

4th International seminar  
*Migrations, Agriculture and Food Sustainability: Dynamics,  
Challenges and Perspectives in the Global Context*  
Center of Human and Social Sciences of CSIC (Madrid),  
26-27 January 2017



**Migrant's agency in global agricultural chains?**  
**Evidences from the case of Bolivian migrants in  
Argentina's agriculture and Moroccan migrants in the  
enclave of Piana del Sele (Salerno, Italy)**

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# 1. Global Chains Perspective

- Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) critique to the “global chains perspective”: authors tend to assume that the workforce is permanently available in a passive way, without autonomy.
- In sum, worker’s agency in global chains is often excluded from the analysis
- **Questions:**
  - **Do migrants have agency in global agricultural chains?**
  - **How they exercise it?**
  - **How does it shape the way chains are structured?**

## 2. Structure-Agency Dilemma

- Complex and eternal debate in social sciences and in the field of migration studies (Block, 2013; Bakewell, 2010; Castles, 2010)
- Massey *et al.* (1998) suggest that each case has to be studied identifying the concrete structure and the existing spaces of agency.
- **Structure:** Jason Moore's World-Ecology paradigm. Global agricultural chains are structured and oriented to produce cheap food as this is one of the four pillars. **Migrants** are inserted in the chains as a cheap workforce in order to reduce costs at maximum. Their exploitation allows producing cheap food (Molinero and Avallone, 2016).
- **Agency:** All these authors consider it's a key dimension to fully understand migration processes (Block, 2013; Sewell, 1992; Bakewell, 2010; Ahearn, 2001; Duff, 2012) and is also a part of the post-colonial study of migrations.

### 3. Migrants' Agency in Global Agricultural Chains

- Selection of two cases that are completely different to show how in completely opposite contexts migrants use their agency and shape the configuration of the chains:
  - Case 1: **Bolivian** migrants in **Argentina's** agriculture
  - Case 2: **Moroccan** migrants in **Piana del Sele's** Agriculture (Province of Salerno, Italy)

## 4. Bolivian Migrants in Argentina's agriculture

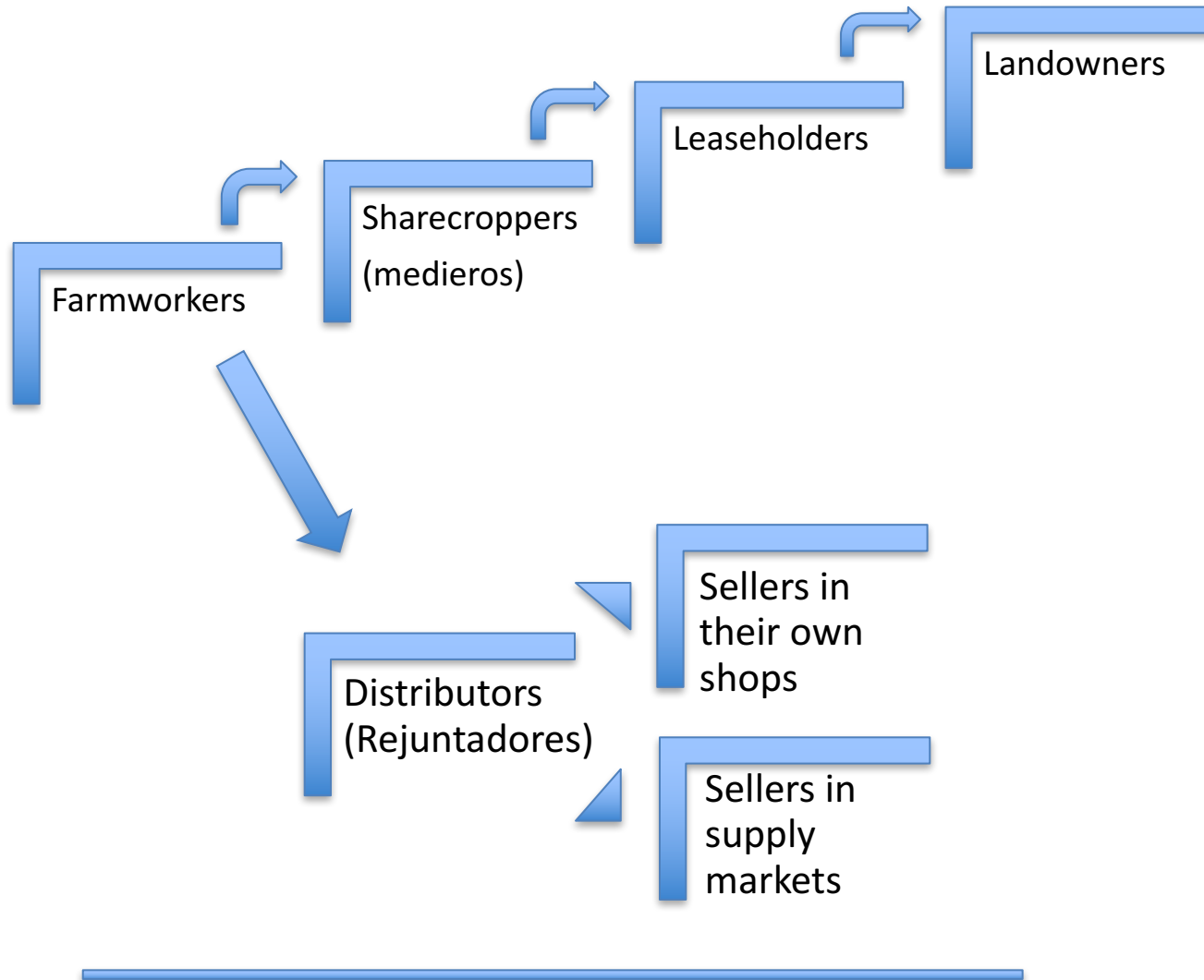
- The agriculture sector has been extremely important for the country since its independence. The vast arable lands and the availability of a huge range of different climates (from the tropical north, to the temperate middle and the cold south) made people call the country “the barn of the world” since the XIXth century.
- In the 70's the development of the “cold chain” allowed producers to increase exportations by including counter station fruits and vegetables. This, coupled with the implementation of adjustment programs caused the “concentration and transnationalization process” (Steimbregger, 2014).
- In this period, the number of Bolivians coming to work in the country's agriculture started to raise.

## 4. Bolivian Migrants in Argentina's agriculture

- Their insertion was usually as farm workers as a cheap workforce for local farmers who sell in the national market.
- Their case is **exceptional** worldwide as they migrate with the objective of escalating hierarchically in the chain to become central actors of the sector, not just cheap workforce.
- Three factors allowed that:
  - Global context: neoliberalism favoured the conversion of Argentina's agriculture into an export sector to the global center
  - National context: economic crises and weakness of local economy produced an abandonment of agricultural production for local markets
  - Bolivians have what Benencia (2014) calls "the correct reading of reality", this is, an ambitious migration project where thanks to their "intelligence, tenacity, constancy at work, conservation of the traditions, personal networks, organizational capacity and savings" (Benencia, 2011) they are able to see the opportunity to grow

## 4. Bolivian Migrants in Argentina's agriculture

### The Bolivian staircase



## 4. Bolivian Migrants in Argentina's agriculture

- They recruit only people from their localities of origin via personal networks and when these people arrive, they start the same process following the staircase
- Their importance is so huge that now we can talk about “Bolivianisation of Argentina's agriculture” (Pizarro, 2014)
- They have “revitalized” Argentina's agriculture invigorating the economic activity, creating new productive spaces and ensuring the availability of fruits and vegetables in the national market.

*“without Bolivians, the agricultural production for national consumption would have disappeared long ago” (interview with a local seller in Sierra de los Padres, Buenos Aires province)*

- Without studying their agency it would be impossible to understand Argentina's agriculture



## 4. Moroccan Migrants in Piana del Sele's agriculture

- At the same time Argentina experienced the “concentration and transnationalization process”, Southern Europe's Agriculture became industrialized and were also oriented to exporting
- Migrant workforce became more and more fundamental and States started to develop their migration legislation
- Italian model (Santoro, 2006): clandestine entry, acceptance of precarious jobs and if workers had good behaviour then they are regularised.
- Italian agriculture benefited from this system that allowed the extension of irregularity and informality in the sector. Agriculture became a “refuge sector” for undocumented migrants willing to work in Italy.

## 4. Moroccan Migrants in Piana del Sele's agriculture

- Piana del Sele is 80 km south from Naples, it's a vast territory of 500 square kms crossed by the river "Sele"

In 2014:

- 8.000 agribusinesses
- 5.000 hectares of greenhouses (3.000 for arugula production)
- Produces 60% of fourth range products (ready to go salads) in Italy
- Mixes Seasonal production (tomato, watermelon, peach, kiwi...) and no seasonal production.
- Most of its production is for exportation (Germany, UK...) and some big companies have a significant presence there like Bonduelle.



## 4. Moroccan Migrants in Piana del Sele's agriculture

- It's an enclave where migrants live in a "subaltern spatial experience" (Avallone, 2012) with an absolute absence of the State's presence.
- Grey work predominates (semi legal labour conditions).
- Illegal intermediation: Caporalato system that directly and indirectly link farms and labourers. They organize labour supply demand matching, they are paid by employers and they pay themselves workers. Perfect figure for employers willing to outsource the employment of farmworkers and have cheap, disciplined and ready workers.
- Labour conditions: 4€ per hour, journeys of 8 hours most of the days extended to 10h or 12h. Some had contracts (not fully declared by employers to the Social Security) and benefit from better conditions (paid extra hours, holidays...). Others work discontinuous day, in general for seasonal production and obtaining work via caporali. Certain stability of those working in greenhouses compared to those working in seasonal production

## 4. Moroccan Migrants in Piana del Sele's agriculture

- In this rigid structure, what kind of agency do migrants have?
- We carried 14 in depth interviews with Moroccan migrants.
- **Individual projects:** they migrate alone, “to improve their living conditions” there is no community project like in the case of Bolivians. They did not plan to work in agriculture: refuge sector.
- Once they understand how the structure work they reformulate their strategies, the illusion of the migratory project vanishes and the fight for survival starts: finding a job is fundamental and there is a competition for that
- Complete disarticulation of their organization, Trade Unions just work as intermediaries for getting documents etc.

## 4. Moroccan Migrants in Piana del Sele's agriculture

We identified 4 kinds of personal projects:

- 1: (the most common) maintain their situation until they get a long-stay permit then move to other Schengen countries
- 2: Come back to Morocco after getting the long-stay permit (guarantee to a possible return or circular informal migration)
- 3: Bring their families to Italy
- 4: Maintaining their situation until they retire
  
- **This kind of agency configures the enclave: migrants accept their subaltern position and hard conditions because they want to achieve their projects. They are not slaves (like some reports or journals tend to say), they are workers who know the conditions and accept them to achieve their objectives**
- **The structure determines their limited space for agency, but their resilience explains why they still work there and the reserve army is reproduced**

## 5. Final reflexions

- Both cases show that there is space for migrant's agency in global agricultural chains.
- This happens in the center but also in the periphery of the world-system and in rigid or "softer" contexts
- Argentina's agriculture can't be understood without studying bolivians agency but neither Piana del Sele's one
- Both types of agency depend on many determinants imposed by the structure, but also on other geographical, historical and economical factors.
- Both cases show that migrant's agency is a determinant factor to understand how enclaves and then global chains are configured

**Thank you**