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## **African Immigrant Workers in Spanish Agriculture**

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## **African immigrant workers in Spanish agriculture\***

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Comparatively little research has been completed on non-European immigrant populations in rural Europe. As recent reviews have made clear (e.g. Ageyman and Spooner, 1997), one has to search wide to find material on ethnic minorities, let alone immigrants. Although this shortfall is being addressed by some analysts (e.g. Jay, 1992; Kinsman, 1995), the European literature falls a long way short of what is available in the United States (e.g. Friedland and Nelkin, 1971; Baker, 1976; Jennings, 1980; Goldfarb, 1981). Perhaps this is understandable, as both the immigrant and ethnic minority populations of the rural USA are larger than in Europe. Although the 1950s and 1960s saw large immigrant inflows into north-central Europe, the destinations of immigrant workers were largely urban (e.g. Schmitter-Heisler, 1986). Today, Europe is experiencing a new wave of non-European labour immigration. This differs from previous inflows, not simply because of its different political and economic context, but also because its destinations have a significant southern European flavour (King and Rybaczuk, 1993; Pugliese, 1993). From what evidence is currently available, it appears that a further difference exists, in that rural areas are playing a more important role in the employment experiences of these new immigrants.

Up to the oil crisis of 1973, the vast bulk of immigration into north-central Europe was directed toward cities. Immigration to rural areas was much smaller, even though it made an important contribution to farm labour in some countries. One indication of this was targeted government efforts to recruit foreign workers for agriculture. In Germany, for instance, 54% of registered seasonal immigrant workers in 1992 were employed in agriculture (Cyrus, 1994). Here the Federal Labour Office started recruiting foreign workers for agriculture in 1955, with manufacturing only targeted later (Castles et al., 1984). In Switzerland the initial recruitment of foreign labour was also intended to meet labour shortfalls in agriculture, along with construction, hotels and catering. Likewise a specific target for recruitment by the French Office National d'Immigration was agricultural workers, with the farm sector employing 100,000 seasonal foreign labourers as early as 1970 (Castles et al., 1984). What distinguished these inflows into the farm sector was their relatively small size, compared with the volume of immigrant workers gaining manufacturing or service jobs, and, significantly, the short-term, seasonal nature (often with rigorous monitoring to ensure workers left when their contracts terminated; e.g. Cyrus, 1994). By contrast, the signs are that agriculture is more central to recent immigrant labour experiences in southern Europe, and that immigrant farm workers are becoming more permanent members of the receiving nations' labour forces.

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At a time when immigration into the European Union is politically sensitive, with governments making forceful statements on the need to restrict inflows (Convey and Kupiszewski, 1996; Marie, 1996), increasing immigrant employment in agriculture might not sit comfortably with prior expectations. Yet

official statistics for Italy denote an upward trend in immigrant farm employment in almost all regions (Istituto Nazionale Economia Agraria, 1992), while King and Rybaczuk (1993) note a major role for foreign labour in Italian vineyard regions, as well as in tomato, tobacco and market garden production. Revealing how immigrant trends have changed, the long-established movement of Iberian workers into French agriculture has more recently been substituted by inflows of Maghrebins (Berlan, 1986). This over-representation of non-EU workers in agriculture is also found in Spain. Thus 15.2% of the legally-resident non-EU workforce in Spain was employed in agriculture in 1996, with this rate going up to 31.6% for Africans (Comisión Interministerial de Extranjería, annual). Providing some indication of similar trends amongst the 'illegal' working population, in the province of Zaragoza, Escalona Orcao and Escolono Utrilla (1993) found that 29% of immigrants in the regularization campaign of 1991 were given work permits for agriculture, which constituted the largest single occupational group in this process. Why such workers have become important to the farm sector in southern European locations has unfortunately been little explored. In the Spanish case, for example, investigations have primarily restricted their attention to identifying the dominant characteristics of immigrant workers (e.g. nationality, year of arrival, legal status).

The objective of this paper is to go beyond such statistical counts by examining the reasons why African immigrants are being employed in Spanish farming.<sup>1</sup> Underlying this concern is recognition of an essential difference between earlier mass immigration into north-central Europe and current inflows into southern Europe. Principally this difference emerges because immigration into southern Europe has occurred at a time of economic weakness and high unemployment. As Kindleberger (1967) indicates, an essential factor in economic growth in north-central Europe after 1945 was a substantial increment in non-agricultural employment. In so far as this helped limit wage inflation, immigration played a key role in promoting economic growth. The idea that employment growth is outstripping local labour supplies clearly bears little resemblance to the situation in southern European economies today (e.g. examine comparative employment performance indicators in Commission of the European Communities, annual).

In contrast to the situation in north-central Europe, where analysts identified labour shortage resulting from the rapid rate of job growth, in southern Europe analysts have pointed to labour shortages being associated with high unemployment, with immigrant labour being called on because work-places are not being filled by home nationals. The reasons that have been put forward to explain this are various. They include the prominence of 'undesirable' work environments, owing to the dynamism of informal economic activities (e.g. Martínez Veiga, 1989) and the importance of small-scale enterprises (Vázquez-Barquero, 1992), alongside higher educational attainment by young people, which has led to a rejection of socially 'unacceptable' types of work (e.g. Huntoon, 1998). Whatever the precise reason, the underlying implication is that the nature of immigrant employment in Europe has changed since the 1970s. But, in theoretical terms, it is questionable whether there is a real difference between the situation now and before the oil crisis. It might be argued that immigrants are now 'called on' to fill the 'holes' in labour supply that home populations have left, whereas in (say) the 1960s they were asked to fill 'absolute' labour shortages. But we have to ask what the basis of these 'absolute' shortages was. Today, the 'holes' in labour supply are associated by some with considerations of social status and poor work-place environments; in effect, with social rather than economic decisions on the part of home nationals. Yet this rationale is little different from the cultural norms of earlier decades that 'decreed' that the employability of certain population groups was undesirable (e.g. married women with children). Here again, a generally in theoretical terms, employment situations have to be seen as socially regulated rather than as simple market relationships (e.g. Peck, 1996). Take this thought further and recognize that, even if there is a seeming absolute shortfall in labour supply, this does not mean that immigrant employment is needed to

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<sup>1</sup> This study focuses on 151 workers in the Spanish province of Girona who were born in Africa and, with the exception of those who have naturalized, are (were) citizens of an African nation. In all, 87 of those interviewed came from Morocco and 64 came from The Gambia or Senegal.

meet the shortfall. Employers (with or without governmental support) have been very willing to invest in labour saving devices when this was in their own personal interests; most evidently when labour has organized to demand better work pay and conditions (e.g. Price, 1983) or more recently in the face of increased market competition associated with globalization (e.g. Rawlinson and Wells, 1993; Bernard, 1994). The decision to utilize immigrant labour is not simply an economic decisions on the part of employers but is penetrated as much by social context as are the decisions of potential employees not to take certain jobs (Peck, 1996). The question of why agricultural employers have taken on immigrant employees is just as valid as why home nationals are not taking work in the sector.

In theoretical terms, a further question that needs asking is the employment consequences for immigrants of labour market conditions. For immigrant labour employability, there should be significant differences between the pre-oil crisis situation, in which a 'genuine shortfall' in supply arguably existed, and the present-day, where home nationals are unwilling to occupy particular labour market roles. In the former case, labour shortfalls should hypothetically result in a greater prospect that jobs are available to immigrants across the occupational spectrum. In the latter case, it is specific occupational niches that are being 'abandoned' and so 'allocated' to immigrants. Irrespective of actual practice, if employers are intent on securing high quality workers, in a context of labour shortfalls, they should 'import' workers with appropriate skills to fill skills shortages; rather than accepting poorer workers, simply because they are home nationals (in so far as this is not the case, of socio-political considerations can be seen to outweigh economic ones). But where the driving force behind immigrant employment is local worker 'abandonment' of undesirable work-tasks, by 'definition' the resulting work opportunities for immigrants are segmented from those of the mainstream population.

Theoretically, this raises an interesting question about the operation of labour markets, for there are two main strands of thought on occupational mobility linked to dissimilar views on the potential for such workers to improve their labour market position over time. In human capital theory, which is based on neo-classical economic assumptions, with labour markets conceptualized as commodity markets that match supply with demand, whatever the initial circumstances of job entry, those with more human capital (e.g. education, job experience) find upward occupational mobility easier to achieve (e.g. Becker, 1964). Contrasting with this view, segmentation theory holds that labour markets are divided, such that access to sectors with better pay and working conditions is restricted to a limited number of workers, who are distinguished by class, ethnicity and gender (amongst other potential division lines). Empirical evidence to support the idea of segmented rural labour markets is readily available from North America. Deseran and associates (1984), for example, indicate that the attributes of labour markets make little impression on the farm family income of blacks in the USA, whereas they have a significant bearing on the earnings of whites (see also Horan and Tolbert, 1984; Bloomquist, 1990). One structural foundation of segmentation processes is made apparent in Stymeist's (1975) study of a small town in Ontario. This shows that the native American population have social networks that close them off from the word-of-mouth information sources that provide most information about available jobs. Providing evidence of a further divide line, Parker and co-workers (1983) point figures from the Farm Workers Housing Coalition suggesting that only 11% of the children of migrant farm labourers in the USA attain the eighth grade at school, compared with 80% of non-migrant children. By their very dates, these studies provide one indication that awareness of labour market segmentation in rural North American is not new. Yet segmentation is a critical feature of labour markets. Accepting that its postulates do not invalidate human capital theory ideas, it is nonetheless true to say that the development of theoretical ideas on labour markets has come to emphasize the centrality of segmentation theory ideas, with human capital theory taking a more secondary role (e.g. Peck, 1996). One clear indication of this is the manner in which human capital theorists have come to incorporate segmentation ideas into their analysis (e.g. Todaro, 1969). Yet, despite theoretical development on labour markets, alongside ample empirical evaluations in the USA, with a few exceptions evaluates of segmentation ideas in European rural contexts is little developed (e.g. Bradley, 1984).

Positioning this paper with regard to these ideas, the central question is why there has been a notable increase in African employment in Spanish agriculture. Accepting that in the current political environment, government action largely permits immigration if it plugs a labour market gap (Convey and Kupiszewski, 1996; Marie, 1996), the paper assumes that on arrival African immigrants will occupy specific niches in Spanish labour markets (viz. that local labour markets are segmented). This prompts the second question to be addressed, which is whether the longer term labour market experiences of African workers are indicative of a 'rigidly' segmented labour market structure or whether farm labourers can utilize their human capital endowments to move up the occupational ladder. The paper concludes with a short discussion on the implications of its findings for the future of Spanish agriculture. In seeking to develop the argument, the paper will examine African employment patterns at the provincial level through a detailed interview surveys of farm employers and farm employees in the Spanish province of Girona. The underlying issues in this paper are whether agriculture occupies a distinctive place in immigrant labour market trajectories and African employment in the sector tells us about the state of Spanish farming.

### **Agriculture and the Spanish accession to the EU**

As a result of Spain joining the EU in 1986, Spanish farmers have seen increased competition for sales at home, as well as benefiting from access to new markets (Pérez Yruela, 1995). From the start of negotiations on Spanish membership of the EU the agricultural question was troublesome. Initially, the primary problems were the potential impact of Spanish farm exports on the agricultural economies of other EU members, which led to some opposition to Spain's membership (Naylon, 1981; Tacet, 1992). On the Spanish side there were fears that the inefficiencies of Spanish producers could result in severe consequences for the farm sector once markets were opened to imports from the rest of Europe (Cruz Villálon, 1987). Since its accession to the EU there has certainly been increased pressure on the competitive position of some farm sectors (San Juan Mesonada, 1993), but this has been accompanied by positive gains for other sectors (as prior analyses predicted; e.g. Mykolenko et al., 1987). Thus, both in the year of accession (1986) and 10 years later, Spain retained its position as a modest net exporter of food commodities (Commission of the European Communities, annual). Signifying that its productive units were in a comparable position with the Union as a whole, in 1995 some 26.1% of Spanish farmers worked full-time on their holdings, compared with 27.7% in the EU12. Moreover, whereas farm incomes in 1986 were 86.7% of the Spanish national average, by 1993 the figure was 100.5% (El País, 6 July 1995). However, despite the positive ring of such figures, a fundamental problem for Spanish agriculture has been its inability to retain or attract local workers.

Thus, according to Encuesta de población activa data (INE, quarterly), the number of farm workers in Spain fell by 445,700 between 1989 and 1996 (that is by 30.9%). For some decades now, with manufacturing and services offering better pay, farm labourers have been leaving farming in vast numbers (e.g. Nadal, 1984; Camarero, 1993). Rural depopulation still characterizes agriculturally-dominated economies, even though other rural zones experience net in-migration (e.g. Hoggart, 1997). Since the 1970s, decline has resulted from natural decrease, as the sector has taken few new entrants and has an ageing workforce (Naredo, 1986). There is a crisis of confidence in Spanish agriculture, with a widespread unwillingness to work in the sector (e.g. Redclift, 1973; Greenwood, 1976; Mansvelt Beck, 1988). Investigators document young people leaving farming because of its low social status, even when this means taking lower paid urban jobs (e.g. Greenwood, 1976), while in wealthier regions relatively low farm profits push would-be employers out of the sector (García Ramon et al., 1995). Hardly surprisingly, Spanish agrarian censuses reveal a loss of 139,949 farm workers aged 25 years or less between 1982 and 1989. During the same period those in the 55-64 age group grew by 51,257 and those over 65 years increased by 32,787 (Enciso Rodríguez and Sabaté Prats, 1995). In this context, it not surprising that the

rate of decline in full-time, non-family farm workers was 22.0% in Spain over the 1987-1993 period, compared with a figure 17.5% in the EU12 (Commission of the European Communities, annual). Significantly, in the context of this paper, placed alongside these figures is change in the number of regular part-time workers. For the EU12 this employment category recorded an 11.1% decline between 1987 and 1993. Yet for Spain this part-time employment category saw an increase in numbers by 18.5%. As will be shown below, an important element in this increase has been the utilization of African workers.

## **Immigrant employment by region**

That stated, it has to be acknowledged that there is substantial regional diversity in the employment of non-EU (including African) labour in Spain. A clear sign of this is given in the work permit data shown in Figure 1. This classifies Spanish provinces into 'agricultural areas' (with a share of the labour force in farming greater than the Spanish average of 9.3% in 1995; INE, quarterly) and 'non-agricultural areas' (with percentages below that average). It also takes a non-EU composition of 5% or more to indicate a high level of non-EU representation in the farm workforce (the average for Spain was 1.4%). What Figure 1 shows is that non-EU workers are significantly over-represented in 'agricultural provinces' (e.g. Murcia) and 'non-agricultural provinces' (e.g. Barcelona). Also noteworthy is the fact that there are few non-EU workers in some areas of high-intensity farm production, just as there is over-representation in some areas of extensive farm production. The most notable case of near invisibility in high-intensity farm work is found in northern regions (e.g. Galicia). Here the key to the lack of (immigrant) hired workers is a surplus farm population (see, for instance, Colino Sueiras, 1984; Salmon, 1995; Calcedo Ordóñez, 1996). At the other end of the scale, low immigrant employment is recorded for large-scale farms that concentrate on extensively cultivated crops. Thus, in the inland provinces Andalucía, Extremadura and Castilla La Mancha, large-scale farm enterprises are associated with a well-established rural proletariat (e.g. Martínez Alier, 1986). Even though these areas lost many farm workers in the 1960s and early 1970s (Nadal, 1984; Camarero, 1993), rural exodus forced landowners to mechanize production (Sapelli, 1995). As a result, provided enterprises continue to engage in extensive production (as still dominates cereal and olive cultivation), they require few workers from outside the immediate locality to meet production needs. Only in a few places of extensive farming, such as the vineyards of Castilla-La Mancha (Giménez Romero, 1992), do work permit data reveal that immigrant employment is close to the Spanish average (although largely season work is involved here). Even in these 'high spots', the magnitude of immigrant employment is considerably lower than in intensive agricultural zones of the Mediterranean coast (e.g. Almería, Murcia or Girona) or in the Ebro Valley (e.g. Zaragoza or Navarra).

It would be too simplistic to characterize the geography of demand for immigrant labour in terms of the location of more labour demanding crops, like fruit, vegetables and vineyards. Even where producers have transferred from cereal production into more labour-intensive crops, locational differences in labour availability produce uneven demand for immigrant labour. Thus, in Cádiz, although intensive crop production has risen significantly, the local availability of an abundant agricultural labour force has limited labour inflows (Cruces Roldán and Martín Díaz, 1997). Yet outside such areas of surplus farm labour, shifts into intensive farm production have commonly been accompanied by growth in immigrant employment. Illustrative of this, in the Andalucía provinces of Huelva and Almería, the 1982 and 1989 agrarian censuses show that cereal production stagnated in the 1980s, whereas land under fruit trees rose by 11.3% in Almería and by 90.0% in Huelva (the figures for vegetables were 50.3% in Almería and 122.1% in Huelva; INE, 1984; 1991). Both provinces have high rates of immigrant employment (Figure 1), with case studies revealing that a key reason for immigrant employment is the introduction of labour-intensive crops (Checa, 1995; Roquero, 1996; Taller de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos, 1996). To put this in context, the critical factor in employing immigrants appears to be the introduction of a specific crop, rather than the dominant crop of a region. Thus, in a 1994 survey of seasonal workers in

Mediterranean Spain (Metra-Seis Consulting, 1995), in the Catalan province of Lleida 96% of seasonal farm labourers were engaged in the fruit tree sector, although the main regional crop was cereals, which occupied one-third of the utilized land area (Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, annual).

Of particular relevance to the growth of immigrant employment is the juxtaposition of an increase in labour-intensive crop production with an increased reluctance to accept farm work by the existing local population (e.g. Greenwood, 1976). It is noticeable, for instance, that in areas that moved into more intensive farming in the 1960s and 1970s, labour shortfalls were at first met by in-migrants and non-working local residents. Only more recently have these sources failed to meet demand, which has led to growth in African employment (Balcells, 1991; Giménez Romero, 1992). By contrast, in areas where the shift into intensive farming is recent, labour-intensive production has immediately been accompanied by the employment of non-EU nationals (Giménez Romero, 1992; Roquero, 1996). Based on surveys of African employees and employers, the next section explores the scope and reasons for the substitution of Spanish workers by African nationals in the Girona. This analysis focuses not simply on the role of immigrants in agriculture, but also highlights the role of agricultural work in immigrant labour market trajectories in Spain.

### **African workers in Girona agriculture**

Situated in the north east of the Iberian Peninsula, the Catalan province of Girona saw its foreign residents pass from 0.8% of the population in 1981 to 3.3% in 1995 (almost twice the Spanish average). One explanation for this rapid growth is the strength of the Girona economy. Thus, the province had the seventh highest per capita provincial income in 1973 but the second highest in 1995. Likewise, it moved from eighth in 1971 to second in 1995 in terms of production levels per capita (Banco Bilbao Vizcaya, biannual). Associated with this, the province has seen rapid population growth, with an almost threefold increase from 1960 to 1996. This resulted largely from in-migration from the rest of Spain (Valenzuela, 1991), although Girona has always attracted a non-Spanish population, traditionally from central and northern Europe. Yet the European share of the foreign population fell as African labour inflows increased in the 1980s and 1990s. As Gozávez Pérez (1995) has pointed out, Girona has a notable potential for the employment of foreign labour, as it has a large tourism-oriented coastal zone, which is associated with a large transient population, while the economic base of the province is diversified. Indicative of this, Girona has a more balanced distribution of non-EU workers across its economic sectors than most Spanish provinces (Mendoza, 1998). These background characteristics were a key reason for selecting Girona for the questionnaire surveys that were undertaken here, for the diversified, dynamic nature of the Girona economy provided a context in which it should be relatively easy for African workers to change employment. As such, the role (and likely continued role) that agriculture plays in African labour market trajectories can be established in a setting in which African workers have other possible job openings. To provide insight on actual patterns of African employment, interviews were conducted with 20 key local informants, 32 employers and 151 African workers. Each of these groups were selected from municipalities with contrasting economic characteristics.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The survey on African employees carried out for this project was conducted between July and December 1995. Interviews were conducted in eight municipalities, with two municipalities selected to reflect each of four different type of local employment structure. These four categories highlighted places with a bias in their employment structure towards agriculture, toward service industries (broadly defined), toward tourism and where there was a strong manufacturing sector presence.

It should be acknowledged that there were difficulties identifying African workers. From the outset it was recognized that some Africans might be employed illegally (although the extent of this is commonly exaggerated; Mendoza, 1998), so the sampling procedure used was snowballing. This started with names provided by organizations for African workers, local social service agencies, trade unions, and so on (in some cases municipal governments provided lists taken from local registration information, although others would or could not provide such lists). Interviewed workers from these lists provided contacts with other African workers living locally. With interviews also conducted with 20 local key informants (government officials, social service

In Girona agriculture, African workers are mainly employed in intensive fruit production. Since 1960, the land area under fruit trees has expanded at the expense of cereals and other crops. This expansion occurred despite a reduction of almost 20% in utilized agricultural land between 1960 and 1993 (INE, annual). But as the shift toward more intensive production occurred there was rising demand for farm labourers. As one farmer explained:

My wife and I regularly work on the farm. She's in charge of the administration, as well as cleaning the calves and milking the cows. In summer, she also picks fruit. I drive the tractor, sulphate land, prune the trees and harvest. So does the only permanent employee on the farm. He's been employed for many years with me. He's almost part of the family. My two daughters help us in summer with fruit picking. They are students at Girona University. As we replaced livestock and cereals with fruit trees, we had to hire temporary employees. Last year, for instance, we had seven workers on fixed-term contracts; one was Spanish, the rest were African. The Spanish worker was employed for the whole of the peak season [June to September]. The Africans were employed for one month or several weeks for specific tasks, like peach collection.

Key informants and employers in Girona report that, as elsewhere in Spain, this rise in demand for temporary workers has occurred at a time when agricultural work carries negative tones and low social status (Greenwood, 1976; García Ramon et al., 1995). As a social worker responsible for small rural municipalities in the province explained: "No one wants to work in farming. Middle-class urban values have quickly spread to the countryside. People want to be doctors, teachers, professionals, whatever - not *pagesos* [agricultural employers]". Along similar lines, a farming couple, who had begun to look to tourism as a primary income source, explained that this was because family farming was not going to be sustainable on their holding:

We have two children. The girl is working for the town social services. The boy is a butcher. There is no reason for us to make any major change to the farm [so they stick to cereal production]. Nobody is going to take on the farm after us. Yet rural tourism is a rock solid business in this area. Our children are happy with it.

If this view holds for would-be farming employers, it comes as no surprise that the agricultural sector is even less attractive for potential Spanish workers. In this context, the coincidence of a 725% increase in fruit production between 1960 and 1993 and a 42-fold growth in African employment in the province (1981-1995) raises obvious questions about causal links (Mendoza, 1998). Indicating that this covariation is causally related, agricultural work provided the first Spanish job for almost half of the African workers interviewed here (Table 1). Moreover, two-thirds of the sample had undertaken agricultural work at some time during their stay in Spain (99 out of 151). Further indicating that farming is a major African employer, interviewees reported high concentrations of African workers on farm holdings. Thus, of the 38 interviewees who were working on a farm at the moment of their interview, 20 declared that more than half of their co-workers were African. A further six stated that all employees were Africans and another five worked on holdings in which he/she was the only employee. Just seven of the 38 farm workers reported that Africans constituted less than half of all employees at their place of work. We should note here a wide geographical spread in African involvement in farm activities. In the different types of municipality investigated in this study (agricultural, manufacturing, service-oriented, and tourism centres), the African presence in farm work was considerably higher than the importance of this sector in

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workers, trade union officials and employers organizations), as well as with 32 employers, checks were run against how far the interviewed group reflected differences in African populations across municipalities (registration, *Padrón Municipal de Habitantes* and census information also helped in this regard). This indicated that the interviewed group provided a reasonable reflection of the variety and character of local African employment. To offer insights on how this might vary across economic sectors, interviews were conducted in municipalities with different employment structures. Further information on the methodology can be found in Mendoza (1998).



local economies. Thus, in agricultural 'towns', farming gave employment to 31.3% at the 1991 Census population, but provided jobs for 52.9% of interviewed African workers. Over-representation was even more marked elsewhere, with the proportion of Africans in farming at twice the percentage in the total workforce in manufacturing towns, seven times the rate in tourism centres and 10 times the rate in 'other services' municipalities. This highlights that African employment in farming is widespread, regardless of the local economic base.

What should also be noted is that of the 38 interviewed Africans who were working in farming at the time of their interview only five had a permanent contract. This is partly due to the seasonality of farm production. The fruit picking season in coastal Girona runs from July to September, after which the farm workforce is reduced, with continuing employees mainly charged with the maintenance of fields and farm buildings. Illustrative of this is the case of a tenant farmer with a 40 hectare holding (the average size for the province was 28.1 ha. in 1989; INE, 1991), with 30 hectares under fruit and the other 10 under cereals. This farmer stated that he had three permanent, year-round employees (the foreman, a Spanish national, and two skilled workers, one Spanish, the other African), with a further three African workers on 'temporary contracts'. Regardless of the length of their contract, these six were employed all year round on the farm. At the end of April, five more workers were employed to eliminate bloom on trees, to encourage fruit growth. These five stayed from April until the end of October, helping with successive harvests (first peaches, then pears, and finally apples). Extra workers were employed for each of these three harvests (9-10 for the peach campaign, around 15 for pears and 25-27 for apples). In the apple season, there were about 35 employees in the farm. This pattern of significant short-term increases in labour requirements is quite characteristic of fruit production in Spain. Thus, for the neighbouring province of Lleida, Balcells (1991) estimated that during the picking season an extra 5,000-6,000 workers are needed. This researcher suggests that about half the extra demand is met by the local population and by Spaniards from other provinces. This means that at least 2,000 temporary farm jobs are filled by foreigners. This figure of 2,000 contrasts with the 300 farm work permits that were issued to non-EU nationals for agriculture in 1990.

Like Lleida, demand for farm workers in Girona outstrips what the available (and willing) local labour force provides. Offering one insight on this, across the province as a whole, in July 1994 only 197 registered unemployed people had their last job in farming (Generalitat de Catalunya, 1995). This constituted less than 1.2% of the number of people registered as unemployed, whereas agriculture accounted for 5.9% of the active workforce in the province (Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya, 1993). These figures signify that there are labour shortages in farming and a lack of competition for jobs in the sector. Interviews with employers and immigrant workers clearly indicate that much of the resulting shortfall is met by Africans. To illustrate this point, one young employer explained that:

On my holding all workers are African. They are temporary workers. This is a small holding. We do not have permanent workers. When we started with apple trees, we hired local women. But it is hard work. Later, Andalusians came for the harvest, but they drank too much. There are still people who hire them. They have room on their property, so they can provide accommodation for the Andalusians. These employers generally hire the same workers every season.

Employers agreed that there had been a common trend in the evolution of hiring practices on Girona farms. Initially this involved the substitution of local female workers by temporary in-migrants from Andalucía. Now workers from southern Spain are giving way to Africans. This substitution first began to occur because local (female) residents opted for jobs other than farm work. This is not surprising, perhaps, with wages in the accommodation and restaurant sector close to 90% higher than in farming (Banco Bilbao Vizcaya, biannual). If we add to this the fact that the summer is the peak season for both sectors, the link between rapid expansion in tourism and labour shortages in farming is understandable.

But this does not explain why employers regularly report that "Andalusians are not coming any more", for work temporary absences are a long-established income earning strategy in southern Spain (e.g. Mansvelt Beck, 1988). In fact, many factors have combined to weaken internal Spanish migration streams that used to fill peaks in agricultural labour demand. For one, there has been a reduction in living standard differentials across Spain (see Ferrer Regales and Calvo Miranda, 1987; Villaverde Castro, 1996). This has been associated with a new economic dynamism in (some) agricultural areas in southern Spain that were the traditional source regions for peak season farm migrants (for the specific example of greenhouse production in Almería, see Tout, 1990). Additionally, since 1985, agricultural employees resident in Andalucía and Extremadura have had the right to claim unemployment benefit after they work 60 days [jornadas]. Agricultural labourers in the rest of Spain are not eligible for these benefits. With Andalucía and Extremadura as the main source regions of seasonal farm labourer migration, these benefits have contributed to reducing the attractiveness of working in other parts of Spain (Bentolila, 1997). As several agricultural employers indicated, some workers from Andalucía now only want to work long enough to qualify for unemployment benefit. In this context, some farmers find that in-migrant Spanish workers are not available at all (if they can secure work in their own region) or have to keep finding new workers as the season progresses. The attraction of hiring workers from another source region is obvious in this setting.

Not surprisingly, then, today few farmers hire Andalusians. Those that do tend to have stable demand for workers across the whole season (e.g. on larger farms), so workers can be offered a long (seasonal) contract which makes 'settling' with one employer for the summer worthwhile. Additionally, these farms tend to be in inland areas, where competition for workers from the tourism sector is lower. For one farmer the decision to employ Spanish temporary in-migrants was clear: "This is a small town. There are no Africans, and locals are not prepared to take up seasonal tasks any more". Yet whenever possible, it seems, farmers turn by preference to African workers. As one employer on a medium-sized holding explained: "Last year I hired 10 Andalusians. I gave them accommodation. But they were not hard workers. Beside, Africans live in town, so I do not have to provide accommodation for them".

### **African employment conditions**

African immigrants are not only employed in seasonal jobs, but also have 'permanent' work. Only five of the 38 working in the farm sector when interviewed actually had a 'permanent' contract, but 10 of the 22 with a temporary work contract had been employed for more than a year on the same farm, regardless of the length of their current contract (Table 2). Illustrating the practices in operation, one agricultural labourer had been employed continuously on the same farm for 14 years, although he had a seasonal contract at the time he was interviewed. Roquero (1996) found a similar pattern amongst African workers in Almería greenhouses, with 'real' seasonal workers employed at harvest time, while other workers with temporary contracts were engaged for nine or 10 months on successive tasks on the same farm. Like Girona, more permanent types of employment are not synonymous with permanent hiring. To put this in context, it should be noted that, in many cases, a rolling programme of temporary contracts is illegal. In Spanish law a worker has to be contracted on a permanent basis after working for the same employer for three years. From the Girona evidence it seems that, to get around this provision, some employers sack their employees and then offer them a new work contract after a short period of time. Without changing their place of employment, other Africans work for a spell without a contract before being offered a new contract. Either way, employers claim their workers have not been employed on a permanent basis for three years.

As some on temporary contracts work all year round, they do the same work as 'permanent' employees. Thus, for four of the five with a permanent contract, as well as for five with a temporary contract who had worked continuously for more than a year on the same farm, it was common to

undertake skilled (foremen, tractor drivers), semi-skilled (pruning) and non-skilled tasks (the latter primarily during the harvest season). Only one worker on a permanent contract undertook unskilled tasks all year round. Numbers are low, but from employer and employee reports, it was clear that 'skilled' tasks are 'reserved' for workers employed the year round. These workers have to be 'flexible', as they are called on to do unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled tasks along the agricultural cycle. But it is significant that the suitability of workers for farm tasks does not come from their skills prior to coming to Spain. It is the case that six out of seven skilled farm employees had worked in agriculture in their country of origin, but those who were interviewed stressed that there are sharp differences between agricultural practices in Girona and in their African homeland. An oft cited example of this is that trees are not pruned in West African farming (amongst those African workers employed in farming the vast majority were from West Africa). Interviews made clear that the skilled nature of farm work undertaken in Girona was almost wholly learnt in Spain (e.g. driving a tractor, working as a foreman and pruning trees).

The suitability of these workers for agricultural employment did not come from prior skills at the time of employment, but from other factors. Signifying a general sentiment amongst employers, one farmer explained that: "Africans are good workers, and are used to the hard working conditions of farming. Africans have a good physical endurance, so they put up with hard agricultural tasks". It seems that the 'skills' farmers require come largely from physical condition and an aptitude for farm work. Flexibility is also important, for interviewed employers in the construction sector made clear that farmers were not adversely disposed to 'hiring' their African employees to construction firms when farm work was slack (this was largely for labouring).

At one level, the uncertainties associated with no-contract work and seasonal employment in farming, accompanied as this is by low wages, might lead to the expectation that African workers will follow the path of Spanish citizens and seek employment in the more favourable climate of other economic sectors. What restrains their ability to do this is the Spanish quota system for immigrant employment. The quota system is not just about numbers. It sets an annual allocation of work permits by economic sector and by province, depending upon employment trends in each province (Cachón Rodríguez, 1995). For instance, whereas the 1994 and the 1997 quotas raised the possibility of job openings in the construction sector in Girona, in 1993 and 1995 no permits were available for work in this sector. Significantly, since the quota system was introduced in 1993, there have always been places for unskilled jobs in farming (as well as in the domestic sector). Assuming a non-EU worker obtains a work permit on entry into Spain, this will be valid for a maximum of one year (often less). To renew the permit, a contract of employment and fully-paid social security contributions are required. Until 1996, a valid work permit had to be held for five years (often involving many more than five re-applications) before a worker could apply for a five-year permit. Only when a five-year permit has been granted (i.e. after five years of continuous legal work), did an immigrant face a less rigid imposition of permit-directed restraints that limited their place of work geographically and sectorally.<sup>3</sup> The process of reaching this more flexible labour market position was (and is) strewn with potential pitfalls. As Cornelius (1994, p.339) noted, the renewing (and obtaining) of a work permit is no straightforward task:

The bureaucratic obstacles to obtaining or renewing work permits in Spain are formidable. Foreigners seeking to renew their work permits must present their social security cards, but only a minority of immigrants working in certain sectors (e.g. domestic sector) are able to obtain work contracts that include social security payments by the employer. Since Spanish immigration laws link work permits to residence permits, most illegal immigrants are unable to obtain legal work contracts.

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<sup>3</sup> Since 1996 the period of continuous legal work that is required to obtain a three-year permit is three years. This three-year permit now gives the holder 'free' geographical and occupational mobility. When a three-year permit is renewed (i.e. after six years of continuous legal residence), workers obtain a permanent residence and work permit which is renewed automatically every five years.

A number of points need to be raised on this score. The first is that processes associated with obtaining and retaining legal permits are so complicated that they heighten possibilities of slippage into illegality. Of the 143 non-EU workers interviewed for this study (eight had EU status through naturalization or marriage), only 122 had legal permits for both residence and work (21 worked illegally). Thirteen of these 122 declared that they had lost their legal status at some time during their stay in Spain. Furthermore, three-quarters of the 122 obtained their legal standing because of either the 1985-86 or the 1991-92 government legalization campaigns, with those who fell into an illegal standing managing to regain legality through these legalization processes. The ease of slipping into illegality restricts inter-sectoral mobility (except as an illegal worker). This is due to limitations on obtaining a job in another sector until a five-year permit has been obtained (with continuous legality over the intervening time period required). One-year permits usually limit the geographical and occupational fields in which employment may be taken. This increases the chances that immigrants will have a discontinuous legal work history (but it should be noted here that practice on permit issuance does vary by province, so it is not always the case that permits are so restrictive).

Even so, African workers do seek to 'escape' from agricultural work. The longer they stay in Spain (and so get to know channels through which to obtain other jobs, as well as increasing the likelihood of escaping the restrictions of the quota system), the more African workers shift into other economic sectors (as Table 1 indicates). Significantly, just 24 of the 67 African workers who entered Spanish employment through farm work were in that sector when they were interviewed. In reality farming provides few permanent jobs for Africans (those available are more prone to Spanish competition than other farm jobs, but in any case there is a declining number of permanent job openings in farming). For most, work in the farm sector is transient and insecure. In this context, most end up having to participate in paid activities in other economic sectors, even if illegally, in order to secure an income through all or most of the year. This sensitizes them to openings in other sectors, as well as making them aware that a shift out of agriculture is likely to be accompanied by higher wages. Only in a few cases did seasonally employed African labourers use the time between farm work to return to their homeland. A few interviewed Moroccans followed this practice, but this was a costly option for the 64 West Africans who were interviewed.

Set against the pattern identified in the last paragraph, it should also be noted that relocations into different economic sectors were not associated with upward occupational mobility (albeit income improvements were made). So, whereas eight of the 47 African workers in the primary sector were classed as having a 'skilled' job (Table 3), for other interviewed workers only two had professional jobs, while just 10 did other skilled work. Put another way, even adding forestry work together with agriculture (the former having no African with a 'skilled' job), 17% of primary sector workers did skilled work (21% in farming), compared with just 12% in other sectors. Of critical significance here is the fact that, irrespective of variation in formal educational skills before coming to Spain, or of training undertaken within Spain, few improvements in occupational standing were recorded amongst the African workers interviewed (e.g. 80% of Moroccans with at least secondary school diplomas had an unskilled job). Indeed, the chance of upward occupational mobility was enhanced by staying in agriculture. This, of course, is easier said than done, for the short-term nature of many farm work engagements, accompanied by poor contractual conditions and bad pay, give few opportunities and little incentive to stay long. This is not to claim that job insecurity and short-term contracts are less prevalent elsewhere, for they are not. In all, 13.2% of Africans employed on Girona farms had a permanent contract (10.6% for the primary sector as a whole), which does not compare badly beside the figures of 19.0% for construction and 5.3% for the accommodation and restaurant sector (Mendoza, 1998). The issue is not that agriculture is 'worse' but that this sector, as with others, provides an uncertain employment base for African employees, so they are often forced to change jobs unwillingly, with unemployment or illegality often resulting. Where agriculture can be seen to be less than welcoming is in its low rates of pay, which interviewees reported

would encourage a higher turnover of workers were it not for the (relative) difficulty of African workers obtaining jobs in another sector.

## Commentary

Evidence from Girona suggests that the majority of African workers do unskilled work, on poor pay, in occupations associated with inferior social status, with short periods of employment, in jobs that are rarely part of a promotion ladder. This is a phenomenon which extends beyond agriculture (Mendoza, 1998), with occupational niches 'made available' for African workers in fields that attract insufficient interest from the local (or in-migrant) Spanish population. The importance of farming as a centre of African employment is starkly emphasized in the way it provides an initial port of entry for many African workers. The ease with which a work permit can be obtained provides a clear message that the Spanish Government is responding to a recognized labour shortfall. Once in Spain, however, most African workers find that agriculture is a short-stay introduction to Spanish labour markets or, occasionally, a returned-to, short-term refuge from failure to secure a job in another sector. Theoretically, given the slight impact that human capital endowments like educational attainment had on occupational outcomes, the evidence from this study provides little comfort for human capital theories of occupational mobility.

Allied to this theoretical position is the notion from the US literature that the 'Americanization' of immigrants is linked to upward social mobility (e.g. Long, 1980; Borjas, 1982). The Girona evidence provides little to support this view. Although the first enclaves of African employment in northern Catalunya and Almería appeared in the early 1980s (e.g. Giménez Romero, 1992), workers from this era have seen little by way of occupational or income improvement (Mendoza, 1998). In this regard, the evidence from Girona provides an important contextualization for trends in other parts of Spain, where research also records that Africans farm labourers commonly work without contracts (Balcells, 1991; Checa, 1995; Taller de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos, 1996). The picture painted by the Spanish evidence is very different from that reached by Cyrus (1994) for Germany and by Odé (1996) for The Netherlands. Unlike these farming environments, many on temporary farm contracts in Girona are employed for the whole year and in many cases over several years. Moreover, despite Spanish labour markets largely offering insecure, short-term work, these immigrants tend to see themselves as permanent residents of Spain (60% of interviewed Moroccans and half the West Africans said that they would like to remain permanently in Spain). Notably here, would-be emigrants have more formal education than those who wish to remain (41.9% who would leave had secondary or higher education, compared with 21.8% for the whole sample). This emphasizes the limited access that Africans with more years of formal education have to professional work in the country, and signifies an oft-expressed frustration at the limited prospects that existed for occupational mobility.

Theoretically this pattern of insecure, low-waged employment, linked as it is to a lack of occupational mobility, is consistent with segmentation theory. African nationals are restricted to limited occupational and sectoral niches within Spanish labour markets. These niches are not based on immigrant skills, but on the availability of 'unwanted', unskilled work (in agriculture, especially in the harvest season). Just as Waldinger (1994) found for public services in New York City, the creation of such employment niches arises from the abandonment of jobs by 'native' workers. In Spain the 'urge' to leave agriculture has been long recognized (Naredo, 1986; Enciso Rodríguez and Sabaté Prats, 1995; García Ramon et al., 1995). The creation of a niche for African workers has followed from 'allowances' made by state policy. These have provided relatively easy entry into farm work for foreign labour, as well as offering a less than rigorous monitoring of contractual conditions or of the location of immigrants whose

work permits expire.<sup>4</sup> The theoretical significance of this is not just that immigrants are 'directed' toward specific occupational niches, but that these niches have particular job characteristics. For Piore (1979, p. 17), the conceptualization in segmentation theory, which fits Spanish agriculture well, is that:

... jobs tend to be unskilled, generally but not always low paying, and to carry or connote inferior social status; they often involve hard or unpleasant working conditions and considerable insecurity; they seldom offer chances of advancement toward better paying, more attractive job opportunities.

Yet it is significant that the directing of immigrants into farm work is not characteristic of the whole of Spain. The key to understanding geographical divergence lies in the character of regional labour markets (even if state policies determine some aspects of African employment, such as the national origins of immigrants, and the sectors they find it easiest to gain access to). A point to emphasize is that the role of agriculture in African employment is not unique. Through agriculture, rural areas are intricately woven into immigrant employment experiences. This occurs in a manner in which rural areas have a much higher level of involvement in immigrant employment than was characteristic of earlier immigration waves into north-central Europe (Schmitter-Heisler, 1986). In Girona, African workers shift in and out of agriculture, with their work experiences in the sector, as well as outside it, characterized by insecurity, low pay and temporary (or no) job contracts. If anything, except for wage rates, the position of African employees in the agricultural sector appears to be slightly more favourable than that in other employment sectors; if only for a limited number of workers (and with the caveat that even for them wages are lower).

This should not blind us to two disconcerting dimensions of immigrant employment in Spanish farming. The first is that analysis of immigrant work experiences prompts worrying reminders of immigrant and ethnic minority employment in US agriculture. The details of their situation are beyond the scope of this paper, but apt messages are captured in Baker's (1976, p. 143) conclusion that farm labour conditions are "not the kind of tale we will retell to our children", given that this is a "dark chapter in social history". As Baker (1976, p. 151) recounts, for "the most part, farmworkers remain a silent, poverty-stricken group floating from one crop to another, making enough dollars to sustain themselves during the 'cropping season' and then returning to the barrios or ghettos". Although it is legitimate to note that, outside the cropping season, African farm labourers often secure jobs in other economic sectors (even if illegally at times), the general pattern is one in which Africans occupy niches of insecure, low paid jobs. If the experience of the USA is transferred to southern Europe, any attempt by farm labourers to improve their social and economic position through collective action will lead to increased mechanization (viz. job losses for farm labourers; Friedland, 1980; Price, 1983). Attempts to improve farm labourer conditions are also likely to provoke more aggressive implementation of immigration laws, including more restrictive entry requirements (Baker, 1976; Goldfarb, 1981). Put simply, when immigrant workers in the USA organized to improve their situation, they were confronted with 'organized' efforts to thwart their aspirations (e.g. Jennings, 1980). As noted here, even for those Africans who have lived and worked in Spain for a long time, the prospects of upward occupational mobility are very limited, irrespective of human capital endowments. Yet the African population in Spain is rising, with the number

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<sup>4</sup> Official data for Catalunya show that for 1988-1991 an annual average of only 1,030 persons were expelled out of the 12,000-12,500 illegal residents apprehended each year (Cornelius, 1994). It is worth contrasting this with Cyrus's (1994, p. 113) observations that the Federal (German) "government is banking on repressive and monitoring methods to ensure regular implementation both of seasonal work arrangement and the work-by-contract agreements". Through this mechanism, temporary non-EU workers in German agriculture are made to leave the country at the end of their contract. By contrast, in Spain, African workers commonly slip (legally or illegally) into work in other economic sectors. Weak monitoring of worker status is clearly influential here but so are the aspirations of African immigrants. In this the hopes of those who can secure year-round work on legal contracts (even if with multiple employers) have been fuelled by the 1996 relaxation of residence and work permit regulations. Even for those who slip into illegality, there is the distant hope that another legalization process will be around the corner to stabilize residence and work standings.

of workers who qualify for automatically renewable residential and work permits increasing. Viewed in this context, the restricted potential for job improvement could generate an underlying sense of grievance that might spill-over into anti-social behaviour (Cross and Keith, 1993), as well as contravening stated EU policies of reducing social exclusion (e.g. European Commission Employment and European Social Fund, 1998).

However, as African workers frequently enter Spain through farm work but then transfer into other sectors, it is possible that agriculture is less likely to see efforts to organize labour to improve working conditions. Perhaps, as in so many sectors in southern Europe, immigrant employment is providing agriculture with a stronger base from which to introduce (or impose) higher levels of worker flexibility, which employers seek in order to enhance the profitability of their operations (e.g. Hadjimichalis and Vaiou, 1990; Mingione, 1995). However, despite the messages that workers commonly lose out in this process, it has to be emphasized that there are some employee benefits (e.g. Baylina and Garcia-Ramon, 1998). This is certainly the case for African immigrants in Spanish agriculture, for whom Spain offers the potential of a better long-term living standard. Yet the continued dependence of profitable segments of Spanish farming on poorly paid immigrant labour raises important questions about the longer term future of the farm sector. In this regard we need to emphasize that there is reluctance amongst the Spanish population to enter the sector. One clear sign of this is the age structure of farm operatives. Compared with the EU12 figure of 76.8%, in 1993 some 80.3% of Spanish farmers were 45 years or older (Commission of the European Communities, annual). The difference is not huge but the trend in Spain moves more rapidly toward an aged farm population increasingly reliant on temporary, hired labour. This combination raises serious questions about the willingness of farmers to invest in farm improvements that will enhance productivity. Especially with their children showing little inclination to follow them into the farm business, the temptation is likely to be to utilize immigrant workers, because their insecure employment situation limits the potential to seek improvements in working conditions. This is the maintenance of competitiveness through a low-wage, anti-investment strategy. It is doubtful whether such a strategy will bring long-term benefits for Spanish agriculture. The market for agricultural commodities is increasingly global in scale (Le Heron, 1994), and there is increasing pressure on the European Union to make agriculture face the full force of international competition (e.g. Ingersent et al., 1994). In this context, a strategy that limits investment in productive capacity improvement, but relies on a cheap labour solution, does not hold out much prospect of sustaining competitiveness in the long-term. Whether on account of low wages scales or much greater capital allocations to farm improvements (plus superior land fertility and more favourable farm and field structures), other nations are likely to be able to offer much cheaper products in the longer term. In this context, the present-day responses of Spanish farmers to labour shortages are likely to be seen as storing up problems for the future competitiveness of Spanish farming.

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