea, or some seeds to snack on without me having to ask for anything. This apparently banal gesture was actually an act of care; he knew I was alone and craved human connection, and he gave it to me without ever asking for anything in return. This made me realize how field research is not only made of formal interviews, but is mostly based on this kind of micro-acts of humanity and hospitality. Moreover, it showed me that gender or class barriers can be blurred and overcome through reciprocal respect and kindness.

Ethnographic research does not merely analyze isolated individuals or contexts as foreign objects, but it has its roots in the field of social and interpersonal relations that are formed between the researcher and informants. My main key informant was Zineb, who served as an epistemological figure, fundamental to guaranteeing the translatability of cultural codes. We met as soon as I got to Larache, when she picked me up from the station, when I still had to process the impact of being alone in a different country. Her role was of primary importance: she taught me everything, from navigating between new neighborhoods to helping me with my research by translating and explaining Moroccan cultural and social codes. Furthermore, during the last week, I lost my apartment, facing a potential methodological and logistical crisis, and she opened up her home to me, letting me stay there for those last days. This dynamic showed me how fragile the illusion of the self-sufficient ethnographer really is, and how the success of research rests on the

hospitality of the studied context. During this time, I got the chance to analyze how Moroccan domestic architecture is not neutral, but physically codifies gender hierarchies and patriarchal power relations. At Zineb's home, lunches were the visible proof of this, with her mother cooking for hours and then bringing her husband his individual tray directly to his floor, where he used to eat alone without joining the rest of the family, or me, upstairs. After that, her mother brought a single large plate to share to a smaller table inside the kitchen for me, Zineb, her sister, and another female friend of ours, though not for herself, whom I never really saw eating, except for fruit at the end of meals, while still sitting at the table with us most of the time. This ritual of commensality functioned as a space of solidarity and intra-female sorority.

One particular episode showed me how field knowledge is generated through the body and somatic experience, not just through the mind or the eyes. On that day, Zineb invited me to a family picnic in a nearby park, and when it was time to eat, her mother kindly offered me a single plate and a fork, clearly worried that I might find eating with our hands from a shared plate uncomfortable. I decided to decline the offer and eat with them, fully immersing myself in the ritual. Eating with one's hands is not a natural or easy gesture, but a sophisticated embodied habitus that requires coordination and cleanliness. Clearly, I was incapable of doing so with the grace they possessed, which highlighted the astonishing difference between my academic preparation and the daily bodily mastery of local women. Everyone laughed at my attempt, but they promptly taught me how to do it, making me feel like part of the group. Rather than dismantling the colonial and academic asymmetry between the European researcher and local informants, this shared vulnerability brought us closer together by partially rebalancing epistemic power, highlighting temporarily inverted traditional hierarchies, with me being the clumsy apprentice who needed to be educated by local women in the primary use of her body.

Humor functioned as the anthropological indicator of overcoming strangeness, allowing me to enter a deeper dimension of familial complicity.

The entrance into domestic space and the sharing of intimate moments such as meals transformed field observation into a deep connection of trust and reciprocal vulnerability. This level of closeness brought out an immediate ethical urgency: when people open up their homes to you and confide their precarious lives to you, the ethics of research cannot reduce itself to a bureaucratic form to be signed, but must be a living effort of care and respect.

In this context, the first challenge was negotiating informed consent without triggering fear. When I conducted the interviews, my interpreter explained to the women that participation was completely voluntary and that they had the choice to skip questions or stop the interview at any time. At the beginning, the women were worried that I was a state functionary, so my interpreter and I had to reassure them and explain my background in detail, who I was and why I was there. Presenting myself with a printed university consent form would have been, first of all, useless, as I later discovered they were all illiterate, and secondly, it would have amplified the state paranoia they were experiencing. He then explained to them that we were going to record the session on the phone solely to assist with the full transcription of the interviews, and that the recordings would be deleted as soon as that work was completed. This reassurance was not made by words alone, but translated directly into data protection: indeed, I informed them that in the final research, their real names would not be displayed, as I would use pseudonyms for all of them to protect their identities. Moreover, I omitted the names of the specific agricultural companies and the intermediaries (waqqaf) from my research, making it impossible for the women to face dismissal or repercussions for their words.

To prevent extractive research and honor relational reciprocity during the sessions, I

brought pastries and juices for everyone to share according to Moroccan social norms. At the end of the day, following the advice of my professor and the interpreter, I provided financial compensation to the three women who had organized the afternoon. Feminist anthropology rejects the stance of those who extract information from local rural women and simply leave; bringing snacks was an act of respect toward local rituals of hospitality, while compensating the three organizers was a necessary economic recognition of their time and organizational labor. As the interviews progressed, I noticed the women looking at me with curiosity as I took notes in my notebook. The interpreter later informed me that they were intrigued by this, as they had never attended school and did not know how to read or write. This epistemic asymmetry risked reproducing deep class and educational divides, with me possessing tools of power from which they had been structurally excluded. From that point on, I decided to minimize notebook use, setting aside the coldness of immediate writing to prioritize empathetic listening, thereby restoring to their spoken words the dignity they deserve.

3.2 Informal access to the field: from corporate rejection to the domestic living room

At the beginning of my research, the original plan was to establish direct contact with agricultural farms around Larache, spending several days on-site to interview women laborers and observe their working conditions firsthand. The professor at the university in Larache with whom I collaborated agreed with this approach and offered to initiate contact with the farm administrations on my behalf. He officially contacted the managers of major agro-industrial export companies in the Loukkos plain, but we encountered a persistent wall of silence; I never received the official permit required to access the farms. Although I never received an explicit refusal, continuous postponements and unkept

promises to call back rendered an official visit impossible. This behavior was not a matter of casual organizational delay, but rather a precise gatekeeping tactic adopted by large export-oriented corporations. Indeed, agribusinesses utilize systematic postponements to discourage foreign researchers without explicitly denying access, which might otherwise spark suspicion or controversy. During the initial days and weeks of waiting, I had interpreted this slowness as an inherent aspect of local administrative pace and bureaucratic temporality; however, when three weeks passed without any response, I realized that this inertia was a passive act of deliberate resistance. This temporal bureaucratic evasion relied on time dilution as a defensive mechanism: leveraging the passage of time ultimately forces the researcher to abandon the attempt. After three weeks of elusive responses, the professor clearly told me that there was a precise reason behind this silence, and that it was not merely a matter of administrative delays: the companies were afraid of what a European researcher might see, document, and make public. These corporations deliberately attempt to shield themselves from an ethnographic gaze, as the exploitation of informal workers, extremely low wages, the absence of contracts and legal protections, and the intensive use of pesticides must be kept hidden. Maintaining a clean and ethical image for Western consumers requires the complete invisibilization of actual working conditions in the field. Their silence is thus the indirect proof of their ethical and legal fragility.

When the professor and I realized that access to the fields through a top-down channel was impossible, we decided to pursue a bottom-up approach, relying on the informal help of workers outside official avenues. In retrospect, I can affirm that the companies' refusal revealed itself as an extraordinary methodological opportunity. Had I entered the greenhouses with a manager's permit, the interviews might have been supervised by employers, or the women might have felt threatened by their presence. Moving the

research outside company premises and into the domestic spaces of the workers guaranteed the independence of the investigation and the genuine freedom of expression of the women.

The professor introduced me to Sana, a woman who worked as a cleaner on the university campus, in order to pursue an informal path. He set an appointment for the interpreter and me to meet her near her home, but we immediately encountered a logistical difficulty: she did not show up at the agreed-upon time, and we ended up waiting for an hour. Luckily, the interpreter ran into a friend of Sana's, whom he asked for help; she agreed and went to knock on Sana's door, as we could not contact her directly since she did not own a phone. After another half hour of waiting, Sana arrived at the meeting point, and we began getting to know each other. This lack of a phone illustrates the material reality of economic marginality, where communication does not rely on digital tools, but rather on physical proximity and neighborhood networks. When we started conversing through the interpreter, she expressed how much she would have loved to speak with me directly, sharing that she was amazed by my research and especially by my interest in their living conditions. She then proceeded to ask how many women I needed to interview and what specific types of work they should be engaged in; she was extraordinarily welcoming, kind, and eager to assist. In doing so, she became another active cultural mediator, capable of understanding the requirements of the research and translating them to the local women. Sana offered to open her home as a meeting point for all the interviews, simplifying my work and ensuring a sense of tranquility. She told me she knew several women who would be happy to help and reassured me that I no longer needed to worry about the farms closing their gates to me, since I now had her support. Her spatial hospitality thus became the condition of possibility for this ethnographic research. This openness, standing in stark contrast to the cold, defensive opacity of the farm managers,

made me realize the fundamental role of subaltern counter-networks of female solidarity. It demonstrated that when formal institutions close their doors to conceal exploitation, the informal female working class opens its domestic spaces to share its truth.

A few days after the appointment with Sana, she gathered all the women she could find and invited me over to her house to interview them. Her house was situated in a poor neighborhood and was an incomplete building, with external walls of raw red bricks and internal walls of unplastered concrete. We went inside and I saw three flights of brick stairs without any protection or handrail. This description is not merely a matter of aesthetics, but the physical materialization of economic precarity. The architecture of raw bricks and exposed concrete represents incremental housing, a tangible sign of the material living conditions of some Larache families. The women came in one or two at a time, when they were done with their work or their duties of care; they were not already there formally waiting for me. This fluid and progressive arrival respected the real rhythms of the daily lives of these women, as opposed to the temporal rigidity imposed by institutions or the companies they work for. I wanted it to be clear that participation was spontaneous and informal; they did not have to conform to more rules, as I simply wanted to have the chance to talk to them about their lives. The living room we settled in was a large, almost empty space, with only sofas around the unplastered room and a central carpet. My interpreter and I stayed in the same space, while the women took turns coming near us to respond to the questions, after which they went back to the other side of the room to keep talking with the other women. The physical closeness erased the hierarchical distance between the researcher and the women interviewed, and the fact that the women stayed in the room to talk among themselves created a peer support network, transforming the interview from an interrogation into a sharing moment. This informal domestic space became a counter-hegemonic safe space, away from the sanctioning gaze

of employers, the waqqaf, and patriarchal pressures. It can be said that Sana's living room allowed the workers' words to emerge as a collective narrative of dignity and resistance.

3.3 Sociodemographic profiles and intersectional vulnerabilities

From this point onwards, the thesis analyzes the biographical accounts of the eleven women interviewed in Larache. It is fundamental to note that these workers do not represent a monolithic group, nor are they all currently employed in the strawberry sector. In fact, while Amina works in strawberry harvesting and Salma in a packaging station, and Souad worked in strawberry processing in the past, the rest of the group is employed across other sectors of Larache's informal economy, such as fish processing, vegetable markets, flour mills, university cleaning, and domestic service. Including women from outside immediate field labor is a deliberate methodological choice: it shows that agricultural precarity does not exist in isolation, but forms part of a broader urban ecosystem of informal labor where women circulate between different low-wage jobs to support their households. Positioned at the intersection of class, education level, and marital status, these interlocutors reflect a complex intersectional hierarchy within the informal labor market of the Loukkos plain. This dynamic recalls the intersectionality paradigm of Soriano Miras et al. (2014); women who lack family or male protection networks end up becoming the most exposed reserve army of the informal work market in the Loukkos plain. Moreover, the entrance into precarious work does not represent for any of them a professional career choice or a theoretical emancipation; it represents the immediate response to an actual survival economic pressure of the domestic nucleus. The central figures of this paragraph are three de facto female heads of household: Rachida, a 55-year-old widow who lost her husband after a long illness and worked 35 years cleaning fish and in the vegetable market; Karima, a 52-year-old widow as well, who manages her

household with her widowed sister and single daughter; and Habiba, a 55-year-old married to a man in a wheelchair who requires daily care and meds. This represents the tangible proof of the data shared by Jehouani & Meryem (2023), which states that 49% of informal workers are widowed, divorced, or abandoned, meaning that they have to become de facto heads of household, as stated by Bossenbroek & Ftouhi (2021): their salary is the only means of material support for the household. As said by Karima:

"There is no male provider in the household, so we depend mainly on ourselves to manage daily life and household expenses."

In some cases, the daughters are the ones who have to take care of their numerous family members because of their domestic conditions. It is the case of Maryam, a single 33-year-old woman who became the economic pillar for seven people following the illness and death of her mother two years prior. As she states:

"I work mainly to support my large family after the death of my mother two years ago... there are around seven people depending on the household income. Most of the money I earn is spent on family necessities, and very little remains for my personal needs."

When a male salary is not available or following a loss like this one, older daughters have to carry the family on their shoulders, combining carework in the domestic sphere and wage work in precarious conditions, forcing them to sacrifice their own ambitions. Among these ambitions appears education, which a lot of the interviewed women wish they could have had. Illiteracy is not a personal lack, but rather the outcome of a precise patriarchal family hierarchy that historically prioritized the education of sons at the expense of daughters. It is the case of Karima, who, about education, said:

"In my family, education was prioritized mainly for boys, while three daughters, including myself, did not receive formal schooling. Because of this, work became the main path available to support ourselves and survive economically."

This is the proof of what I analyzed in the previous chapters, namely that 86% of informal workers are completely illiterate, with only 12% of them having completed primary school, and 2% secondary. As stated by Lopez-Acevedo et al. (2021) and Verme et al. (2016), the lack of education denies every chance of access to office and service jobs, condemning these women to manual unskilled work, where the workforce is undervalued and easily substitutable. These narratives deconstruct the patriarchal ideology of the second salary, which, as stated by Bossenbroek and Ftouhi (2021), undervalues female labor as pocket money "to buy lipstick". The salaries of these women are completely absorbed by rent, food, medication, transportation, and utility bills, leaving almost nothing for their personal care or anything else. The informal market extracts profits by refusing to recognize that women's work allows and guarantees the biological and material reproduction of rural families. Moreover, these women represent the most dramatic, lowest point of the U-shaped curve described by Claudia Goldin (1994, 2023). Being too poor, without education, and lacking a male breadwinner, they cannot gain social respect by staying home, but are forced to enter the informal work arena and endure the stigma caused by manual labor, just to survive.

3.4 Voices from the strawberry sector: fieldwork, packaging stations, and factory discipline

The work inside the strawberry supply chain (filière) in the Loukkos plain is characterized by an operational and spatial dualism: on one side, there is direct manual harvesting in the fields and under plastic tunnels; on the other, processing and packaging in the stations de conditionnement. Amina and Salma, two 39-year-old women, both work in this environment: the former in Laouamra, and the latter in the station of Ain Chouk. Their physical routine is debilitating in many respects: their shifts are unpredictable, ranging

from 8 to 12 hours or more, while day and night shifts alternate unstably during the biological peaks of strawberry ripening. These rhythms disrupt the organization of family life and biological rest, as articulated by Amina herself:

"I have around five years of experience working in the strawberry sector, including factory work, packaging, and farm-related activities. I previously worked in the area of Laouamra... A normal working day lasts around eight hours, although overtime is sometimes added depending on production needs. Work schedules can change between day and night shifts, making daily life unpredictable and tiring."

The rigidity of these shifts is directly linked to the overarching structure of the Plan Maroc Vert; strawberries are a highly perishable fruit destined for export to Europe, which means that harvesting and packaging times must be reduced to a minimum, transferring temporal pressure directly onto the bodies of the workers. The experience of Salma in the packaging station (station de conditionnement) of Ain Chouk, where labor takes place under a rigid industrial discipline, illustrates this perfectly: Salma must manage her daily life while working a shift that starts at 5:00 a.m. and finishes at 4:00 p.m. for 90 dirhams a day, less than 9 euros. Her employer strictly forbids the use of cell phones and constantly surveils her and her colleagues to prevent errors in packaging or damage to the strawberry boxes destined for European supermarkets. There is a stark contrast between the extreme precision required to handle such a delicate fruit and the total wage devaluation of the job. In her own words, Salma recalled:

"My workday starts very early, around 5:00 in the morning, and usually finishes around 4:00 in the afternoon... The work environment is strict. Phone use is forbidden during work, and there are strict safety rules... The hardest part is that the salary is low compared to the long hours and physical effort. Even though the daily wage is around 90 Moroccan dirhams, it still feels insufficient."

It is crucial to connect these empirical observations to the "nimble fingers" theory formulated by Elson and Pearson (1981) and expanded by Moreno Nieto (2012) and Bossenbroek (2016). The ability of Salma and her colleagues to rapidly select and package strawberries without damaging them is not an innate biological female quality, but a genuine technical competency acquired through years of labor. Agribusiness naturalizes this skill, framing it as a natural female gift in order to withhold professional recognition from the workers and justify wages as low as 90 dirhams a day.

Agribusiness companies not only underpay their workforce, but offload operational, transportation, and even hygienic costs directly onto the workers. This is the case for Amina, who states that when companies do not provide transportation, women are forced to organize themselves and pay for private taxis out of pocket. Sharing a taxi amounts to 8 dirhams each way, meaning that 16 dirhams are taken from their salary every day just to reach the workplace, which corresponds to almost 20% of their daily wage. Furthermore, Amina reveals that workers have to buy soap to wash their hands with their own money:

"Transportation is one of the biggest challenges. Sometimes the company provides transport close to the factory, but often workers must pay for taxis themselves. For example, transportation can cost around eight dirhams each way, which becomes expensive over time (16 DH/day)."

"Another difficulty is that workers sometimes have to buy certain supplies, such as soap, using their own money."

The case of the soap is directly linked to the previously analyzed concept of embodied toxicity: Dr. Ismaïl Tomizy (in Hellio, 2014) had already denounced that employers ban workers from using gloves so as not to damage the aesthetic appearance of the fruit. This leads to a profound reflection: women are forced to touch barehanded the plants wet from

toxic chemical products that cause allergies and broader health issues, and the company even denies workers the soap to clean themselves with at the end of the shift. It represents the most extreme form of externalizing biological costs onto the female body.

Working under these conditions also has a severe impact on the social and relational dimension in the fields and packaging centers. Amina and Houda both admit that they prefer working in total silence, avoiding conversations with other women when possible. As they state:

"I usually prefer to focus on my work and avoid too much conversation because I believe concentrating helps me earn more and complete tasks faster. It is possible for me to work an entire shift without speaking much if I choose to."

"I usually prefer to work quietly and independently. I do not socialize much at work and mostly speak only when necessary."

Individual work and the lack of informal spaces for interaction end up creating an isolated work environment that connects directly to my field notes, in which I highlighted the tense and silent atmosphere encountered when coming into contact with workers returning from a shift on a truck, where women were completely silent due to physical exhaustion. Silence in the fields can be seen as an efficiency tactic: in a piecework system or under grueling rhythms, talking to one another means losing focus and risking earning less or enduring reprimands. Workers end up using silence as an individual shield to survive the shift and maximize yield, but at the same time, this forced silence obstructs the emergence of trade unions or collective demands.

To conclude this section, it is crucial to highlight the generational fracture and the profound desire to escape from this sector. Veteran workers in the strawberry sector, such as Amina and Salma completely reject the idea that their daughters or young women in general might end up following the same path of labor they were forced to pursue. Amina

advises younger girls to pursue their education and seek stable employment, revealing that her only true dream is to emigrate to Europe to achieve dignity and economic security. As she states:

"I would advise her to think carefully about stability and future opportunities. While strawberry work provides income, it also comes with instability, low wages, and difficult working conditions."

"I would like more stable working conditions, better wages, and reliable transportation... Like many workers, I dream about going to Europe, especially Spain or France, to look for better opportunities and a more stable life."

Amina's dream of moving to Spain directly connects to the concept of H'ragues, which will be analyzed in detail in the following chapter. Strawberry fields are not perceived by workers as a final destination or an opportunity for professional career advancement, but rather as a transitory space of suffering that they hope to escape.

3.5 Beyond the fields: multi-sectoral precarity, university subcontracting, and domestic work in urban Larache

Moving the analytical gaze from the plastic tunnels of strawberries to the semi-urban fabric of Larache, it can be noted that informal precarity extends itself to university cleaning, flour mills, fish processing, and domestic work. The strawberry sector is just one of the many nodes of an hyperexploitation circuit that extracts value from women's bodies. The women interviewed do not possess a sectorial or static working identity; on the contrary, access to the informal market in Larache is characterized by a continuous convertibility between different working sectors. On this topic, Naima, a 55-year-old woman, stated:

"I have worked for around thirty-five years in different kinds of jobs. Much of my work

was informal and based on whatever opportunities were available. I worked in fish processing, especially removing fish heads during production work, and I also worked in vegetable markets selling or handling products like potatoes and tomatoes."

Meanwhile, Jamila explained that before entering the cleaning sector, where she has been working for the last year and a half, she worked for seven years in a flour company, and Rachida similarly noted: "I have many years of work experience in different kinds of jobs, including factory work, fish processing, cold storage work, and buying and selling goods." These other sectors present the same problematics as the strawberry companies. Regarding low and unstable wages, Naima stated:

"The hardest part was the instability of the work and the low wages. Payment changed depending on the task and the length of the shift. Some days the earnings were around 40 to 60 Moroccan dirhams, while full shifts could bring around 50 to 90 dirhams. Although this income was better than nothing, it was never enough to create a stable life."

The daily fluctuation of wages makes any long-term family planning impossible, and the lack of a fixed monthly salary generates a state of chronic financial anxiety that forces workers to live hand-to-mouth and to chase whatever daily job is available in any extra-agricultural sector. This phenomenon deconstructs the idea of an "agricultural worker" or a "cleaning lady" as differentiated bureaucratic tags. These women serve as a completely fluid and flexible workforce; it is from this extreme convertibility that the urban agro-industrial economy of Larache extracts surplus, highlighting the concept of an informal reserve army. The lack of contracts, social security contributions, and trade union protections allows employers to hire these women only when needed and to shift them from fish to strawberries, from flour to cleaning, offloading the cost of unemployment periods onto their shoulders.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the women interviewed live in informal and peripheral neighborhoods, away from the urban life of Larache. Amina lives in "Jnan Bidawa", while Souad and Habiba both reside in the "70 area", both impoverished marginal zones that show how the precarization of informal labor does not only concern the rural douars of the Loukkos plain, but also manifests in the residential segregation of urban peripheries. Living in these neighborhoods lacking public transportation and urban infrastructure links residential segregation to workplace precarity, forcing women to face a double penalization: the exhaustion stemming from a precarious labor market and the isolation that accompanies living in impoverished peripheral neighborhoods, which requires the use of taxis to go everywhere, including to work.

There exists another apparently formal sector that absorbs the female workforce in Larache: cleaning jobs in university structures. Contrary to what one might think, entry into a public institution does not guarantee any greater stability than other jobs offered by the informal market, since the university does not hire women directly, but externalizes the service to private subcontracting companies. This creates a veritable wage trap, with a fixed salary of 1,500 dirhams per month (around 140 euros) in exchange for exhausting 12-hour shifts. Four of the women I interviewed worked or still work in this sector: Maryam (33 years old), Latifa (50 years old), Jamila (50 years old), and Rachida (60 years old). Despite having ages and life stories that differ from one another, they all share the same low salary of 1,500 dirhams. Regarding the long shifts and low pay, Maryam stated:

"My work shifts are very long, usually around twelve hours, which leaves little time for rest or personal activities. My work is housework at the university... My monthly income is around 1,500 Moroccan dirhams, but after transportation costs and household expenses, almost nothing remains."

Jamila similarly confirmed:

"My salary is relatively limited, around 1,500 Moroccan dirhams, so most of it goes toward basic personal and household necessities. Everyday expenses are very high, and even small amounts of money no longer last long."

Beyond the low salary, the internal work environment presents severe problems: the suffering of these women stems not only from financial or physical factors, but becomes deeply psychological and emotional. On this, Jamila states:

"The work itself is not the most difficult part. The real challenge comes from relationships between people at work. There is sometimes jealousy, monitoring, and unfair treatment between coworkers, which creates emotional stress and tension. In many ways, stress itself feels like a kind of illness."

This testimony shows how, in underpaid and undervalued work contexts, companies foster competition among workers, which becomes unbearable for the women; as Jamila notes, the physical fatigue of cleaning work is manageable, but the body and mind are devastated by the toxicity of interpersonal relations, characterized by jealousy, mutual monitoring, and unfair treatment among colleagues. The metaphor used by Jamila compares relational stress to a real illness produced by the organization of work. Latifa, on the other hand, affirms that the only way not to collapse is to exercise strict emotional self-control, avoiding anger and keeping her nerves steady in the workplace. As she stated:

"I generally feel satisfied with my current work environment... One important thing for me is avoiding anger and keeping my nerves calm while working."

The isolation and jealousy between coworkers are not accidental, but the direct result of how companies manage space and communication. On this point, one concern mentioned by Latifa was the absence of group gatherings or meetings at work, which may reduce communication and coordination among workers.

She denounces the complete lack of meetings or group gatherings at the workplace. This absence has a clear anthropological explanation: companies assign individual tasks in a manner that isolates workers from one another, deliberately avoiding moments of assembly or discussion among the cleaners. This responds to a precise logic of control: without collective meeting spaces, workers are unable to coordinate, communicate, or build class consciousness, remaining isolated and easily vulnerable before the employer.

The most extreme and invisible extra-agricultural job in Larache is private domestic work in other people's homes. This is the case for Habiba, a 55-year-old (or 56, as she is unsure of her exact age) woman who worked for twenty consecutive years as a domestic worker for a single family, enduring exhausting shifts that stretched from early morning into the night. Even though it was twenty years of continuous service, her work remained 100% informal: she had no contract, no paid leave, and no social security contributions (CNSS). When she was forced to stop working a year ago to return home and care for her sick husband, the family she worked for dismissed her without granting her any severance pay or retirement benefits, leaving her in absolute poverty. As she recalled:

"I worked in domestic service for almost twenty years for one family. The work was informal, without an official contract or social protection. I eventually stopped working around a year ago. At the end of the job, there were some problems related to payment and the final agreement."

Regarding her double burden of wage labor and caregiving, she added:

"My daily life was extremely demanding. I worked during the day and often continued late into the night, sometimes until morning... taking care of my husband's health, buying medicine, and preparing it for him. Balancing work and caregiving created a great amount of physical and emotional pressure."

Private domestic work represents the pinnacle of capitalist value extraction: twenty years

of grueling toil do not generate any formal rights, transforming the aging of women into a condemnation to misery.

While work in the strawberry sector takes place in open fields under plastic tunnels and is characterized by extreme seasonality and unpredictable biological peaks, extra-agricultural urban labor moves into enclosed, indoor spaces, such as private houses and university corridors. Many women look for jobs in the university cleaning sector hoping to find respite from the physical exhaustion of the fields or from the extreme heat and cold of the greenhouses. Nonetheless, they end up discovering that moving to the city merely substitutes one form of exploitation for another. Both in the fields and in urban services, there is a structural lack of formal contracts, social security coverage (CNSS), and guarantees for the future. The fixed salary of 1,500 dirhams for cleaners guarantees an apparent regularity compared to the variable 90 daily dirhams earned in the strawberry fields, but this regularity is immediately neutralized by inflation and the rising cost of urban living. On this issue, Rachida stated:

"One positive aspect of work is the social environment... The hardest part is the financial pressure. Even with long working hours, the salary is not enough to fully cover the family’s needs. Prices for essential goods such as gas, flour, and sugar have increased a lot, and daily life has become more expensive and stressful."

Precarity starts during the daily commute to and from work. According to the women I interviewed, both agricultural companies and cleaning subcontracting companies offload the responsibility and cost of transportation entirely onto the workers' shoulders, refusing to compensate them for the money spent. This mechanism transforms spatial mobility into a real private tax on labor. Amina, who works in the strawberry fields, states:

"Transportation is one of the biggest challenges. Sometimes the company provides transport close to the factory, but often workers must pay for taxis themselves. For

example, transportation can cost around eight dirhams each way, which becomes expensive over time."

This shows that the company does not guarantee consistent transportation, forcing women to pay for their own taxis to get to work. In the same way, Maryam, who works in the university cleaning sector, has to travel using taxis and buses, whose costs have significantly increased, devouring a large part of her salary. Moreover, traffic and poor road conditions often cause delays, generating anxiety before the start of a 12-hour shift. On this, Maryam notes:

"Transportation is especially difficult because I do not own private transport and must rely on taxis or buses. Transportation costs have increased significantly and now take a large part of my salary. Delays caused by transportation and road conditions also create problems at work."

The lack of efficient public transportation functions as a mechanism of wage devaluation and psychophysical exhaustion.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight the structural responsibility of subcontracting (*sous-traitance*) companies in the exploitation of female workers. The mechanism of *sous-traitance* allows institutions to benefit from cleaning labor while deliberately avoiding any legal, contractual, or social responsibility toward the workers. Private cleaning companies win lowest-bid contracts by cutting labor costs, imposing 12-hour shifts, capping salaries at 1,500 dirhams, and denying any allowance for transportation or health risks. Urban neoliberalism uses subcontracting to construct a regime of hyperexploitation shielded by public institutions, leaving women in a state of constant economic vulnerability.

To sum up, this precarity has two facets: the agricultural realm of strawberries and the extra-agricultural realm of cleaning and services. Whether these women earn 90 dirhams

a day bent under greenhouses, 1,500 dirhams a month cleaning university corridors, or clean private homes for twenty years without a contract, they all share a common condition: the impossibility of accumulating capital or achieving economic stability. These limited resources are immediately absorbed into the domestic sphere, a dynamic that will be analyzed in the following section.

3.6 Domestic budgeting, inflation, and patriarchal financial negotiations

The wages earned, whether the fluctuating daily pay from strawberries or the 1,500 dirhams from cleaning, do not remain in the workers' hands for personal consumption or leisure time, but are immediately absorbed by inflation on primary food items. The workers state that there has been a price hike on gas cylinders, since households in Larache still rely on them, as well as flour and sugar:

"Prices for essential goods such as gas, flour, and sugar have increased a lot, and daily life has become more expensive and stressful."

Inflation works as a silent and structural mechanism of impoverishment. In working-class families in Larache, rising prices transform daily grocery shopping into an experience of constant anxiety, and even those who work 12 hours a day struggle to secure basic subsistence. Regarding these difficulties, Naima noted:

"Most of the income was used for household expenses, food, and utility bills. Sometimes electricity and water bills had to be paid gradually because there was not enough money available at once. Financial difficulties were constant, and very little money remained for personal use."

She explained that, lacking lump-sum liquidity and without access to bank credit, women develop informal financial survival tactics by paying bills gradually. This practice shows that paying bills in instalments is the only way to prevent the home from being

disconnected from the electricity or water grid, fragmenting their meager daily earnings to appease creditors.

Women living alone must manage their household autonomously and face domestic costs on their own. This is the case for Latifa, a 50-year-old woman who asserts the importance of using her monthly salary to carry out repairs and maintenance in the home. For divorced or autonomous women like Latifa, directly allocating the budget toward domestic repairs is not a mere expense, but an act of personal independence through which they reclaim material control over their living space. In her own words:

"I mainly spend my salary on personal needs and household responsibilities, including repairs and maintenance in the home. Managing my own finances independently is something I consider important."

The scope of budget micro-management expands when considering informal cooperation between women of the same family unit. The lack of state guarantees and the instability of informal work push women to share housing resources, salaries, and domestic labor. With the disappearance, death, illness, or unemployment of male breadwinners, the management of the house shifts to matrilineal and sororal networks. Two of the women I interviewed lived in this condition: Karima and Maryam. Karima, 52 years old, lives and shares rent and bills with her sister, who is widowed like her. In the absence of male figures, their household relies on their mutual cooperation and the occasional contribution of her daughter, Amina. Maryam, 33 years old, following her mother's passing, shares the management of the house and the care of her family with her younger sister. These stories can be linked to the concept of social reproduction networks. The cohabitation between sisters and the sharing of costs represent an essential collective survival strategy to avoid financial crisis and the collapse of the family unit. On this, Karima told me:

"I live with my family and share responsibilities with my sister, who is also widowed.

There is no male provider in the household, so we depend mainly on ourselves to manage daily life and household expenses... My daughter also contributes financially when possible."

And Maryam noted:

"At home, household duties are shared with my sister because our mother is no longer present to manage the home."

When a parent or a relative falls ill, these women's living conditions deteriorate abruptly. Not having contracts or social security and health coverage (CNSS) places them in a vulnerable position where health expenditures must be paid out of pocket. This is the case for Houda and Naima, both of whom have experienced ill or deceased relatives. Houda is only 30 years old and works in the informal market two to three days a week to pay for her sick daughter's care, while taking her to specialized medical appointments. She states: "I am married and have two daughters, one of whom is currently sick and requires special care... One income alone is often not enough to cover household needs, especially when there are children and health-related expenses."

On the other hand, Naima had to face the difficulties caused by the illness of her husband, who was sick for years before passing away, requiring substantial financial resources that drained the savings Naima had accumulated over 35 years of informal work. Illness in these cases operates as a factor of systemic impoverishment, with accumulated money directly absorbed by pharmacies or private clinics, making it impossible for them to save or accumulate capital.

Beyond the purchase of medication, managing illness requires a biological and material effort that falls entirely on the worker's body. Habiba explained to me that after endless shifts, she had to go home and care for her husband, who uses a wheelchair. She had to prepare meals for him, buy and administer his medication, move him, and take care of the

house until late at night:

"My daily life was extremely demanding. I worked during the day and often continued late into the night, sometimes until morning... taking care of my husband's health, buying medicine, and preparing it for him. Balancing work and caregiving created a great amount of physical and emotional pressure."

This is a case of embodied carework in which the woman's body represents the only available support infrastructure, where the overlap between informal work and domestic care labor produces a psychophysical toll that compromises her own health. The disengagement of the state in the healthcare and social security sectors must be compensated for by the work and salaries of women, who act as living shock absorbers: they cover medical expenses with their savings and sustain rent costs through sororal cooperation. This central role in the economic survival of the family triggers a questioning of traditional gender roles.

The traditional patriarchal framework assigns men the exclusive role of breadwinner, but the constant increase in living costs and male occupational precarity cause the progressive erosion of this social norm. The entry of married women into wage labor takes place in the face of initial resistance from husbands, who ultimately accept it not out of an ideological or feminist stance, but out of simple survival necessity. Salma, a 39-year-old woman with three children, told me:

"At first, my husband did not want me to work, but later he accepted it because of the economic pressures facing the family... Today, women’s income is necessary because families often cannot survive on one salary alone."

The same dynamic occurred with Houda, a 30-year-old woman with two daughters:

"At first, my husband was not completely comfortable with the idea of me working outside the home. Over time, however, he became more understanding and accepting

because of the financial needs of the family."

In almost all the cases I documented among working-class families, women's wages are immediately allocated to essential consumption, such as food, utility bills, and children's education. Once again, it is essential to dismantle the notion that views women's wages as a mere extra or money for makeup. Empirical evidence completely refutes this narrative: female earnings represent a structural and irreplaceable component for the biological and social reproduction of the family. On this point, Salma adds:

"My husband and I share the costs of the household together. Most of the money goes toward family needs, bills, and especially the children’s education. There is almost no money left for personal use."

Regarding the acceptance of women's work, Amina stated:

"Women need income because life has become expensive and unstable. Having work allows women to support themselves and their families and gives them a sense of independence and security, even if the wages are limited."

In contexts where the male figure is absent, elderly, or unemployed, women assume full responsibility for domestic sustenance, leading to a complete inversion of patriarchal and intergenerational hierarchies, with older workers or young unmarried women supporting elderly fathers or unemployed men, effectively becoming de facto heads of household. The cases of Maryam and Rachida illustrate this phenomenon. Maryam is 33 years old and works to support a family following her mother's death. She states:

"I work mainly to support my large family after the death of my mother two years ago. My family includes my father and six siblings, so there are around seven people depending on the household income."

Rachida, on the other hand, is 60 years old and still has to work to support her three adult, unemployed sons:

"I am a 60-year-old woman living with my three children, who are all still unmarried and live at home with me. One of my sons is around 30 years old, and the others are close in age. I am mainly responsible for supporting the family financially and managing the household."

It is important to note the structural contrast that pervades this dynamic: workers have gained a decisional and economic centrality that is fundamental to the survival of the household, yet they continue to pay a heavy toll on their bodies, without legal or health protections. Faced with a present characterized by physical wear and tear and the impossibility of accumulating capital, what margins are left to imagine a better future?

3.7 Emaciated dreams, ethnographic encounters, and generational hopes

When I first started conducting the interviews, I noted that the majority of the women did not know the year in which they were born, and consequently, they were unsure of precisely how old they were. Their responses when the interpreter asked them for their age were approximate ("late thirties", "around 50", "around 60") or reluctant. This chronological inaccuracy is the direct consequence of the structural illiteracy that affects 86% of informal workers in the rural areas of the Loukkos plain, as well as the historical exclusion of rural populations from civil status registers. I have already analyzed how time in Morocco is not as linear and precise as in Europe, and this provides further evidence of such a perspective within the larger picture. The lives of these workers are measured through a biological and ecological temporality, through the cycles of the agricultural seasons or through major personal events, such as the birth of a child or the death of a relative.

It is therefore not a surprise that when the women saw me taking notes in my notebook, they were struck by the practical act of writing. I have already highlighted the power

imbalance between myself and them, as these women have been systematically excluded from the written word and institutional bureaucracy (which includes agricultural cooperatives, where male administrators manage 96% of bureaucratic procedures, as shown by Tribak & Rguig, 2021). I attempted to position the notebook as an act of witnessing, allowing these women to see their spoken words written down and striving to foster a consciousness that their stories of biological fatigue were emerging from the invisibility of Larache.

At the end of the interviews, a couple of women approached me and asked if I could help them find an agricultural job in Spain. At first, this request almost made me laugh, as I assumed they were joking; however, after just a moment, I realized they were entirely serious. The request revealed an unfamiliarity with the rigid institutional channels (filières) that regulate circular migration, as well as how these women projected an assumed power of intermediation onto me, the Western researcher, overlooking formal bureaucratic requirements. Moreover, this request directly connects to the responses that almost all the women gave when I asked them about their future aspirations:

"Like many workers, I dream about going to Europe, especially Spain or France, to look for better opportunities and a more stable life." (Amina)

"I dream of moving to Europe to find better opportunities and improve my life, but financial difficulties make this goal very hard to achieve at the moment." (Maryam)

"I remain open to the possibility of a better opportunity in Spain if the conditions become clear and suitable in the future." (Latifa)

Chronic precarity, the lack of savings, and physical exhaustion diminish the very capacity to imagine a different future. There is an underlying analytical tragedy to their request for me to find them a job: the greatest dream of emancipation that these women are able to envision and hope for does not involve rest, retirement, or an office job, but rather access

to another form of arduous manual agricultural labor under different greenhouses. The violence of precarity is so profound that it narrows the horizon of what they can dream to a simple substitution of one site of exploitation for another, one that is better paid, but not truly liberating.

I previously analyzed how some of the women prefer working in isolation and silence, but this does not apply to all participants. For many of them, sharing time, jokes, domestic difficulties, and laughter constitutes a genuine informal emotional infrastructure. On this point, Naima stated:

"One of the most important things at work was companionship with coworkers. Laughing and spending time with the other women helped me endure long and difficult working days... Yes, social interaction with coworkers was very important. We laughed together and shared conversations to make the difficult work easier and less exhausting emotionally."

Similarly, Rachida emphasized:

"One positive aspect of work is the social environment. The women and coworkers are close to one another, almost like neighbors or family members, and there are solidarity and mutual support between us... We talk often and support each other emotionally. The workplace creates a sense of community where women share daily struggles, family concerns, and moments of humor together. These relationships help make difficult work more bearable."

Habiba also noted:

"Yes, there was communication and solidarity between the women. We talked, laughed together, and shared moments that helped reduce the stress of work. These interactions created a sense of companionship and emotional support."

In the absence of public psychological support services or health protections, sociability

among workers operates as a tool for maintaining mental health and resisting the biological destruction of the body. Beyond migrating to Spain in search of a more stable life, some of the women share the dream of opening a small business near their homes, a dream that stems not from neoliberal ambition, but from the need to escape the absolute control of employers and the physical exhaustion caused by domestic and agricultural labor. On this point, Naima expressed: "I would like to change my source of income and start a small business based on buying and selling goods. I hope for more financial stability and a life that is less dependent on unstable daily labor." Finally, when asked about their greatest dream, two of the women I interviewed expressed their desire to perform the Umrah or Hajj, the religious pilgrimage to Mecca, in order to find inner peace and forget their daily suffering. Karima explained:

"I would like a life with less exhaustion and more stability. One of my personal dreams is to perform Umrah and find spiritual peace after many years of hard work and responsibility."

In a similar vein, Jamila shared:

"I would like to live with less stress and more peace of mind. My biggest wish is to find emotional and spiritual comfort. I dream of performing Hajj or Umrah one day because I believe it would bring peace to my heart and help me forget some of the worries and pressures of life."

When capital accumulation, retirement, and social mobility are precluded by the structures of informal capitalism, the spiritual and sacred dimension becomes the only untainted space of dignity and inner peace, with the pilgrimage representing a symbolic liberation from a life of invisibility.

In the same phase of the interview in which I asked the women about their dreams, I also asked what advice they would give to younger girls or their daughters regarding

agricultural and informal labor. There was complete unanimity among them: none wanted their daughters to follow the same path as they had. Mothers accept their condition as 'living shock-absorbers' within the manual informal market so that their wages can be converted into educational capital for their daughters, as education and the acquisition of foreign languages are viewed not merely as formal qualifications, but as the sole hope for intergenerational redemption. On this point, Jamila, Rachida, and Maryam stated:

"I would strongly encourage her to continue studying and to learn languages because education and language skills create better opportunities in life. Without education or communication skills, job opportunities remain limited." (Jamila)

"I would not encourage young girls to follow the same difficult path that I experienced... I would prefer women to live comfortably, receive support, and have better opportunities through education and stability." (Rachida)

"I would encourage her to look for better opportunities, especially jobs that provide higher salaries, stability, and opportunities to use education or language skills." (Maryam)

In this perspective, converting their daily wages into educational capital represents the mothers' ultimate attempt to break the hereditary cycle of precarity, ensuring that their own biological toll becomes the foundation for their daughters' social emancipation.

This chapter aimed to demonstrate the continuum of exploitation experienced by these female workers. By examining their labor within both the agricultural sector, under the greenhouses, and the service sector, such as university cleaning, this analysis has shown how informal capitalism is rooted in the systematic devaluation of women's work. Although these women become *de facto* breadwinners, they remain unrecognized as such, and I have explored how they negotiate their daily lives and rights while trapped in exploitative conditions. Furthermore, I analyzed the role of informal emotional infrastructures and spiritual aspirations as mechanisms for preserving dignity in the face

of severe bodily depletion. According to Social Reproduction Theory, these women must bear on their shoulders both agricultural production and the survival of their households, paying a heavy biological toll without any legal or health protections.

The physical depletion and the weight of household reproduction experienced in the Loukkos plain constitute the structural prerequisite sought by major European agribusinesses. In the following chapter, it will be analyzed how the institutional mechanisms of *contratación en origen* and the GECCO program intercept this local vulnerability, transforming the female workforce of Loukkos into seasonal *temporeras* in the strawberry fields of Huelva, Spain.

Chapter 4.

The agro-migratory circuit between the Loukkos and Huelva

In this fourth chapter, the analysis shifts towards transnational circular migration. The very same women interviewed from the Loukkos plain constitute the specific sociodemographic target of this process. On the basis of this analytical link, this thesis argues that the delocalization of Spanish agribusinesses to Larache and the importation of Moroccan female labor to Spain represent two sides of the same global coin, forming a single, highly integrated agro-migratory circuit. By introducing an intersectional decolonial and gender perspective, this chapter aims to uncover how the Strait of Gibraltar functions as a highly selective biopolitical filter. This mechanism enables the flexible and temporary importation of Moroccan women for the strawberry harvest in Huelva, while systematically externalizing the social and biological costs of their reproduction back to rural Morocco. Ultimately, analyzing this transnational dimension connects the greenhouses of Larache with the fields of Huelva, revealing how the extraction of surplus value is structurally grounded in the same global asymmetries of gender and development.

4.1. The institution of contratación en origen and the ethnic filter

The arrival of Moroccan women in the Huelva region was not an accidental event, but rather the result of a specific campaign by Huelva's agricultural employers' organizations ("*patronal agrícola"*) to circumvent trade union conflicts. Historically, the strawberry sector has been built upon continuous cycles of workforce ethnic substitution. At the end of the 1990s, the Spanish fields were cultivated by local day laborers and groups of male migrants coming from Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreno Nieto (2012) shows how this dynamic began to change between 2000 and 2002, when serious protests and social mobilizations occurred against immigration laws and the harsh working conditions

inside the fields, leading employers to perceive Moroccan men as conflictual or dangerous. This mistrust pushed employers' associations to look for more docile and easily disciplined workers, employing what Moreno Nieto terms an “ethnic filter” (filtro étnico). In 2002, as Katja Lindner and Till Kathmann (in Gertel e Sippel, 2014, p. 127) explain, the Spanish government initiated this ethnic substitution, bringing around 7,000 Polish women to Huelva, who initially lacked local union representation, causing Moroccan men to lose their previous jobs. Nonetheless, the Eastern enlargement of the European Union disrupted Spanish employers' control over Polish workers, forcing them to seek a new workforce in rural Morocco. Moreno Nieto (2012) explains how, since the entry of Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria into the EU, the women coming from these countries gained full freedom of sectoral self-allocation; this allowed them to leave Huelva's fields to find work in tourism and the catering industry, where they received better wages and better working conditions. An example illustrating how employers perceived this new dynamic can be found in an interview cited by Emmanuelle Hellio (2013), in which the coordinator of the Aeneas-Cartaya Project, Jesús Oveja, candidly admitted on May 14, 2009, that from a strictly mercantilist perspective: “Romanians are no longer recruited [en origen]... A contracted labourer from a non-EU source can only work in Huelva, while the Romanian goes where she wants. [...] The Moroccan [woman], no, she has to work in agriculture”. Finally, to visually understand this process, we can analyze the data concerning the evolution of seasonal labor quotas recruited directly in Morocco through the *contratación en origen* (GECCO) program for the fields of Huelva. The official statistics show that contracts signed in Morocco prior to departure rose from just 198 in 2000/01 (compared to 540 for Poland) to 2,330 in 2005/06 (compared to 9,796 Polish and 19,153 Romanian), surged to 13,600 in 2007/08 alongside Romania's EU accession, and peaked at 14,190 in 2009 (as shown in Figure 11).

Cuadro 1. Contrataciones de temporeros a través del contingente/GECCO en la provincia de Huelva por nacionalidad y campaña

Países	2000/ 2001	2001/ 2002	2002/ 2003	2003/ 2004	2004/ 2005	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013*	2013/ 2014*
Bulgaria	0	0	0	508	604	941	3.021	4.656	0	0	0	0	0	0
Colombia	0	149	177	105	82	8	22	11	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ecuador	0	0	15	8	64	26	12	14	7	0	0	0	0	0
Filipinas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	270	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marruecos	198	336	95	620	1.094	2.330	5.277	13.600	14.190	5.450	5.300	2.409	2.185	2.000
Polonia	540	4.954	7.535	8.506	7.361	9.796	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rumanía	0	970	4.178	10.589	13.186	19.153	20.710	20.634	0	0	0	0	0	0
Senegal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	749	40	0	0	0	0	0
Ucrania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	557	130	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	738	6.409	12.000	20.336	22.391	32.254	29.042	40.491	14.367	5.450	5.300	2.409	2.185	2.000

figure 11: GECCO seasonal recruitment in Huelva by nationality and season. Source: Subdelegación de Huelva, in Gordo-Márquez (2014, p. 178), cited in Macías Llaga et al. (2016, p. 182).

The *contratación en origen* is a system through which Spanish agricultural enterprises recruit temporary workers directly in their countries of origin (such as Morocco) prior to their travel to Spain. This system was officially regulated by Spain's Immigration Law (Ley Orgánica 4/2000). As Emmanuelle Hellio (2014, p. 143) explains, Article 42 granted this temporary quota system, known as GECCO, a formal legal status, codifying into official law what had been merely an informal practice during the 1990s. In addition, Article 41 recognized the seasonal nature of agricultural work, legally requiring companies to provide workers with decent and hygienic housing.

The transition toward Moroccan women was pioneered by the case of the Fresdeloc company which had already delocalized part of its production to Morocco since the early 1990s. In 2000, when the legislative framework paved the way for the *contratación en origen*, Fresdeloc transferred some of "its' Moroccan workers directly to its farms in Huelva. This recruitment is anchored in the bilateral agreement on workforce regulation signed between Spain and Morocco in 2001. On paper, Article 6 of this treaty states that Moroccan workers must enjoy the same rights and protections as Spanish nationals

(Echajri Amhaouch, 2021; Fernández Quiroga, 2024). Nonetheless, these conditions remain purely theoretical; in practice, linguistic isolation, the lack of labor inspections, and the persistent fear of not being recruited again the following year prevent the workers from reporting abuses (Echajri Amhaouch, 2021).

This dynamic is regulated by annual ministerial orders (Orden GECCO), which define the arrival quotas and mandate that companies provide accommodation, while simultaneously imposing an obligation on the women to return to Morocco, thereby creating a veritable "precarity trap". (Fernández Quiroga, 2024). During the first few years of the program, the selection of workers occurred through informal channels, whereas starting from 2005–2006, the system became fully institutionalized, integrating the Moroccan government and local rural authorities (caïds) directly into the recruitment process (Juana Moreno Nieto, 2012, p. 130). This mobilization of public authorities was designed with a specific aim in mind: preventing workers from escaping (the taux de fuite, or escape rate) once in Spain, which during the early campaigns hovered around 50%.

The *contratación en origen* is not presented by institutions as a mere way to obtain cheap labor; instead, it is cloaked in a humanitarian rhetoric called *codesarrollo* (codevelopment), a term that originated in France at the end of the 1990s to link migratory flows to the development of sending countries. Researchers from the University of Huelva do not oppose this model, since, in their view, genuine codevelopment is a spontaneous, bottom-up experience created through the human relationships established between those who migrate and those who host. They argue that this system builds a strong territorial connection and "depolarizes" migration conflicts because it is rooted in the well-being of families (Macías Llaga et al., 2016, p. 177). An example of this dynamic is the utilization of remittances (remesas). The wages earned by Moroccan women in Huelva function as a local engine of development for rural Morocco, as they are spent to purchase food, fund

schooling, establish micro-enterprises, and meet other essential needs. Indeed, Macías Llaga et al. (2016) employ the ethnographic example of a strawberry picker who, thanks to her savings accumulated in Spain, purchased a cow and started a small dairy business at home; this allowed her to achieve economic autonomy, ending her need to repeatedly migrate to provide for her family. This idea of reciprocal development was subsequently absorbed by the European Union to promote and legitimize its temporary migration policies under the framework of "circular migration", presenting it as a modern and flexible model (Hellio, 2014, p. 155). This approach was formalized through the "win-win-win" slogan, which designated three distinct winners. The first "win" was for Spanish agricultural employers, who obtained the flexible workforce required during the strawberry harvest season without the social costs associated with permanent migration. The second "win" benefited the country of origin, as this model alleviated the heavy pressure of unemployment in rural areas while bringing the economic benefit of foreign currency through remittances. Finally, the third "win" was for the workers themselves, who were given the opportunity to earn higher wages that could then be legally invested back home. This discourse frames seasonal mobility as a voluntary, positive choice, thereby concealing actual power asymmetries (Hellio, 2013, p. 261).

Through a Marxist and feminist critical lens, this positive narrative falls apart. Concepts like "co-development" and "circular migration" act as ideological covers that hide deep geopolitical and gender inequalities. Instead of fostering mutual growth, this system simply exploits the poverty of rural Moroccan women to boost the profits of Andalusian agribusinesses (Moreno Nieto, 2009, pp. 58, 61). Circular migration is not the free mobility it is presented to be, but rather a legally enforced obligation. These women live in a state of perpetual suspension, as their legal stay is strictly linked to their labor contract with a specific company. If a worker falls ill or protests, she risks losing the right to be

recruited the following year, which effectively forces them to self-discipline (Hellio, 2013, p. 256).

Moreover, the *contratación en origen* allows Spanish capitalism to consume the workers' labor energy only during their peak productive periods. Simultaneously, the biological and social costs of their health and reproduction are transferred back to their rural Moroccan families. Their healthcare, motherhood, and general well-being are placed entirely on their families' shoulders; Europe extracts surplus value while leaving the biological costs of the workers' lives to be borne by rural Morocco (Hellio, 2014, p. 40). Furthermore, co-development initiatives, such as training courses organized by Spanish NGOs to teach Moroccan women how to set up small businesses upon their return, ultimately serve to prepare these women for their future expulsion from the system, ensuring their basic survival once they are no longer useful to employers (Hellio, 2014).

4.2. Recruitment profiles and the regulation of female mobility

Spanish employers justify their choice of recruiting women through stereotypes linked to the female body; it is argued that women possess smaller, nimbler hands and fingers, which are considered biologically perfect for picking delicate fruits like strawberries without damaging them, and that they are far more patient, allowing them to endure hours bent over in the fields (Fernández Quiroga, 2024, p. 307; Echajri Amhaouch, 2021, p. 110). This idealized vision of the perfect female picker stands in sharp contrast to the strongly negative representation of Moroccan men. While men are constantly stigmatized by Andalusian agricultural employers as dangerous and conflictual individuals, prone to drinking and protesting, women are perceived as disciplined, grateful, and mostly docile and submissive (Echajri Amhaouch, 2021, p. 110; Chadia Arab, 2009, p. 184). This rhetoric ultimately serves to conceal the true economic motive: their lower contractual

capacity and extreme vulnerability to coercion.

The recruited women must come from a very specific background. The recruitment system excludes young, single women; instead, it requires candidates to be married, widowed, or divorced (Moreno Nieto, 2009, p. 68; Echajri Amhaouch, 2021, p. 111). Married women with children are considered the ideal candidates due to their perceived stability (as shown in figure 12). Directly behind them are widowed or divorced women with children, whose economic vulnerability makes them highly prone to coercion to accepting any working conditions to provide for their children. This system presents a severe paradox: although single Moroccan mothers represent one of the poorest and most marginalized social categories, they are systematically excluded by recruiters. This occurs because they are not part of a traditional family network that could serve as a moral guarantor of their behavior or their return (Moreno Nieto, 2009, pp. 68–69).

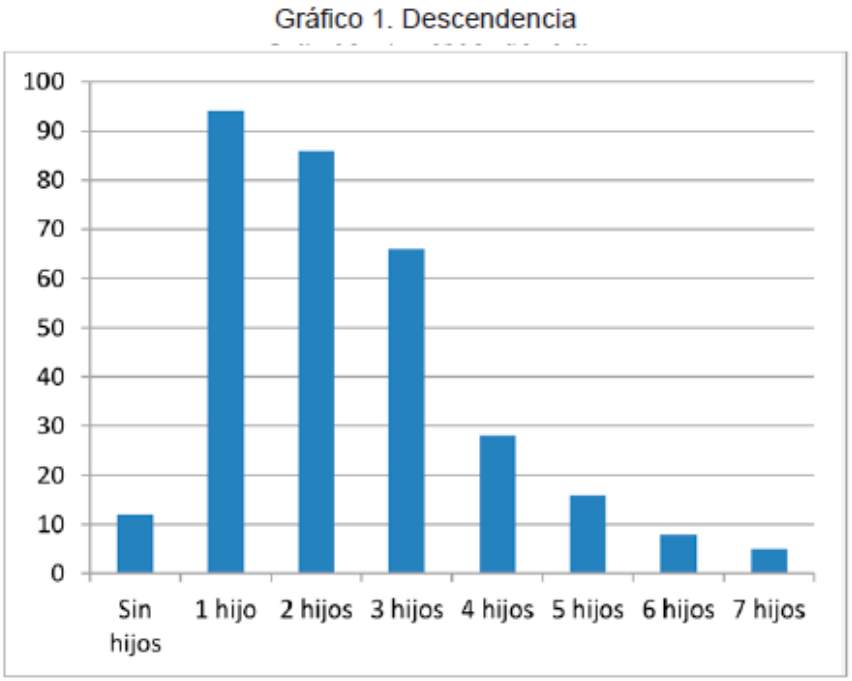

Figure 12: Offspring of surveyed Moroccan seasonal workers. Source: GECOA survey (2014), cited in Macías Llaga et al. (2016, p. 186).

This institutional targeting of specific sociodemographic profiles reflects the local expectations and desires gathered during my fieldwork in Larache. For many local daily workers who are excluded from formal recruitment channels, Spain is envisioned as the only tangible horizon of economic survival. As Amina explained when reflecting on the instability of local agricultural work: “Like many workers, I dream about going to Europe, especially Spain or France, to look for better opportunities and a more stable life”. This sentiment was shared by Maryam, who highlighted how structural precarity fuels the aspiration to migrate: “I dream of moving to Europe to find better opportunities and improve my life, but financial difficulties make this goal very hard to achieve”. While institutional recruiters treat these women's maternal and family ties as mere guarantees against contract desertion, for the women themselves, circular migration represents an imagined exit strategy from the systemic misery of local wages. This deep sense of exclusion often turned into direct requests during my fieldwork. After several interviews in Larache, once the recorder was turned off, a few workers asked if I could personally help them get an agricultural contract for Spain. Their request shows just how opaque official recruitment feels from the outside, pushing women to look for any possible shortcut, even asking a foreign researcher, to find a way into the Spanish circuit.

Alongside these social criteria, recruiters favor illiterate and uneducated women as a strategic choice, as their inability to read or write limits their capacity to understand their contracts and increases their dependence on employers. Indeed, statistical surveys indicate that nearly 75% of the surveyed Moroccan seasonal workers are completely illiterate, as shown in Figure 13 (Macías Llaga et al., 2016, p. 186).

Figure 13: Educational level of surveyed Moroccan seasonal workers. Source: GECOA survey (2014), cited in Macías Llaga et al. (2016, p. 186).

Moreover, control over the bodies does not happen only through documents, but it manifests physically during recruitment. Spanish recruiters actively reject women who do not correspond to the perceived stereotyped version of a rural, docile peasant. For example, if a woman goes to an interview with makeup, with her hair down, with painted nails, or wearing clothes that are too modern or too "beautiful", she is immediately turned down by the selectors, who tell her to leave (Hellio, 2014). This serves as a way to choose only socially submissive women.

Hellio and Moreno Nieto explain how, in 2004, Morocco approved a historic reform of the family code, the Mudawwana, that, on paper, abolished a woman's duty of obedience to her husband and granted women full legal capacity, including the freedom to travel and work abroad without the permission of a male guardian. In order to avoid destabilizing rural hierarchies and to prevent conflicts with husbands, who accused the state of encouraging the abandonment of the marital home, ANAPEC introduced an

administrative workaround in 2007 to bypass national law, requiring a co-candidacy signed by the husband before allowing women to depart. In the rural areas where these women originate, such as the Loukkos plain, the progressive reforms of the Mudawwana remain largely unknown or unapplied; the structural need of men to control women's bodies and mobility continues to prevail over state legislative reforms.

This kind of biological control over women's bodies reached the point of surveilling their reproduction prior to departure. To prevent women from giving birth in Spain, a circumstance that would temporarily halt their forced return to Morocco for several months on humanitarian and maternity grounds, the Moroccan Ministry of Employment proposed making candidates undergo mandatory pregnancy tests before departure. This measure was blocked thanks to the protests of Spanish trade unions, which called it a form of gender discrimination, but the fact that this proposal existed in the first place still shows how the biological body of women is treated as a productive machine to be controlled (Hellio, 2014, p. 163). "Finally, this spatial control is legally reinforced by the structure of the contract itself, which strictly binds the worker to a single employer for the entire duration of the campaign. Under the GECCO framework, women are legally prohibited from changing companies or seeking alternative employment, effectively locking them into a rigid contractual dependency that restricts their labor mobility across Spanish territory.

4.3. Housing control and working conditions in Huelva

Moroccan workers do not live inside Andalusian urban centers, but inside the properties of their employers (fincas), which are often isolated and hidden among the woods of the Huelva province (Moreno Nieto, 2009). Employers progressively substituted old colonial houses with small prefabricated modules, called *algecos*. As an example, Hellio (2014, p.

331) tells us that in the Domínguez farm, housing went from two old houses in 2000 to twenty new prefabricated ones in 2010, allowing them to lodge eighty women without increasing the farmland. These buildings lack thermal insulation, meaning that they get very cold during the winter and scorching hot during the summer, while also presenting water infiltration and a lack of electricity. To understand the precarity of these accommodations, we can analyze the case documented by Hellio in 2009 on the farm where Saadia used to work. Here, the employer denied fresh water to the workers, deciding to connect the buildings' taps directly to the reservoirs used to irrigate the fields, meaning these women were forced to drink and use water full of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. Moreno Nieto (2009, p. 72) illustrates this through an interview with a Moroccan worker upon her arrival at "*Casa del Gato*", a public reception center located in Palos de la Frontera (Huelva) and funded through European Union programs. Before leaving Morocco, the worker had heard rumors that seasonal laborers were being abandoned in the pine forests (*pinares*) surrounding the agricultural fields, forced to survive in informal shantytowns (*chabolas*). Although Casa del Gato was built as a public social facility, it reproduced the same disciplinary model as private company accommodations on the farms (*fincas*). Located ten kilometers away from the nearest urban center, the facility was kept under strict surveillance, and workers were strictly prohibited from receiving visits from outside. This demonstrates how spatial isolation and surveillance were structural elements shared by state institutions and private agribusinesses alike. While housing on the farms is provided free of charge, it remains an instrument of contractual leverage: because lodging is tied directly to the employment contract, any worker who is dismissed immediately loses her shelter, instantly falling into homelessness and being forced into informal shanty settlements in the woods (Hellio, 2014) According to Hellio, since 2004, agricultural companies have started to install

metal fences and closed gates at the entrances to prevent any external contact. These buildings are under surveillance during the day and especially at night under the pretext of protecting the women, but, in reality, they were meants to prevent visits from men. Furthermore, companies are supposed to provide the women with weekly trips to the store in the neighboring town, but this did not happen. Mikaela, a woman interviewed by Hellio, stated that the farms function like a prison in which exit is denied, forcing women to escape through holes in the fence, or walk for kilometers along the road to buy groceries. This forced isolation in Andalusia is not so different from what women face back in Larache. Looking at how transportation works on both sides of the circuit shows how worker mobility is used as a tool of control. In Larache, companies force women to pay for their own rides, swallowing nearly twenty percent of their daily wage just to get to the fields (Amina, interview, 2026). In Huelva, instead of making them pay, employers simply deny them transport altogether, keeping them trapped inside the farm. Whether in Morocco or in Spain, controlling how women move remains a key way to keep them dependent. Additionally, the majority of Moroccan women do not speak Spanish, nor do they speak to any Spanish people at all, meaning that they find themselves in a completely isolated position. They often do not even understand their contracts, since they are drafted only in Spanish, and they end up not knowing when their contract will end or when they will return to Morocco (Moreno Nieto, 2009).

To better understand this dynamic, it is useful to explain how Moreno Nieto applies to the Huelva workers the concept of captive status (*estatus cautivo*), which was originally coined by Binford to explain the situation of Mexican workers in Canada. This term indicates a situation of asymmetrical transaction: in exchange for legal work, the women surrender their freedom of movement and market freedom. These women's work and residence permit is strictly bound to only one employer. It is not possible to change

companies, unless the employer signs a release letter. If a woman gets sick, protests, or does not work hard enough in their opinion, she risks being fired and not being recruited the following year.

This asymmetry obviously favors economic abuses and violence. The workers often have to pay for electricity, groceries, and transportation out of their salary, all while working for ten or more hours a day, without breaks or paid overtime (Moreno Nieto, 2009, p. 71). On this note, although the Huelva labor agreement prohibits piece-rate work and mandates a fixed daily wage, employers abusively impose a daily minimum of strawberry boxes to pick. If a worker does not meet this request, whether she is sick, tired, or there are not enough strawberries to pick, she undergoes an actual punishment. The employer prevents her from working for the following five to six days, leaving her in the housing without earning any wages (Hellio, 2014, p. 416). In the most serious instances, the isolation favors physical abuse or sexual assault by the foremen, confirmed by the dramatic ruling of the Audiencia Provincial of Huelva in 2014, which reports threats like "if you don't behave with me, you're not getting called next year" (Echajri Amhaouch, 2021, pp. 112–113).

Making the workers live on the working site was not only a logistical choice, but it also served as a way to guarantee total availability. Since they live in the fields, employers have the freedom to change working hours at the last minute depending on the weather or the seasonal fruit cycle. If it rains in the morning, the women stay in the housing without being paid, but if it is sunny in the afternoon, they are sent to the greenhouses immediately. In the peak months, the pickers are forced to work in the packaging warehouses until 21:00 or 22:00, or, in the worst cases, late into the night (Hellio, 2014, p. 409).

4.4. Escapes from the fields and strategies of survival in Spain

In Darija, the verb h'ragueמeans “to burn” (Arab, 2009). The origin of the term comes from a Berber commander who, in 711, after crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, commanded his soldiers to burn their ships to prevent them from turning back, forcing them to keep going (Arab, 2007). In the nineties, this term became a neologism to indicate young, male clandestine migrants, known as *harraga*, who burn sea frontiers through the actual burning of their identity documents during the journey to avoid being identified and sent back to Morocco (Arab, 2007). Huelva's female workers have reclaimed the term; they call themselves *harraga* when they decide to break their contract and escape, even though they arrived there legally. For these women, the new geopolitical frontier is inside the Spanish territory, and is no longer represented by the sea. The monitored closed gates function as an internal border (Hellio, 2013). Since their legal permit allows them to stay in Spain only as long as they remain with that specific company, escaping the farm before the contract ends equates to a real geopolitical transgression, a spatial *hreg* in which the authority of the employer and the state are burned. Their decision to escape comes from a rational choice fed by the instability of the recruitment system. As Hellio explains, the *contratación en origen* is based on the complete discretion of the Spanish employer, who can arbitrarily decide not to call a worker for the following season, preferring younger and more docile women. During the 2010/2011 season, Spain halved the permits for Morocco, lowering them from 8,400 to 4,700. This generated panic among the women, since they knew that if they were to go back to Morocco at the end of the season, they would have risked not being able to return to Spain legally. At this point, escaping and becoming irregulars in Spain became a self-defense strategy to avoid getting stuck in rural poverty.

Escape represents the only option to evade conditions of severe exploitation and sexual abuse from their employers, who abuse the women's precarious status. As Amhaouch (2021) states, Shadia, a twenty-five-year-old woman, escaped after only six weeks to avoid sexual assaults by her boss. Moreover, for some women, escaping means protecting themselves from violent marriages in Morocco or serious, stigma-inducing situations, such as pregnancy outside wedlock, which would cause family repudiation back in Morocco (Fernández Quiroga, 2024; Hellio, 2014).

Hellio (2013) explains that the breakaway is an actual process of active illegalization operated by the state. When the woman breaks the contractual link with the only authorized employer, the system takes her legal rights away. Leaving the farm means losing housing, electricity, and water provided by the company, so she winds up in an extreme vulnerable condition, exposed to the speculations of local owners who, on the black market, rent out dilapidated beds at insanely high prices in neighboring towns.

The women find themselves living in a climate of fear: at the end of the season, Andalusian bus and train stations are heavily patrolled by the police to intercept escaping workers, forcing them to constantly hide. To avoid these kinds of controls, many women flee toward different agricultural provinces of Spain, such as Almería or Lérida, where they hope to hide among the many undocumented migrants, and where they know employers will overlook documents to secure a cheap workforce. If they remain in Huelva, they end up living in *chabolas*, the degraded self-built settlements constructed from greenhouse plastic sheets and cardboard, hidden in the Andalusian pine forests. In these places, Moroccan women find freedom from employers' control and a new form of solidarity based on mutual aid and resource sharing, but they have to pay the price of living in disastrous hygienic conditions, without running water or heating. (APDHA, 2018).

These women find themselves in the lowest ranks of the labor market, since they do not have the needed documents. Working undocumented, they have to endure low salaries, grueling shifts, and the allocation of the most physically harmful and heavy tasks (Gertel & Sippel, 2014, p. 235). To obtain regularization in Spain through the *arraigo social*, which requires three years of certified residency, the workers desperately need at least a one-year contract, feeding an informal racket in which Andalusian employers sell fake contracts to women at extremely high prices, between 1,000 and 1,500 euros, forcing them into a serious debt spiral (Gertel & Sippel, 2014, p. 235).

This dynamic ends up, in the worst cases, in sexual exchanges for the women as a survival strategy. Since rent prices are high, they do not know the language, and they do not have contracts, women are compelled to use their body and sexuality as as a strategy for survival. (Hellio, 2013). Moreno Nieto explains that many workers accept relations of concubinage or sexual exchanges with older Spanish men just to survive in this new world, since they receive housing, food, and money for regularization. In the most dramatic cases, isolation and misery push women toward seasonal or permanent prostitution in the clubs near the greenhouses, demonstrating how the discrimination and segmentation of the Andalusian labor market is reflected violently in the sexual exploitation market (Hellio, 2013).

To survive the harsh conditions of the fincas before the escape, Moroccan women develop strong solidarity links to fight the employers' attempts to put them against one another. For example, if a woman is having trouble with work, they have each other's back, and in pregnancy cases, they band together to hide it from the employer to prevent her from being fired. This keeps going even when they escape. In these situations, women have to stick together by sharing food, spaces, and information about informal work. As already stated, escaping is incredibly hard, since the women do not speak Spanish and mostly

they do not know Spanish geography, having to ask for help from mediators. The workers rely on informal networks of Moroccan migrants already settled in Spain, mainly men, who become a fundamental resource to secure housing, food, and protection (Hellio, 2014). Beyond informal solidarity, the workers find support in organized trade union networks. A historic role has been played by the SOC (Sindicato de Obreros del Campo), a union that offers legal and humanitarian support, denouncing the abuses of landowners. Fernández Quiroga (2024, p. 316) introduces the extraordinary case of the Jornaleras en Lucha association, which was founded in 2018 by the union of Huelva's female workers. This self-managed network monitors rights violations, offers psychological and legal support to migrants, and organizes collective complaints, transforming the women's vulnerability into a powerful form of political activism (Fernández Quiroga, 2024).

4.5. Return to the Loukkos between remittances and patriarchal control

The following section shifts the focus towards the women who do go back home at the end of the season, respecting the circularity constraint. Huelva and the Loukkos region are not two separate worlds; on the contrary, they form an integrated transnational space, united by the physical flow of the women's bodies and the inverse flow of money, which try to compensate for an ecological and agrarian crisis. In the second chapter, I analyzed the Loukkos under its macro and meso profile, while, in here, the aim is to explain the micro-social impact of the women's return.

The climatic collapse described by the agro-climatic indexes works as a powerful transnational push factor, destroying farming families' subsistence. Ellouaziri (2025) explains that the water crisis does not affect everyone the same way. While the multinational companies monopolize the water resources, small rural owners face the frontal impact of the climate crisis without institutional protection. The combination of

the four indexes that were already analyzed in Chapter 2, the reduction of rain by 18%, the increase of 62% of hot days, the reduction of the river's flow by 21%, and the extreme salinization of the fields by 50%, translates to an economic collapse: the traditional rural land is not able to feed the family anymore, making international circular mobility a survival imperative.

These independent farmers lose their condition and become forced salaried laborers, through a process called depeasantization. Ellouaziri (2025) affirms that 67% of temporary workers come from families whose land is almost completely lost due to salinization or drought. Working in Spain gives a chance to stabilize and provide for the basic consumption needs of the family. But while men get stuck in rural unemployment, contratacion en origen offers a legal access channel for women only. This finds an example in a sentence said by a woman interviewed by Ellouaziri (2025): "My husband is a mason, but in winter there are very few construction sites. It is my contract in Spain that pays for the children's schooling." This shows an inversion of gender roles as the man loses his breadwinner status, and the woman earns it, having to carry the biological reproduction of the family all by herself.

We already analyzed how during the season in Huelva, NGOs organize training sessions for the workers on the co-development theme, trying to teach women how to save money to open a store, a company, or similar back home, to avoid them staying in Spain. This rhetoric works as an institutional attempt to use rural development as a method to fix the workforce in the country of origin (Hellio, 2014). According to Moreno Nieto (2009), the workers' migration already starts "at a loss": women face a minimum starting cost of almost 250 euros, to pay for passport, medical visits, permits, and transportation. In the most rural areas, this sum is huge. Women are forced to ask for loans from their relatives, and their first preoccupation once in Huelva is to send back the first savings to extinguish

the debt (Hellio, 2014).

To better understand the usage of these savings, we can look at the empirical data gathered by Huelva University. Macías Llaga et al. (2016) show that the average saving per season is 2,000 euros, which equates to a year of rural work in Morocco, where, when there is work, the average salary is 100 euros per month. Usually, 181.70 euros gets sent back to Morocco every month, and this money is received in 40% of cases by the husbands and is destined almost entirely to daily survival, with 32% devolved to daily consumption, like food and debts, 23% for medical expenses, 23% for the schooling of the children, and only 11% for the house. These savings obviously last very little: in the interview by Moreno Nieto to the worker Aicha, she states that: "In one month, in one month everything is finished". This money does not produce capitalistic accumulation, but it works as a temporary anesthetic against rural poverty. The fact that seasonal earnings vanish so quickly in Huelva mirrors the daily economic reality back in Larache, directly clashing with official claims about female entrepreneurship. When remittances are immediately swallowed by household survival and inflation in Morocco, as Jamila explained, there is nothing left to invest. Comparing these transnational savings with local wages in Larache shows that instead of dreaming about starting a business, women simply long for rest and peace of mind. As Jamila put it: "I dream of performing Hajj or Umrah one day because I believe it would bring peace to my heart and help me forget some of the worries and pressures of life". When hard labor on both sides of the circuit provides only short-term survival, the pilgrimage remains the true horizon of dignity.

Housing is the only actual structural investment that these women make. The house back home represents the visible sign of one's transnational success. Going from a temporary shack made of metal sheets or mud, a *gourbi*, to a bricks and cement building with electricity and warm water is the central aspiration. In the interviews conducted by Hellio

(2014), Saadia reflects on the comparison between her house in Morocco and the one in Spain, noting that in Spain she has warm fresh water and a washing machine, while in her douar she still has to go to the well and wash her clothes in the river; a brick house firstly serves to alleviate the physical burden of labor once she is back home.

Once she was back from her first season, Saadia brought back 1,500 euros in savings, and she decided to give her father-in-law only 800, and keep the rest to send her daughter to school; but this refusal to give all of her salary to her husband's family ended up in her being kicked out of the house by him. With the 500 euros left, she decided to build a temporary gourbi, and the next year, with the 1,500 euros saved again, she built the walls of a brick house, strategically positioning it twenty meters from her in-laws' house. This structural independence shows how the home is a micropolitical family negotiation space, allowing the woman to escape the daily control of her parents-in-law thanks to the transnational money.

Other examples of this dynamic are the ones of Aziza and Rqiyah, women interviewed by Hellio: Aziza manages to use her savings to build a house on her father's land. By moroccan law, the father's land is designated to go to the male sons, but Aziza, thanks to her economic power, was able to make her brothers sign a document in which they relinquished the land in her favor, while Rqiyah used her money to renovate her home and install electricity, but imposed a condition on her husband: the new property has to be under her name, dismantling the male monopoly on land ownership. This process is not an easy, short one, and it can be seen in Habiba's example: she bought land in 2009 for 750 euros, fenced the land and built two rooms in 2010 for 1,500 euros, and in 2011 she finished the load-bearing walls. When she is asked how long this will take, she laughed and said at least ten years. All of this shows how the new houses in the Loukkos are a physical monument to the bodily sacrifice of the women going abroad. Every brick

is built with their health and with their backs' physical wear and tear under the plastic tunnels in Huelva.

When the women get home, nonetheless, they have to face an invisible barrier, the social stigma associated with female mobility and how this is used as a form of control by the rural patriarchy. Sociologist Soumaya Naamane-Guessous (1991), cited by Juana Moreno Nieto (2012), explains the concept of hchouma, which means shame or stigma, and it represents a rigid social code that controls a woman's reputation. To cross geographical frontiers alone without a male guardian means exposing oneself and one's whole family to public discredit.

This concretizes in explicit accusations. In February of 2008, an Islamist Moroccan newspaper published an article accusing *temporeras* in Huelva of immoral behavior, and mostly prostitution. On this, Keltum, a twenty-five-year-old woman, commented: "People told me: “You go there and you don't return anymore...” The Islamists say this only out of envy because men cannot go and women can... they say that women go to Spain only for prostitution" (Moreno Nieto, 2012, p. 133).

To defend themselves from the accusations, women must self-impose an extreme regime of confinement and discipline once in Spain. As Hanan says: "We came here only to work, not to wear our best clothes... We do not move at all, we only went once to the market on the beach because they told us it was cheap... We do not go anywhere" (Moreno Nieto, 2012, p. 135). This serves to show their community back home their moral purity.

Moreover, the moral control is not only exercised by the husbands, but it is institutionalized. Indeed, as previously stated, despite the family reform of the Moudawana abolishing the obligation to the husband, ANAPEC still requires the written and co-signed authorization of the husband for a married woman to emigrate to Spain. The Moroccan state and Spanish employers work together to use local patriarchy as a tool

to assure the workforce docility and their forced return.

Migration does not break the traditional obligations of care. Moreno Nieto introduces the concept of "double presence": even when they are working in the Spanish fields for six months, women keep handling via phone the daily life of their children and sending some savings for their subsistence. This concept is linked to the one of *cadenas globales de cuidados*, global chains of care: the *temporeras* have to delegate the physical care to other women of the family, creating a transnational network of social reproduction that allows them to work abroad. So, despite the exploitation, the season in Huelva is lived by many women as a freedom space, escaping the strict patriarchal control.

An illuminating case is the one of Msbayah reported by Hellio (2014): her colleagues in the housing noted how she seemed to be reborn after a few weeks of work: "Msbayah is doing better. She has a good complexion now. When she arrived, she was tired and had dark circles under her eyes. She works in Morocco, but there are too many family problems. Here, she works less and eats better." Sometimes, the labor under the Andalusian greenhouses is preferable to the isolation and the violence back in their village.

The trajectory of the *temporeras* is not a series of isolated events, but a transnational, closed cycle. The mobility physically links the exploitation under the Andalusian greenhouses with the subsistence in the Loukkos plain. Moreover, the neoliberal empowerment concept promoted by the institutions is redefined; it is a form of asymmetrical resilience, with women crushed between the expropriation of their rights in Spain and the patriarchal control in Morocco, who manage to negotiate fragments of power, paying with their sacrifice. This case study on the Spain-Morocco corridor shows the human invisible costs that sustain the agro-industrial European system of fresh fruits.

Conclusion

The heart of this investigation consists in answering the central research question: "How is the global agro-industrial value chain embodied, negotiated, and resisted by subaltern female laborers in the Loukkos plain, and at what bodily, social, and reproductive cost is the 'cheap strawberry' produced for the European market?". Addressing this primary inquiry requires synthesizing the empirical results that emerged across the three sub-questions, which respectively map the bodily discipline of greenhouse labor, the economic-patriarchal structure of the informal market, and the subjective tactics of subaltern resistance.

Answering the first sub-question regarding toxicity demonstrates how the technological and ecological restructuring of the Loukkos plain translates directly into physical suffering and embodied toxicity under the greenhouses. Across the micro-tunnels of Laouamra and Ain Chouk, the plastic sheets of the mer de plastique trap extreme heat and the toxic fumes of pesticide chemical mixtures locally known as "the liquid". Employers systematically prohibit the use of protective gloves under the pretext of avoiding damage to the delicate skin and aesthetic perfection of strawberries destined for European export. As local medical testimony confirms, this exposure sparks an explosion of cutaneous-respiratory allergies, hormonal disruption, and thyroid dysfunctions, while company managers refuse even to supply basic hygiene necessities. The story of Amina highlights how female pickers handle chemical-soaked plants barehanded throughout their shifts and must spend their own earnings to buy soap to wash their hands. Meanwhile, as recorded in fieldwork observations from Larache, the local working class can only afford the damaged, unvalued residuals of their own bodily destruction, bruised reject strawberries sold from street wooden carts for less than ten dirhams a kilogram. The ten-dirham paradox reveals how the cheap price of produce condensates physical

exhaustion and wage devaluation. To answer the second sub-question it is important to note that his economic devaluation relies on a gendered narrative shared by agribusiness and the state: the myth of the "second salary." By framing women's labor as mere pocket money "to buy lipstick" (Joekes, 1985; Bossenbroek & Ftouhi, 2021), employers justify paying ninety dirhams a day in the fields and capping subcontracted university cleaning wages at fifteen hundred dirhams a month. Companies also reduce technical harvesting skills to natural female traits, praising "nimble fingers" and traditional patience (sabr) to rationalize the low wages.

At the same time, environmental strain across the Loukkos basin (an 18% drop in rainfall, a 62% increase in extreme heat days, a 21% decline in river discharge, and 50% soil salinity) has destroyed traditional smallholder agriculture. As small family farms collapsed, men lost their status as sole providers, leaving many unemployed or doing sporadic seasonal work. In peripheral neighborhoods of Larache like Jnan Bidawa and the 70 area, women like Latifa, Karima, Habiba, Jamila, and Rachida have, out of necessity, become primary breadwinners. Their wages cover basic survival needs: flour, sugar, gas cylinders, medical costs, and electricity paid in small instalments to avoid disconnections.

With 49% of these workers widowed, divorced, or abandoned, and 86% completely illiterate, their life stories illustrate the lowest and most painful point of Claudia Goldin's U-shaped curve. Lacking both formal education and a male breadwinner, these women cannot afford to stay home to avoid social stigma. For them, entering informal wage labor is a survival trap that forces them into hard physical labor without National Social Security Fund (CNSS) protection.

Addressing the third sub-question demonstrates that subaltern laborers do not remain

passive vactims; on the contrary, they actively construct everyday tactics of negotiation and survival. In fields, processing stations, flour mills, and university corridors, workers like Naima, Rachida, and Habiba transform collective jokes and laughter into informal emotional support structures that cushion the gruelling conditions of the shifts. Where state healthcare fails, sororal and matrilineal networks share rent, split domestic tasks, and help eachother to care for sick children or aging relatives. Spiritual aspirations, such as performing the Umrah or Hajj expressed by Karima and Jamila, represent profound desires for dignity and sacred peace beyond the reach of economic extraction. The most radical expression of agency, however, lies in the unanimous refusal of mothers to pass agricultural precarity onto their daughters. Women like Jamila, Rachida, and Maryam willingly accept their role as living shock-absorbers in the informal market so that their daily wages can be converted into educational capital and foreign language acquisition for their daughters. Through this investment, mothers transform their own biological depletion into a deliberate strategy of intergenerational redemption, ensuring that their physical sacrifice breaks the hereditary cycle of rural servitude.

Synthesizing these findings reveals the true cost of the global commodity chain: the flawless, cheap strawberry sold in European supermarkets incorporates directly the toxic exposure and bodily depletion of subaltern female laborers across the Loukkos plain.

To understand how precarious female labor is across the Loukkos plain, one has to look beyond the agricultural fields. Work in the greenhouses of Laouamra cannot be separated from cleaning jobs at the university in Larache or seafood processing along the coast. These are not distinct worlds for local women, who move back and forth between farm picking and urban housework depending on the season or immediate family needs. When the strawberry harvest ends in early summer, many transition into processing factories or cleaning subcontracts, where daily pay remains below the legal minimum wage. Moving

from one informal job to another leaves rural women acting as a buffer against economic instability, with no contracts or social security to fall back on.

This local vulnerability sets the stage for the seasonal migration route linking North Africa to Southern Europe. Through the GECCO agreement and ANAPEC centers, recruitment is far from random. Selection explicitly targets married women, widows, or divorcees with children under fourteen. Leaving young dependents behind in rural douars turns maternal responsibility into a guarantee that workers will return to Morocco once the harvest in Huelva ends. While official narratives present circular migration as a mutually beneficial partnership, field evidence shows otherwise. The system relies on women's physical energy during peak production months and sends exhausted bodies back to the Loukkos when the season closes. Long-term health issues and chemical exposure are simply passed back to local households and female support networks.

Yet women still find ways to build independence. Forced to live in harsh conditions on Andalusian farms, some break their contracts to seek work in Spanish cities or join self-organized groups like *Jornaleras en Lucha*. Those who return to the Loukkos invest their wages in buying land in their own names and building brick houses in neighborhoods like the 70 area. A house of their own in Larache provides real protection against family pressures and a concrete space of personal autonomy.

On a theoretical level, this thesis extends Social Reproduction Theory to global agribusiness. Classic models look at unpaid care work as what keeps a worker ready for the next shift. In export farming, capital goes further: it wears down the worker's physical body. When pesticides or heavy labor injure a picker, agribusiness steps aside, leaving female family networks to handle her recovery. Social reproduction becomes a physical subsidy to global supply chains, as families absorb the health costs that companies create.

The study also rethinks how the worker agency is considered. Formal strikes and unions

are suppressed in informal agriculture, but that does not mean women are passive. Instead, they use quiet, long-term strategies. By putting seasonal wages into land ownership, brick houses, and their daughters' education, women use their earnings to break the cycle. They endure hard labor today so their children can leave agricultural work behind tomorrow.

Ethically, studying vulnerable lives required a flexible approach. When farm managers refused access, fieldwork moved to informal spaces, centered around Sana's living room in Larache. Listening to women on their own terms meant dropping formal questionnaires. Verbal consent replaced paper forms to respect illiteracy and avoid triggering distrust, while pseudonyms protect participants who rely on staying invisible to authorities. Although this qualitative study is not statistically representative of all farm workers in Morocco, it offers a grounded look at the human realities behind export agriculture.

While focusing on eleven core interlocutors brings out rich personal biographical narratives, this study has clear boundaries in time and space. Restricted access to private packing sites meant relying primarily on workers' testimonies and off-site observation. Translating across Moroccan Darija, French, and Spanish also required careful interpretation at every step.

These constraints highlight clear directions for future research. Follow-up studies could track whether mothers' investments in their daughters' education actually break the cycle of rural labor, or if job market barriers push these young women back into informal work. Comparative research across different export hubs, from the Loukkos and Huelva to Almería or even to Italy, could also show how global supply chains continuously reshape female labor across the Mediterranean. Above all, research should keep treating these workers not as abstract data, but as individuals fighting for dignity on the margins of the global economy.

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Appendix A: transcripts of fieldwork interviews

Woman Worker in Morocco (Participant 1 – Amina)

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTIONS

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I am a woman in my late thirties (39 years old). I come from a family with several siblings, and my father has passed away. I currently live in an area referred to locally as “Jnan bidawa”. I am the only woman with different brothers.

How long have you been working, and how did you start?

I have around five years of experience working in the strawberry sector, including factory work, packaging, and farm-related activities. I previously worked in the area of Laouamra and later received offers from other companies, but I chose not to move. Some members of my family also work in the same sector.

PHASE 2: DAILY LIFE AND SPACE

Can you describe your typical day from the moment you wake up until you go to sleep?

A normal working day lasts around eight hours, although overtime is sometimes added depending on production needs. Work schedules can change between day and night shifts, making daily life unpredictable and tiring. Transportation is also an important part of the routine because workers often need to arrange their own travel to and from the factory.

What do you like about your workspace, and what is the hardest part for you?

I have mixed feelings about the work. In general, I like strawberry work itself, but I do not like many aspects of the current workplace because the shifts are unstable and the financial return is low.

Transportation is one of the biggest challenges. Sometimes the company provides transport close to the factory, but often workers must pay for taxis themselves. For example, transportation can cost around eight dirhams each way, which becomes expensive over time (16 DH/day).

Another difficulty is that workers sometimes have to buy certain supplies, such as soap, using their own money. Overtime may occasionally bring slightly better pay, but overall many workers feel the wages are still not enough.

When you are working, do you talk to the other women? What do you usually talk or laugh about?

I usually prefer to focus on my work and avoid too much conversation because I believe concentrating helps me earn more and complete tasks faster. It is possible for me to work an entire shift without speaking much if I choose to. However, many women from the same families or communities work together, so there is still a shared sense of familiarity among workers.

PHASE 3: MONEY AND INDEPENDENCE

Why is it important for a woman in Larache to have her own income today?

Women need income because life has become expensive and unstable. Having work allows women to support themselves and their families and gives them a sense of independence and security, even if the wages are limited.

How is your salary used? Do you decide how to spend it, or is it managed by the family?

Most of the money goes toward transportation, household expenses, and everyday necessities. Because wages are low and work schedules are irregular, it is difficult to save money or achieve financial stability.

PHASE 4: NEGOTIATIONS AND MEN

What do the men in your family think about your work? Did you have to convince them?

My brothers have a general acceptance of women's participation in the workforce.

If a young girl in your family wanted to do this job, what advice would you give her?

I would advise her to think carefully about stability and future opportunities. While strawberry work provides income, it also comes with instability, low wages, and difficult working conditions. Better opportunities and more secure work would always be preferable if available.

PHASE 5: CLOSING

If you could change one thing about your life or your work, what would it be?

I would like more stable working conditions, better wages, and reliable transportation. I would also like greater financial security and a more predictable future. Like many workers, I dream about going to Europe, especially Spain or France, to look for better opportunities and a more stable life.

Woman Worker in Morocco (Participant 2 - Maryam)

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTIONS

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I am 33 years old. I work mainly to support my large family after the death of my mother two years ago. My family includes my father and six siblings, so there are

around seven people depending on the household income. Most of the money I earn is spent on family necessities, and very little remains for my personal needs.

How long have you been working, and how did you start?

I started working because of family responsibilities, especially after my mother became ill and later passed away. At first, I was motivated by the need to help care for my family.

PHASE 2: DAILY LIFE AND SPACE

Can you describe your typical day from the moment you wake up until you go to sleep?

My work shifts are very long, usually around twelve hours, which leaves little time for rest or personal activities. My work is housework at the university. At home, household duties are shared with my sister because our mother is no longer present to manage the home.

What do you like about your workspace, and what is the hardest part for you?

I do not really enjoy the current work itself, but I continue because my family depends on the income. The hardest part is balancing long working hours, transportation difficulties, and family responsibilities at the same time.

Transportation is especially difficult because I do not own private transport and must rely on taxis or buses. Transportation costs have increased significantly and now take a large part of my salary. Delays caused by transportation and road conditions also create problems at work.

When you are working, do you talk to the other women? What do you usually talk or laugh about?

The work environment does not include many formal meetings or strong social

interaction. Most tasks are individual, although women still occasionally share conversations about daily struggles, work pressure, and family responsibilities.

PHASE 3: MONEY AND INDEPENDENCE

Why is it important for a woman in Larache to have her own income today?

Having personal income is necessary because many families rely on women's earnings to survive. Without work, it would be impossible to support household expenses, transportation, and everyday necessities.

How is your salary used? Do you decide how to spend it, or is it managed by the family?

My monthly income is around 1,500 Moroccan dirhams, but after transportation costs and household expenses, almost nothing remains. Most of the salary is spent on family needs, while the little support provided by my father is often used for transportation expenses.

PHASE 4: NEGOTIATIONS AND MEN

What do the men in your family think about your work? Did you have to convince them?

The work is generally accepted because the family depends on it financially.

If a young girl in your family wanted to do this job, what advice would you give her?

I would encourage her to look for better opportunities, especially jobs that provide higher salaries, stability, and opportunities to use education or language skills. I believe young women should continue developing their abilities to improve their future chances.

PHASE 5: CLOSING

If you could change one thing about your life or your work, what would it be?

I would like to have a better and more stable future with less financial pressure. I dream of moving to Europe to find better opportunities and improve my life, but financial difficulties make this goal very hard to achieve at the moment.

Woman Worker in Morocco (Participant 3 - Naima)

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTIONS

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I'm 55 years old and I'm a woman with many years of experience in informal work, although I am currently unemployed. I have children and my husband was ill for a long time before he passed away, and during that period I carried most of the financial and household responsibilities for the family.

How long have you been working, and how did you start?

I have worked for around thirty-five years in different kinds of jobs. Much of my work was informal and based on whatever opportunities were available. I worked in fish processing, especially removing fish heads during production work, and I also worked in vegetable markets selling or handling products like potatoes and tomatoes. I accepted different jobs wherever work could be found.

PHASE 2: DAILY LIFE AND SPACE

Can you describe your typical day from the moment you wake up until you go to

sleep?

My daily life used to revolve around long working hours and trying to manage both employment and household responsibilities. Because the work was irregular, every day depended on whether jobs were available. At home, there were always responsibilities related to family care and managing basic needs.

What do you like about your workspace, and what is the hardest part for you?

One of the most important things at work was companionship with coworkers. Laughing and spending time with the other women helped me endure long and difficult working days.

The hardest part was the instability of the work and the low wages. Payment changed depending on the task and the length of the shift. Some days the earnings were around 40 to 60 Moroccan dirhams, while full shifts could bring around 50 to 90 dirhams. Although this income was better than nothing, it was never enough to create a stable life.

When you are working, do you talk to the other women? What do you usually talk or laugh about?

Yes, social interaction with coworkers was very important. We laughed together and shared conversations to make the difficult work easier and less exhausting emotionally.

PHASE 3: MONEY AND INDEPENDENCE

Why is it important for a woman in Larache to have her own income today?

For many women, earning money is necessary for survival and supporting the family. In my case, I had to work because my husband was sick and later passed away, leaving me responsible for household expenses and daily needs.

How is your salary used? Do you decide how to spend it, or is it managed by the family?

Most of the income was used for household expenses, food, and utility bills. Sometimes electricity and water bills had to be paid gradually because there was not enough money available at once. Financial difficulties were constant, and very little money remained for personal use.

PHASE 4: NEGOTIATIONS AND MEN

What do the men in your family think about your work? Did you have to convince them?

As I said, the work is necessary for survival and supporting the household after the illness and death of my husband.

If a young girl in your family wanted to do this job, what advice would you give her?

I would probably encourage her to search for something more stable and less exhausting. After many years of difficult labor, I would prefer younger women to have safer and more secure opportunities.

PHASE 5: CLOSING

If you could change one thing about your life or your work, what would it be?

I would like to change my source of income and start a small business based on buying and selling goods. I hope for more financial stability and a life that is less dependent on unstable daily labor.

Woman Worker in Morocco (Participant 4 - Latifa)

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTIONS

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I'm 50 years old and I currently work and try to maintain a calm and stable life. Family responsibilities remain important to me, especially because my daughter is now married, which has reinforced the importance of personal independence and self-reliance.

How long have you been working, and how did you start?

I work as a houseworker at the university with Maryam. My monthly salary is around 1,500 Moroccan dirhams. I started this work because I needed to support myself and help with household expenses. Over time, I became used to the routine and responsibilities of the job.

PHASE 2: DAILY LIFE AND SPACE

Can you describe your typical day from the moment you wake up until you go to sleep?

My routine is relatively calm and organized. I work during the day and then return home feeling comfortable and emotionally at peace. Maintaining emotional balance is very important to me.

What do you like about your workspace, and what is the hardest part for you?

I generally feel satisfied with my current work environment. Relationships with coworkers are good, and there are no major personal conflicts. One important thing for me is avoiding anger and keeping my nerves calm while working.

"One concern mentioned was the absence of group gatherings or meetings at

work, which may reduce communication and coordination among workers".

When you are working, do you talk to the other women? What do you usually talk or laugh about?

The relationships between coworkers appear positive and respectful. The atmosphere is generally calm, and there are no serious tensions reported between workers.

PHASE 3: MONEY AND INDEPENDENCE

Why is it important for a woman in Larache to have her own income today?

Having personal income is important because it allows a woman to depend on herself and manage her own responsibilities independently. Financial independence becomes especially important as family situations change over time.

How is your salary used? Do you decide how to spend it, or is it managed by the family?

I mainly spend my salary on personal needs and household responsibilities, including repairs and maintenance in the home. Managing my own finances independently is something I consider important.

PHASE 4: NEGOTIATIONS AND MEN

What do the men in your family think about your work? Did you have to convince them?

The discussion did not focus heavily on family conflict or negotiation around work because the participant lives alone.

If a young girl in your family wanted to do this job, what advice would you give

her?

I would tell her that the wages in this type of work are very low and often not enough to build a stable future. I would encourage her to look for better opportunities, continue her education if possible, and search for work that offers more security and better conditions.

PHASE 5: CLOSING

If you could change one thing about your life or your work, what would it be?

At the moment, I feel relatively satisfied and thankful for my current situation. My main priority is peace of mind and maintaining a calm life. However, I remain open to the possibility of a better opportunity in Spain if the conditions become clear and suitable in the future.

Woman Worker in Morocco (Participant 5 - Karima)

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTIONS

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I'm 52 years old and I live with my family and share responsibilities with my sister, who is also widowed. There is no male provider in the household, so we depend mainly on ourselves to manage daily life and household expenses. I also have a daughter named Amina, who is unmarried.

How long have you been working, and how did you start?

I have been working for many years because of family responsibilities and financial necessity. In my family, education was prioritized mainly for boys, while

three daughters, including myself, did not receive formal schooling. Because of this, work became the main path available to support ourselves and survive economically.

PHASE 2: DAILY LIFE AND SPACE

Can you describe your typical day from the moment you wake up until you go to sleep?

My workdays usually begin early in the morning. Most jobs finish around 5:00 p.m., but sometimes work continues late into the night, even until 10:00 p.m. Waking up early has become normal for me, although waking before dawn remains physically difficult and exhausting.

In addition to paid work, I also manage household responsibilities and daily family needs together with my daughter.

What do you like about your workspace, and what is the hardest part for you?

The hardest part is the long and irregular working hours combined with the responsibilities at home. Constant fatigue and lack of rest create a heavy physical and emotional burden.

Another challenge is the lack of formal education, which limits opportunities for better jobs or career advancement.

When you are working, do you talk to the other women? What do you usually talk or laugh about?

The women share common experiences related to work pressure, family duties, and everyday struggles, and she didn’t focus deeply on workplace relationships.

PHASE 3: MONEY AND INDEPENDENCE

Why is it important for a woman in Larache to have her own income today?

Women need to work because many families depend on their income to survive. In my case, there is no male support in the household, so financial independence is necessary to cover rent, bills, and everyday living expenses.

How is your salary used? Do you decide how to spend it, or is it managed by the family?

I personally manage my income and organize household spending. Most of the money goes toward rent, bills, and basic necessities. My daughter also contributes financially when possible to help support the household.

PHASE 4: NEGOTIATIONS AND MEN

What do the men in your family think about your work? Did you have to convince them?

Because there is no male provider in the household, work is viewed mainly as a necessity for survival rather than a personal choice.

If a young girl in your family wanted to do this job, what advice would you give her?

I strongly encourage younger girls to continue their education and avoid entering the same difficult line of work. I especially want my daughter to have a better future through education rather than through exhausting labor like mine.

PHASE 5: CLOSING

If you could change one thing about your life or your work, what would it be?

I would like a life with less exhaustion and more stability. One of my personal dreams is to perform Umrah and find spiritual peace after many years of hard

work and responsibility.

Woman Worker in Morocco (Participant 6 - Salma)

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTIONS

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I ‘am 39-year-old and I work in the area of Ain Chouk. I have been working there for several years. I am married and have three children, including two who are around ten and four years old.

How long have you been working, and how did you start?

I started working because of financial necessity. At first, my husband did not want me to work, but later he accepted it because of the economic pressures facing the family.

PHASE 2: DAILY LIFE AND SPACE

Can you describe your typical day from the moment you wake up until you go to sleep?

My workday starts very early, around 5:00 in the morning, and usually finishes around 4:00 in the afternoon. The work requires constant attention and discipline throughout the day.

At home, my husband and I share household expenses and responsibilities, especially those related to our children and their education.

What do you like about your workspace, and what is the hardest part for you?

One positive aspect of the workplace is the support from coworkers. Working with

a small and coordinated team makes the day easier and more comfortable.

However, the work environment is also strict. Phone use is forbidden during work, and there are strict safety rules, including prohibitions on flammable materials. Workers must stay focused to avoid damaging goods or making mistakes.

The hardest part is that the salary is low compared to the long hours and physical effort. Even though the daily wage is around 90 Moroccan dirhams, it still feels insufficient for the amount of work required.

When you are working, do you talk to the other women? What do you usually talk or laugh about?

The team usually tries to stay focused on work and avoid unnecessary talking so the day can pass smoothly. Still, there is a sense of support and cooperation among coworkers that helps reduce stress during long shifts.

PHASE 3: MONEY AND INDEPENDENCE

Why is it important for a woman in Larache to have her own income today?

Today, women's income is necessary because families often cannot survive on one salary alone. Work allows women to contribute to household expenses and support their children's future.

How is your salary used? Do you decide how to spend it, or is it managed by the family?

My husband and I share the costs of the household together. Most of the money goes toward family needs, bills, and especially the children's education. There is almost no money left for personal use.

PHASE 4: NEGOTIATIONS AND MEN

What do the men in your family think about your work? Did you have to convince them?

At first, my husband was against the idea of me working, but eventually he accepted it because of the family's financial situation and responsibilities.

If a young girl in your family wanted to do this job, what advice would you give her?

I would not recommend this job to someone in my family. I would prefer that younger girls search for other opportunities with better conditions and less physical and emotional pressure.

PHASE 5: CLOSING

If you could change one thing about your life or your work, what would it be?

At the moment, I am not planning any major changes. I believe that if administrative procedures and work organization remain clear and well managed, the work becomes easier to handle. However, I still wish for better wages and less pressure in daily life.

Woman Worker in Morocco (Participant 7 - Houda)

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTIONS

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

My name is Houda, and I am around 30 years old. I am married and have two daughters, one of whom is currently sick and requires special care. Family responsibilities are a major part of my daily life.

How long have you been working, and how did you start?

I work irregularly depending on when jobs are available. Usually, I work two or three days when there is demand, and sometimes I work full-day shifts. At the beginning, my husband was hesitant about me working outside the home, but over time he gradually became more accepting of it because the family needed additional support.

PHASE 2: DAILY LIFE AND SPACE

Can you describe your typical day from the moment you wake up until you go to sleep?

My daily routine combines household responsibilities with paid work. When work is available, I usually start around 9:00 or 9:30 in the morning and finish around 5:00 in the evening. Sometimes there are evening or late shifts depending on the tasks. At home, I also take care of my children and manage domestic duties, especially caring for my sick daughter.

What do you like about your workspace, and what is the hardest part for you?

At the beginning of a shift, the work often feels physically difficult and tiring, but after becoming familiar with the routine and tasks, it becomes easier. Sometimes I also take on extra responsibilities when needed.

The hardest part is the instability of the work because employment is not regular and income changes from month to month. Balancing work with childcare and household duties is also exhausting.

When you are working, do you talk to the other women? What do you usually talk or laugh about?

I usually prefer to work quietly and independently. I do not socialize much at work and mostly speak only when necessary. Because of this, the work environment

can sometimes feel isolated.

PHASE 3: MONEY AND INDEPENDENCE

Why is it important for a woman in Larache to have her own income today?

It is important because women need to help support their families together with their husbands. Today, one income alone is often not enough to cover household needs, especially when there are children and health-related expenses.

How is your salary used? Do you decide how to spend it, or is it managed by the family?

Most of my earnings are spent on household expenses and the needs of my children. Since the work is irregular and income is limited, there is usually very little left for personal savings or individual spending.

PHASE 4: NEGOTIATIONS AND MEN

What do the men in your family think about your work? Did you have to convince them?

At first, my husband was not completely comfortable with the idea of me working outside the home. Over time, however, he became more understanding and accepting because of the financial needs of the family.

If a young girl in your family wanted to do this job, what advice would you give her?

I would encourage her to look for work that is stable and provides security. Personally, I hope to find a more permanent job with one employer because stability makes life easier and reduces stress.

PHASE 5: CLOSING

If you could change one thing about your life or your work, what would it be?

I would like my work conditions to be easier and more comfortable. More than anything, I would like stable employment and a steady income so that I can better support my children and create a more secure future for my family.

Woman Worker in Morocco (Participant 8 - Souad)

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTIONS

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I'm 42 years old and I live about ten minutes away from the area where we met (70 area). I do not have children. At the moment, I mostly live alone.

How long have you been working, and how did you start?

I am currently unemployed and mostly stay at home. In the past, I worked in strawberry factory. My work routine used to vary from day to day, depending on the situation and available tasks. I also spent time interacting with people, attending social gatherings, and following local news and conversations.

PHASE 2: DAILY LIFE AND SPACE

Can you describe your typical day from the moment you wake up until you go to sleep?

My daily life is relatively quiet now since I am no longer working regularly. I spend most of my time at home, managing personal responsibilities and passing time through social interaction and daily routines.

What do you like about your workspace, and what is the hardest part for you?

Some parts of the work environment were positive, while other parts were difficult. I could not identify one specific task as the hardest because the experience changed depending on the day and the situation.

When you are working, do you talk to the other women? What do you usually talk or laugh about?

Yes, there was social interaction with other people during work and gatherings. Conversations were usually casual and helped create a more comfortable atmosphere.

[During the interview itself, there was also some joking and light conversation with the participant to reduce shyness and make communication easier]

PHASE 3: MONEY AND INDEPENDENCE

Why is it important for a woman in Larache to have her own income today?

I believe it is important for women to work and earn their own income. The value of work is not only about money, but also about having activity, independence, and purpose.

How is your salary used? Do you decide how to spend it, or is it managed by the family?

When I worked, I mostly spent the money on myself and my own needs.

PHASE 4: NEGOTIATIONS AND MEN

What do the men in your family think about your work? Did you have to convince them?

The discussion did not go deeply into the opinions of male family members about

work, and no major conflict or negotiation around the issue was described because the participant lives alone.

If a young girl in your family wanted to do this job, what advice would you give her?

I would tell her to think carefully before choosing this type of work because the wages are very low.

PHASE 5: CLOSING

If you could change one thing about your life or your work, what would it be?

No specific future goal or major change was clearly expressed during the discussion.

Woman Worker in Morocco (Participant 9 - Jamila)

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTIONS

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I'm 50 years old and I currently live with my son, Jamal, and I am responsible for managing the household and daily responsibilities. I work at the university as a housework, where I returned after previously working there for several years. My life revolves around balancing work and home duties while trying to maintain stability despite difficult economic conditions.

How long have you been working, and how did you start?

I have many years of work experience in different sectors. I worked for about seven years in a flour company, and I also worked previously at the university for

around three to four years before leaving and later returning. In my current position, I have been working again at the university for about one year and six months. Over time, I gained experience and became used to managing work responsibilities independently although the wages are very low.

PHASE 2: DAILY LIFE AND SPACE

Can you describe your typical day from the moment you wake up until you go to sleep?

After finishing work, I return home to continue my daily responsibilities. I usually rest briefly, perform ablution, and pray. Then I organize household tasks such as cooking, washing clothes, and cleaning the home. Most of my time is divided between work and domestic duties.

What do you like about your workspace, and what is the hardest part for you?

The work itself is not the most difficult part. The real challenge comes from relationships between people at work. There is sometimes jealousy, monitoring, and unfair treatment between coworkers, which creates emotional stress and tension. In many ways, stress itself feels like a kind of illness.

The economic situation also adds pressure because many women today are responsible both for earning money and managing the household at the same time.

When you are working, do you talk to the other women? What do you usually talk or laugh about?

Yes, women often talk together during work. Conversations usually focus on daily life, family responsibilities, financial struggles, and social issues. These interactions help reduce stress and create emotional support among coworkers.

PHASE 3: MONEY AND INDEPENDENCE

Why is it important for a woman in Larache to have her own income today?

It is important because life has become very expensive, and many families cannot survive on one income alone. Women need financial independence to support themselves and their households, especially when economic opportunities are limited.

How is your salary used? Do you decide how to spend it, or is it managed by the family?

My salary is relatively limited, around 1,500 Moroccan dirhams, so most of it goes toward basic personal and household necessities. Everyday expenses are very high, and even small amounts of money no longer last long.

PHASE 4: NEGOTIATIONS AND MEN

What do the men in your family think about your work? Did you have to convince them?

I live alone with my son, so I need to work for my daily life expenses and because of economic pressures.

If a young girl in your family wanted to do this job, what advice would you give her?

I would strongly encourage her to continue studying and to learn languages because education and language skills create better opportunities in life. Without education or communication skills, job opportunities remain limited. I would advise young women to choose useful work but also continue improving themselves through learning whenever possible.

PHASE 5: CLOSING

If you could change one thing about your life or your work, what would it be?

I would like to live with less stress and more peace of mind. My biggest wish is to find emotional and spiritual comfort. I dream of performing Hajj or Umrah one day because I believe it would bring peace to my heart and help me forget some of the worries and pressures of life.

Woman Worker in Morocco (Participant 10 - Rachida)

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTIONS

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I am a 60-year-old woman living with my three children, who are all still unmarried and live at home with me. One of my sons is around 30 years old, and the others are close in age. I am mainly responsible for supporting the family financially and managing the household.

How long have you been working, and how did you start?

I have many years of work experience in different kinds of jobs, including factory work, fish processing, cold storage work, and buying and selling goods. Over time, work became necessary to support my children and maintain the household. I have always worked hard to provide stability for my family. I currently work as a houseworker at university.

PHASE 2: DAILY LIFE AND SPACE

Can you describe your typical day from the moment you wake up until you go to

sleep?

I wake up very early, around dawn, to prepare breakfast, clean the house, and make sure my children are ready for their day. My routine combines domestic responsibilities with paid work, so I sleep very little. Most of my day is spent balancing work outside the home with caring for the family inside the home.

What do you like about your workspace, and what is the hardest part for you?

One positive aspect of work is the social environment. The women and coworkers are close to one another, almost like neighbors or family members, and there are solidarity and mutual support between us.

The hardest part is the financial pressure. Even with long working hours, the salary is not enough to fully cover the family's needs. Prices for essential goods such as gas, flour, and sugar have increased a lot, and daily life has become more expensive and stressful.

When you are working, do you talk to the other women? What do you usually talk or laugh about?

Yes, we talk often and support each other emotionally. The workplace creates a sense of community where women share daily struggles, family concerns, and moments of humor together. These relationships help make difficult work more bearable.

PHASE 3: MONEY AND INDEPENDENCE

Why is it important for a woman in Larache to have her own income today?

It is important because many women are responsible for supporting their families. Having an income allows a woman to provide food, education, and basic needs for her children. Without work, it would be very difficult to maintain dignity and

stability in the household.

How is your salary used? Do you decide how to spend it, or is it managed by the family?

My income is mainly used for necessities such as food, electricity, water bills, transportation, and school expenses. I personally manage the household budget and organize spending carefully because money is limited. Even small daily costs have become difficult to cover due to inflation.

PHASE 4: NEGOTIATIONS AND MEN

What do the men in your family think about your work? Did you have to convince them?

My work is accepted because the family depends on it. However, there is still pressure and exhaustion from carrying the responsibility of being the main provider. One of my sons dreams of leaving Morocco and traveling to Europe in search of better opportunities.

If a young girl in your family wanted to do this job, what advice would you give her?

I would not encourage young girls to follow the same difficult path that I experienced. I believe many of these jobs are physically exhausting and socially difficult for women. I would prefer women to live comfortably, receive support, and have better opportunities through education and stability.

PHASE 5: CLOSING

If you could change one thing about your life or your work, what would it be?

I would want a more secure and stable life for my children and myself. I hope for

a future where my children can live with dignity, honesty, and good values, without having to struggle as much as I did. My biggest wish is for them to have better opportunities and a more comfortable life than mine.

Woman Worker in Morocco (Participant 11- Habiba)

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTIONS

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I am an older woman, around 55-56 years old. I live near the “70” area. I live with my husband and children. My husband uses a wheelchair and requires daily care. Life is difficult, and I often think about how to provide basic needs such as food and breakfast for my husband and family.

How long have you been working, and how did you start?

I worked in domestic service for almost twenty years for one family. The work was informal, without an official contract or social protection. I eventually stopped working around a year ago. At the end of the job, there were some problems related to payment and the final agreement.

PHASE 2: DAILY LIFE AND SPACE

Can you describe your typical day from the moment you wake up until you go to sleep?

My daily life was extremely demanding. I worked during the day and often continued late into the night, sometimes until morning. I was responsible for housework, cooking, and serving the family I worked for. At the same time, I also had responsibilities at home, especially taking care of my husband’s health,

buying medicine, and preparing it for him. Balancing work and caregiving created a great amount of physical and emotional pressure.

What do you like about your workspace, and what is the hardest part for you?

One positive aspect was the good relationship with the people around me. There was respect in daily interactions, and sometimes we laughed together and supported one another. However, the hardest part was the insecurity of informal work because there were no guarantees, rights, or protections.

When you are working, do you talk to the other women? What do you usually talk or laugh about?

Yes, there was communication and solidarity between the women. We talked, laughed together, and shared moments that helped reduce the stress of work. These interactions created a sense of companionship and emotional support.

PHASE 3: MONEY AND INDEPENDENCE

Why is it important for a woman in Larache to have her own income today?

Having personal income is important because women need dignity and some independence. Financial contribution helps support the family and allows women to feel more secure and capable of managing daily life.

How is your salary used? Do you decide how to spend it, or is it managed by the family?

The income was mainly used for household necessities and basic food. The money was limited and disappeared quickly because of family responsibilities. At the present time, there is no stable monthly income, and life depends on modest spending and basic necessities.

PHASE 4: NEGOTIATIONS AND MEN

What do the men in your family think about your work? Did you have to convince them?

The work seemed accepted within the family context because it was necessary for survival and family support. However, the pressure of combining work responsibilities with caregiving duties remained very heavy.

If a young girl in your family wanted to do this job, what advice would you give her?

I would not want my daughter or any girl in my family to follow the same path of informal domestic work. I believe education and self-reliance are very important. My children and extended family members are educated and independent, and I would prefer younger women to have safer and more stable opportunities.

PHASE 5: CLOSING

If you could change one thing about your life or your work, what would it be?

I would want a safer and more stable life with less physical and emotional burden. I would also want work that provides dignity, legal protection, and better conditions, especially for women who carry both professional and family responsibilities.

Appendix B: Fieldnotes

20/03/26 Volo Roma-Rabat e poi l'autobus per Larache. Il mezzo è davvero vecchio, con i sedili sfondati, le sospensioni a pezzi e l'aria carica di polvere e odore di diesel. Mi sono sentita subito senza i soliti filtri protettivi da viaggiatrice occidentale, abbastanza spiazzata. Però i compagni di viaggio sono stati di una gentilezza incredibile: vedendomi in difficoltà con i bagagli enormi, sono intervenuti subito per aiutarmi a sistemarli e mi hanno spiegato con molta cura dove scendere.

21/03/26 All'arrivo a Larache mi aspettava Zineb, che è il mio punto di riferimento qui. Siamo salite al volo su un taxi collettivo nel caos del traffico. Per arrivare all'appartamento abbiamo percorso una strada sterrata e polverosa, e a un certo punto ci ha tagliato la strada un carretto tirato da un asino. L'appartamento però era in condizioni pessime: uno strato di sporco ovunque, pareti spoglie e la bombola del gas completamente scarica. Poco dopo è arrivato il figlio del padrone di casa, rigidissimo e paranoico all'idea che potessi occupargli la casa, e ha preteso l'intero affitto subito in contanti. Mi sono sentita vista come una rendita da prosciugare solo perché europea. Ero così abbattuta e a disagio che sono uscita di corsa a comprarmi lenzuola e asciugamani nuovi, giusto per avere qualcosa di pulito e tracciare un mio confine minimo per riuscire a dormire.

22/03/24 Stamattina Zineb e Wissal mi hanno dato una mano e abbiamo chiamato una signora per fare le pulizie profonde della casa. Parlando in spagnolo con lei ci siamo capite subito e si è creato un clima molto disteso. A fine giornata le ho offerto il pranzo e abbiamo mangiato insieme sul tavolo ancora umido di pulito. È stato un gesto spontaneo che ha cambiato del tutto la situazione: invece di una fredda transazione tra padrona e lavoratrice, condividere il cibo ha creato un

rispetto reciproco e ha fatto sparire quel distacco.

25/03/26 Ho iniziato a girare da sola per la Medina. Camminare per strada senza compagnia è stancante: gli uomini occupano i marciapiedi e le soglie dei negozi, ti fissano senza spostare lo sguardo e commentano a mezza voce quando passi. L'essere bianca, europea e sola fa scattare subito lo stereotipo della turista ricca e disponibile. Ho provato a vestirmi più coperta, mettendo sciarpe ampie sulle spalle per farmi notare meno, ma gli sguardi non cambiano granché. Non è una questione di quanta pelle mostri, ma del fatto stesso di essere una donna che cammina da sola in spazi gestiti dagli uomini.

28/03/26 Sono andata verso la zona del porto. C'è un rumore fortissimo di motori diesel, le grida dell'asta del pesce e un odore intenso di salmastro e sangue di pesce. All'inizio speravo di capire se ci lavorassero anche delle donne per fare un confronto con il lavoro nei campi, ma al porto la presenza maschile è totale e assoluta. La banchina è un territorio esclusivamente degli uomini e ho capito subito che lì per me non c'era alcuna possibilità di fare ricerca, quindi devo concentrarmi solo sulla filiera agricola.

02/04/26 Ho trovato un posto dove staccare la spina: il cimitero spagnolo in cima alla scogliera. È un luogo silenzioso, con le lapidi un po' scrostate, la vegetazione spontanea e il rumore delle onde dell'oceano sotto. È l'unico posto dove posso sedermi a scrivere e pensare senza avere addosso lo sguardo costante di qualcuno. Ho provato ad andare anche alle rovine di Lixus, ma lì è pieno di uomini che girano e pattugliano la zona, e la sensazione di allerta torna subito.

05/04/26 Siccome non volevo rinchiudermi in casa, ho deciso di fare una piccola prova: andare ogni mattina a prendere il caffè nel bar sotto casa, che è un posto frequentato solo da uomini. I primi giorni si giravano tutti a guardarmi con malizia

e curiosità, ma a forza di vedermi arrivare alla stessa ora la mia presenza si è normalizzata. Ora mi salutano con un cenno formale, mi lasciano il mio spazio e posso prendermi il caffè tranquilla.

10/04/26 Oggi sono andata a Beni Garfett con Zineb per l'intera giornata. L'impatto con il paesaggio rurale è fortissimo: distese di serre di plastica e file interminabili di donne piegate sui solchi a raccogliere o diserbare sotto il sole, mentre altre stanno accovacciate sulla polvere del bordo strada a vendere qualche ortaggio sfuso. Il paese è un insieme disordinato di case basse in cemento grezzo con i blocchi a vista e tetti di lamiera tenuti giù con le pietre. Per il pranzo ci siamo addentrate nel souk locale, sotto una tenda di fortuna che fa da macelleria e ristoro. A terra c'era fango, polvere e scarti organici, con carcasse di animali squartati appese ai ganci arrugginiti con le interiora di fuori e sciami di mosche attorno, oltre a un odore penetrante di letame, fumo di brace, spezie e sangue fresco. Appena sono arrivata mi sono trovata circondata da frotte di bambini incuriositi. La donna che ci accompagnava si scusava in continuazione per la sporcizia e il disordine, confrontando la loro miseria con la comodità dell'Europa. Ci ha raccontato di essersi spaccata la schiena nei campi fin da ragazzina, lavorando a giornata per poco o niente, o facendo lavoro gratuito per la famiglia senza mai avere un soldo suo. Nel frattempo il macellaio ha tagliato la carne sul ceppo di legno con la mannaia, l'ha impastata a mani nude con le spezie e ha messo le polpette sulla graticola. L'odore del grasso e del fumo mi chiudeva lo stomaco, anche perché sto cercando di non mangiare carne. Però la signora insisteva tantissimo perché mangiassi, felice di potermi offrire quel piatto. Rifiutare sarebbe stato percepito come un gesto di disprezzo verso la sua ospitalità, così ho mangiato con loro, riflettendo sulla macellazione rituale halal rispetto agli allevamenti

industriali.

18/04/26 Lungo la strada statale si incrociano continuamente asini e cavalli che tirano pesanti carretti di legno carichi di cassette. Mi sono fermata a una bancarella sul ciglio della strada e ho comprato un chilo di fragole per meno di dieci dirham, neanche un euro. Guardando quel sacchetto mi è venuta una stretta allo stomaco: sono le fragole scartate dai controlli estetici dei nostri supermercati europei perché non abbastanza lucide o calibrate. Vengono rigettate indietro e svendute per pochi centesimi. In quel prezzo così basso c'è tutta la svalutazione del lavoro enorme delle braccianti.

22/04/26 Nel tardo pomeriggio la statale si riempie dei furgoni che riportano le donne dai campi. Sono carcasse di metallo arrugginite senza portiere né finestrini. Davanti guidano gli uomini, mentre nei cassoni dietro sono stipate le donne, ammassate come merce, con i vestiti incrostati di fango secco e polvere di serra. Ma la cosa che mi ha colpita di più è il silenzio: un silenzio totale e pesante. Dopo dodici ore piegate sotto la plastica sono così sfinite che non dicono una parola, usano tutta la forza rimasta solo per puntare i piedi e tenersi strette ai tubi di ferro per non volare fuori nelle curve.

28/04/26 Abbiamo provato a chiedere di entrare nelle serre delle grandi aziende agro-industriali della zona, accompagnate anche da un professore universitario, ma ci hanno sbarrato la strada. I proprietari hanno il terrore che qualcuno dall'esterno veda come lavorano le persone e quali contratti informali usano, quindi sbarrano l'ingresso a chiunque.

03/05/26 Siamo riuscite a superare questo blocco grazie alla signora delle pulizie dell'università, che ci ha fatto da tramite con le braccianti. Oggi siamo andate per la prima volta a casa di Sanaa, una casa spoglia e incompiuta con le scale di

mattoni senza ringhiera, per iniziare a incontrare le lavoratrici. Con noi c'era anche Mohammed, uno studente che ci faceva da traduttore. La presenza di un ragazzo universitario in mezzo a tutte quelle donne rurali rischiava di frenare i racconti, quindi ho cercato di compensare con i gesti, gli sguardi e la postura per farle sentire a loro agio.

05/05/26 Secondo giorno a casa di Sanaa per continuare l'ascolto delle storie di vita. Oggi le donne raccontavano con grande intensità e mentre Mohammed traduceva io prendevo appunti sul taccuino. Le donne, che non sapevano né leggere né scrivere, guardavano la mia mano correre sul foglio con una specie di rispetto rapito. Lì ho sentito tutto il peso e l'ingiustizia dell'alfabetizzazione come privilegio. Ogni tanto sospiravano dicendo "Hamdullah" per farsi forza nel raccontare fatiche tremende.

07/05/26 Ultimo giorno di interviste a casa di Sanaa per completare il quadro delle undici storie di vita. A fine incontro una delle lavoratrici mi ha chiesto con la massima serietà se potevo aiutarla a trovare lavoro nei campi in Spagna. Guarda all'Europa non come a un posto di libertà o diritti, ma solo come a un altro posto dove piegare la schiena nelle serre per non morire di fame.

10/05/26 La famiglia di Zineb mi ha praticamente adottata. Oggi era venerdì e siamo andate a mangiare il couscous insieme. Attorno al piatto c'eravamo io, Zineb, sua madre e Wissal. Il padre mangiava da solo nell'altra stanza, come si usa fare per lasciare alle donne il loro spazio conviviale. Io ero goffissima: cercare di raccogliere le verdure calde e il pesce usando solo il pane e le tre dita della mano destra senza posate è stato un disastro. Le donne ridevano affettuosamente vedendomi così impacciata, ma si sono rifiutate di darmi la forchetta proprio per farmi imparare le loro tecniche.

14/05/26 Preparare il tè alla menta qui è un rito solenne: versano la bevanda dall'alto per farla schiumare, ripetendo il gesto con estrema calma. All'inizio mi veniva l'ansia per la fretta che mi porto dentro dall'Italia, ma poi capisci che la relazione e la fiducia si costruiscono proprio in questi tempi lenti e non cronometrati.

18/05/26 Le bambine del quartiere sono diventate una presenza costante. Suonano al citofono a ripetizione, portano biscotti e vogliono curiosare in casa mia, cancellando ogni mia idea di privacy. Oggi una di loro mi ha chiesto a bruciapelo se credessi in Allah o negli "idoli", per capire dove collocarmi nel suo mondo. Poi hanno provato a vendermi dei trucchi fatti in casa dalle loro sorelle maggiori: siccome le ragazze giovani stanno chiuse in casa, usano le bambine come venditrici per la strada. Gli altri bambini maschi, invece, se ne stavano rannicchiati nell'ombra a spiarmi da lontano, nascosti tra le pieghe delle djellaba delle madri.

22/05/26 A fine ricerca il figlio del padrone di casa ha provato di nuovo a estorcermi soldi inventandosi spese assurde e minacciando di cacciarmi. Se il primo giorno mi ero spaventata, stavolta ho reagito diversamente: mi sono irrigidita, l'ho guardato negli occhi e gli ho detto un "no" secco e fermo, proprio come ho visto fare tante volte a Zineb e alle altre donne. Lui si è imbarazzato e ha fatto subito marcia indietro. Subito dopo ho fatto le valigie e mi sono trasferita da Zineb. Nel loro garage c'è già il montone per la festa dell'Eid al-Adha: sentire i suoi rumori e l'odore di stalla al pian terreno fa un effetto strano, ma porta la vita rurale e il sacro direttamente dentro casa.

25/05/26 Sono arrivati alcuni miei amici dall'Italia. Vedere il loro spaesamento di fronte alla polvere, al traffico e ai gesti quotidiani mi ha fatto rendere conto di quanto io sia cambiata in due mesi. Non mi sento più un'estranea spaventata, ho

imparato a muovermi e a vivere la strada con naturalezza.

27/05/26 Prima di rientrare sono andata a Fès. Ma senza Zineb, senza la rete di protezione di Larache e senza le facce amiche del quartiere, mi sono ritrovata di nuovo del tutto persa e vulnerabile nei vicoli della Medina, esattamente come il primo giorno.