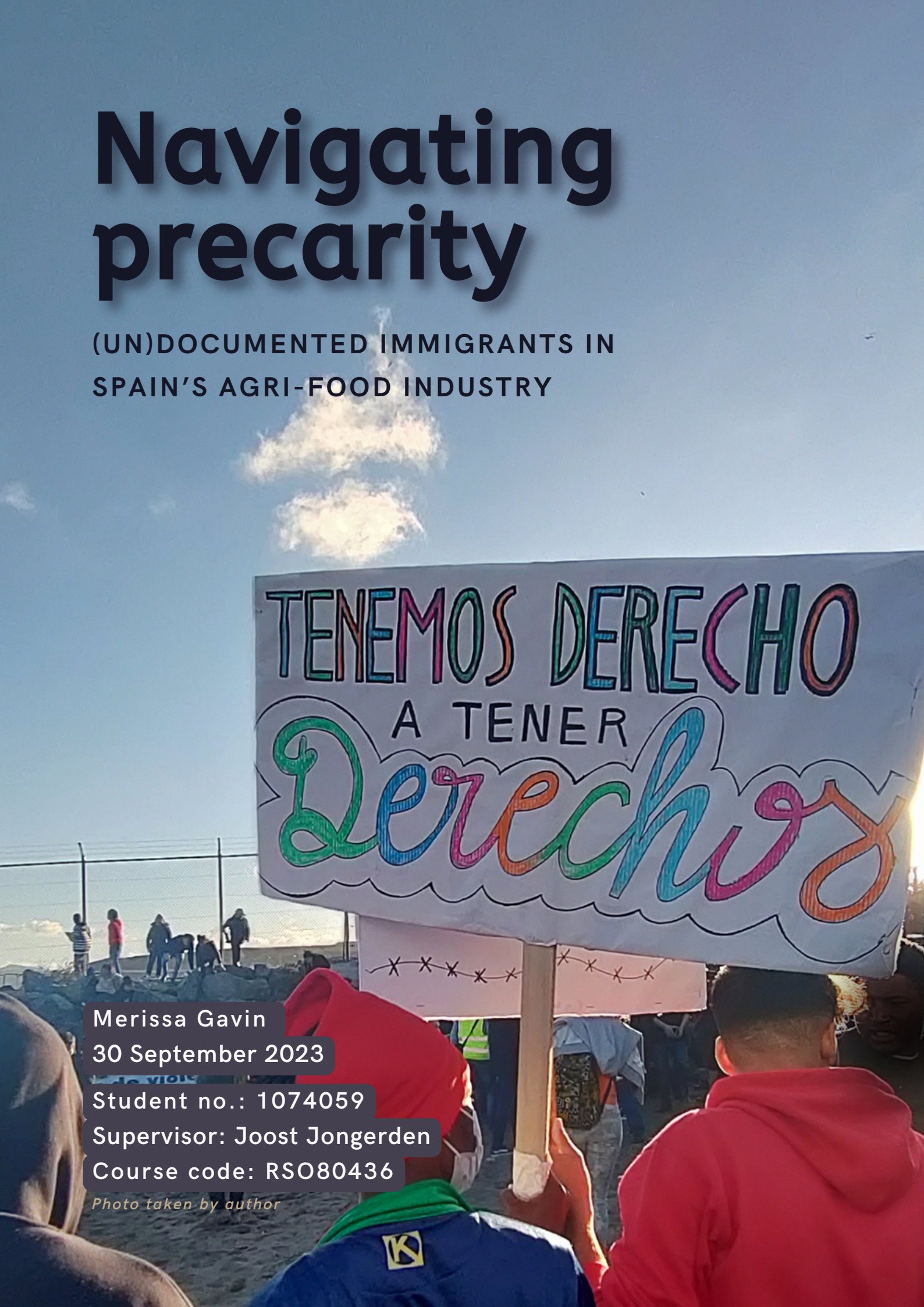
Navigating precarity

(UN)DOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS IN SPAIN'S AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY



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Abstract

Over the last two decades, immigrant workers have become a structural element of Spain's agri-food industry. Arriving to Spain undocumented, immigrant workers have few options other than the exploitative working conditions of the agricultural sector. The present research centres on the precarity of these workers, highlighting the multitude of ways they navigate vulnerability and uncertainty. This research is important, firstly, to raise the voice of undocumented immigrant workers and demonstrate how they exercise agency in everyday activities. Secondly, to investigate the socio-spatial conditions that facilitate, or obstruct, the emergence of a collective political being. Focusing on seasonal harvesting in Andalucía, this research adds to a body of literature on the political creativity of immigrants, where attention to agricultural workers is lacking. The main research question concerns how the legally marginalised, undocumented workers are making and enacting claims for a social and political alternative. This question was addressed through fieldwork research, including participant observation, informal conversations, and semi-structured interviews. Documented or undocumented, immigrants in Lepe face extreme precarity and are in the perpetual struggle of negotiating the tension between being tolerated within the confines of the farm site but unwelcomed and unworthy to participate beyond this space. In an effort to secure documentation and escape the trap of farmwork, some pledge misguided loyalty to an exploitative boss who feigns benevolence while making empty promises. Others challenge mistreatment at work, threatening to report the boss to the authorities for hiring undocumented workers. Consumed by the micro-politics of everyday life when working the harvest season in the rural right-wing governed town, immigrants in Lepe seldom engage in collective action to claim better conditions. Nonetheless, ostracised from the town centre, they enact a dignified alternative in the informal settlements, where they are freed from the gaze of local residents and authorities and unencumbered by the precarity of their legal status. An intersection of social, spatial and temporal conditions influences the political engagement of immigrants in Lepe. In the absence of an enabling environment, collective action is limited and the prospects for change are bleak. This is timely research, given the ongoing campaign for blanket regularisation of undocumented immigrants currently living in Spain, as it remains to be seen how the success of the campaign would make material change in immigrants' lives.

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Contents

1. Introduction

I was sat chatting on the couches of the day centre when Moussa came in and asked me if I wanted to join for dinner at the chabolas. Pleased to have been invited, I hopped up from the couch and we headed out of the centre together. Moussa led me towards the settlement, crossing the bridge and turning right at the football stadium onto a dusty sand pathway. We passed a group of people gathered around a bonfire just over from the chabolas. We saluted them and kept walking. Moussa laughed uncomfortably as we walked through the settlement asking if I had ever seen the chabolas up close before, which indeed I hadn't. We turned into where he lived and the people in the neighbouring chabolas greeted us. The door of his chabola had his name graffitied on the front. He's lived there 3 years, he told me. A thin green blanket hung inside the door like a flynet. He pulled back the blanket and ushered me in. It was dark inside. The only light came from the setting sun cracking through the door and a tricoloured, battery-charged lamp perched in the corner. There were four others inside, three sitting on a raised mattress and one on a mattress on the floor. I was surprised by the warmth inside the chabola, until I spotted the gas stove just inside the door, with two of the hobs lit. Moussa was cooking a big pot of rice and a pan of meat in a tomato and peanut sauce, making a dish called 'mafé'. I asked if he was the chef of the group. He told me that they take turns cooking each day. He always cooks on Fridays.

Joining the others on the raised mattress, I tried to look around as much as possible without being seen to be snooping. The walls were covered with old advertisement boards (most with photos of women on them) hanging on large, woollen, insulating blankets that layered each wall. At the foot of the mattress on the floor, there was a bookshelf stacked with shoes and clothes, and two suitcases balanced on top. Chatting to the people on the beds, I learned they were each from Senegal. One I recognised from the day centre, but the others were new. They arrived in Lepe five days ago from Almería. The guy I spoke to the most told me it was his first time in Lepe, but he's been working in Almería for four years. It's easier to get your papers in Almería, he said, because police are stricter for fining employers with undocumented workers, so employers tend to cooperate with the documentation process. He said he got his papers earlier than most, after only two years and six months. Later, talking about housing, one of the others said that if he manages to get a room in Lepe by the end of the season, he'll move here permanently.

Moussa called us and we all went outside to eat. He presented the mafé in a big, black, round, double-handled pan, which he placed onto the ground and we all squatted around. Moussa handed spoons to me and two others. The rest ate with their hands. The food was gorgeous. Really spicy. I asked about the dish and they told me that mafé is eaten in most west African countries, not just Senegal. Several neighbours passed in and out of their chabolas while we were eating. Everyone that passed was invited to join, to which the usual response was a clap on the back, accompanied by a "No, thank you my friend. Enjoy your meal". One by one, as they began to feel full, each stood up from the pan and rinsed their hands clean in a bowl of water that was next to us on the ground. When I finished eating, Moussa took my spoon and washed it in the bowl, then he brought me a cup of water to drink. Before going back inside the chabola, Moussa brushed his teeth using a bottle of water and spitting the toothpaste into the grass. I stayed outside for a little while, chatting to one of the guys who had just arrived from Almería. He wanted to practise his English, so we switched from Spanish for a bit. It was getting cold, and we went back into the chabola. The older Senegalese man, who had been sitting alone and silent on the mattress on the floor, lifted his head from his phone and began speaking to me in near-fluent English. We started talking about languages and they taught me how to say 'Thank you' in Serer, their native language:

'Joo kanjal.'[1]

[1] Observation notes, February 10

1.1. Research context: Living and working in the town of Lepe

The living conditions of Moussa and his housemates are typical of the hundreds of seasonal workers that arrive in Huelva every spring for the strawberry and orange harvests. Refused entry to rental properties, seasonal workers - typically male, undocumented and from Mali, Senegal or Morocco - find alternative accommodation in informal settlements. For four months of the year, they live in these conditions while working long hours under the heat of the sun, picking delicate strawberries or cutting kilograms-worth of oranges. Fruit that feeds Europe and the pockets of wealthy farm owners.

The agri-food industry is a lucrative source of income for the region of Andalucía. The majority of the industry's yield is exported to northern European countries where fruit is sold at a high margin. Fruit harvesting positions are most commonly filled by immigrants, the majority of whom are undocumented, and costs are kept low by foregoing legal minimum wage requirements. The industry returns such profit in the region that the strawberry has become known as *'el oro rojo andaluz'* (the red gold of Andalucía). Andalucía's agri-food industry has particularly intensified in the provinces of Almería and Huelva. *Andalucía Acoge* (2022) recently carried out research in both provinces and documented the 'invisibilized realities' of immigrants working and living within the industry. The report names the red fruit industry as the 'economic engine' of Andalucía, with over 2,400 million euros in exports in the marketing year 2021/22. This economic engine was fuelled by the over 100,000 work contracts issued in the same marketing year, as well as the unquantifiable number of undocumented immigrants working without contracts.

In Lepe, a town in western Huelva, seasonal workers typically live in informal settlements, locally referred to as the *chabola* settlements or simply the *chabolas*. *Chabolas* are shack-like structures, erected using whatever scrap materials are at hand, but most commonly are built with wooden pallets, wrapped and roofed in sheets of plastic and insulated with cardboard panels or woollen blankets. The contents of a *chabola* are usually limited to two or three second-hand mattresses and a gas cylinder topped with a cooking stove. Inhabitants of the *chabolas* lack access to running water and electricity, in conditions that threaten their right to health. Each *chabola* houses four to five inhabitants, with anywhere between 15 and 50 *chabolas* in each settlement. Clusters of *chabolas* are surrounded by heaps of rubbish, tossed there by inhabitants in the absence of waste disposal facilities. The *chabolas* have been a feature of the Lepe landscape for over 25 years. Some *chabola* inhabitants live there year-round but the majority leave in June at the end of the harvest, later returning to the same *chabola* the following January when the new season begins. Negatively perceived by locals, Lepe town hall recently introduced regulations to reduce the number of *chabolas* by prohibiting the renovation of existing *chabolas* and the construction of new *chabolas*. On the ground, this means the *chabolas* in Lepe are not only dilapidated but also overcrowded. Town hall workers monitor the settlements daily to ensure that, despite growing demand, no new *chabolas* are built. One recent 'win' for *chabola* inhabitants came when a local NGO fought in court for *chabola* inhabitants to have the right to register with the local municipality, following which a handful of inhabitants have presented at the town hall to register themselves. However, the large majority continue to live there unregistered, invisible in the eyes of the authorities, yet the *chabolas* a salient manifestation of immigrant precarity in Lepe.

Work opportunities for immigrants in Lepe are limited to the months of January to June, when, first, oranges and mandarins and, then, strawberries and blueberries, are in season.

Workers are collected by contracted drivers at Lepe bus station in the early hours of the morning and are driven over an hour to the designated farm. The work day is usually from 8:00 to 17:00, at which point workers are dropped back to Lepe by the drivers. Wages correspond to the national minimum wage, which suggests €51/day after tax, however in almost all cases, undocumented workers are earning far less than minimum wage, the average somewhere between €20 and €35 per day. Work in the orange harvest involves strapping a large wax bag to the front of one's body and moving along a row of trees with a scissors, cutting the fruit stems, and letting the oranges fall into the bag. At full capacity, the bag weighs 25 kilograms. Once filled, the worker empties the bag into a collection crate and starts fresh. Harvesting strawberries and blueberries involves less compounded weight however is equally taxing on the body as the worker is bent down, picking the delicate fruits from ground level ridges, which, after an extended time, is reported to cause lasting pain to the lower back. In Lepe it is the exception not the rule that workers are given breaks throughout their shift and they are often on the receiving end of verbal abuse from their bosses, the *jefes*.

Not all immigrants in Lepe secure work every day. Those left behind will pass the day strolling about the town, often starting at the *comedor* (meal centre) where coffee and bread is served in the mornings. From there, many go to the NGO immigrant day centre, *Asociación de Nuevos Ciudadanos por la Interculturalidad* (ASNUCI). At ASNUCI, paying a monthly fee of €5 to earn a membership card, centre members can sit on the couches, charge their phones, connect to the wifi, take a shower and wash their clothes. Other hang out spots in the town are the café at the bus station, where the barman lets people sit out on the terrace even if they haven't ordered anything, and the benches in front of the cemetery, which face the main junction entering Lepe and the town's shopping and business park, a good people-watching perch. Many later return to the *comedor* for lunch, usually to be served bread, rice, and beans, chickpeas or meat. As the day wears on, workers return in bus loads and after the rush hour at the day centre showers, many gather to hang out at the fire pit at one of the *chabola* settlements or by the fountain at the town square. There's a clear division between the immigrant workers and local residents of Lepe, the *Leperos*, with each group socialising at distinct locales. Immigrants are commonly subject to racist slurs and egg-throwing. To avoid attracting such attention - or drawing problems on themselves in general - many immigrant workers gather at ASNUCI's centre in the evenings, where they watch live football, listen to music, drink *café Touba* (typical Senegalese coffee) and, though not without occasional fights, feel at ease in the presence of fellow Africans.

The town of Lepe can be better understood through its social and spatial characteristics. It is a *Vox*-governed town; led by right-wing party representatives. Located near large ports on the southwest, it is a strategic town in the Spanish drug trade which precipitates high levels of drug use and drug-related crime in the area. On the national scale, Lepe and its inhabitants play a unique role in Spanish culture, infamous for being the butt of all *chistes de estupidez* (stupidity jokes) (Rubio Hancock, 2016). Regarding interaction with immigrants, the *Leperos'* reluctance to interact with the seasonal workers most visibly manifests in local landlords' refusal to rent their flats to immigrants, resulting in empty, boarded up buildings throughout the town. There are no immigrants working in local shops, bars or restaurants in Lepe, except for in the handful of independently-run Moroccan shops, which are seldomly frequented by Spanish locals. There is little to no deliberate engagement between immigrants and *Leperos*, aside from the undeniable and essential role immigrants play in maintaining the *Leperos'* economy.

1.2. Problem statement: Necessary but unwanted

Immigrants across Europe live in a paradoxical situation of being essential, but unprotected (Siscar Banyuls & Herreo Garvín, 2022); they are essential for the economy but unprotected by the state. The growth of the dual labour market in Western societies has led to an increased demand for cheap immigrant labour to work in low-skilled and poorly paid '3D jobs' (dirty, difficult and demeaning) that non-immigrants increasingly reject given the harsh conditions and low-status of such work. As a result, governments, influenced by economic lobbies, are often willing to turn a blind eye to the illegal employment of immigrant workers (de Haas et al., 2019). Meanwhile, restrictive state policies, increased border controls, the externalisation of migration management and the criminalisation of migrant solidarity have each contributed to an increase in the number of immigrants living in "legal limbo", with many arriving undocumented earning the badge of 'illegal immigrant' (Aris Escarcena, 2022, p. 6; de Haas et al., 2019). The precarious status of their living situations is further compounded by a securitisation rhetoric across European politics and media that portrays migration as "a fundamental threat to security and the cultural integrity of destination societies" (de Haas et al., 2019, p. 232). In short, immigrants are essential for the economy and so tolerated for the benefit of production, however, cannot claim work conditions for which a 'citizen' would qualify.

In this context, Spain is a topical case-study for three reasons. Firstly, Spain forms part of the European Union's Mediterranean frontier, the maritime border with Northern Africa. This migration route was illegalised in the 1990's following the introduction of visa requirements and intensified border control by Spain and Italy (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019b; de Haas et al., 2019). Furthermore, the route has been subject to regular discouraging - and even criminalisation - efforts, hindering the work of search and rescue operations of organisations such as Proactiva Open Arms and Médecins Sans Frontières (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019b; della Porta & Steinhilper, 2021). Such efforts to externalise responsibility have not reduced rates of migration but instead increased irregular migration, meaning that a greater number of immigrants arrive to Europe's Mediterranean shores undocumented. Secondly, Spain is a relatively newly net-immigration country however is now home to more than 7.2 million immigrants, the majority from Morocco (Statista, 2023a). Regarding irregular patterns of migration specifically, in 2020 the highest represented country of origin was Algeria (39.5%), followed by Morocco (20.3%) (Statista, 2023d). Spain is an arguably attractive destination for undocumented immigrants given its migration policy which adheres to a post-hoc regularisation of irregular immigration (Aris Escarcena, 2022). This means that once undocumented immigrants have arrived in Spain, if, after an extended period of 'illegality', they meet certain criteria, they can apply on an individual basis for documentation and residency (Parainmigrantes, 2023). The most common application of this regularisation policy is known as *arraigo laboral* (labour ties). Applicants must have lived in Spain undocumented for a continued period of two years and prove that within such time they have been in employment for at least six months. Another common route is the *arraigo social* (social ties), where applicants must have lived in Spain for a continued period of three years, submit evidence of their social integration and present a pending year-long work contract. The final reason that Spain can be considered a topical case-study is because it is one of Europe's largest producers and suppliers of fresh fruit and vegetables, which drives up demand for cheap immigrant labour (Corrado, 2017). Indeed, immigrant workers "have become a structural element of the agri-food

system across the EU" (Palumbo et al., 2022, p. 181). These three characteristics and processes combined partly explain the rising number of "irregular immigrants" recorded in Spain in recent years (Statista, 2023c).

Necessary for the economy but widely unwanted, immigrants are located in a precarious inbetweenness, amidst legal shortcomings and "staggered economic and social entitlements" (Palumbo & Corrado, 2020, p. 31), where mobility and public appearance become invariably restricted. Emerging from this inbetweenness, as means to navigate precarity, are various cases of immigrant self-organisation, mobilisation and solidarity, often leading to transnational networks of both immigrant and non-immigrant actors. In the Greek agri-food industry context, while it was noted that "migrant labour exploitation and precarity [...] do not inevitably lead to social and political mobilisation, [...] the emergence of a migrant social movement was encouraged by left-wing facilitators" (Papadopoulos et al., 2018, p. 207), highlighting the influential role of a broad political network. Research on immigrant solidarity in Spain has been carried out largely in Barcelona and Madrid, where municipal governance movements offer fertile ground for self-organisation and social change (Agustín, 2020; Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019b; Bazurli & Delclós, 2021). Municipal initiatives originating in these cosmopolitan centres have started to spread across the country[2]. However, limited scholarly attention has been afforded to the emergence of immigrant self-organisation and solidarity in Andalucía, Spain's southernmost and poorest region, home to 24 of the country's 30 poorest municipalities (Press, 2022). Moreover, Andalucia hosts a growing number of immigrants, ranking third in the list of net migration figures per autonomous community, higher than Catalonia (Statista, 2023b). The increasing number of immigrants, paired with the limited financial clout in the relatively poor region, is likely to heighten immigrant precarity given there are less resources to support the large population. Huelva, in western Andalucía, is home to a concentration of immigrants owing to the seasonal work in spring harvests at strawberry farms (Corrado, 2017). Almería, in eastern Andalucía, is Spain's centre for counter-season fruit and vegetable production and requires a permanent workforce year-round (Corrado, 2017). At both locations, "[m]igrant labourers are preferred due to their lower salaries, greater docility (due to precarious conditions), and the evasion of administrative and social security obligations" (Corrado, 2017, p. 3). The immigrant experience is coloured by abuse in both cases. In the former, female recruits are subject to gender-based violence and sexual abuse (Carlile et al., 2023), while in the latter undocumented immigrants live in informal settlements, lacking access to water and electricity[3]. Such workers "have been facing abuses of their basic human rights for over two decades" (Carlile et al., 2023, p. 12). Immigrants are routinely mistreated and their precarious legal status is leveraged to minimise dissent.

1.3. Literature review

This section briefly outlines important literature contributions to the following themes: immigrant othering and precarity, agency and resistance, and collective self-organisation.

[2] The *Ciudades del Cambio* (Cities of Change) website provides an interactive 'Municipalist Map' that visualises several transformative political initiatives that have taken hold across Spain. http://ciudadesdelcambio.org/
[3] YouTube documentary (part 1) interviewing inhabitants of informal settlements in Almería. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mnYa1JlIqY&ab_channel=SindicatoAndaluzdeTrabajadores

Becoming the precarious 'Other'. Bauman's concept of order building is a useful point of departure to understand immigrant othering and precarity, as social hierarchies founded on essentialist beliefs render immigrants superfluous. Order building refers to the processes of human design that create orderly, rule-governed spaces as a means to cope with the chaos of infinite inclusion (Bauman, 2004). In other words, social rules set limits and therefore define exclusion criteria. As a result, "each order casts some parts of the extant population as 'out of place'" (Bauman, 2004, p. 5).

In the case of immigrants, under the logic and order of nation-state building, the immigrant is made to be categorically different to the citizen (Dahinden, 2016). However, categorisation in itself is not a harmful process, indeed it is a necessary tool for sense-making. Problems of exclusion and othering arise when such categories are not merely innocent products of sense-making, but rather are weaponised to serve and advance one's interests at the expense of the 'other'. Examples of this are found across contexts. Yonucu (2008) researched the lives of youths in a squatter suburb of Istanbul, who were the descendants of rural Turkish migrants of the 1940s. The contemporary youths' inability to successfully participate in the fast-paced consumerist society, led to their exclusion and othering, a social boundary that was strengthened by their spatial segregation in the squatter neighbourhood. In the interest of the growth of capitalist consumerism, the poor and marginalised squatter inhabitants were considered 'out of place' or redundant. Conducting research at a tomato drying factory in Turkey, Duruiz (2015) highlights representational practices – a process comparable to order building – that create the categories of Kurdish workers versus local workers, and the consequent ontological difference that was believed to exist between members of this binary categorisation. People began to internalise the categories and their understanding and treatment of 'us' and 'them' was governed accordingly, where the Kurdish worker was considered dirty, uncivilised, ignorant and untrustworthy. Holmes (2013) found comparable social ordering in the case of Mexican workers in the US agri-food industry, arguing that the normalisation and naturalisation of farm hierarchies render the suffering of workers unquestioned. The workers of indigenous descent, faced with dire working and living conditions, "are understood to deserve their location in the social hierarchy because of what are perceived to be their natural, ethnic, bodily characteristics" (Holmes, 2013, p. 181). Just as in the case of the squatters in Istanbul and the Kurdish workers at the tomato factory, representations of the Other are created on the basis of historically and socially constructed hierarchies. Essentialist presumptions underpin and justify structural inequality and suffering of immigrant workers.

The rapid acceleration of modernity and the consumerist culture of Western societies, Bauman (2004, p. 83) argues, renders immigrants the "'imported waste' from other countries with a lingering hope of recycling." This harrowing depiction of immigrant instability and inferiority is a product of 'Fortress Europe' and its "attempt to find a balance between the two blatantly contradictory yet equally vital postulates of airtight borders and of access to cheap, undemanding, docile labour" (Bauman, 2004, p. 61). The 'wasted lives' of immigrants represent the 'superfluous', or the 'supernumerary', which "present[s] itself in plain sight, but it does not receive a place [...]. It is *included in* a situation, but it does not *belong to* the situation" (van den Hemel, 2008, p. 22, emphasis in original). Immigrants are considered mere cogs in the production process. They are tolerated but not welcomed. Within this context, undocumented immigrant workers experience heightened vulnerability due to the instability of their legal status. The "paper 'walls' of visas" are

a human design of order building and contribute to an ongoing process of immigrant othering (van Houtum, 2021, p. 35). These paper borders create an "immobility trap that imprisons people from afar, by depreciating their territorial origin" (van Houtum, 2021, p. 40). However, in the countless cases of those who hurdle this trap and arrive – documented or not – at the destination society, the paper 'wall' is continually reinforced through biopolitical and geopolitical othering, for example through differential access to citizen membership and rights (van Houtum, 2021). In this sense, the process of bordering permeates ontological boundaries; the border resides within the immigrant. This echoes the justification of the suffering of the naturalised and normalised Other discussed above. The ontological bordering process is facilitated by "the continuous social construction of a We-community and identity" within a bordered space (van Houtum, 2021, p. 36). Scott (2021, p. 30) builds on this notion, arguing that bordering is a cognitive process, and emerges "out of embodied interaction with the urban environment". Beyond physical borders, socio-spatial borders also play a role in the othering of immigrants. Structural forces of the nation-state and consumer markets have created an immigrant Other, faced with precarious conditions of inferiority and disposability. Butler's (2004) concept of recognition can shed further light on the acute paradox and vulnerability of undocumented immigrant workers. Until such workers become documented and are recognised as valuable members of society, they lack social and political protection and are at risk of being deported. Yet, being undocumented and living in fear of being caught they are less likely to demand recognition as a valuable worker and rights-deserving being. However, within the structural conditions presented here, Brambilla (2021) sees room for agency and the possibility for a 'politics of hope' for immigrants and those living in the 'borderscape'. Through the everyday cultivation of hope, the precarious conditions and quarters of immigrants can be considered sites of "alternative political subjectivities and agencies", and "space[s] of political creativity" (Brambilla, 2021, p. 15).

Defying precarity. Examples of such political creativity are abundant across Europe and have become increasingly visible since the 2015 'migrant crisis'. One manifestation of political alternatives to immigrant precarity is widespread immigrant solidarity. Such solidarity is distinct from its institutionalised, top-down counterpart through horizontal participation and an emphasis on forging new (transnational) alliances and collaborative relations (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019a). The 'Barcelona's City Refuge Plan' exemplifies immigrant solidarity which engages in direct democracy and aims to generate an alternative political culture of collaboration and compassion. The risk inherent in such an approach, however, is that while urban spaces may strive to "open up a new scale to articulate solidarity, [...] it still happens under the constraints imposed by other scales, particularly the nation-state" (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019a, p. 102). Yet, while nation-state imposition may impede the formalisation of solidarity, the urban space provides fertile ground for networks of solidarity, of immigrants and non-immigrants alike, to build alliances and "[make] visible the 'invisible politics' of everyday resistance by undocumented people" (Bazurli & Delclós, 2021, p. 73).

An illustrative example of this is the formation of an informal trade union of street vendors in Barcelona, the *Sindicato Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes* (SPVA), who, through the help of city activist networks, transformed themselves from "black, poor, illegal foreigners" into "political beings", who shared in contention against the collective struggles of precarious daily life (Bazurli & Delclós, 2021, p. 75). This successful self-organisation of marginalised immigrants was

facilitated by the urban space, namely through the proximity to potential allies, as well as the strategic choice to frame their precarity as rebellion against unemployment, in an effort to "politically align themselves with native workers" (Bazurli & Delclós, 2021, p. 76). The SPVA illustrates the unique positioning of urban spaces to engage in a politics of proximity; to harness "those forces that pull us together" (Russell, 2019, p. 1002). In a recent example within the agri-food industry, undocumented immigrant workers similarly transformed themselves into political beings by taking to the street in protest of planned demolition of their informal living settlements (SOC-SAT Almería, 2022). In what Butler (2011) would consider 'bodies in alliance', the workers came together with a diverse group of individuals, from local residents to municipal governance representatives, to demand a revision of the decision to demolish or, if the demolition proceeds, a dignified living alternative. The protests were carefully framed under the shared struggle of the working class, making their claim against the town hall and demanding the right to dignified shelter (SOC-SAT Almería, 2023). Despite the demolition later going ahead and the settlement inhabitants left to find their own alternative, the coming together of bodies to act in concert and demand the undocumented immigrants' right to dignified shelter is an example of what Arendt (1951) famously theorised: the right to have rights. While legally 'invisible' or 'non-existent' in the eyes of the state, the undocumented immigrant workers claimed the foundational right of belonging to a political community that recognises them as rights-deserving agents.

Solidarity with everyday immigrant resistance features a politics of proximity, as outlined above, and, what Lundström (2017, p. 2) refers to as, political subject formation; "individuals with divergent experiences, contingently unified in political struggle". Political subject formation is embodied in the unification of precarious immigrant labourers and the unemployed 'native workers'. Additionally, urban immigrant solidarity often entails relations of a translocal and multi-scalar nature, "[manifesting] themselves beyond city limits" (Bauder, 2021, p. 3214). This attention to complex and interconnected geographies is widespread across literature on immigrant solidarity and contention (Agustín, 2020; Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019a; Ataç et al., 2016; Bauder, 2020, 2021; Bazurli & Delclós, 2021; García Agustín & Jørgensen, 2016). One shared objective of these authors is to highlight that transnational resistance alliances are constituted at varying scales and that these geographies of resistance transcend traditional geographical and categorical borders. This blurs the division of nation states, and, more importantly, the boundaries between ontological categories such as 'immigrant' and 'citizen' (García Agustín & Jørgensen, 2016). By making visible their everyday politics and struggle against precarity, immigrants are pushing the boundaries of the nation state container and de-stabilising traditional ideas of citizenship. It is within this ontological borderscape that immigrants "start to organise, mobilise and to verbalise their right to live, work [and] move freely" (García Agustín & Jørgensen, 2016, p. 16). Ataç and colleagues (2016) credit the transnational character of such self-organising as key to global enactments of citizenship located beyond the confines of nation states. Immigrants are a unifying force between societies of origin, transit and destination, and it is through their extended networks and unified claims that "new ways of being political" are emerging, as political life is reimagined from the margins (Ataç et al., 2016, p. 532).

1.4. Thesis structure

Research overview and roadmap of remaining chapters. Captivated by the success stories of immigrant political participation and mobilisation across Mediterranean Europe, I had hoped to find similar patterns of political engagement by undocumented workers within Andalucía's indispensable agri-food industry. To my initial disappointment, there was minimal evidence of collective action in Lepe, the town where I conducted research, except for one case of internationally recognised protests in 2020. After a short-lived spotlight, things returned to business-as-usual: undocumented workers exploited and living in dire conditions, while farm owners continue to profit lucratively off their suffering.

Engaging with the workers over months of fieldwork, I became familiar with their distinct values, objectives, and relations. One factor that appears to contribute to a lack of collective, political action amongst workers in the seasonal harvest is temporality. Unlike the street vendors in Barcelona who live in the city year-round, farmworkers live temporarily in Lepe, spending three to four months working the fruit harvest, before moving elsewhere. In the knowledge that they will spend but a few months there, many workers don't see the point in becoming involved in collective action. They are disheartened by authorities, both in their country of origin and in Spain, and prefer to stay out of trouble, focusing instead on what they came to do: earn money. Another factor that contributes to the political disengagement of workers in Lepe is the spatial and social segregation of immigrants and non-immigrants in the town. The lack of any alliance with locals, and a largely uncooperative relationship with the town hall, does anything but facilitate collective action. It is difficult to decipher which came first, but immigrants are socially segregated as they are relegated to the dirty, demeaning work of fruit-picking, and they are spatially segregated by their living conditions, where they live in clustered, informal settlements on the outskirts of the town. Out-of-sight and out-of-mind, immigrant well-being and rights are not high on the local political agenda and receive little attention from local residents.

My exploratory research centred on the daily lives of documented and undocumented workers in Lepe, aiming to make sense of the strategies used by immigrants to navigate the instability of the agri-food industry and to understand the complex identities and relations in which they engage. In other words, I observed and enquired about who they spoke to, how they presented themselves, where they spent their free time, how they found work and shelter, how they overcame obstacles, who they turned to in times of need, what they needed to survive in Lepe and how they managed to satisfy those needs. The remaining chapters outline the research questions and theoretical framework applied to this context. Following this, I detail the results of my research, established from the immigrants' perspective. The subsequent results chapters elaborate, firstly, on the strategies used by immigrant workers to navigate mistreatment within the agri-food industry. The second results chapter focuses on the identities of immigrants and how they leverage different aspects of their identity as a way to sustain life in Lepe. The final results chapter centres on network relations immigrants are engaged in, looking at who they interact and why, or why not. This is followed by a discussion chapter, which speaks to literature on the topics of immigrant precarity and politics, and, finally, the report closes with a short conclusion on the research, addressing the research questions, objectives, and relevance.

2. Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

The present research had three main objectives. Firstly, I set out to present immigrant agency and to make visible the everyday politics of immigrants in everyday relations. Secondly, I aimed to document the strategies, campaigns and struggles of immigrants, as embedded in their social and spatial contexts, as a way to understand the relationality and reciprocal shaping within immigrant struggles (García Agustín & Jørgensen, 2016; Lundström, 2017). Finally, I hoped to argue for the productive dimension of precarity (Aris Escarcena, 2022), and to demonstrate how it generates new forms of political presentation. In this way, presenting immigrants' struggle as a new way of being political (Ataç et al., 2016) and challenging the traditional binary of 'citizen' and 'non-citizen'.

2.1. Research questions

To achieve these objectives, I formulated the following research question:

> How do (un)documented immigrant workers in Spain's agri-food industry engage in claim-making and claim-living to navigate precarity?

To answer this research question, I formulated the following sub-questions:

1. What strategies do (un)documented immigrant workers employ, as a means to navigate precarity in Lepe?
2. What identities do (un)documented immigrant workers subscribe to, as a means to navigate precarity in Lepe?
3. What network relations are (un)documented immigrant workers engaged in, as a means to navigate precarity in Lepe?

2.2. Theoretical framework

Defining the field. Before arriving to the field, my understanding of the difference between documented and undocumented was binary and theoretical. Arriving in Lepe, I became aware of the degrees of documented one can become, and the very real possibility that someone who is documented can very easily become undocumented again, if papers are revoked or if circumstances change (as illustrated in chapter 4). For this reason, I decided to broaden my participant pool to include immigrants across the spectrum of undocumented to documented. Furthermore, the complexity and instability of legal statuses offers little assurance of one's position in society, something that is indeed better predicted by language abilities, propensity for fearlessness and relations of trust. Throughout this report, I refer to both documented and undocumented immigrants, with the stand-alone term of immigrants encompassing both, unless otherwise specified. However, more commonly I refer to my participants as documented or undocumented workers, or just workers. Over the course of my research, as I began to build close relations and even friendships with the participants, I became less and less comfortable referring to them as 'the immigrants'. This was a confronting development for me. I had an unconscious, preconceived pity for 'the immigrants', which deteriorated as they became humanised through our daily interactions. While I was confronted with the narrow identity I had afforded participants up

until that point, I was also encouraged by the potential for wider empathy and change through meaningful interactions and relations.

In keeping with labelling participants based on the given context, when discussing living conditions, I commonly refer to participants as inhabitants, or specifically *chabola* inhabitants. This label in turn forced me to define the non-immigrants of Lepe. Participants referred to non-immigrants as *Leperos*, a term I also use. Additionally, despite the conceptual ambiguity of the term 'local', for ease of understanding I interchangeably refer to the *Leperos* as local people and local residents. Finally, I differentiate between the immigrant 'inhabitant' and the non-immigrant 'resident' given the temporal nature of the former's occupancy and permanent nature of the latter.

Theorising the precarity of (un)documented immigrants. Drawing on Butler's conceptualisation of *precarity*, this research explores relations between immigrant workers and the social and political structures that "maximise precariousness for some and minimise precariousness for others" (Butler, 2010, p. 3). While Butler theorises on precarity largely in the contexts of gender and warring conflict, I see fit to apply her conceptualisation to the similarly unsettled circumstances of life for undocumented immigrants, and so define precarity in terms of vulnerability, exposure to harm and an absence of social and political protection. Additionally, this research aims to identify how precarity manifests and where there is room for agency and the ability to renegotiate one's position. As Butler argues, this can be achieved through the "recognition of precariousness as a shared condition of human life" (Butler, 2010, p. 13). In other words, Butler maintains that by acknowledging the uncertainty and vulnerability that characterises all human life, individuals become empowered to collectively address their shared precariousness. Such collective action gives rise to agency and the potential to improve one's circumstances.

Precarity manifests in a number of ways. Extended periods of waiting, to secure work or receive documents for example, are considered a symptom of "the effect of power" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 228). The undocumented immigrant, who experiences the feeling of being powerless, risks mental health issues as they "[wait] for a job opportunity to reveal itself" (Winther, 2014, p. 142). Immigrant precarity in the European context has been aggravated as a result of the 2015 'migrant crisis', which was followed by a multiplication of statuses marked by irregularity, contributing to a greater inbetween space of "legal limbo" (Aris Escarcena, 2022, p. 6). Disproportionate exposure to harm and the lack of social and political protection, as outlined by Butler (2010), constitutes a situation of precarity and is revealed in immigrant expressions of instability, uncertainty and insecurity at the hands of dominant authorities. Unified response to this precarity, by means of recognition of precariousness as a shared condition (Butler, 2010), as indicated above, is central to this research. Identifying such an occurrence will be guided by what Lundström (2017) refers to as 'political subject formation'. An illustrative example of this is the demonstration of immigrant workers and network allies who protested the exploitation and mistreatment of the immigrant workers under the campaign slogan, *Llegó la hora! Al campo y al manipulado con derechos!* (The time has come! Rights for the countryside and the manipulated!)[4]. The protestors were denouncing the planned evictions of immigrants as well as the general lack

[4] YouTube documentary (part 2) interviewing inhabitants of informal settlements in Almería. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LagAySEv200&ab_channel=SindicatoAndaluzdeTrabajadores

of affordable housing in the region. This broader collective framing created a new political subject, *el manipulado*, (the manipulated). In researching the experience of immigrants in Spain's agri-food industry, I was motivated by an interest in this process of collective framing and the formation of a political subject as a means to renegotiate precarity.

The claim-making and claim-living of immigrants. Central to this research is understanding how immigrants renegotiate precarity. Precarity, and the empowering potential in recognising its universality, is understood through Butler's conceptualisation. To address practical renegotiation of such precarity, I depart from Tilly and colleagues' conceptualisation of 'contentious politics'. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (1996) define contentious politics in terms of 'claim-making' activities, by means of interaction with various parties, including the target of the claim (the object). Describing such processes requires the identification of "political actors, political identities, contentious performances, and repertoires", and in explaining each of these identified features, further attention is required to the concepts of "sites, conditions, streams of contention, episodes, outcomes, mechanisms, and processes" (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, p. 28). In more broadly defined terms, however, Tilly (2008, p. 5) theorises contentious politics as the intersection of collective action, contention and politics; "interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interest, in which governments appear either as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties." My theoretical approach is indebted to Tilly and colleagues' conceptualisations, particularly the 'contentious conversation' which exemplifies the interaction of the subject/action/object triplet (Tarrow, 2008; Tilly, 2017), however my aversion to pre-defined indicators and reluctance to limit the object - or third party - to formal governments, redirects me to a broader conceptualisation.

Ataç and colleagues elaborate on Tilly's work, offering the following definition of contentious politics: "concerted, counter-hegemonic social and political action, in which differently positioned participants come together to challenge dominant systems of authority, in order to promote and enact alternative imaginaries" (Ataç et al., 2016, p. 530). This definition echoes Butler's (2011) writing on bodies in alliance acting in concert. Two elements of Ataç and colleagues' extended definition are important. Firstly, 'dominant systems of authority' broadens the scope for identifying oppressive social and political forces, such that an undocumented immigrant worker speaking out against an exploitative employer can be considered a claim-maker, engaged in contentious politics. Secondly, and bridging claim-making and claim-living (defined below), Ataç and colleagues are similarly concerned with the concomitant enacting of alternative imaginaries. Here, they refer to the activities of immigrants who are "reimagining political life from the margins", which involves the "invisible politics [...] of everyday practices" (Ataç et al., 2016, p. 532;538). Borrowing from Lundström (2017), I understand this continuity of contention through everyday practices to be a narrative enactment, or claim-living.

Lundström (2017) theorises on the continuity of a contingent political subject, namely, Brazil's *Landless Workers' Movement* (MST). Exemplified in the MST catchphrase, *la luta continua* (the struggle continues), Lundström (2017, p. 11), drawing on Scott's (1990) influential *Hidden Transcripts*, argues that open confrontation parallels disguised resistance and that it is through everyday defiance that agents actualise their political visions and goals "in the 'here and now'". This parallel, everyday struggle (claim-living) is distinguished from open confrontation (claim-making) by the former's lack of a direct target. Claim-living is a non-hegemonic,

constructive form of resistance, wherein the desired social and political alternative is actively created and lived, in concert with bodies in one's environment.

Another valuable contribution of Lundström's (2017) work is to theorise claim-making and claim-living using the concepts of agents, activities and advocacies. Tilly's (2017) *Contentious Conversation* provides an articulate conceptualisation of the interaction, through claims, between the subject and object (subject/action/object triplet). It sheds light on the fluidity of contentious interactions, notably shaped through the "multiple identities [people have] at their disposal" (Tilly, 2017, p. 504). Taking this conceptualisation as a foundation, I will use Lundström's agents, activities and advocacies trio to research immigrant claims, given it affords appropriate weight to the visions and goals that drive the subject's actions (or, in Lundstorm's terminology, the agent's activities). Drawing on Butler's bodies in alliance, I will look at the diverse identities of those involved in claim-making and claim-living activities, and the processes that unite them. These concepts will guide my research as I look at who claims are made by and for, and at how the claim-makers represent themselves and who they are allied with. Additionally, I will observe how claims are made and what the claim-makers are striving to realise.

The inseparability of the spatial and the social. A final note on my theoretical lens concerns the adoption of a relational approach to research. Inextricably linked to claim-making and claim-living is the reciprocal influence of the spatial and the social. Martin and Miller (2003, p. 143) argue that "spatial processes are inseparable from, and constitutive of, social processes" and that "a spatial perspective can produce more illuminating understandings of how people perceive, shape, and act upon grievances and opportunities." They draw on Lefebvre's (1991) conceptual triad of space, place and scale to argue that "the potential for contention is often greatest where there are disjunctures among different types of space" (Martin & Miller, 2003, p. 147). An illustrative example of this are the immigrant workers of Almería whose material geography (informal, roadside settlements) contradicts the conceived space of 'Refugees Welcome' in the city of Almería, a symbolic meaning wildly different to that of the immigrants' lived experience.

Continuing with Lefebvre's triad, place is considered "the terrain where basic social practices [...] are lived out" (Merrifield, 1993, p. 522, cited in Martin & Miller, 2003, p. 147). In this regard, spatial perspectives can be considered to "illuminate the connections between daily life experiences and broader social, political, and economic processes" (Martin & Miller, 2003, p. 143). An example of this is the multiple identities at the agent's disposal, as outlined by Tilly (2017) and Lundström (2017), which have varying degrees of salience, according to the embedded social and spatial conditions. In the case of MST members, the female subject position, or performed identity, is deliberately accentuated during the women's *luta* on International Women's Day in a performative move with "distinct confrontative appeal" (Lundström, 2017, p. 106). Similarly, I am interested in the spatial conditions that activate and shape various identities, and how, in turn, these identities influence the broader spatial and social context of resistance. How, for example, Moussa and his fellow Senegalese *chabola* housemates have come together to enact a social alternative in the face of exclusion and othering in the town of Lepe. The very basis upon which they are excluded is a source of collective pride in their traditional cuisine. Being locked out of the housing market, they are brought together under one roof and, in an act of resistance, perform and celebrate the identity that excludes them.

To summarise, in researching immigrants' precarity, and their renegotiation of this precarity, I will look specifically at those activities through which a demand is made against a target, in response to a perceived threat to the immigrants' values, interests or identities (claim-making), as well at those everyday activities of disguised resistance through which social and political alternatives are actively created (claim-living). Within each of these claiming processes, I will explore the involved agents, activities and advocacies. Agents referring to the immigrants themselves and the various identities they perform, but also to the alliances in which immigrants are engaged. Activities refers to the strategies of these agents in their interactions with the target, as with everyday performances of resistance. Advocacies refers to recognition of the shared condition of precarity and the visions of the future that agents are engaged in pursuing. Finally, each of these processes will be addressed from a non-essentialist perspective, acknowledging relational forces, such that immigrants (and their identities) shape, and are shaped by, their social and spatial environments.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methods used in the field, as well as the unexpected changes made during data collection. It ends with a reflection on my positionality as a researcher and moments of discomfort I experienced during fieldwork.

3.1. Data collection

To address my research questions, I conducted participant observation, informal conversations and semi-structured interviews over a period of four months (February-May 2023). Data collection took place largely in Lepe, however I also accompanied my participants to visit the neighbouring towns of Cartaya, Palos and Moguer. Participants I observed and chatted to daily were both male and female, from countries across northern and western Africa, with Senegal, Morocco and Mali the most heavily represented. The fourteen participants I formally interviewed were all male, aged between 26 and 53, and from Senegal, Morocco, Algeria, Sierra Leone, Mali and Ivory Coast. I did not intentionally seek male-only participants. The *chabolas* had an overwhelming majority of male inhabitants and over 90% of ASNUCI members were male; I had limited exposure to female workers. They were present, but a much smaller representation. I reached my sample through purposive, snowball sampling, making initial contact with my key informants by hanging out in the living and socialising quarters of the immigrant workers. The following outlines my entry point to the field, the various locations I hung out with and interviewed my participants and the expansion of the field through the use of public transport.

Access to hanging out in the field. I arrived to Huelva at the end of January expecting to observe and participate with *Jornaleras de Huelva en Lucha* (JHL), a self-organised, feminist and anti-racist group of day labourers in the strawberry industry, who I had been in contact with before arriving. Unfortunately, after a couple of informal meetings with representatives of JHL, having lunch and joining activist events, I received an email from a sociologist at the organisation, saying they don't agree with students interviewing their Moroccan colleagues, that these women not only are afraid but are tired of recounting their violent and painful situations. Gatekept from those workers, instead of JHL the entry point for my research was *Asociación Nueva Ciudadanía por la Interculturalidad* (ASNUCI) in Lepe. ASNUCI greatly facilitated rapport-building with potential participants as it was a regular hang-out spot of locally living immigrants. With three *chabola* settlements located within a 500m radius of ASNUCI, it was at the day centre in the busy afternoons and evenings where I met many of my research participants. Every night when I got back to Huelva, I wrote detailed descriptions of everything I had observed, who I had spoken to, where, and any striking quotes from our conversations. I also kept a personal diary, recording moments of shock, discomfort and general personal reflections. The following is an excerpt from observation notes on my first visit to ASNUCI, about which I felt somewhat anxious having had no prior contact with anyone from the organisation.

Walking from the bus station, I crossed a large roundabout and passed the cemetery and commercial and business park. As I headed towards the industrial warehouse units where ASNUCI was located, three men sitting on a bench called out to me, "Hey beautiful", about which I felt quite uncomfortable but acted as if I didn't hear. Approaching the warehouses, I saw a group of six men gathered outside a unit door, speaking

a language I didn't recognise. I walked past the men at the door, and, despite glancing inside and seeing an 'ASNUCI' banner hanging on the grey cement wall, I kept walking, too intimidated to enter the busy, unfamiliar centre. I turned the corner, had a chat with myself and, shortly after, marched myself back to the door, asking the group if this was ASNUCI and whether I could come in. To which came the answer, "Yes, of course, come in, come in."

Stepping inside the cold centre, I glanced up at the high, corrugated iron ceilings and gave a sweeping look around the room. Just inside the entrance, I spotted a man sitting behind a desk in the right-hand corner. With no appointment, he told me to sit and wait on the couch in the far left-hand corner and the "jefa" (boss; feminine noun) will call me in when she's free. Appeased by the presence of female authority, I sat on the couch. Waiting, observing. People were constantly entering and leaving the centre. The large, central floor space was delineated by couches lined up, side-by-side forming a rectangle facing two coffee tables that stood in the centre. On the couches, many sat silently using their phones, though some chatted in groups of two or three. At the back of the room, there was a narrow space between the back of the couches and the wall, laid with decorative rugs, creating an area for prayer. Hanging on the grey walls were paintings, banners, balloons and bunting. Photos of protest marches. Posters of silhouettes standing next to tall, barbed wire fences. And timetables of daily Spanish classes and weekly lawyer consultations. A large TV played videos from a music channel, background noise to the chatter of those drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes just outside the front door.

Laura, the jefa, called me into her office. I explained my research, she gave me more information about the centre and then she brought me back out to the main room to introduce me to some centre members. I tasted my first café Touba and spoke in half-English, half-Spanish to two lads from Gambia. We sat with our coffees, together on the couches, and bonded over a shared colonial past with (and eternal dislike for) England. I explained why I was there in relatively vague terms, feeling a dose of imposter syndrome in calling myself a 'researcher'.[5]

From this evening onwards, I established the daily routine of taking the bus to Lepe, walking to ASNUCI and spending the evening hanging out there, rotating between watching TV on the couches, drinking coffee by the front door and sitting on the footpath across the road, chatting to whoever was about, making myself a common and approachable figure in the Lepe landscape. I also became more confident in my role as a researcher and more assured in explaining the purpose of my stay. My positionality as a young, White woman most certainly impacted my research. It was at first an 'enabler' (Jackson, 2006), unthreatening to and drawing the attention of the largely-male prospective participants. With initial contact made, I grew to experience my positionality an 'inhibitor' to the research process (Jackson, 2006), as participants were more interested in the potential for sexual relations than research collaboration. Though uncomfortable with being sexualised - called beautiful, asked on dates or inappropriately touched - I dealt with such circumstances by respectfully rejecting advances, guided by methodological reflections of Mügge (2013). Telling the white lies of having a long-term partner or being unavailable for plans, I reconciled with the unwelcomed flirting by acknowledging that blunt rejection would have limited the research potential. To echo Mügge (2013), a principled, feminist, zero-tolerance approach would have made it difficult to conduct research.

A week after my first visit to ASNUCI, I suggested to Laura that I teach free English classes, which served greatly in expanding my network of contacts. Throughout the weeks I spent at ASNUCI, I participated in activist events, both locally across Huelva and in cities such as Madrid

[5] Observation notes, January 23

and Seville, and I accompanied several centre members to their documentation appointments at the police station in Huelva, deepening my understanding of the process to obtain papers and building solidarity with many immigrants as we stood, sometimes for up to three hours, waiting for our turn at the police station.

The 'ride-along'. Hanging out at ASNUCI meant taking the 45-minute bus from Huelva to Lepe. While at first I was less than thrilled at the prospect of an hour-and-a-half commute over and back every day, I later began observing areas surrounding Lepe and sparking up conversation with my fellow passengers. Eventually, I stopped considering the bus as purely a commute to and from the field, but rather a component of the field itself. I learned that immigrant workers who travel to Lepe for the seasonal harvest, first arrive to the city of Huelva and then take the regional bus to Lepe. Taking the bus route added great value to my qualitative research, as I shared in the experience of the participants through "direct exposure to situations, processes, people and things" (Wegerif, 2019, p. 125). That said, "[i]t can never be completely the same experience", given my positionality and impact as a researcher, and the temporary nature of my involvement (Wegerif, 2019, p. 125).

One of the most valuable things I was exposed to via my bus journeys was the role of the Lepe bus station as a central node in the immigrant experience. More than just a site to embark and disembark the bus, the station was a place where people gathered in the evening to offer their services to *jefes*. A place where people on the streets stored their belongings overnight. The adjacent café, a place where those who didn't find work would sit and pass the hours, chatting and people-watching. At both Lepe and Huelva stations, on more than one occasion I was victim to no-show buses, or I didn't get a seat because the bus was full. On these occasions I learned that when the bus lets you down and you don't have €40 to pay for a metered taxi, the available alternative is a taxi service run by locally-living immigrants who charge half the price per head, earning their fare by filling the car with passengers each journey. The shared struggle of navigating public transport was a source of solidarity between the participants and I. One evening when I missed the bus, one worker offered to drive me to Huelva, commenting that it must be hard for me too, being a foreigner in Lepe.

Arriving at Lepe station each day, I walked the five minutes past the cemetery and across the shopping and business park towards ASNUCI. Along this short but well-trodden route, I crossed paths with people at various stages of their migration trajectory. People just arriving to Lepe. Those pushing trolleys of empty bottles from the *chabolas* to the cemetery to refill their water supply at the hose by the cemetery gates. People-watchers sitting on the benches in front of the cemetery. People begging for money in the carpark. And late afternoon footfall of workers who had returned from the farm. Exposure to these situations and processes helped in contextualising interview data. Furthermore, I was afforded the opportunity to observe interactions in context and to observe my participants' social and working lives (Wegerif, 2019). In one example, in a taxi journey from Huelva to Lepe, our Moroccan driver told my Senegalese companion and I, "If the police stop us, I'm not a taxi, we're friends, okay?". Other journeys I shared with participants were bus rides between immigrant-populated villages across Huelva, and carpools to and from activist events. The beauty of these shared commutes is that conversation was greatly facilitated, as people were willing to talk on end throughout the journeys we took together.

Informal chats and semi-structured interviews. Hanging out at the day centre and travelling between Huelva and Lepe, I began to develop a thick understanding of the field and to build trust and rapport with participants. I preceded formal interviews with informal chats about my research and related topics. Encouragingly, in most cases people were enthused about the research and were obliging to follow-up requests for an interview. Through trial and error, I learned that while people were happy, even eager, to informally chat with me at the centre, the *comedor*, the bus station and other meeting points across Lepe, to earn the trust required for formal interviews, we first needed several one-on-one meetings, away from the other workers. This materialised as a coffee or a beer in town together, lunch at the Turkish restaurant, or dinner at the given person's *chabola*. My routine approach began to resemble a 'third date rule', where finally after three 'dates', I got an interview. One advantage of this was that I had a lot of personal, background information on each of my formal interviewees before conducting the interview and was better able to facilitate the recorded conversation with this prior knowledge. However, navigating my positionality of a young, unmarried female and making clear to my participants the purpose of my stay in Lepe was an on-going challenge.

A handful of participants were wary of the requirement to record but were happy to share their time and experiences off the spoken record. Others felt embarrassed about their Spanish language abilities and requested the conversation not be recorded. In both cases, we conducted the interview and immediately after I made written notes of what we had talked about. As for the recorded interviews, they were conducted at the participants choice of location, usually at a café or bar in town, the bus station or sitting in their car. I began interviews by reminding interviewees of my research purposes, letting them know that the recording can be stopped whenever needed and by opening the conversation very broadly, asking, "Tell me about your life here in Lepe". There was a list of topics I aimed to cover in each interview: living conditions, farmwork conditions, legal status, political engagement, social networks, individual and collective identities, and relationship with locals of Lepe. However, through a combination of (i) not wanting to impose what I considered to be topics of priority and (ii) an initial lack of confidence as a researcher, interview content was largely steered by the participants themselves. When conversation went off on tangents, I would recentre the discussion to the participant's lived experience in Lepe, and Spain more generally. This interview approach gave rise to relevant conversation topics I hadn't anticipated, such as combining farmwork with work in the drug industry and merchandise sales. This exploratory type of 'weak methodology' aligned with my research intentions, to be guided by my research proposal and fieldwork preparation but ultimately be informed by the data, embracing the unexpected and unknown with a curious openness (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Stewart, 2008). In practice, this meant allowing a multitude of conversation topics to arise and be unpacked, becoming the active listening partner. At the time, I questioned the relevance of certain topics, conspiracy theories about an elusive powerful elite, but engaged in conversation and gently circled back to relevant content. The outcome of this approach were long, irrelevant chunks of transcript. Interesting conversation, nonetheless, and potentially insightful data for other research purposes.

3.2. Data analysis

As fieldwork drew to a close, I began transcribing interviews. Throughout transcription, I corrected minor language errors made by participants. I did so for ease of understanding when later reading back over transcripts, but more importantly to avoid contributing to the notion of the 'unintelligible immigrant'. Spanish was not the first or second language of any of the participants, yet they expressed themselves clearly despite occasional grammatical errors. Presenting verbatim speech would not have added any value to the report.

Once transcribed, I uploaded interviews, along with observation notes, to Atlas.ti. Within Atlas.ti, I read through passages of transcriptions and inductively created base codes directly from the speakers' text in an effort to remain close to the data. Having inductively coded each interview, I revisited my research questions and deductively organised the base codes into group codes, according to concepts set out in my theoretical framework. The remaining base codes, which fell outside the concepts of the theoretical framework, were grouped intuitively. For example, base codes that referred to access, or lack thereof, to means of travel were grouped as mobility. Next, I revised the group codes, merging groups with considerable overlap. Lastly, guided by the final list of group codes, I deductively coded my observation notes. Reasoning for this was that the observation notes were produced from my perspective, while the group codes were derived from the interviewees' perspectives. In staying true to being informed by the data, I coded my written observations through what emerged in the interviews; my observations thus serving to reinforce, or contradict, what interviewees had told me.

3.3. Positionality and ethics

Throughout fieldwork I had the regularly recurring thoughts of, *"What good are you doing for these people?" "You get data for your thesis, what do they get?"*. This guilt somewhat abated when I began teaching English classes twice a week and felt like I was giving back somehow. However, this created a new problem. People referred to me as the *teacher*, not the *researcher*. Despite overcoming the imposter syndrome and confidently reiterating the reasons I was there, my most visible identity was the *teacher* and in day-to-day interactions people seemed to forget I was a researcher, which at times made me feel like I was spying. Instead of correcting every instance where I was addressed as the teacher, I decided to choose my battles. I regularly corrected those who had good levels of Spanish and, more importantly, those who I had ear-marked to be potential interviewees. I alleviated my sense of guilt for feeling like a spy in the instances that I did not correct people by recognising that beyond my research purposes, I had grown to enjoy spending time at the centre and hanging out with the members. While I did record my observations after each visit, I was not always acting out of research interests. The more time I spent in Lepe, the more often I found myself visiting ASNUCI or bars in the town centre just to catch up with people and enjoy each other's company. Developing relations beyond the extraction of data, I started to perform a third identity, the *friend.* Sharing stories and having genuine conversations is something many people thanked me for, with several commenting that White people don't usually give them the time of day.

In the latter half of my fieldwork, I began accompanying centre members to police station appointments. Offering up my morning to queue with them and liaise with the police station staff on their behalf was tangible and practical participant compensation. Throughout fieldwork, I joined

activist events and took friends along with me, both to observe the events and attract greater attention to the affairs. Conversations with Seydou helped me see the good that I was doing for participants, even if I was simultaneously compiling data for my own academic purposes. One afternoon at the centre, he told me he appreciated my research, even just for having a coffee in town with the participants, so that the people of Lepe see a White woman and a Black man hanging out together as something normal. In my last week, we were driving back from Moguer and I told him I was feeling guilty for having extracted knowledge and was now leaving Lepe. He reassured me that I had participated and contributed a lot to ASNUCI in a genuine and consistent way. Despite being exactly what I needed to hear, I will always feel indebted to my participants, and hope I can return to Lepe next year to visit those who are back for the season.

Within this context of endless gratitude and respectful consideration for participants' time, I noticed strong emotions arise in myself when journalists or other researchers arrived flippantly at the centre. One evening, two Finnish journalists arrived. They spoke to Seydou but to none of the centre members. They took non-consensual photos of members as they were seated on the couches or knelt down in the prayer area. Given our shared positionalities of White, western women, they approached me with ease, asking what I was doing there. I felt an urge to distance myself from them, not wanting centre members to think I condoned or subscribed to their intrusive approach. I did, at the same time, feel envious of how brazenly they took photos. I had wanted to be able to visibly document what I was observing, however I never dared to do so. In balance, respecting others' space was more important to me than photo evidence of what I saw. For this reason, I have very few photos from fieldwork.

Another time two Spanish researchers, Pablo and David, came to the centre, similarly addressing the office staff first but eager to speak to centre members too. They again felt ease in approaching me and indeed it was nice to discuss experiences in the field with other researchers. Pablo and David were spending three weeks in Huelva city, in which time they hoped to visit and interview strawberry pickers living in Lepe, Moguer and Palos. An ambitious goal, they wasted little time arriving at the centre and getting straight to the point. Having recounted stories of prospective participants who immediately lost interest when they revealed they were researchers, they asked me to introduce them to workers at the centre. Facilitating Pablo and David's interviews was an uncomfortable experience. I felt tension between becoming a gatekeeper, had I chosen not to introduce Pablo and David, but also being an accessory to the aggressive researcher tactics of simply extracting selective information and then leaving. Precisely what I wanted to avoid. As a compromise, I agreed to sit on the couches with them and let whoever was interested to approach us of their own accord, at which point I would introduce Pablo and David as researchers with similar interests as my own.

On the topic of gatekeeping, I had a number of requests from Spanish friends I made during fieldwork to come to Lepe to visit ASNUCI. Each time I had the same internal response of discomfort, feeling reluctant to bring anyone to the centre. I was becoming somewhat of a gatekeeper myself. Reflecting on this discomfort, I realise I didn't want to bring people to ASNUCI, to visit as if members there were a spectacle to behold; something to 'see' or something for me to 'show'. I couldn't anticipate how people would react or behave at the centre and I felt protective and defensive of the workers. As I type this, I understand more and more the rejection email I received from the sociologist at JHL.

Regarding consent to research participation, I followed the guidelines for informed consent outlined by the American Anthropological Association (2004). In brief, the guidelines establish communication of information, comprehension of information and voluntary participation as the three key components for informed consent. I achieved these components by preparing a short mental script of what I was doing and why, which I then orally pitched to prospective participants. I encouraged participants to clarify any doubts before deciding to participate or not. In some cases, participants had been similarly interviewed before and were familiar with the process. Despite investing time in building rapport, some participants were uncomfortable with voice recording, to which I adapted by instead making mental notes throughout the interview and immediately writing them all down once we finished. In respect for the anonymity of those involved in my research, all names used throughout the report are pseudonyms, including those of the Spanish researchers.

3.4. Limitations

Language barriers excluded a number of potential participants, arguably the most precarious as they have not mastered the Spanish language and rely on the goodwill of others to translate for them. Without speaking Arabic, Wolof, or French, I was unable to communicate meaningfully with these individuals. A translator would have facilitated interaction considerably.

The experiences outlined throughout this report are unique to participants and cannot be generalised to the collective 'immigrants'. Nonetheless, highlighting these individual experiences offer a glimpse into the reality of undocumented workers, the types of obstacles they face and the decisions they make in response. Presenting these lived experiences in depth of description humanises 'illegal' immigrants and offers the reader an understanding of their ongoing struggle. Not least of all, presenting the living and working conditions of undocumented immigrants - as follows in the upcoming chapters - advances scholarly recognition for their needs and rights.

4. Navigating Lepe

This chapter outlines the strategies of immigrants in achieving the short-term goals of dignified living and work conditions and the longer-term goal of securing documentation. It outlines the conditions in Lepe and highlights participants' values and priorities in decision-making.

4.1. Shelter

Finding a place to sleep in Lepe. Finding decent accommodation is difficult for immigrants across Spain, however circumstances in Lepe appear to rank in the extreme. Several participants expressed their shock on arrival, saying they live comfortably back home and never saw conditions such as the *chabolas* before coming to Andalucía. One participant emphasised this point saying that even in the smallest villages in Gambia, every house has a roof, water and electricity. However, while the *chabolas* first come as a shock, they are often later accepted as the preferred alternative to sleeping on the streets, given access to the housing market is denied by unaccommodating local landlords.

Chabolas have been a characteristic feature of the immigrant space in Lepe for over 25 years but they are not the only form of shelter immigrants occupy. This section elaborates on the *chabola* settlements, alternative shelter and the broader social environment. A fundamental human right, shelter should provide "security, personal safety and protection from the weather, and [prevent] health problems and diseases" (European Commission, 2023). Immigrants in Lepe make a number of decisions and concessions in navigating basic shelter. Some normalise and accept adverse living conditions. Others establish alternatives, unwilling to surrender to the hardship of the *chabolas*.

The *chabolas*. Individual *chabolas* vary in shape and size but most commonly take the form of a small, square hut with walls made of wooden pallets, wrapped together and roofed by the same sheets of plastic used in strawberry greenhouses. Inside, the *chabolas* are insulated with layers of cardboard panels and fabric sheets. The flooring is made of more cardboard panels which are then lined with mattresses, leaving just enough floor space to fit a butane gas cylinder topped with a cooking stove; a small kitchen area. None of the *chabolas* have access to running water and the large majority are without access to electricity, except the handful of inhabitants who have installed solar panels on their roofs.

The *chabola* settlements I most frequently visited are located on the outskirts of town, two in the shadows of a large industrial estate, another at the rear of the town cemetery. *Chabolas* are typically built close together, in clusters of three or four. The site I visited the most had an adjacent bonfire area where people would gather every evening to eat, drink and hang out. Inhabitants had also built an outdoor seating area, where, under the shade of large trees, couches were arranged in a square. On the several occasions I was invited to eat in the *chabolas*, my hosts would prepare the meal inside the *chabola* and then gather housemates and neighbours outside to squat around a large pan and eat together.

Living at the *chabolas* presents a number of risks to one's physical and social safety. Above all is the chronic threat of fire. The highly flammable materials that *chabolas* are made with represent grave vulnerability for the inhabitants. In the long-standing history of *chabolas* in Lepe, inhabitants have witnessed fires of both accidental and intentional outbreak. Accidental fires are

most commonly caused by carelessness when cooking. For example, if the open flame of the cooking stove catches on flammable material.

> *There were a lot of* chabolas *[before] but now there is a lot of burning, [which] usually comes with the heat. It is very easy to burn the* chabolas, *some are burned with the gas cylinder. [...] Once you've burnt one* chabola*, all the nearby ones start to burn.*
>
> - *Mohamed*

Intentional fires are a regular occurrence, most commonly believed to be at the hands of the locals from Lepe. Participants pointed out that these fires 'conveniently' break out at the end of the season, once the workers have served their purpose. Intentional fires are very easily lit and safety concerns from participants reflect the perceived preparedness for just anyone to do so.

> *Those* chabolas *are the most dangerous. [...] Because you can sleep in the chabola, I can come at night and burn it down.*
>
> - *Ousmane*

Theft is customary at the *chabolas*. Most that I visited were locked with a chain and padlock, to which each inhabitant had a key. However, even with these precautions some *chabolas* were broken into, with money or other valuables stolen. Aware of this risk, most carry their valuables on them at all times, in a small, crossbody bag. Lack of running water at the *chabolas* means the daily task of taking emptied and rinsed fertiliser canisters to the nearest water hose and filling and carrying them back to the *chabola*. On one very unfortunate occasion, a newly arrived immigrant from Senegal filled one of the canisters, believing it to have already been rinsed. When he later fetched the canister to wash his hands and face, the acidic residue in the water burned the skin around his face and he was rushed to the hospital to be treated. He wore sunglasses for six weeks afterwards to protect the scalded skin around his eyes as it healed. In the longer-term strategy of renegotiating one's position, living in the *chabolas* was a means to an end. Participants were willing to endure four months of hardship living in the *chabolas*, knowing it's impermanent, if it means they can earn money and contribute to social security payments. All with the end goal to regularise their legal status.

The *chabolas* were far from the vision many had of Europe before arriving. And while some accept the conditions they arrive to and eventually become accustomed to the *chabolas*, others are outraged at the normalised suffering and seek alternative shelter.

> **Alternative shelter.**
>
> *When I entered the* chabolas *for the first time, I imagined "How can you live here? How?" There are people who are very comfortable, very calm, like in a five-star hotel. They are very comfortable. They get used to it. They also get used to not paying anything. Living without paying.*
>
> - *Amadou*

Appalled by the conditions of the *chabolas*, people pursue alternative options. Workers that have long-standing relationships with their *jefes* (farm bosses) leverage their position by demanding the *jefe* provides accommodation. However in most cases, workers who choose not to live in a

chabola must find alternative accommodation by themselves. Renting a room, or a bed, in a flat in the town centre is the first avenue of pursuit. Many participants expressed the desire to live in a flat, paying an average monthly rent of €150. Despite having the necessary funds available, many said there were a lot of people looking for rooms this year, making it particularly difficult to secure a place. This is compounded by local landlords' reluctance to rent to immigrants, under the claim they would destroy the flat. The immigrant-run hostel, adjacent to ASNUCI's day centre, is a favourable alternative, however it houses only 40 at capacity and charges up to €200 per month, which is beyond the budget of most workers. Ousmane, who lives throughout the season in a shared *chabola*, told me that because he couldn't get a room in a flat or the hostel, he paid for a two-month stay at a hotel in Lepe, to get a break from the *chabola* and calm his nerves.

> *I lived in a hotel for almost two months. [...] Every day, €30 [...] Yes, it's expensive. But I like to sleep and live peacefully. Nobody bothering me. I like that no one bothers me. Because if they bother me a lot, I get very nervous. I don't like it.*
>
> - *Ousmane*

In response to being locked out of the housing market, several workers pried open doors of derelict, unoccupied buildings, squatting there until they were driven out by authorities. Thanks to legal red tape that favoured the squatters, many managed to live there for a few weeks before they could be formally evicted. Squatting was a contentious topic. Many said they would rather live in a *chabola* than draw problems on themselves.

Lepe forms part of a seasonal harvest intra-migration circuit in Spain, where workers spend three to four months and then return to their base city for the remaining months of the year. Bilbao, Lleida, Granada, regardless of *where* workers return too, several have a flat, the rent for which they continue to pay, waiting for them at base when they return from Lepe. Mamadou couldn't get a room to rent in Lepe. He continues to pay rent in Granada and he considers the *chabolas* disrespectful. In light of all this, he chooses to sleep in his car while working in Lepe. A solution that is very common amongst those fortunate enough to own a car.

> *Right now I don't have a home here. You know what I'm saying? Me and my car, that's it, nothing more. Yeah, because I'm not going to live in the* chabolas*. I have seen all that, and from what I can see, it is disrespectful.*
>
> - *Mamadou*

For those locked out of the housing market, due to financial or social exclusionary reasons, and without a car to sleep in, finding a *chabola* to lodge in is even becoming complicated. Given the regulation recently introduced by the town hall that bans the building of new *chabolas*, accompanied by the yearly fires that diminish existing *chabola* numbers, demand for *chabolas* is beginning to outweigh the supply.

> *Even in the* chabolas *there is no room. There are people who want to live in the* chabolas, *people who sleep on the street, want to go live in the* chabolas *but there aren't any. You can't build new* chabolas*, and even if you have an old* chabola*, and you want to repair it? Can't be done.*
>
> - *Mohamed*

With nowhere else to go, many people find themselves sleeping on the streets, facing utmost insecurity as they weather the cold of night without a roof over their heads. Gora, an older Senegalese man, explains to me that he currently sleeps in the shelter of the monument in the middle of the roundabout by the bus station. He goes to sleep at midnight and wakes up at 6am. It's better than living at the *chabolas*, he says, where people are caught up in drinking, drugs and fighting. Others feel embarrassed about living on the streets. Ayoub didn't correct me when I mistakenly assumed he lived in the *chabolas* during one of our first conversations. Weeks later he invited me to have dinner and confessed that he had wanted to invite me to eat for a long time but he never did. He wished he had a house to invite me to but, it is what it is he said. During his time in Lepe he was sleeping, with two friends, in a ditch next to a blueberry farm. They built a small fire pit and cooked meals there. As Ayoub and I sat and ate the lentil dish he had prepared, he stored the pot on the ground under the small table we were sitting at. He said it was to trap the heat and to protect the food from the dogs that roamed around nearby. Seven stray dogs hang around where they sleep. Sometimes they feed the dogs and they have now become like guard dogs. Familiar with the three who sleep there, if any stranger comes around, the dogs bark, alerting them awake.

A number of factors guide decision-making when seeking shelter in Lepe. The availability of funds and attitudes of locals are evidently at play. Another important factor is the social environment in Lepe, namely the *comedor* and the ASNUCI centre.

Social environment of Lepe. The *comedor* (meal centre) is a central node in the immigrant space in Lepe. People gather there daily to avail of the midweek breakfast and lunch services. Those sleeping on the streets and in the *chabolas* frequent the *comedor* and are arguably dependent on its services. Without the free food given at the *comedor*, those who do not secure regular work would be unlikely to afford to feed themselves.

The *comedor* is located in a warehouse unit on the outskirts of the town centre. More than just a place to eat, it is a meeting point that is loud with lunchtime conversation. News played on the TV screen and people wished one another a pleasant meal and engaged in small talk about political affairs. The *comedor* also hosted an informal market, where people selling drugs and stolen goods sought clients. While almost everyone I had spoken to had visited the *comedor* at least once if not multiple times, several participants expressed a wariness of eating there too often. They didn't want to become reliant on the help of the state, for it to be unplugged one day and they are unable to fend for themselves. A rumour I heard from more than one participant was that the food in the *comedor* was spiked by the chefs with sleeping medicine in order to keep immigrants docile and, for that reason, many others were suspicious about eating there. Moussa told me that he used to eat at the *comedor* but there were too many fights there so now he prefers to eat his meals at the *chabolas*.

ASNUCI is another central node of Lepe's social environment. The role that ASNUCI plays in the immigrant space is thoroughly elaborated in section 6.2. However, in brief, ASNUCI is an immigrant-run day centre that offers services catered to those living in the streets and the *chabolas*. It is a place where people can shower, wash their clothes, charge their phones and connect to wifi. Not unlike the role of the *comedor*, the availability of ASNUCI's services means that people on the streets and in the *chabolas* can survive in such living conditions. Despite an

unstable roof over their heads, workers can alleviate hunger, maintain hygiene and stay connected to distant family members, contributing to health and social security.

4.2. Farmwork

Relationships with the *jefes*. For undocumented immigrants, central to navigating life in Spain is getting and keeping a job. This is obvious in the short-term context, as a way to financially sustain oneself. However, in the longer-term, regular work, a quota of social security payments and the promise of a year-long contract are necessary requirements to satisfy the application for legal residency and work permit. A crucial element of this application process is the need for a year-long contract. This affords considerable leverage to the *jefes*, as contracts are written and offered at their will. Some *jefes* were described as *buena gente* (good people), however in the majority of cases *jefes* were considered to *engañar a los trabajadores* (cheat/deceive workers). Worker strategies when engaging with *jefes*, ultimately as a means to obtain documentation, varied from unwavering loyalty and a willingness to break their back at work, to challenging unreasonable demands of *jefes* and threatening to report them to the police.

Good and bad bosses exist across all fields of work and navigating relationships is common across all employment sectors. The crucial difference in the undocumented immigrant and *jefe* relationship is how heavily dependent the former is on the latter. In the short-term, decent working conditions depend on the willingness of the *jefe* to provide them. In the long-term, the goodwill of the *jefes* to offer a year-long contract determines whether or not undocumented immigrants can apply for their papers. The power afforded to *jefes* in this transaction renders immigrants extremely vulnerable and heightens their precarity, given that the *jefe* can, at any moment, withdraw their side of the deal, while immigrants have few avenues through which to claim rights. A good boss eases precarity, a bad boss exacerbates it.

The good boss. *Jefes* influence three aspects of their workers' lives: work conditions, well-being and access to documentation. Dismal expectations of work conditions and well-being are satisfied by 'good' *jefes*, the topic of concern is the *when* and *how* of accessing documentation.

Adama, a now-documented immigrant from Ivory Coast, recounted the story of meeting his *jefe*, who within one week offered him a contract to get his documentation.

> *I met my* jefe *one day in August. We sat down and talked and I went to work with him the next day. He asked, "How long have you been here in Spain?" And I said, "I've been here for two and a bit years, in a month's time it will be three years and I'll need a contract." After a week of work, he says, "Don't be afraid, you're working with me. If you like the job, I'll write you a contract and I'll do everything I can, so don't be afraid of anything, because I'm going to make things easier for you to regularise your situation". It was as clear as that. After a week of working with him.*
>
> - *Adama*

He went on to explain that his *jefe* went to great lengths, collaborating with Adama's lawyer to do what he could to sort the documentation. Adama considers himself lucky to have met such a cooperative *jefe* and expressed to me his gratitude towards him a number of times. Yet, he also

acknowledged that what his *jefe* did for him was nothing more than basic legal requirements for employing farm workers, something that even the *jefe* himself acknowledged.

> *...that's why I say that I will always be grateful, even though I shouldn't be. And he himself, my* jefe*, recognises this. He tells me that, "It shouldn't be like that." I don't have to thank him for anything. He's done what he's supposed to do.*
>
> - *Adama*

In an environment where a cooperative *jefe* is the exception to the rule, the bare minimum of support from *jefes* is celebrated by workers. Mohamed, currently with a year-long residency permit subject to review at the end of the year, told me that he and friends often meet up to discuss current affairs and workers rights, as a way to keep each other informed on such issues. They regularly tell each other what they're earning incase salaries have risen and your *jefe* hasn't raised yours. He went on to reassure me, however, that the *jefe* himself usually pays the salary rise directly. He continued by telling a story he heard of workers in Lepe who refused to begin the harvest until their *jefe* found them decent housing. Mohamed lives in the immigrant-run shelter at ASNUCI, paying €180 a month for a single bunk-bed in a room shared with five others. He says he wouldn't threaten a workers' strike because his *jefe* had offered him accommodation on site but he doesn't want to live in the countryside. Beyond the gracious act of offering a room in an isolated farmhouse and the bare minimum of paying a legal wage, Mohamed attests that he has a good relationship with his *jefe* and that he is willing to help him with whatever and whenever he needs, even if it's not work-related.

Mamadou, a documented immigrant from Senegal, met his *jefe* not long after he discharged himself from Red Cross emergency accommodation and went searching for ways to make a living. Confident he had proved himself as a worker, after one day on the farm he approached his future *jefe* and offered his services and long-term commitment.

> *I told the* jefe *straight away, "Look, I'm new here". I spoke French a bit like that, I say, "I'm new here. If you want to work with me, it's without papers." I don't have family here to help me with papers or whatever. He accepted. And that's it. [...] Either you accept it or not. Because I passed. On the first day I passed. He wants to work with me. So do I. I like working with him and that's it. And we went on like that. Until I reached three years to get my contract and that's it.*
>
> - *Mamadou*

Not unlike Adama, Mamadou felt profound gratitude towards his *jefe*, telling me that,

> *...he is the one who helped the most when I had nothing [...] If it wasn't for him, I would be without a job, without documentation.*
>
> - *Mamadou*

This undying gratitude guides Mamadou's decision to return to the same farm every year, despite now being documented and free to pursue work in other sectors. He doesn't feel obliged, he says, but will never forget his *jefe's* help.

Informal conversations and extensive participant observation taught me of other token acts of benevolence by *jefes* such as letting workers take home a small bag of oranges or allowing

time at the end of the workday to hunt rabbits to later cook at the *chabolas*. Such acts of kindness pale in comparison to experiences with *jefes* outside of Lepe, where being provided accommodation is a given and in some cases additional work benefits are included. Omar, a documented worker from Gambia who follows the winter, spring and summer harvests and then takes three months holidays in autumn, told me about the *jefe* he had in Cataluña who always respected him as a worker, facilitating his access to unemployment benefit in the off-season and accommodating his yearly return visits to Gambia. The *jefes* of Lepe that are considered 'good people' only earn such a status when compared to the vast majority of *jefes* in Lepe who not only refuse to do the bare minimum but will actively exploit and manipulate workers.

The bad boss.

> *The* jefe *loves you because he's exploiting you, man, you have to understand that. He is taking advantage of your situation. There are* jefes *who don't want people with papers. They prefer people without papers. [...] who they're going to pay €20-something a day and they're going to make them run like a donkey.*
>
> - *Amadou*

In stark contrast to the few who described their *jefe* as good people, I more commonly heard stories of how the *jefe* takes advantage of undocumented workers. Amadou, a now-documented immigrant from Senegal who has learned to speak both Spanish and Catalan fluently, recounted the story of how a *jefe* who was unaware that Amadou was documented tried to exploit him.

> *I went to a farm where I was the only one with papers and he [the* jefe*] didn't know that I spoke Spanish, nor did he know that I had papers. [...] I saw him in the car, he didn't get out and from there he stuck his head out, commanding. And we finished. He paid per day, the* jefe*. He paid me €29, from 9:00 to 19:00. He gave it to me, I said "What's this?". He said, "Today's work." I say, "Take it. You're going to pay me €50," I took out my paper and put it on the table. "And why am I going to pay you that?" I say, "We'll sort it out at the police." And he's like, "OK. I'll call you back, I'll call you in a bit." So that the [other workers] leave. And when I went, I took two [workers] too, so that they could see how he was going to pay me [...] They saw that he paid me €58, but they accept the €29. And the whole season, the three or four months, they are going to get paid like that. [...] The* jefes *here take so, so, so much advantage of immigrants.*
>
> - *Amadou*

The undocumented are first-in-line in being mistreated and exploited by the *jefes*, especially if they haven't mastered the Spanish language.

> *When you speak Spanish- You know, there are many people who are here, the truth is that they don't know how to speak well. They don't understand well, you know, that's why I think there are always some* jefes *who take advantage, steal. Taking advantage, you know. Sucking blood. Poor blood, you know? And that's it.*
>
> - *Oumar*

The hardship of farmwork and the exploitation at the hand of the *jefes* appears to take three distinct but overlapping forms. The most commonly expressed, and already indicated above, was

the greed of *jefes* and of the undocumented being underpaid or not appearing on the payroll. Secondly is the physical toll of the work, compounded by the *jefe* shouting at workers to move faster. Finally, a number of participants spoke about incidents of *jefes* reinforcing the invisibility of the undocumented by not providing contracts or telling undocumented to hide on days when police checks were carried out.

Work conditions: shamelessly underpaid. *Jefes* leverage the desperation of the undocumented to avoid paying the legal wage.

> *No papers? If you don't want [to accept the work conditions], there is no work. If you want to work, for example, [you get] €5 every hour and 10 hours, 11 hours, if you want to work. But if you don't want to, there are a lot of people [who do].*
>
> - *Ahmed*

Mamadou talks about underpaying *jefes,* emphasising this desperation and explaining that if the undocumented refuse to accept below minimum wage they are likely left without anything to eat.

> *This is to take advantage. Then nothing. What do you do? There are people who do it, because if you don't have papers, no one will take you to work. No one will take you. So, what are you going to eat?*
>
> - *Mamadou*

Jefes are concerned with maximum profit return and are willing to forgo any respect owed to their workers in their greedy pursuit. The “shameless” *jefes* satisfy this greed in a number of ways. One way is by stealing time from workers everyday.

> *Of course, it's a matter of payment, a matter of time, because there are people who, for example, we start at 9 o'clock. Finish at six. But we always start at a quarter to nine. Imagine stealing 15 minutes, every person, every day. And then finish at six o'clock to pick up the tools, and that also takes another ten or 20 minutes. And you can't even be five minutes late. [...] Start early, you know? 15 minutes earlier and finish five or ten minutes later. You know? Every day you steal five minutes from me, another one 25 minutes. How many hours stolen per day? And you have more than us. Shameless, you know? And stealing. That happens to me so many times. I go through it so many times. You have to respect the time.*
>
> - *Oumar*

In other cases, *jefes* will pay the legal wage to some workers but not to others, or they will pay part of the month on the books and the other half cash-in-hand.

> *Money, for example. The people who work here in the fields, on the oranges, the blueberries, the strawberries. We don’t all enjoy the same workers’ rights. For example, the worker works 30 days every month. But he doesn't work 30 days according to the payroll, he works 18, 20 days. [...] he’s paid 20 days per the payroll, but 10 days cash-in-hand.*
>
> - *Ahmed*

Some *jefes* lack any respect for the undocumented workers, to the extent that they don't pay them at all.

> *...they [the* jefes*] don't respect people, because they say you are undocumented so they don't respect you. It doesn't apply to everyone but there are* jefes *who don't pay.*
>
> - *Mohamed*

Elaborating on this power relation and the gall of the *jefes* to not pay workers at all, Ahmed explains that because they pay cash-in-hand, undocumented workers have no proof of work and feel helpless to report the *jefe* for non-payment.

> ***Well-being: worked to death.***
>
> *Some of the* jefes *cheat, they don't pay social security or pay workers well, you know? But there are some farms too where they force you [to run]. You know? "Come on, come on."*
>
> - *Oumar*

Not only are workers underpaid, they are treated like animals, being run like donkeys and considered easily disposable and replaceable. To increase yield and ultimately earn more money, *jefes* in Lepe are notorious for shouting at workers, telling them to hurry up and run.

> *A bad* jefe *is no good. No good. [...] A lot of* jefes *here at work are like, "Dude. Come on, come on, come on, come on, come on, come on!" [...] No good. Let me work calmly. Without pressure. "Run, run, run" is no good.*
>
> - *Moussa*

Moussa went on to explain that *jefes* behave this way to profit off and cheat the workers. This sentiment was echoed by Abdoulaye, also from Senegal, who explained that *jefes* are only concerned with high produce yields, not caring where workers sleep, or if they have slept at all.

> *They are interested in [the worker] who can pick a lot of [fruit]. [...] They don't care that he lives in a* chabola *or anything like that. "Collect a lot of strawberries, or collect a lot of blueberries. But I don't care where you are, if you sleep or not. It's not my problem."*
>
> - *Abdoulaye*

Utterly indifferent about the well-being of the workers, forcing them to run through the ridges collecting as much fruit as possible, *jefes* are also well-known for shouting insults at workers and denying them breaks during their shift. One evening I accompanied Koli, an undocumented worker from Senegal, to the water hose by the cemetery to fill 5L bottles of water to take back to the *chabolas*. He had just come home from work and was complaining of aches in his back, saying that his ***jefe's*** son is beginning to take over the farm, that he is *un cabrón* (a bastard) and doesn't let the workers break to drink water.

Amadou explained to me that when he begins working on a new farm, he treats it as if it were his own land, working with the same respect he would if it was his own.

As if it were my own work. I work like that too, as if it were my own. I respect it. And if I do all that, why can't I get your respect? Isn't all that enough? You have to yell at me. You have to insult me. You have to treat me badly, because I don't have the papers.

- *Amadou*

One afternoon, Abdoulaye and I went to Palos, another village in the province of Huelva that owes its wealth to the agri-food industry. On the bus over, Abdoulaye told me stories of previous *jefes* he had worked with and others he had refused to work with. He said that he would never degrade himself to work the strawberry farms, calling the work *cabeza abajo, culo arriba* (head down, ass up). He recounted stories of *jefes* calling him crazy for rejecting their offers of work, to which he responded, what is crazy is agreeing to do such back-breaking work and to be mistreated by the *jefe* in the meantime. Abdoulaye also told me that *jefes* often cause problems between workers by pitting them against each other. *Jefes* approach workers who run on demand, telling them to find friends who can work as fast as them and the *jefe* will fire the slower workers and replace them with their friends. This division of workers was echoed by others. *Jefes* often compared one worker to another, and in some cases, the three workers who returned the lowest yield each day were penalised with three days of no work. *Jefes* can afford to send workers home, safe in the knowledge that there are many desperately waiting for the chance of a day's work. Oumar reflected the Spanish *jefes'* stance by quoting them.

If you work yourself to death, it's no good. "One gone, another one tomorrow." That's what they say. Those are the words of the Spaniards.

- *Oumar*

Work injuries, and even fatalities, were not uncommon during my time in Lepe. The handling of these incidents by the corresponding *jefes* often followed steps towards renouncing responsibility. One hot afternoon in mid-March, news got back to the ASNUCI centre that a Ghanaian worker had died, presumably of exhaustion or dehydration, while working the orange fields. His *jefe* was someone who Abdoulaye worked for as a middle man, arranging workers to fill harvesting positions. Later that evening, Abdoulaye told me that the *jefe* hadn't called the ambulance because the worker was undocumented and it would have meant a hefty fine for the *jefe*. One of the fellow workers had to call the ambulance. Recounting the events, Abdoulaye said he will never work with that *jefe* again and that he needs to protect his brothers, he won't send them to a farm where they are going to die. This is no life, he told me, we have to get out.

In a similar abdication of responsibility, Amadou told me the story of an older Malian man who suffered a knee injury at work. Similarly, his *jefe* did not call the ambulance but instead dropped the worker back to Lepe, gave him some money and said he would be back in a few days to check in on him. When the *jefe* returned, he came with voluntary resignation papers, which the worker signed, unaware that he was signing away his rights to injury benefit, without the possibility of working until his injury heals.

For a lot of people, too, it's a lack of knowledge. A man from Mali, who comes to the day centre, has a knee problem. He was working on a farm, he fell there, he broke his knee. The jefe *put him in his car, took him to the village, without calling ambulances or anything. He gave him some money for food. In a few days he went to pick him up with papers to take voluntary sick leave. And he*

signed it. [...] That shouldn't happen to me in your job. And you're kicking me out? You tell me that it's me, that I want to go. And then he signs it. You're leaving. What are you going to eat? You've signed off voluntarily. You're not entitled to unemployment benefits. You're not entitled to your rights. Because of what happened to you at work. [...] The jefe *has taken advantage of his innocence to do this to him.*

- *Amadou*

Not only are workers facing miserable conditions of pay and risking their physical and mental health on the farms, by covering up work injuries and knowingly depriving workers of their rights, *jefes* are guilty of actively invisibilizing undocumented workers.

Access to documentation: empty promises. *Jefes* will actively obscure workers if they've been tipped off about upcoming police checks. Undocumented workers are told to go home or hide when police arrive.

Yeah, working last month, the jefe *says "Let's go home, today there is a lot of control in the farms." [...] Otherwise, the* jefe *faces problems. They [the police] fine, a lot. Of course they do.*

- *Moussa*

Such a strategy favours both the *jefe*, who avoids a fine, and the undocumented, who avoids legal recourse. Mohamed verbalises the invisibility of the undocumented and explains that the ambiguity with which rights are applied in farmwork is exactly why the undocumented seek to work there. If *jefes* were to become strict law-abiding citizens overnight, the undocumented would be left with few other options.

Because if they say that we are going to live as the law says, we cannot live here in Spain. We can't because we have to go to live and work where very few rights apply. In farmwork, they generally don't apply as the law says, because here you can take a job without papers but another job.... I'm not saying there isn't, but it's very little compared to farmwork.

- *Mohamed*

Yet, while invisibility can be a survival strategy of the undocumented against the perceived risk of deportation, there are instances when the undocumented require proof of their existence. This is granted or denied, at the will of their *jefe*, in the form of a work contract.

Adama, introduced earlier, was eternally grateful to his *jefe* for offering him a contract, despite recognising that his *jefe* had just done what is legally expected of an employer. Decent conduct of the sort was uncommon for the *jefes* in Lepe. Mohamed went through a number of different *jefes*, each with the empty promise to provide a work contract until finally one *jefe* delivered on the promise.

I had been working with my asylum [document] and some jefes *I was working with them and they told me that they are going to give me the contract. But in the end they didn't give it to me. So I kept looking until I found a person who would really give it to me.*

- *Mohamed*

Mohamed was lucky to finally find an honest *jefe.* Amadou spoke about the tiring "routine" that many undocumented have found themselves in.

> *If you hear someone saying that "my* jefe *is bad", it's because they've been there for so many years and they didn't get the papers. [...] They're fed up, they're broken. You say "That's it", and you're going to look for a new* jefe *and you're going to start from scratch. And you have to show that you're hard-working, a warrior, that you're so and so. And if they don't contract you, you go find another one. That's the routine they have.*
>
> - *Amadou*

Constantly being denied a contract, many workers are trapped in this routine, unprotected and unrecognised. Trapped in the seemingly powerless state is exactly where *jefes* want workers, invisible and easier to exploit. Oumar explained that in the past when he has tried to speak to fellow workers on a harvest about rights and the need to stand up for oneself as a worker, his efforts were curtailed by the *jefe* who, as soon as he realised Oumar's intentions, fired Oumar.

> *The* jefes*, some of them are very smart. When they know that you can get into [the workers'] heads, they will kick you off the farm. [...] They don't want anyone to profit or to talk about rights or anything like that, you know?*
>
> - *Oumar*

On the rare occasion that workers try to unite and demand better work conditions from their *jefe*, Ahmed explained that these efforts also commonly failed, as the jefe pits workers against one another, praising the hard-working people while chastising the others.

Invisibilized by *jefes*, gatekeepers to documentation, workers must decide how best to navigate work conditions, in order to be granted the coveted legal status. Strategies employed include remaining detrimentally loyal to the *jefe*, or standing up to the *jefe* demanding fair treatment and respect.

Loyal to the *jefe*. The loyalty pledged to *jefes* can be broadly categorised into two forms: reciprocated loyalty and misguided loyalty. Unsurprisingly, the former most commonly corresponds to documented workers, while the latter is the case of the undocumented. Several of the documented workers are still working with the *jefe* who helped organise their papers, with some expressing their intentions to continue to work for the same *jefe* every year.

> *In two months, I have to go back there and work there with him, because he is the one who helped me the most before when I had nothing, you understand? So I don't have to abandon him either. When the time comes for work on his farm, I'll go. Whatever is needed, I'll go.*
>
> - *Mamadou*

For the documented, loyalty to their *jefe* is not an obligation. Most workers feel grateful to the *jefe* for their help and are returning to familiar and guaranteed work, which facilitates patterns of circular migration across harvests. Oftentimes, the *jefe* seeks the worker's return. While recording an interview with Abdoulaye, a *jefe* sent him three messages, asking him to return for the season. Abdoulaye told me he had worked with him for a long time on his farm in Moguer.

The misguided loyalty to *jefes*, usually pledged by undocumented workers, is distinguished from the above by characteristic empty promises from the *jefe*. Chatting to Abdulai about his reluctant return to the orange harvest in Lepe, he told me that his *jefe* called, begging Abdulai to return. Knowing he would be returning to live in a *chabola*, Abdulai refused. His *jefe* persisted, paid for Abdulai's bus from Albacete to Lepe and promised that next year the *jefe* would buy a flat for the seasonal workers to rent from him.

The ultimate promise is, of course, to later help the workers to get their documents, at the very least providing the necessary year-long contract. Amadou criticised fellow farm workers, saying they are willing to do anything to please their *jefe* in order to get their papers.

> *The farm workers also want the* jefe *to be happy because they need papers but by doing the impossible, and I am not like that. I'm not going to do things that you are not willing to do, just to make you happy. [...] I'm not going to kill myself to make you happy. A job that should take three days, you do it in one day. And the* jefe *is happy and you're happy too because the* jefe *is happy, maybe he's not even going to do the papers for you.*
>
> - *Amadou*

Wise to the tactics of the greedy *jefes* and with a strong sense of self-respect, many other workers refuse to accept mistreatment of *jefes*. In response, some leverage their undocumented status to demand better working conditions, while others walk away from a disrespectful *jefe*, knowing they can easily find work elsewhere. Yet, more often than not, a combination of fear and desperation prevent workers from taking a stance against an exploitative *jefe*.

Standing up to the *jefe*. Despite having not long arrived, Amadou was well informed on the laws concerning undocumented workers in Spain. In his early days working the fields, his *jefe* began shouting at and insulting him. Amadou stood up for himself, triggering a threat from the *jefe* to report him to the police for being undocumented. Amadou responded in kind, reminding the *jefe* of what would happen if the police came to find half a dozen undocumented workers on his farm. The *jefe* backed down, claiming he had been joking all along.

> *The first few days on the farm, when I had just arrived, the* jefe *shouted at me, he insulted me. And I stood out from my ridge, and I said, "What did you say?" And he was silent, shocked. I said to him, "What did you say? Did I scare you?" He threw aside his tools. Pissed off. He said, "I'm going to call the police." I pulled out my mobile phone, I said, "Before you call, I'm gonna call the police." I count five people around me, I say, "Nobody here has papers. Do you know if the police come, what's going to happen?" He was sweating. Because they think you don't know - I had just arrived. But I've lived a life, an experience and I know a lot of things. I tell him, "Should I call the police or not?" And he's like, "No, leave it. Let's carry on, there's nothing going on here. I was just joking." If the police catch him, it's a fine per head.*
>
> - *Amadou*

On a bus journey I shared with Abdoulaye, he recounted the story of when his *jefe* was pressuring two undocumented Malian workers, saying that if they didn't hurry up he would fire them. Abdoulaye, knowing the *jefe* respected him as a worker, stood up to his *jefe* defending his fellow

workers saying that if he threw his Malian brothers off the harvest, then he would leave too. He proudly retold this story, reminding me that workers need to stand up for themselves.

In a very bold move, one undocumented worker, Daouda, took formal legal action against his *jefe* for having promised the coveted contract, to only later send Daouda packing, empty-handed, after three loyal years of work. Despite being warned by his friends of the trouble that would likely ensue, Daouda says he refuses to start the process of suffering again, working undocumented and disrespected. He decided to report his *jefe* and, with the help of a lawyer who volunteers at ASNUCI, is taking him to court in January of next year. In the four years he's been in Lepe, Daouda says things are only getting worse and that there are mafias and serious corruption in the town.

Many workers subscribe to the belief that being *jefe* doesn't make you king, and they are happy to run the risk of being thrown off the farm for speaking up for themselves because they know well they can find work elsewhere. Others take a different approach. Instead of rising to the mistreatment of the *jefe* to later be thrown off the farm, they walk away themselves, placing their own worth and self-respect above the perceived duty to please one's *jefe*.

> *No, I have never been fired. But before they'd try, I'll go alone. Because that's the way I prefer it. I'm not going to fight with anyone. Your job, you want a worker. I'm a hard worker. I can work with you, but treating me badly? No. [...] [I walk away] and I tell him, "Man, look. That's not necessary."*
>
> - *Mamadou*

> *[At work] you can't think straight, you can't do anything. Always thinking one thing or another. And until when? You're struggling. You're running and we don't know when we're going to die. Why are you running so fast? Because I know [the jefe] is taking advantage of me. No, I'm not going to keep running after him, I'm going to find work somewhere else. Of course, I'm going somewhere else. Be that as it may. There is plenty of work. If not Spain I'm going to go elsewhere.*
>
> - *Oumar*

Despite standing up for themselves in the presence of many other undocumented workers, the majority do not follow suit but rather remain silent and obliging in the face of exploitative *jefes*. Fear, desperation and hopelessness are the main drivers of this docility, as many feel they have no other option.

> *And that's why many people accept many things here. Since I arrived here in Lepe, I have argued with many people. They don't understand me. They will never, never understand me, but I keep trying, talking to them. A few people do understand you, but they are afraid to go and face it.*
>
> - *Amadou*

While some leverage their status as undocumented to threaten the *jefe*, others feel paralysed by this status, unable to report mistreatment because they have no proof of employment:

> *Most people think they can't do anything. Because how can you go and report that you have worked with your* jefe*? You don't have anything? Some people don't even have a passport. How can you go to report that you have worked? Because when you go to the police, they say "Bring me the*

proof". What proof can you bring? You cannot consciously go there yourself because they will say, "It is forbidden to work without papers".

- *Mohamed*

Finally, while some recognise the potential in standing up to the *jefe*, it is often considered pointless because while you demand fair pay, there is always someone who is willing and desperate enough to work for less.

It's like, for example, we say, "It's over, it's over. That's not the way we're going to work. [...] For example, I tell him, "I don't want to work for €5". But someone else, he'll work for €4.

- *Ahmed*

Many recognise they are being exploited, yet they are either afraid to stand up for themselves or are willing to endure the short-term suffering in favour of the long-term goal of documentation.

Beyond farmwork.

Me, alone here, earning €50 a day. What can you do with €50 a day? That's nothing. I have a family. I have a father. I have a mother, I have brothers, a sister. I have to send them money to eat or help them with one thing or another. With €50, I have to pay rent. So how can it be? With farmwork alone you can't earn anything.

- *Mamadou*

Farmwork alone doesn't usually provide sufficient income. With the legal wage currently set at €51/day, legally paid workers earn just over €1000 a month. However, many are paid much less than the legal wage and others not paid at all. For that reason, many workers seek to diversify their streams of income. In a sort of farmwork offshoot, a number of participants capitalise on the *jefes'* collateral needs, such as working as a recruitment middle-man between the *jefe* and potential workers, addressing contract concerns and language barriers. Several others have bought themselves multiple, seven-seater cars and work for the *jefes* as drivers, taking workers to and from the farm every morning and evening, earning €6 per head for each journey.

The *chabola* settlements also offer opportunities for the entrepreneurially-inclined to earn money. In Lepe, Malik cycles from one settlement to another every evening after work selling a typical Senegalese, doughnut-like treat, *beñé*. He returns from farmwork every afternoon at 15:00 and rolls balls of dough made of flour, yeast and water. He leaves the balls to sit for an hour while he showers and later fries them in oil. Making over 200 balls of *beñé* every evening, he carries them in two big shopping bags on the handlebars of his bike and sells them for €1 per bag of 8 balls.

Before the devastating fires in the summer of 2020, many ran businesses within the *chabola* settlements in Lepe. The infrastructure to maintain these businesses was lost to the fire however at *chabola* settlements in other villages in Huelva, inhabitants are working either part- or full-time in on site bars, restaurants, or mechanics. Other inhabitants offer mobile services, working as barbers and sex workers. Some long-standing *chabola* inhabitants rent out a bed in their *chabola* to newcomers for €50 per month.

Many workers are also involved, sporadically or seasonally, in selling drugs or counterfeit goods, two lucrative industries. Abdoulaye was contracted by a mafia in Madrid to work three months taking care of marijuana plants, secretly grown in apartment blocks in the city centre.

> *There is a very, very big mafia in Spain, they do all this. And you mind [the plants], you give them water, you put the products on the trees, and all that, and you take care of it, you cut it. [...] All that, for three months. In three months, that's what I've done. Because, you know, during those three months, I was able to earn a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of money.*
>
> - *Abdoulaye*

Moustapha follows a circular migration in Andalucía. Contracted by his *jefe* in Lepe, he drives workers to and from the farm during the harvest season, then moves to Marbella for the summer months to sell counterfeit bags and watches to wealthy tourists. In the four months selling on the beach, he earns enough money to last him the whole year. Driving in Lepe is extra cash.

The creatively-inclined make their profit selling goods such as bracelets and hand-sewn garments. Ibrahima was unlucky in getting farmwork and spent his idle days sitting in the common room of the immigrant-run hostel, weaving brightly coloured threads and beads in various patterns, making a stock of bracelets that he will sell this summer on the beach. Calculating profits, he told me that he buys each 45m roll of thread for €2, uses approximately 25m to make each bracelet and aims to sell each bracelet for €5. A profit margin of almost €4 per bracelet. Toumani learned to sew and make dresses back in Mali. He bought a second-hand sewing machine for his flat in Lepe and sells made-to-fit dresses to African women living locally. Most of his materials are African fabrics but he also buys some patterns, as well as needles and thread, at the textile shop in Lepe. On top of the cost of materials, he charges between €20 and €50 per garment, depending on how elaborate the requested design.

Another very common alternative source of income, afforded to those with a car and driving licence, is to work as an unofficial taxi driver. My love-hate relationship with public transport in Huelva gave me the opportunity to meet a lot of these drivers. They would park near the station and offer their services to groups of people waiting in the queue for the bus. Their peak shifts are when there's a no-show bus or a bus is full to capacity and another one isn't scheduled for the remaining, would-be passengers. These drivers also give their phone number to clients, telling them to call any time they need a lift somewhere.

Finally, in more dismal attempts to earn a living, some immigrants in Lepe collect metal trash and recycle it, earning 20c per kilogram. Others return trolleys left abandoned at the carpark, taking the €1 coin from the trolley handle. Some sell stolen goods, such as ladders and bicycles left unattended, while others beg for money from people outside the shopping centre or in the town square.

4.3. Rights

Navigating rights in Lepe happens at both the individual and collective level. Many undocumented workers are primarily concerned with getting their papers, through whatever means possible, so that they can avoid being deported and can earn more money and greater mobility. Strategies to achieve this individual objective involve staying out of the political spotlight to avoid unwanted attention and normalising one's suffering as a way to cope with the undetermined, intermittent

period of waiting between the statuses of undocumented and documented. Immigrants must balance the duality of being tolerated as an undocumented worker but being persecuted as an undocumented inhabitant.

Documented immigrants, on the other hand, are generally more concerned with a collective navigation of rights, namely the goal of becoming recognised, valued citizens in society and to earn widespread regularisation of undocumented immigrants in Spain. Working towards this goal involves defending workers' rights, informing fellow immigrants of their rights and engaging in politics at multiple levels.

4.3.1. Operating under existing conditions

Normalised and endured suffering. Several participants dream of legally returning to their countries of origin. To do so, they need papers and money. Many undocumented workers are so concerned with money and working the minimum requirement of days that they forgo self-worth, arguing that making a living and getting papers are more important than workers' rights. As outlined above, becoming documented is often at the will of the *jefe* and many feel they have no choice but to wait until their papers are granted to them. This has resulted in a majority of workers in Lepe normalising their dire situations and enduring the indefinite suffering until their papers are granted. Lepe is framed as a place of transit, a place to endure as opposed to a place to live. Such a narrative makes one's suffering more bearable.

> *I am here in Lepe and I am putting up with it because there is no other option. Really, I don't like it. But when another [opportunity] comes along, really, I'm going to try it.*
>
> - *Mohamed*

Another participant admitted to me that he would never live in a *chabola* long-term, he is just enduring it for the season. Relinquishing one's living and working preferences in the short-term is a passive strategy towards the long-term goal of obtaining papers. This strategy is regularly accompanied by thought repression or the bid to avoid dwelling on one's situation.

> *I don't understand. I really don't. I don't understand that here you have to put up with [the suffering]. You should not overthink all the things that happen. Otherwise, you can't live. [...] The lack of respect here. You can't dwell on the disrespect here, you can't. If you do, you can't live.*
>
> - *Mohamed*

Other participants echoed Mohamed's words in a conversation one evening at the *chabolas*. One began by saying that thinking too much is dangerous, you'll drive yourself crazy. He elaborated saying that if you think about all the things you have wrong in your life - shitty accommodation, no papers, very little money - and about all the responsibilities you have - send money back to your family, find food to eat - you will lose your mind. The other two agreed, with one adding that if he starts thinking about his situation before going to bed, he doesn't get any sleep at night. If he manages to sleep four or five hours, he's done very well. They all agreed that it's better not to think too much or you will fry your head.

Creative strategies towards documentation. While some persevere in their perceived helplessness, others in arguably more privileged positions employ a multitude of creative strategies to promptly secure their papers.

A common strategy is to obtain papers on the grounds of a genuine or falsified relationship with a Spanish national. Falsified relationships involve a lot of money, as the supposed partner as well as a contracted lawyer must be paid to carry out the process. One participant paid €8000 to a Spanish woman so that she would act as his partner, agreeing to live together for a designated period of time, holding hands with him as they walked into court together, saying and doing whatever was necessary to convince the courts. On top of this, he paid €300 to a lawyer to defend their case. The participant later admitted to me that he didn't want to become her legal partner but had to in order to get his papers and move on with his life project. Obtaining papers through a legal partner is risky. Five years after the court case, the couple must present together to sign a renewal form, to confirm the longevity of the relationship and provide proof that they continue to live together. Securing the renewal depends on the falsified partner's will and if they refuse to cooperate, your papers are revoked and you start from scratch with the documentation process.

Another route to documentation that several participants pursued was to enter the country on asylum and then apply for papers via *arraigo laboral*. Asylum is granted on a benefit-of-doubt system, which affords applicants a six months grace period. In these six months one can legally work and contribute to social security requirements. When the six months have ended and they have reached the required quota, instead of renewing their asylum application they apply for *arraigo laboral*. One participant that I accompanied to the police station confided in me that he was applying for asylum on the grounds of threat because of his sexual orientation, lying to the police about being gay. The drawback of falsely seeking asylum is that once granted you are not allowed to legally return to the country while the threat remains. Such freedom of mobility is something most are not willing to voluntarily surrender.

One final strategy I regularly encountered was of undocumented immigrants paying lawyers a monthly fee to fabricate the evidence required to apply for their papers. One Moroccan participant crossed the border to Portugal where he arranged to pay a lawyer €120 monthly, for a year and two months, after which he'll have everything he needs to present for his papers. In the meantime, the participant told me, he'll go to France where it's easier to find work undocumented. Ayoub, from Algeria, has all the documents he needs except for a document of permission required from his country. The only way he could get it himself would be by returning to Algeria, something he's not willing to risk doing. Instead, he told me, he's willing to pay a lawyer whatever it takes to get the paper, something he's expecting to cost between €500 and €1000 to obtain. In numerous other cases, participants pay employers and lawyers for work contracts and proof of municipality registration, documents that should lawfully be free. In circumstances of desperation, they value security more than money.

Political disengagement. The undocumented, whether waiting for papers to be granted or taking initiative to secure them, must meanwhile navigate the limbo of their legal status. An approach favoured by many is to fly under the radar, stay out of politics and out of trouble.

I prefer to do my thing, peacefully. I don't want to get involved. I don't get involved in politics.

- *Mamadou*

Instead of fighting for reform of the documentation process (elaborated on later in this chapter) many choose to keep their heads down, saying they have no interest in or time for protests or politics. One participant reasoned that there are far fewer protests in Lepe these days because people who arrive don't stay around. Instead of fighting to improve circumstances in Lepe, they go where life is easier. One afternoon when having lunch at the *chabolas*, we talked about protests and fighting for workers' rights. One worker told me that he had been in Spain for five years and still had no papers. He said he doesn't want to waste more time on politics, he came here to help his family, that's what he's going to do: work hard, earn money, and avoid politics. This sentiment was echoed across several conversations I had at the ASNUCI centre. People were disheartened with collective action, saying they no longer engage with it, firstly, because change never happens and, secondly, because they don't want to draw problems on themselves. Many have no hope for change in Lepe, saying that protests are futile because things will always stay the same. In a similar conversation another evening at the *chabolas*, other participants talked about the 2020 town hall occupation in Lepe. They claimed that nothing has changed since, if anything things have gotten worse. One participant said that one day things will change. One God knows when but he believes things will improve. His colleague challenged this stance, saying that the only way things can improve is by leaving Lepe. Lepe is hopeless of any change, he said.

4.3.2. Re-negotiating conditions of play

Immigrant-led change. Instead of responding to hardship and legal injustice with normalised suffering and invisibilization, or indeed ignoring the problem entirely, other immigrants are addressing issues at their source, fighting for their shared rights and recognition.

> *On a personal level, yes [I feel like I belong to Andalusian society]. But on an immigrant level, no. Because my way of thinking, my way of seeing things is: if my fellow immigrants don't feel good or don't have the same rights or the same dignity as me, I don't feel it. Because I cannot be more privileged than others. We are all people and everyone is equal. If the immigrants who live in the* chabolas *don't get houses, when it comes to talking, they are not going to say, "Seydou has a house". They are going to say, "The immigrants from Lepe so and so". And I am one of those immigrants. So, what does it matter to me if I have a house or not? Rights should not be privileged. Rights have to be for everyone.*
>
> - *Seydou*

Seydou, Adama, Amadou and Abdoulaye are four documented immigrants who spoke passionately about the fight for immigrant rights and dignity. Despite being documented and having gained legal status and freedom of mobility, they feel compelled to shed light on immigrant exploitation and to campaign for the collective rights of immigrants in Spain. Adama maintained that small gains are constantly being made and that it's important to be realistic but to keep fighting to improve things gradually. Both Amadou and Abdoulaye separately pointed out that they do not rely on income from farmwork, are each entitled to unemployment benefits and could easily be taking a well-deserved break. Yet instead they are amongst the farm workers in Lepe, doing what they can to improve the situation for their fellow immigrants, their undocumented counterparts.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, several undocumented immigrants consider the struggle for rights a waste of time. One participant claimed there is little-to-no chance of anything ever changing in Lepe because of the bad-minded people living in the town. Another participant was disheartened as we sat together at ASNUCI watching a live stream of an activist event Seydou was speaking at. Same old, same old, he sighed. The Spanish say one thing and do another, it's a waste of time. Another person sitting next to us on the couch despondently asked what the point of these events is. Hardly anyone attends and those who are there are already convinced of the message, so nothing changes.

Regardless of whether disheartened or emboldened by the prospect of change, participants shared the belief that change needed to come from immigrants themselves.

> *Look, you need people who understand immigrants, who know the roads, who have lived through this, in order to really help people. [...] Because when it comes to immigrant issues, you have to have immigrants working inside as well.*
>
> - *Oumar*

In a similar vein, a conversation I had one evening concluded that the solution to immigrant injustice must come from the bottom-up, not from those who cause the problem. Immigrant-led approaches to addressing injustice took different forms. Not least of those included informing fellow immigrants of their rights, speaking to those in your immediate environment as a way to broaden their perspectives and protesting injustice to pressure politicians and demand reform.

Informing workers of their rights. Amadou, given his financial stability, dedicates his spare time to travelling around Spain giving talks on immigration to various audiences. Speaking to fellow immigrants, he teaches them their rights and reminds them of their self-worth, driving home the message that they do not have to accept terrible work conditions and miserable pay. Despite knowing that many ignore what he says, he perseveres with his talks, believing he is creating change, even if it's just one person at a time. Oumar, also documented but continuing to work on the farms, explains his approach to discussing rights with his colleagues. He first keeps a low profile on the farm, slowly beginning to speak to workers one by one. However, as discussed in section 4.2, *jefes* who catch people discussing such matters have been known to fire them.

Seydou is very active in informing other immigrants of their rights in Spain, particularly regarding their living conditions. I joined him one evening to visit a *chabola* settlement in Moguer. We sat outside the *chabola* bar, where Seydou explained to two fellow customers the recently passed policy of *empadronamiento extraordinario* (extraordinary registration). The policy holds that one can register as a municipal resident at any location within the district, whether living under a tree, on a bench or in a *chabola*. Seydou explained the step-by-step process and offered to accompany the two inhabitants to Moguer town hall to register with the municipality, like others had done in Lepe. Seydou wanted to teach a couple of people how to do it, so they could then teach the others at the settlement.

Broadening the perspectives of others. Many participants advocated for engagement with non-immigrants as a way to precipitate change. Adama maintained that we cannot leap to national level changes without first addressing change at the local level.

Changing the perspectives of the people you deal with on a daily basis is the first thing. I think that from there, people start to realise what is going on around them, and can grow little by little. But you can't, I think, we can't skip the environment around us and go straight to the top, because I see that as a very big step.

- *Adama*

His personal steps on this front have involved speaking to locals, and to people from other European countries, about the lived experiences of immigrants. He firmly believes in the power of genuine conversation to engage with non-immigrants to build understanding. Another participant, Modou from Gambia, uses TikTok to broadcast live videos, sharing ideas with his followers about immigration and the Gambian government's leadership of the country.

Collective efforts for increased visibilization include regular public gatherings of aligned organisations, where various speakers talk and organisation members network. One such event was organised by ASNUCI and an allied Spanish-led NGO from Seville. Hosted in Seville, seven ASNUCI staff and volunteers filled their cars with centre members and drove to the event. Open to the public, the gathering was held in a neighbourhood park and began with speeches from representatives of each organisation. Seydou spoke about inhabitants of the *chabolas*, the exploitation of immigrant workers and the obligation of town hall registers, even in the absence of formal accommodation. Once speakers had finished, all attendees gathered around picnic tables and mingled over the mix of traditional Senegalese and Spanish dishes and drinks.

A more formal route to engage with others, with the explicit intent to broaden their perspectives and dismantle existing prejudices, is university talks. In early May, I accompanied Seydou and other ASNUCI members to a roundtable panel discussion at the University of Huelva, entitled '*Understanding the causes and effects of migration to understand people'*. Seydou gave a speech and actively elicited interaction from student attendees.

…the university is a way of collaborating. Of facilitating and breaking down the barriers of prejudice. Because the students that we face are going to occupy decision-making positions in the future. And it is important that they know what is happening in the field of immigration. Because once we are [at the university], everyone talks about what is actually happening. And in the world of immigration, it helps for them to see the genuine reality. It's also a way of creating a network of closeness between us and them. [...] [We want to] break down social prejudices. And the discourses of hatred. People [have the opportunity to] interact with issues that they are largely unfamiliar with. I really like these kinds of encounters. I think it's also the best way to try to socialise and try to normalise the life of immigrants with civil society.

- *Seydou*

Adama reinforces Seydou's stance, arguing that we need a diversity of thought in politics, with a need for wide representation in politics. To this end, Adama had recently joined a local political party. He uses this platform to table issues of immigration and workers' rights more generally.

Protesting to pressure politicians and demand change. Mohamed argues for the importance of organised protests as a way to expose people to how immigrants are living. He reiterates that we should continue to protest because things have not sufficiently changed.

Seydou applauded the 2020 protests and town hall occupation in Lepe, saying we shouldn't forget that people have a right to take to the streets and claim their rights.

> *…politicians are always willing to do whatever it takes to protect their political image. And we have to recognise that. It looks bad when we go out in the street criticising the town hall. This social pressure that comes from all around is not good for them. We have achieved this [pressure] because we have media coverage, and if we publish online, it spreads. It spreads because there are journalists who write articles and lots of people read them. And it reaches the social networks and all that, that doesn't suit [the politicians]. At the time, they were getting calls, every minute, people calling, complaining. And that's also very bad [for them], you know?*
>
> - *Seydou*

Amadou argued for the power of protest and political leverage of workers using a hypothetical example of the seasonal workers striking. Since locals refuse to work the farms, just two days of mid-season striking would force parties to negotiate, given the rotting of fresh produce and consequential loss of profit with nobody left to harvest. The flaw in his hypothetical case, he caveated, is that enduring the two days as unified, striking workers is the greatest obstacle.

Broadly, there are two reasons why people avoid protests. One is lack of knowledge of their rights. Some workers do not realise that they are being exploited or that their rights are being violated. More commonly, people refrain from protests or public dissent because they fear the consequences of their actions.

> *…many times, people don't want to show their faces or are afraid to go to demonstrations because they don't have, first of all, papers and they don't have a support network, which is absolutely fundamental.*
>
> - *Adama*

Some people are aware of the exploitation and rights abuse they are subject to, but they are infused with fear and would rather endure the suffering than face the risky struggle for freedom.

4.4. Concluding remarks

In navigating life in Lepe, immigrants face several obstacles in their spatial environment. Firstly, the most accessible form of shelter, the *chabolas*, leave a lot to be desired in terms of safety and protection. Secondly, exploitative farmwork conditions expose workers to health risks and perpetuates legal instability via the withheld work contract. Finally, the town of Lepe offers little support in the pursuit of immigrant workers' rights and the conditions of a dignified life. To renegotiate one's position in such a space hinges on social relations within that space. Trusting relationships with your *chabola* neighbours means a lightened mid-week workload, as you share cooking and water collection responsibilities. However, a mistrusting relationship with neighbours means a constant threat of theft of fire to your belongings. The good boss can provide decent shelter, fair working conditions and access to documentation through a year-long work contract. The bad boss impedes access to each of these. Similarly, town authorities can cooperate to facilitate better living and working conditions, or not.

The take-away here is that social and political alternatives require not solely the navigation of one's spatial conditions, but also the inextricably linked social dimension of the given conditions. Unfortunately, in the case of *chabola* inhabitants, the conditions under which they must live give rise to the tendency to dissociate from collective action, effectively abstaining from claiming their rights.

5. Leveraging Identity

In navigating precarity there are two identities that immigrant workers subscribed to. Ascribed identity, namely nationality and ethnicity, and achieved identity, one's legal status as documented or undocumented. Immigrants navigate these positionalities with the end goal to improve their living and working conditions in the short-term, and to obtain their papers in the long-term. Navigating identity, both ascribed and achieved, involves traversing 'us-them' social ordering by leveraging one's position under a complexity of circumstances.

5.1. Ascribed identity

> *I don't know whether to define myself as someone who is learning to live here in Spain or as the person I want to be. Because many times, no matter how much you want to become a [certain type of] person, there are some realities that you realise stop you from becoming the person you want to be. There are some limits that you can't go beyond.*
>
> - *Adama*

Ascribed identity refers to social groups you are born into, where you don't have to do anything to gain membership (Deaux et al., 1995). In Bauman's (2004) terms, ascribed identities are the product of social ordering, categories upon which the excluded are 'othered'. In the case of immigrant workers in Spain, their salient ascribed identity, and the basis of their othering, is African and, in most cases, Black. These identity markers represent "limits" for many immigrants, as they carry negative stereotypes and prejudices of the Other. Indeed, several participants reported experiencing racism on the grounds of their ascribed identity, as elaborated in sections 4.1 and 6.2.

The social order of 'us' and 'them'. Social order is built through the innate need to categorise and simplify the world around us. Defining the category one belongs to simultaneously defines that which one does not belong to, the Other. Formal and informal discursive practices create and reinforce hierarchy between those who belong and those who do not. In Lepe, those who do not belong are the African immigrants. This is reinforced both externally, by locals, and internally, by immigrants themselves. While I did not interview any *Leperos*, the perceived opinions of locals were conveyed to me by participants. If one Black person does something bad, all Black people are considered bad. However the same does not apply White people. This is a rationale widely understood to be held by *Leperos*. Several participants described situations of being generalised as 'the Africans'. One evening I was walking to the day centre with Oumar, when the security guard of Decathlon, a sports retailer, was ushering someone off the premises. He shouted over to Oumar saying, "Hey, this fellow countryman of yours is always stealing things, drinking alcohol and stealing". Oumar called back, "How do you know he's my fellow countryman? You don't know where I'm from. Have some respect, this has nothing to do with me so don't shout at me over it". When I later interviewed Oumar, he reflected on the events.

> *Okay, we are Africans. Some of us are Senegalese, some of us are Malian, there are many nationalities here. But there are bad guys and there are good guys, like everywhere. But they always generalise people, you know? They say "the Africans, the Africans".*

- *Oumar*

This generalised view of the African immigrant Other takes several forms. One is that *they* are thieves, who are here to steal *our* money and ruin *our* economy. Another, that *they* are 'savages' who cannot understand *our* civilisation. Finally, *they* are poor, helpless victims, who desperately need *our* charity and pity.

Internally reinforcing the us-them binary, many immigrants similarly draw divides between themselves and *los blancos* (the White people). Amadou explained that he had befriended White people while taking language classes in Barcelona. In response, he received concerned calls from his fellow countrymen, who said White people were not to be trusted.

> *I have received messages from people who tell me that "Hey, we didn't come here to study. We came here to make a living. Leave those White people behind. In the end, you can never know what they're going to do to you, or when".*
>
> - *Amadou*

Reinforcing the rich-poor binary, Seydou explained the thought process of his fellow countrymen when they saw him working alongside Spaniards in the office of the ASNUCI centre.

> *A lot of people, because I'm here and working with White people, they think I'm loaded. That's what they think. I'm not stupid because I've been like them and I know how they think.*
>
> - *Seydou*

Mirroring the narrative of the 'uncivilised', in one conversation I had with a worker living in the *chabolas* he mocked himself and his housemates, commenting that Africans don't calculate anything, they have hard heads. Another participant echoed the narrative, in a particularly self-deprecating manner, rhetorically asking,

> *Why don't White people want immigrants in the house? [...] Because if they take the house, in the end they'll destroy the house. They'll make shit of the house. They don't have the head to take care of a house.*
>
> - *Ousmane*

Finally, some participants reproduced the trope of the lazy immigrant, here for a 'free life' and unwilling to work hard to earn an honest living. Varying in degree to which one subscribes to these strict binaries, it is undeniable that the farmworkers are relegated to one social group, with its associated stereotypes and identity markers, while the local residents pertain to another. Yet, having spent three years in Spain, Adama, originally from Ivory Coast, began to blur this boundary, with some locals beginning to refer to him as 'us'.

> *[Us] is a very strong word, like someone who says "you are like us". It's as if us Africans, we are one way, and the Spanish… Because I've been told by people from here, for example, from the village that "you are like us, you talk like us, you dress like us, you do everything like us".*
>
> - *Adama*

Treading the line between ‘us’ and ‘them’, Adama was unsettled by well-intentioned comments to integrate himself fully into Spanish culture. Choosing to proudly embrace one's culture of origin or to instead distance oneself from it, are alternate strategies employed by participants as they navigate the precarity associated with their ascribed identity.

Leveraging ascribed identity to navigate the precarity of ‘us’ and ‘them’. It is under such conditions of social ordering, that immigrants leverage their malleable identities. Some embrace their African identity, feeling a sense of belonging and protection surrounded by their own. Others dissociate from their fellow countrymen, claiming they are *zigzag*; unreliable, untrustworthy and liable to cause trouble. Those taking a longer-term perspective, invest time in learning the Spanish language and cultural codes, as a means to integrate with locals and unify across differences.

One participant discussed previous shelters where he had gained admission through his identity. In several cities across Spain, Senegalese communities rent large houses and convert them into ‘Houses of Cheikh Amadou Bamba’, where followers of this Senegalese saint and religious leader are welcome to take refuge. The houses are funded by its permanent residents, with each offering whatever they can to meet rent and bill payments. The houses are a temporary solution for those who are sleeping on the streets and cannot afford a place to live. Within these houses, not only are you taken care of for being part of the community, community traditions are reinforced with weekly celebrations of their shared culture. However, this is not something that is possible in Lepe.

> *...every Thursday we did a celebration of our culture. Playing the drums, singing. You know. Cooking. Bring everybody together, for everybody. Here you can't do it. Not even singing.*
>
> - *Oumar*

Locked out of the housing market in Lepe and without the opportunity to open a House of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, immigrant workers still manage to seek comfort through their identity while living on the farm. Abdoulaye, who lives in an on-site farmhouse provided by his *jefe*, explained that every evening at the farmhouse the workers come together to cook and share each other’s culture. Sometimes it would be a Malian night, other times a Senegalese night. Regardless, everyone gets involved to eat, dance and spend the night together.

As well as preserving their cultural identity, many workers told me about support extended amongst their kin. Oumar explained the intricacies of his religion and that back in Senegal he fulfilled the role of *Baye Fall*, where he is tasked with collecting donations from within the community to later share amongst those who cannot afford to feed themselves. He continued this responsibility in Lepe. I frequently saw him with an old yoghurt bucket, collecting coins from those who were in a position to donate. Amadou, who speaks fluent Spanish, tells me he does what he can to help newly arrived Senegalese, particularly helping with complicated asylum applications. A sad, but not uncommon, reality is that of workers dying unexpectedly during the seasonal harvest. In anticipation of this, and the associated costs of repatriating the body, people pool resources together in an emergency savings fund. Aliou told me that, to address this financial instability, he and nine others pay €30 monthly into a shared bank account, contributing to an

emergency fund. The account can only be accessed with at least three name holders present, to avoid anyone stealing from the shared fund.

One's ascribed identity can be considered a potential avenue to satisfy short-term needs of food and shelter, and contribute to the long-term goal of papers, by leaning on well-informed others for support. Yet, many participants expressed concern with those who insulated themselves with the fellow countrymen alone.

> *I don't want to sit with my countrymen. [...] I go inside [the village]. With Spaniards, Romanians, Bulgarians, Moroccans. I have [friends from] everywhere here. [...] A lot of people call me, we go to their house, I talk to them. [...]. [Other countrymen] are afraid because many people don't speak Spanish well. Before, I didn't speak Spanish well. But I left my countrymen, all of them. Five years without living or with any of them. Just me and the Spaniards.*
>
> - *Ousmane*

Moussa, a worker I accompanied to the police station for an asylum processing appointment, shared this sentiment explaining to me that he lives with other Senegalese in a *chabola* but that he doesn't talk to them or consider them his friends, because he doesn't like people who are *zigzag* and prefers to keep out of trouble and to himself.

Striking a balance between insulating yourself with your community of origin and rejecting your community entirely, other workers spoke to me about attempts to integrate into Spanish society. Despite mockery from their fellow countrymen for having 'gone off with the White people', many adapted to their new environment, taking initiative to learn the language and interact with locals, effectively overcoming the us-them binary. Amadou, now documented, dedicates himself to unifying the 'us' and 'them' of immigrants and non-immigrants, touring the country to give talks and share anecdotes about migration in Spain, with the goal to voice the lived experience of immigrants and to break down the barriers between the two social groups.

5.2. Achieved identity

Ascribed identity, in the case of African immigrants in Spain, is undeniably identifiable by appearance, however, one's legal status is not a visibly recognisable identity. Navigating the us-them of documented-undocumented takes place both between immigrants and non-immigrants, and amongst immigrants alike. Though an invisible identity marker, legal status greatly influences the spaces one can occupy. Firstly, as outlined in chapter 4, limited job opportunities and the deprivation of rights dictate where and when undocumented immigrants can enter the workforce. Additionally, undocumented immigrants enjoy far less freedom of mobility. Fear-driven self-inflicted immobility arises from the internalisation of the label 'undocumented' or 'illegal', and many justify their choice to remain in Lepe by saying it is a temporary measure, in place until they get their papers.

> *I can say that I already had a much better [life] in Africa before I came here. But when you come here, you can't go back quickly. Because you have another project. But the project is not a project without papers. You can't do it without papers. You say to yourself, "I'm going to endure it, I'm going to endure it, I'm going to endure it until I get my papers". Something like that. Then I'm going to change my life a little bit.*

- *Moustapha*

The personal projects of undocumented participants varied from dreams to play in the amateur Spanish soccer league, to job progression within the agri-food industry context. An aspiration that was common across all participants was to return to their country of origin, be it a yearly visit to see family or to return permanently to build or invest in business at home. However, these dreams cannot be realised without first getting your papers.

Unwanted but necessary: the tolerated paradox of the undocumented. In working towards their destiny, undocumented immigrants navigate a hostile terrain. They live in a paradox of being unwanted but necessary and therefore tolerated. The identity of 'undocumented', and the concomitant, unsettling feeling of being unwelcome but trapped, is 'achieved' on arrival.

> *You let someone into your country, but while they are in the country, at any time, you can catch them and send them back to their country. [...] …in Lepe as well, the way they are looking at you, you feel that this person doesn't want to see you here and you don't want to stay here either, but you are forced to.*
>
> - *Amadou*

Amongst the undocumented, there is a widely shared feeling of "being nobody" without having papers. Unable to legally participate in society, it is as if you do not exist.

> *Here, without papers, you are nobody. The system itself and society at large rejects you. You are nobody. You are not even a pet. And pets, like dogs, are more legal than you, at least they have papers. And they're treated with love and respect. But you're nobody here, honestly.*
>
> - *Seydou*

> *Because if you don't have papers in Spain, you are not a person, you don't exist anywhere. You don't exist anywhere. You can't say anything, you can't do anything. You can't have a bank account, which is the most basic thing. I couldn't do anything. Nothing.*
>
> - *Adama*

These feelings of non-existence in Spain were at times accompanied by anger, when the 'illegal' movement of people was juxtaposed with the freedom of movement of goods and resources from western African to Spain. Ludicrous deals made with corrupt governments mean that commercial goods flow freely, yet people arrive to Mediterranean shores criminalised and invisibilized, denied of human rights. Trapped in a desperate state of non-existence, one participant told me he is willing to do whatever it takes to get his papers. At least then, he continued, he will have more security, the possibility to open a bank account, to travel home, to see his family and to get a stable job with steady income and a fixed contract.

Participants had mixed views on the transformative capacity of becoming documented. One participant maintained that, despite increased mobility, very little material change occurred in his life when he got his year-long residency permit. One explanation for this could be that while he may have 'achieved' a documented legal status, his ascribed identity remains unchanged.

My lifestyle has not changed. It is still the same. But I was really happy when I got papers because I can go and visit my family and all that.

- *Mohamed*

Yet for others, obtaining papers is equated with becoming a person again. Adama remembers clearly the day he became documented, and the significance it held for his presence in society.

The papers are very important. Because when you have the papers, you are a different person. As soon as you have the papers, as Thimbo says in his play, you are reborn. [...] Everyone experiences it in their own way, but it's a day you can't forget. And especially the day I went to pick up my ID card. That day was like, "Finally. Now I am a person here in Spain." Because before I was not a person in Spain. Because if you don't have papers, you are not a person in Spain. You can't do anything in Spain.

- *Adama*

Here, Adama refers to Thimbo Samb's one-man theatre performance, which I saw live at a protest march in Ceuta in early February. Thimbo is Senegalese and has been in Spain for over 16 years. Since becoming documented he has become a nationally recognised actor and performs his play at activist events across the country. The play follows his migratory journey, depicting his 'rebirth' when he received his papers and pleading to his undocumented audiences to keep dreaming, that things will be difficult but to never lose hope.

The undocumented in Lepe. Unlike cities such as Bilbao and Almería, the threat of deportation of undocumented immigrants is relatively low in Lepe. Several participants talked about the lackadaisical law enforcement in Lepe, from the tolerance of workers without papers, to the common knowledge and acceptance of others working with fraudulent papers. If an undocumented worker is caught, often the worst that happens is they are fined, without any further legal recourse. Not a single participant personally knew anyone who had been deported for being undocumented. Abdulai offered an explanation for this.

If the foreigners stop working in Lepe? I will tell you one thing, in only one week they will lose millions of euros. Millions of euros they will lose. Maybe they will call France, they will say, please give me immigrants.

- *Abdulai*

Thus, despite a lack of social recognition (particularly by the locals of Lepe, as elaborated in chapter 6), the economic necessity for an immigrant workforce grants them reluctant tolerance, particularly where the local economy owes its wealth to the agri-food industry. As such, while authorities are aware of the hundreds of people illegally entering the country every day, they take no action to facilitate *their* lives, nor to return *them* to *their* country. Instead, immigrants are made invisible by not being seen.

Making oneself invisible. Mamadou describes his inability to go anywhere during the off-season months when he worked undocumented. He preferred to remain on the farm and keep out of trouble to avoid running the risk of being exposed as undocumented.

Before, I couldn't even leave. Because if we finished the season, only six months, then I couldn't leave because I don't have papers. I didn't want to ask anybody for their papers to work with them. Because you can take papers from someone but then if you go, you fight with someone, and he hits you or something else, he stabs you with a knife or whatever, the owner of the papers is going to be in trouble. Because he's not there, and his paper is there on discharge. I didn't want that to happen to me. So, whatever makes trouble, I stay out of it. I don't want to get involved.

- *Mamadou*

Seydou expressed similar concerns regarding fear of being caught as undocumented, especially at the prospect of travelling between cities.

Here we live in fear. And sometimes you want to go to Madrid, you want to go to Barcelona. Or you want to go wherever you want. In the end, without papers, you are in the habit of saying, "If I leave, what will happen to me? They can control me. What if they find me?" And indeed, these are questions that you have to ask yourself daily because it's something normal, something that can ruin your life.

- *Seydou*

Whether deliberately employed or not, immobility of undocumented immigrants is usually derived from feelings of fear. Internalising the meaning of their legal status, they further invisibilise themselves and accept mistreatment and subordinate living conditions. On top of this, the shame associated with such a lifestyle impedes many from sharing with their families the reality of how they are living. Many comfort this dissonance with the Spanish expression, *Es lo que hay* (It is what it is), but that soon they will have their papers and will no longer have to endure it. However, therein lies the considerable risk of not getting your papers and remaining stuck in Lepe. Several participants made reference to the people who have been in Lepe fifteen-plus years and still have not gotten their papers. These examples are worst case scenarios and something many workers steer away from.

Visible but disguised. Photos of documented workers' papers would commonly circulate amongst groups of undocumented workers, at times with over five people working under the same name and documentation. Disguising as documented is one preferred alternative to working cash-in-hand. Mamadou mocks the Spanish government, saying that by tolerating such worker fraud, they are the ones losing out.

So, from one document, two people are working. One is recorded for 13 days, the other for 13 days. So what has to be contributed [in social security], is already contributed, right? But Spain has lost 26 days of social security contributions there. So who loses? Hahahaha [...] Spain is the one who loses. The foreigners don't lose. Why? They are taking advantage and making money.

- *Mamadou*

Moustapha employs a more subtle disguise. Keenly aware of the vulnerability of being undocumented, he rarely reveals his legal status in conversation with others.

People don't know that I don't have papers. Because I am lucky that I speak little Spanish, they see me with my cars, they think that nobody can drive here without a Spanish licence. So far, the company I work for thinks that I have papers. Also I don't talk about things related to papers. I am at peace on my level. Full stop. What I care about is my work. What I don't care for is that people know my private life. It's private, you know? [...] Some people ask me "Hey man, how many years are you here?" I say, "Me? Many years". Many years, I am not a liar, I am speaking the truth. The years are many. "How many years have you not been to Senegal?" I say, "How many years do you think I have not been to Senegal?" I haven't been to Senegal for many years, I just don't clarify anything to them.

- *Moustapha*

The identity one chooses to perform hinges on the context and the people you are faced with. Sometimes being blatantly honest is more effective than a disguise.

Visible, honest, and transparent. In chapter 4, I introduced Mamadou and the story of how he secured work and eventually his papers by being transparent with his potential *jefe*, announcing on day one that he was undocumented. The effectiveness of this brazen honesty rests on the tolerance for undocumented workers across farmwork and the ill-intentioned preference of some *jefes* to hire undocumented workers.

Curiously, Moustapha, the same person who evades the truth when speaking to his fellows, employs the opposite strategy when engaging with authorities. Again, leveraging the tolerance of the undocumented, he very openly explains his legal status and the barriers he is facing in his attempt to become documented. In the times he's been pulled over by police to have his licence checked, being honest with them, pleading to their compassion, he has dodged several fines.

For example, the driving licence from Senegal, where I'm from, is no good here. But what is important is that you know how it goes, for example, if the police stop you. They ask you for your driving licence. Which you really have. They're going to look at it and know that it's your face, it's your licence. They say, "Pal, this licence is no good. It's no good here in Spain, you have to change it." I say, "I can't change it because I don't have money". Then he asks you, "How many years are you here?" You tell him the truth. It depends if you are here for three years, five years. You say it as it is. He says, "Five years and you don't have papers?" I tell them very clearly, "Sir, you know very well how the law is in Spain. The law in Spain says that before you have papers, you have to have three years, otherwise you have to get married or something else. After the three years, you go to look for a contract. So far I haven't found it. Full stop."

- *Moustapha*

Self-invisibilization, disguising oneself, or owning one's legal status were recurrent strategies used by participants in the face of documented counterparts or Spanish authorities. Mediating the choice of strategy is a degree of emotional reasoning, guided by one's personal philosophy.

Mental mediation.

> *It's always the same, adapting to life. In my game of draughts [analogy], you eat one today, tomorrow I eat another one of yours. Always. [...] You eat a pawn from me today. Tomorrow, I eat one of yours. Or maybe today you eat three. Tomorrow, I eat four. Life goes like this. It's a game.*
>
> - *Adama*

A number of participants shared the sentiment that everyone will eventually have their day and not to worry too much about minor setbacks. This further echoes the message of Thimbo's play, that it won't be easy but don't give up. Adama summarised this through the analogy of a game of draughts, giving more depth to his analogy saying that there will be some sacrifices along the way but the good we do is always compensated.

There is also the realistic acceptance of how things are and that societal change is difficult and slow, and yet an undying resistance to lose faith in the possibility of change. Things can gradually improve. Moustapha doesn't let the papers, or lack thereof, get to his head.

> *There are a lot of people already living here in Spain, people with papers, but they are not lucky enough to return to their country because they lack the money. [...] There are people who have money, but they don't have papers. Everyone has what God gives them. It is what it is.*
>
> - *Moustapha*

Putting things into perspective, he recognises that some people have papers but are financially stuck. He has money, but no papers. "It is what it is".

The documented vs. undocumented. Every single one of the workers I spoke to in Lepe arrived undocumented. While some obtained their papers faster than others, each of the now-documented has experienced the 'existential cold' portrayed in Thimbo's play and the vulnerability of "being nobody" in Spain. Through this shared suffering, I expected to find solidarity between the documented and undocumented. The reality is that the undocumented feel a degree of resentment and suspicion towards the documented. Speaking about the dismay at seeing his fellow countrymen accept mistreatment and poor working conditions, Amadou explained the response he received when he encouraged the workers to stand up to their *jefe.*

> *And that hurts me so much, to see my people, my countrymen like this. They don't react, they don't think. They don't want to listen to me. One guy even told me that he heard a group talking about me, saying that "He has his papers, he can't come here to fuck us over, to take our jobs". They say, "He's got his papers, he's got his job and he's coming here to look for trouble between us." I don't look for problems with anyone.*
>
> - *Amadou*

Modou, an undocumented worker who previously lived in Barcelona, told stories of documented immigrants who had lived in Spain for years and were charging newly-arrived, undocumented immigrants €300-plus for municipality registration, a document that is legally free to all municipality residents. The documented, in this case, were taking advantage of the ill-informed undocumented. Other comments from undocumented workers conveyed the idea that documented immigrants perceived themselves to be on a higher level to the undocumented,

exhibiting a sort of superiority complex. The divisiveness of this achieved identity amongst immigrant workers led to the breakdown of potential alliances and effective collective action.

5.3. Concluding remarks

The social ordering of and within the collective category of 'immigrant' means that distinct identities are performed under given circumstances. The African 'us' can be celebrated within the confines of an immigrant space, like Senegalese night at the workers' shared farmhouse accommodation. In this way, one's African identity provides a sense of belonging and security amidst social exclusion. However, given the stereotypes of the poor and uncivilised African 'them' in the eyes of the *Leperos*, some choose to distance themselves from this identity, creating strategic relations with *Leperos* in an attempt to stabilise their social position.

Regarding the categorisation within the collective immigrant, namely documented or undocumented, the most common strategy is for the undocumented to invisibilise themselves, avoiding the gaze of local people, authorities and residents. This strategy becomes redundant, however, when amongst fellow immigrants. The undocumented immigrants' behaviour, as an expression of their legal identity, hinges on the characteristics of their spatial environment. In other words, where you are and who you are surrounded by plays a role in determining the identity you perform. Acknowledging this, some undocumented immigrants behave as though they were documented in order to be recognised and treated accordingly. That said, 'achieving' legal status does not address the precarity of immigrant workers in Spain in a transformative way. Navigating the othering, as a consequence of ascribed identity and the racially tinted lens of the *Leperos*, is a constant battle.

6. Cultivating Networks

Spaces that undocumented immigrants occupy are maintained through distinct and dynamic relations. This chapter highlights the characteristics of these relations and the interactions that build and maintain them. The same relations that offer support, can at other times be a source of pressure and instability. Decisions are made in cultivating one's social network based on the nature of relations and the outcome of given interactions.

Chapter 5 outlined when and where the identity of the 'illegal' 'undocumented' immigrant is produced. In the face of the Other, the Spanish *jefe*, police authorities, or town locals, the identity of undocumented is highly salient. Conversely, despite one participant elaborating on how he kept his legal status hidden from his colleagues, most didn't feel the need to recognise or address their 'illegality' in the company of other immigrants, meaning the identity of undocumented is far less significantly produced in such an environment. For this reason, the following sections are divided as follows: immigrant-occupied spaces; and immigrant- and non-immigrant-occupied spaces.

6.1. Immigrant-occupied spaces

Family relations. Almost every conversation I had involved some reference to or concern for family members, both mine and those of my conversation partners. Participants were in contact with family members - parents, wives and children - weekly and even daily. Familial relations are amongst the most stable that immigrants have, particularly when they are engaged in seasonal migration, relocating around Spain multiple times a year. The nature of familial relations varied greatly, from receiving financial, social and emotional support, to hiding from or lying to family members, or, as in most cases, feeling a burden of responsibility toward and financial pressure from home.

Family support helps immigrants orientate themselves and overcome hardship. Some ASNUCI members knew about the centre from a brother or cousin who had been there in years passed. Moustapha felt a degree of comfort arriving to Spain with his brother. Later, when his cousin also arrived to Spain, he warned him of the living conditions in Lepe, recommending he find work elsewhere. Ayoub confides in his family, and no one else, when he suffers hardship.

> *In reality, if anything happens to me, if I have anything bad, I'll tell you something, if I want to tell anyone I tell my family. Nobody else.*
>
> - *Ayoub*

Ayoub's brother is also in Spain, in Almería, and they share access to an emergency bank account, through which they can send money to each other if either one finds himself in trouble. In an exceptional case of familial aid, Omar's cousin, who long had his Spanish nationality, agreed to stand as his father for Omar to get documented via Spanish family ties.

Others are less transparent with family members. Adama talked about his relationship with his sister, who still lives in Ivory Coast. He doesn't want to burden her with his problems, and instead keeps them to himself.

I also have that thing of, "Fuck, I can't give her a hard time". Because I know that when I tell her that I'm not well, she'll be there thinking, "I wonder what's going on with my brother today, what's going on with him? What's going on with him?" I can't express to her what's happening to me here, so I just have to manage the pain on my own.

- *Adama*

Several participants told me that their relatives know nothing of the *chabolas* or the living conditions they are in. They feel ashamed of how they are living and do not want family members knowing. Some immigrants build an alternative life in Europe, meeting new partners and choosing to hide this aspect of their lives from families at home.

In most cases, participants felt a degree of pressure from their familial relations. Their lives in Lepe were heavily strained by the burden of financial responsibility for their families.

There are people [in Lepe] who manage [their money] well. But the problem is that many immigrants arrive to Europe after having married a woman in their country.

- *Abdoulaye*

Families at home are dependent on immigrants to send money back, sometimes monthly, sometimes weekly. Abdulai complained about how accustomed his mother became to him sending her money, that one day she rang him and before even asking how he was doing she asked him to send €50 because she needed her car fixed.

Family relations provide comfort amidst the loneliness of a foreign country. However, they are also a source of stress, given that the main reason for participants to have immigrated was to provide for their families, due to job insecurity and an unstable economy in their countries of origin.

Relations at the *chabolas*. Nearly all of my participants live, or have lived, at the *chabolas*. The *chabola* settlements are a unique space where, out of sight, the documented and undocumented live largely unthreatened by the state, irrespective of their legal status. Aside from the *chabola* inhabitants themselves, there is very little movement in and out of the settlements. Police only enter at reports of serious fights or fatalities. NGOs make rare visits, with little more purpose than to deliver dried foods or take another census. Independent journalists sporadically appear to take photos and leave. However, by and large, the relations within the *chabolas* remain between immigrants, beyond the gaze of *jefes*, police and authorities.

Something I heard over and over was that you find good and bad people, no matter where you turn. The *chabolas* were no exception. In my experiences at the *chabolas*, I witnessed solidarity and friendship between *chabola* neighbours. Groups of seven or eight would rotate the daily chore of cooking dinner, and, while eating, passersby would salute and wish them a good meal. This was especially pronounced throughout Ramadan, when large groups would gather around the bonfire in the evenings and wait together for the sun to set. Once their fast could be broken, people would walk around handing out dates and coffee before gathering together to eat. Discussing the organisation and importance of shared celebrations, one participant referred to a collective strength and sense of self.

There are always people that can take care of [organising the celebrations]. Because it's also very good. It helps, you know, to talk. We're all together, we have a lot of strength. [...] Because when

we are together and we are talking, you know, laughing, it's a good way of supporting [each other] and letting go.

- *Oumar*

Evidence of a collective sense of pride was revealed to me one afternoon when I went to have lunch with Ibrahima at his *chabola*. Inside, graffitied onto a cotton sheet that insulated the cardboard-layered walls, read the words, 'This is a piece of shit, we're black and I am proud to be black and always black'. Ostracised from Lepe's town centre and spatially relegated to the *chabola* settlements, there are signs of solidarity amongst immigrants at the *chabolas*, however not without its measure of conflict.

The infamous 'problems' associated with the *chabola* settlements usually derive from fighting, drinking and/or drugs. On his first night in Lepe, Abdulai was attacked at his *chabola* by three others, who then stole €870 cash from him. When I first visited Omar's *chabola*, where he lives alone, I asked about the large axe and hammer he kept next to his bed. Laughing, he said that they are his weapons in case someone tries to break in and attack him. One afternoon at the day centre, I was put in charge of dry food donations that had come in from an NGO in Madrid. Saf, one of the *chabola* inhabitants, came to collect food with his left thumb and index finger thickly wrapped in white bandages. One of the Malians bit his finger, he told me. Talking to someone else later on, they said that Saf failed to mention he had bitten the other guy first. And that they were both heavily drunk when it happened. A Senegalese man, with whom I regularly crossed paths, told me that he used to live in the *chabolas* but now sleeps in the shelter of the monument in the middle of the roundabout. He left the *chabolas* because there was a lot of drinking and drugs that almost always led to fighting. Ibrahima, the same inhabitant who had the empowering graffiti on the walls of his *chabola*, said that there's no peace at the *chabolas*. People are always begging, asking for money or food, or else getting drunk or high, knocking on doors, bothering people. It's not a bad life, he quickly added, it's what they're accustomed to, but it bothers him a lot and makes him want to leave Lepe. Indeed, two weeks after I had lunch at his place, he left for Zaragoza.

While unthreatened by state pursuit, the regular violence at the *chabolas* offers little in the way of peace and refuge for the inhabitants. Relationships with fellow *chabola* inhabitants are to be navigated.

One thing is that someone can get angry with you, they come and they burn [the chabola]. So, if you're inside, you're going to die, right? It's closed, so you'll burn. If they light the chabola, you're going to die inside.

- *Mamadou*

Fighting aside, while inhabitants of the *chabolas* have pleasant neighbourly interactions, many claimed that people are self-interested and unconcerned with the well-being of others.

The biggest problem is that people, they don't have the same mind. [...] Some people are looking for money. Some people are looking for their own interests. Some people are looking out for themselves. They're not looking out for others. That's the problem.

- *Abdulai*

Seydou, formerly living in the *chabolas* and now documented and a figurehead for immigrants' rights activism, recalls his *chabola* housemates mocking and discouraging him when he spoke of his dreams to become an activist.

Indifference for other immigrants extends across the housing spectrum. People are unconcerned with the problems of others.

> *It is very difficult to bring these people together. He who has his room, you tell him that they are going to burn the* chabolas*. It doesn't matter, because he has his room. He who sleeps in the* chabola*, if they are bothering those who are in the street, they don't care because they have their* chabola*. If he who is in the street gets up to protest. They say, well it's in his interest.*
>
> - *Amadou*

Relations at the *chabolas* are built on proximity and shared hardship. They are maintained through friendly, neighbourly interactions and dismantled through substance-induced fighting and apathetic individualism.

ASNUCI day centre. Relations at the ASNUCI day centre follow similar patterns to those of the *chabolas*, though with an emphasised discrimination on the basis of nationality. The *chabolas* are generally inhabited in clusters of the same nationality, however, to avail of ASNUCI's services, all come together under one roof.

Praise for ASNUCI credited it for being a vital service for those living in the *chabolas*, giving them somewhere to shower and wash their clothes. One Gambian participant commented that he was grateful to have a place to hang out and be surrounded by fellow Black people, making him feel at ease. Others complimented the proactive role of the ASNUCI staff, particularly of Seydou, the activist figurehead, in rallying groups of people to join protests and organising the necessary transport. In the evenings after farmwork, there was usually a good atmosphere at the centre. People sat on the couches and watched movies or football matches together, and they regularly offered each other fruit and coffee. The 20-plus students taking the English classes I gave at the centre, layered their existing relations through language practice. During the day, the atmosphere was considerably bleaker. The only people in the centre were those who couldn't find work, and they would sit quietly on the couches, taking shelter from the heat outside, passing the time on their phones or watching the television.

In a less favourable review, Ibrahima said he doesn't like the centre because people are unpredictable. Sometimes they're friendly, other times they bother you with their money problems. He spoke negatively of the people who spend all day at the centre. They sit there and do nothing but chat. What's there to gain, he asked rhetorically. Work hard and leave the rest to God, that's his philosophy. Another participant gave a similar assessment of those who pass the day at the centre, telling me that he didn't come here to sleep or become a zombie watching the television all day. Regardless of the services one avails of, be it the couches and television or the showers and language classes, the centre is undoubtedly a great place to meet people, particularly if you've arrived alone. Younger generations tended to gather together, bonding over their shared experiences. However, this rarely happened across nationalities. Language was a key factor here, but also a general discrimination between nationalities and an apparent tendency for people to seek out their own.

Stealing, teasing, and fighting. With over one hundred members frequenting ASNUCI daily, each one as exhausted as the next, it's no surprise that there were regular disputes between members. One of the main reasons many came to the centre was to charge their phones. Just inside the door, right next to the reception desk, there was a long desk lain with a dozen outlet extension cords. People would plug their device in to charge and come back in a couple of hours to collect it. However, despite security cameras pointed at the desk from opposing ends of the room, phones were commonly stolen, inevitably leading to angry accusations and brewing mistrust amongst members.

Another source of conflict was the use of facilities. Post-work, people arrived in hordes, exhausted, looking to shower. There were two showers for which you paid €1 for ten minutes. People would become impatient, banging on the shower doors and skipping others in the queue, leading to more accusations, shouting and people storming out. One, very outspoken, Moroccan woman, Fatima, was regularly involved in these shower wars. The younger Senegalese men showed her very little respect and always skipped her in the queue and even teased her for the photo on her ASNUCI membership card, taking pictures of it and laughing. On one occasion the jeering and taunting overwhelmed her to the point of threatening to report them to the local police, though it's doubtful they would have involved themselves. Fatima regularly complained to me of the Senegalese, calling them rude and disrespectful.

One Sunday afternoon I was walking back from the *chabolas* when I heard the sound of glass shattering and people shouting inside the centre. An older Moroccan man was visibly furious with one of the Senegalese men, Aliou. Shouting at him in Arabic, he grabbed Aliou by the chest and shoved him back. He then stormed outside and picked up two big stones, threatening to launch them at Aliou. A Senegalese centre worker tried to calm the situation, until a friend took the Moroccan man away. I asked one of the Senegalese guys on the couches what had happened. He didn't know, he told me, but the Moroccans are always causing problems. Another fight I witnessed was just in front of the centre and was over a trolley of recyclable metals. Two Senegalese men each claimed to be the rightful owner of the trolley and were shouting at each other in Wolof, yanking the handle from the other's hands. Eventually, one managed to leave with the trolley, while the other was placated by his friend. Since local police tend to keep their distance from the area, people are left to their own devices in settling disputes that break out. In this way, the centre is somewhat lawless, governed by the majority population, the Senegalese.

Favouritism and national divides. There was a general consensus that your fellow country people can be trusted, or at least more than those of a different nationality. ASNUCI is largely occupied by Senegalese, closely followed by Moroccans. Negative stereotypes of each nationality pervaded the centre. Senegalese are loud and disrespectful. Moroccans steal because they are lazy and don't like hard work. One Moroccan man told me he doesn't like to shake the hands of "Africans" because they carry witchcraft in their hands. It's the work of Satan, he said.

The centre, run by Sedyou (Senegalese), Alba (his Spanish wife) and Laura (Alba's childhood friend), was believed to be biased towards Senegalese members. Fatima complained of favouritism in giving out donated bikes. The Senegalese are always taken care of, but anytime she inquired about a bike she was told there were none left. Abdulai, from Sierra Leone, said that non-Senegalese are more strictly monitored regarding membership.

One thing that happens in the [centre]. If they know you're not from Senegal, you know what they say? They say, "If you don't have a [membership] card, don't come here anymore." And most of their people that go there don't have a card. They sit inside, without a card, talking, shouting. That's something that you need to understand.

- *Abdulai*

Abdulai explained that the dominance of Senegalese at the centre deters other nationalities from paying the fee to become members.

I'll give you one example. The [centre]. Most people who go there are Senegalese. And most problems there are from Senegalese people. For example, there are two communities there. It's Moroccans and Senegalese. That's why many, many [people] from other countries, they have money for the [membership] card. But when they go there, they see, Okay, it's this community, there are plenty. When they go- Like me, when I go there, I don't have respect, they don't respect me. You understand? Because I'm not from Senegal. I don't speak Wolof. They will not respect me. So maybe I need something, but they will not give me the opportunity to tell them what I need. You know, they are just talking Wolof, pap, pap, pap. That's why there's many people who are here, there are Guineans, Nigerians here, Sierra Leonans, Congolese here, Cameroonians here. They all have money, 5 euro? It's nothing. It's one hour work or 30 minutes work.

- *Abdulai*

Hidden intentions. Another recurring complaint about the centre, coming most frequently from the apparently-favoured Senegalese, was that ASNUCI claims to help immigrants but really all they are doing is profiting from their suffering. Under the guise of helping people that live in the *chabolas*, the centre is accused of bleeding poor people dry.

Because there was [a centre] in Palos called ACCEM. [...] I swear to you. There, to have coffee in the morning, free. People shower there, free. They give people clothes and take them to the doctor. Helping so much without charging a penny. But look, how many people are showering here? Each one, €1. When I was here, I paid €1 like everybody else. But so many people. It's something...He who has a card pays €5 [monthly]. Come on, that's not helping. It's an association for making money. You know, here, they can earn twice what they have to pay [to rent] this warehouse. What they have to pay [for rent], fair enough. But they are earning twice as much.

- *Oumar*

Abdoulaye, another participant dissatisfied with the functioning of the centre, explained it to me using an African fable. In a 50kg bag of onions, if one onion is rotten you have to take it out quickly, otherwise it will contaminate the rest. The European political system is the original bad onion. ASNUCI, founded by a Spanish woman, is contaminated because it came from the same bag. Seydou, joining ASNUCI, has become contaminated by the others.

I addressed the accusations with Seydou himself. Nothing he hadn't heard before, he told me. He knows exactly who is criticising ASNUCI behind his back because people gossip.

They are Senegalese, like me. But I'm not fighting for those guys. I'm fighting for a person who recognises what I'm doing. I mean, the work I'm doing is hardly "nothing", it's something visible. But

> *there are a lot of people who criticise not to be constructive but for their own ego. And those guys come crawling back, down on their knees. And I tell them "Get up. I'm going to help you, I'm not angry with you". Because my role in life is already set to help people. "Even if you insult me, I will help you. Even if you speak badly of me, if you need me, I'll help you. I will never be angry with you. Okay?" And these guys have come back in a way that you wouldn't believe.*
>
> - *Seydou*

Seydou does not rise to the insults and criticisms of centre members, instead seeing the importance of his role at ASNUCI to work towards independence and dignified working and living conditions for immigrant workers.

> *My dream and my interest and my whole project is focused on the community, so that they have decent houses, they get their papers and everyone works. If everyone works, everything goes well, I can dedicate myself to something else, because no one will need me. That's what I want. Why? Because I have to help people to get all their tools. The only thing they need is to live in dignity and those papers. That person can make a life for themselves. But what [some] are creating is dependency. And we should not create dependency. Everybody has to be free.*
>
> - *Seydou*

ASNUCI is a central node and complex meeting place for undocumented workers in Lepe. Shared learning and the exchange of food create relations of solidarity and gratitude. Yet, these relations are intersected by nationality, where people rarely cross national boundaries and will discriminate along these lines. Members pay a monthly membership fee and a per-usage fee to shower and do laundry. The financial nature of this relation causes some members to doubt the intentions of the organisation, suspecting their goal is to profit off immigrant desperation. Despite recognition of much needed assistance afforded to immigrants, there is a widespread discontent with the internal workings of the association. This suspicion and discontent leads to resentment towards the staff of the centre, with many keeping their distance. Targets of this resentment deflect the malintent to large NGOs who create relations of dependency between undocumented immigrants and state aid. This is further elaborated in the following section.

6.2. Immigrant- & non-immigrant-occupied spaces

Venturing beyond the *chabolas* and the ASNUCI centre, immigrants in Lepe juggle several other relations, from those with the town hall, local police and the Red Cross, to those in public spaces such as the bus station and local cafés and bars. Highly conscious of their legal status in such settings, there is a heightened sense of vulnerability and insecurity.

Lepe town hall. A cooperative relationship with the town hall can contribute to alleviating precarity. In the neighbouring town of Palos, the town hall facilitated the installation of plumbing facilities at the *chabolas* so people could install toilets and showers. In another neighbouring town, Moguer, the town hall routinely circulates the *chabolas* to collect rubbish from designated sites, meaning waste is disposed of responsibly and inhabitants are not surrounded by heaps of rubbish. Each of these measures greatly increase the hygiene safety of *chabola* inhabitants,

creating a safer environment and shelter. Unfortunately, the nature of the relationship with the Lepe town hall is, at best, one of indifference, or at worst, repression.

The indifference of the town hall manifests in a number of ways. Unlike its neighbouring towns, it does not provide plumbing facilities or a waste collection service. The one development they have provided, a 140-capacity seasonal workers shelter, has been locked up and tightly patrolled since building was completed and nobody can give an explanation as to why workers are not being housed there. Participants are increasingly despondent and frustrated about the conduct of the town hall.

> *[The seasonal workers shelter] is not up and running yet, but they've built it. They've said they're gonna put the people who work in the season- It's written on the plaque [in front of the building]. That the people who work the season are going to live here. But they haven't opened it up yet.*
>
> - *Mohamed*

> *I went looking for them to talk to, but I saw that they can't explain anything clearly. They are people who have been sent here to do their job, but they have no idea what they are doing. Ask them about the workers shelter, they tell me "No, it's under construction". I say, "What construction? I've been told it's been closed for three years".*
>
> - *Amadou*

Several participants expressed the belief that the town hall is not concerned with the well-being of its immigrant inhabitants. It doesn't care where they sleep nor how much they are suffering, and is certainly not inclined to offer any support or help. Mohamed lamented the urgency of immigrants' housing crisis and the lack of compassion from or action by the town hall.

Town hall repression, in the form of demolishing existing *chabolas* and banning the construction of new *chabolas*, exacerbates the precarity of immigrant living conditions. One afternoon while on a food donation run to different *chabola* settlements across Lepe, Seydou pointed out a small settlement near the back of the police station saying that before there were far more *chabolas* there, but the town hall comes around at the end of the season to demolish them. Everyday, town hall 'vigilantes' pass through the settlements, monitoring, making sure new *chabolas* are not built and removing any attempts to do so. Living in *chabolas*, the only option that remains for people who don't want to live on the street, is also being denied. Those living on the streets are also targeted by town hall vigilantes. When having dinner in the grass area where Ayoub eats and sleeps with two other friends, he told me that every morning the vigilantes come and tell them "You boys shouldn't be here". The town hall has made it more than clear to immigrants that it does not want them in Lepe, or at least does not want to see evidence of their existence.

In response to the town hall's stance, most undocumented workers silence themselves, in fear of what might happen if they were to speak up and defend themselves.

> *Not one immigrant from the village can tell me why the shelter is closed. [...] And I can swear that no one has gone to talk, to find out. They have come to live here without asking. You have to have the courage to fight for that. But a lot of people are going to say that they are afraid. Their fear too, I understand it. "I don't have papers. I can't stand there talking. They can do this to me, they can do that". And in the end, they accept everything that happens to them here. Everything.*

- *Amadou*

Aside from Amadou, no other participant ever individually approached the town hall to question its actions, or lack thereof. The relationship between the town hall and immigrants is largely one-sided, with the town hall imposition and the immigrants unconditional acceptance and silence. Bar two exceptions: the 2020 protest in Lepe organised by its immigrant inhabitants and the ongoing, though rocky, relations between the town hall and ASNUCI.

In 2020, immigrants organised a protest in front of Lepe's town hall (introduced in section 4.3), following fires that claimed several *chabolas*. Fed up with the lack of response from the town hall, they took to the streets, receiving national and international attention[6]. However, despite visibilising the issue, the town hall has done nothing more than build a decorative shelter, refusing workers entry. The lack of material change following the protest, left many feeling like it was time and energy wasted.

ASNUCI is in regular contact with the town hall, particularly regarding the registration of immigrants living in *chabolas* as official residents of the town. Led by Seydou and Alba, ASNUCI fought a legal battle with the town hall to earn the right for *chabola* inhabitants to be registered with the municipality, declaring the *chabola* settlements their official address. Following its loss of this legal battle and the bad press from the 2020 protest, the town hall has ceased to cooperate with ASNUCI.

> *The relationship [with the town hall], terrible. The relationship is not like it used to be, it has to be said. But apparently they're changing, they're accepting so many things that were a problem and they're lending a hand. Because what they want and what we want- We are not enemies. I always say that too. They think we are enemies. But in reality we are not enemies. [...] The only thing they don't like us to do is to make reality visible. And that is what we have to make visible, because otherwise we are not what we are claiming. Because we cannot be in a town where the basic rights of immigrants are sold. And we, as a social entity, remain silent in the face of this truth. [...] Telling the truth does not mean that you are enemies. You tell the truth in order to change and improve conditions, because they are the ones who can do it. But they don't take it like that. They interpret it differently or in another way. That's the problem.*
>
> - *Seydou*

Seydou is not phased by the conditional cooperation of the town hall. He visits settlements in Lepe and in neighbouring towns, recounting the success of their legal case, winning the right to register at the municipality. He informs *chabola* inhabitants of the town hall's obligation to review every request they receive and the protocol of 'positive silence', where if you haven't been contacted within three months of submitting a request, you get automatic approval.

Most undocumented immigrants in Lepe are too afraid to actively engage with the town hall and choose rather to invisibilise themselves, avoiding any confrontation with authority. In their silence, Seydou, their documented counterpart, mediates the relationship, visibilising their reality and informing immigrants of their rights.

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[6] *'Starting from Scratch'.* Documentary about temporary workers in Lepe. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hO2swdK4Qtw&ab_channel=Jes%C3%BAsMinch%C3%B3n

Local police. Most participants did not consider Lepe's local police a reliable port of call in the pursuit of justice. Police are believed to be in collaboration with drug dealers who hire immigrants as drug traffickers. According to Abdoulaye, if drugs are seized by the police, drug dealers pay the officers to keep them quiet and Spanish traffickers are let go, while Black traffickers are arrested. There is very little trust or faith in the work of the local police force.

> *The police in Lepe, they are not really doing their jobs because, to me, the way I see the police, most of them, they are drug dealers.*
>
> - *Abdulai*

Even if police involvement in drug trafficking was hearsay, Abdulai's comment that police "are not really doing their jobs" rings true in the context of immigrant reports of racial offences falling on deaf ears of the local authorities.

> *Because lately, I'll tell you, a lot of things are happening at night in Lepe. Kids with cars throwing stones at immigrants, throwing eggs, shouting racist insults. At night it is happening. [...] The police have received many complaints, but if you file a complaint they will never call you back to say, "Hey, so and so", no. You report a complaint. "Okay, we understand". And that's it. And a day later? The kids do that at night and then during the day it's the police on the street saying, "Hey, you have no right to be here, you have no rights here."*
>
> - *Amadou*

At the same time that immigrant reports are dismissed, unworthy of police attention, officers are persecuting immigrants in the streets, telling them they have no right to be there. Police officers are known to be cronies of several farm *jefes*, rendering reports of mistreatment at work similarly futile. One case of police dismissal that was recounted to me a number of times was following one of the large - believed to be incidental - *chabola* fires. An iPhone, not belonging to any of the inhabitants, was found next to where the fire started. It was turned into the police as evidence, however the case was never followed up on.

Racist attitudes are pervasive across the local police force. One Spanish staff member of ASNUCI commented that the police and locals of Lepe think that immigrants do not have brains, that they can't think for themselves, and they need others to tell them what to do. Dealing with incidents reported at the *chabolas* or on the farm, officers have been heard referring to immigrants as 'crazy' or 'savages'. Reporting work incidents at the police station, Abdoulaye told me you are met with condescension, with officers exclaiming they have real work to do and ordering you out the door. The perceived racial hierarchy between immigrants and police officers was made clear when Abdoulaye asked me to accompany him in approaching the police concerning the post-mortem arrangements of an inhabitant found dead inside his *chabola.* Without a White person present, he explained, they will not treat me with respect.

Local authorities' unwillingness to address immigrant reports and the racist stereotypes that guide their conduct send a clear message to immigrants: our law enforcement services do not extend to you. In response to this, the large majority have given up on reporting to the police and avoid interaction with them where possible. There are exceptional cases of documented immigrants challenging 'random' document checks, refusing to show their papers and threatening to report the officer for racist discrimination. However none of the undocumented recounted any

such story. Relations with police appear to be a double-edged sword when it comes to immigrant precarity. Immigrants are unprotected by law enforcements and are actively persecuted by racist police officers. While serious repercussions tend to be rare, the local police represent constant potential risk and insecurity for undocumented immigrants.

Humanitarian networks: Red Cross & Lepe Meal Centre. Participants' opinions on the Red Cross as a humanitarian network were divided. Almost everyone I spoke to had spent up to three months at a Red Cross emergency accommodation facility on arrival to Spain. While some recognised the need for and value of the Red Cross' services, especially given the desperation and loneliness of newly arrived immigrants, others criticised the Red Cross saying that the lack of follow-up services once the immigrant is released from emergency accommodation causes them to lose their minds, unequipped to survive alone and faced with hostility from Spanish society.

In the previous section, I introduced the concern of some participants that ASNUCI, a supposed-support network, was creating dependency and profiting from undocumented immigrants. The same argument is made by Seydou, a staff member of ASNUCI, against the Red Cross. He believes the Red Cross, and similar organisations, are purposely creating relations of dependency with immigrants as a way to secure long-term finances.

> *Many people, if immigration did not exist, would die of poverty. Because they live at the expense of immigrants. If the immigrant is not there, they have no work, they have no function. How many people are earning money, have a luxury car, a house, a mortgage, thanks to the immigrant. We have to recognise that. When it comes to helping, the work has to be done well. And I will never work with, even if it is going to pay me millions of euros, I will never work with the Red Cross.*
>
> - *Seydou*

As well as creating dependencies, Seydou maintains that the Red Cross is an arm of the state, serving to cover up the state's wrongdoings by understating the reality of immigrants. They are well-resourced and know the reality better than anyone, Seydou argued, but they never dare speak the truth.

> *[The Red Cross] help and then step all over human rights. That's what I can tell you. I don't agree. Do they do very good things? Yes, of course they do. Do they sometimes help guys out? Yeah, they do. They do some good. But when it comes to putting the truth on the table, they never tell the truth. They always speak in favour of the state.*
>
> - *Seydou*

Regarding work on-the-ground, the only account I had from participants regarding their interactions with the Red Cross was from one *chabola* inhabitant who said that whenever the Red Cross come around, they keep their distance from the *chabolas*, with some holding their nose in disgust at the smell at the settlements. The same person went on to explain that some people just have a bad impression of immigrants living in the *chabolas*, thinking they are scary or dangerous, or will do something bad to them.

Lepe's meal centre, the *comedor*, is funded by regional banks and town halls, as well as through private and public donations. Not unlike the Red Cross, the *comedor* received conflicting

reviews. It is considered a good service for those in need, specifically those who do not work. My visits to the *comedor* revealed a social element of availing of their services. People met friends there and discussed current affairs. Some took the opportunity to sell stolen goods or drugs at the regular meeting place. Many also had the routine of hanging out outside the building afterwards, chatting to friends and rating the food compared to the previous day. A number of participants told me about fights that take place at the *comedor* however I was never witness to any.

Both Mohamed and Abdoulaye acknowledged the benefit of the *comedor* but were wary of the risk of becoming dependent on something that you cannot control. Mohamed said he goes very rarely, only if he really needs to, underlining that he independently provides for himself. Abdoulaye explained that he doesn't go to the *comedor* everyday, otherwise he risks becoming reliant and handing power over to them. He went as far to say that even if you are starving, you should fend for yourself and fight for your wellbeing, because to fight is to live. This sense of pride that motivates people to provide for themselves is accompanied by an air of suspicion that hangs over the *comedor*. Several participants recounted the same story to me, according to which the food at the *comedor* is spiked with sleeping powder. Reasons to explain such an act were up to the story-tellers' interpretations. Fact or fiction, the sleeping powder story reveals a degree of mistrust between immigrants and state-funded services, where the intention behind the service provision is not taken at face value.

Both the Red Cross and the *comedor* exist in response to the desperation of undocumented immigrants, though immigrants exercise caution when engaging with their services. While often not in the position to refuse help, relations with state-funded services are coloured by a complexity of pride, mistrust and necessity. Despite requiring state provisions, participants at times choose not to concede their independence to the state.

Relations with *Leperos* and local hangouts.

> *There is a story that says that the first Black man who came here to Lepe, they killed him. [...]. It's true. They say that they were playing with him, like with a doll, because they had never seen an African or a Black man before. And they killed him. Here in Lepe. Ask the other people. That story has been going on for years. It's been going on for years but nobody's ever gonna forget it. Who could forget that, you know? It's a story that everybody knows. [...] Everybody [knows the story] because when you arrive here as a newcomer, people will tell it to you. If you are complaining, saying "Ah, the people here, they are the worst". They will tell you, "Don't worry, you're doing fine. The first Black man who came here, they killed him".*
>
> - *Oumar*

Leperos are racist. They are angry and false. They are strange, unintelligent, close-minded pieces of shit. The worst of all Andalucía. *Leperos* are afraid of immigrants and want to see them worse off.

This is a collection of participants' perceptions of the local people of Lepe, the *Leperos*. Relations between immigrants and the *Leperos* are grounded in a reproduced history of racism and disrespect, illustrated in the story passed on through generations of immigrants in Lepe. Earlier in this chapter, discussing the indifference of the local police, I referred to nighttime drive-

by incidents of *Leperos* throwing eggs or stones and shouting racist insults at immigrants. Another incident involved one *Lepero* driving his car over a cluster of tents that immigrants were living in. They are always trying to kill us, a participant explained to me, but luckily nobody was inside when it happened. Abdulai told me that the owner of the bus station café called him a "fucking nigger" and when Abdulai called the police they told him he was banned from returning to the café. Several participants recounted occasions of *Leperos* staring at them in the streets or in local cafés. Oumar asserted that they stare constantly as a way to make immigrants feel small. Amadou recounted the interaction he had with a woman who stepped off the footpath to distance herself from him.

> *A woman walking, she steps off the footpath as if not to cross me. After, she looked all the way back, to tell me, "I just don't know what you're doing here". [...] I went towards her to talk to her, respectfully. Then she's like, "No, I'm not talking about everybody, I don't know, it's just that there's some…" "Some, but you don't have to blame everybody. Do you know me at all?" She says, "No". "Why do you have to treat me like that? First of all, you made a racist gesture of stepping off the footpath to avoid me". She says, "No, no, no, no, I'm not a racist". I said, "Then why did you get off the footpath?" "I don't know. Sometimes they come up to you like they want to rob you". I say, "Have you ever been robbed?" "No, no, it's just- Do you understand me?" I don't say, "You haven't said anything yet that I understand". "And how long have you been here?" I say, "Five years". "Yeah, that's why. But the ones who just got here-". I saw her very scattered. I know that if it was another person who doesn't know how to defend himself, they just go away, put up with it. They're not going to do anything, out of fear or whatever, and just walk away.*
>
> - *Amadou*

In his five years in Spain, Amadou said that while towns generally tend to be worse than cities, he has never experienced racism like that of Lepe and the *Leperos*.

Explaining such racism, there was unanimous agreement amongst participants that *Leperos* consider themselves superior to immigrants and have utter disrespect for them.

> *They're closed-minded and very racist. Why are they like that? 'Cause they think they're superior. Money changes a person. And they have a lot of money. It's a rich town and they feel superior.*
>
> - *Seydou*

> *But people here don't have much respect for immigrants. They always look down on them. And try talking, "Oh, I feel sorry for them". [...] Sometimes when you walk in the street and you come across some children, they will say something bad to you. There is a lack of respect.*
>
> - *Oumar*

Pitying immigrants and failing to show basic respect, *Leperos* exacerbate divisions in a town that is already extremely segregated, both spatially and socially. Walking through Lepe one afternoon, Modou pointed out to me the distinct areas where Blacks, Arabs and Spaniards usually hung out, explaining that there was very little mingling between groups. Amadou pointed out the total absence of Black people working in bars or shops in the town centre, further obstructing opportunities for immigrants to positively engage with *Leperos*.

Verbal abuse from children on the street points to the normalisation of mistreating immigrants in Lepe. Some feel hopeless about the racism ingrained in the town, lamenting that

they can do nothing in the face of it. One participant acknowledged that nobody is born racist just that *Leperos* have been raised that way, something that is difficult to change because they are ignorant to their behaviours. Anecdotes of friendly interactions show that once the initial communication barrier is overcome, immigrants and *Leperos* are capable of amicable relations.

> *Relations between us and the Leperos? There are relations, but they are very few. [...] Sometimes you can talk to people, even if you don't know them, because when you meet them in the neighbourhood you can chat.*
>
> - *Mohamed*

Walking back one evening from the metal recycling centre with Aliou, he joked with a staff member, later commenting to me that she was a very good person. One afternoon, while grocery shopping with Omar, an older Spanish man approached Omar to ask him what *okra* (a typical western African vegetable) was. The man asked if it was spicy and how it should be cooked, before turning back to companions to relay what he had learned. One the same grocery run, Omar and I went to a corner shop to buy drinks. He says he goes there everyday and that the woman working there is really friendly, always making smalltalk about the weather.

Unfortunately, however, these friendly interactions are the exception. Navigating the general animosity from *Leperos*, immigrants will either challenge the racist behaviour (like in Amadou's interaction with the woman on the footpath) or they will just tolerate the behaviour, enduring it until the season ends and they leave Lepe. One participant could no longer bear the misery of the town, and, overnight, decided to move back to Madrid. The next day he sent me a voice note saying he was happy to get out of Lepe, it's a sad and racist village with nothing to do and miserable living conditions.

One participant showed significant deviation from the typical interactions with *Leperos*. Ousmane immerses himself in the town centre with two distinct objectives. One, he observes behavioural patterns of locals and seeks to build a relationship if he sees the potential for personal gain or skill development.

> *When I arrive in a new country, I look at the people. I always look at the people. If I see someone doing things well, I mean very well, I will approach them to start a relationship. [...] But if I see that they always do things very badly. I stay away from them. I don't know them. Forget them.*
>
> - *Ousmane*

Ousmane's second objective when infiltrating the town of Lepe is to meet romantic partners. While in Europe he will never begin a relationship with an African woman because she needs money more than he does. A White woman doesn't need money, he says. And while it wasn't clear if his motives were financial or sexual or both, he said he is only interested in pursuing White women. Others in Lepe, and indeed across Spain, will similarly seek relations with Spanish women as a means to secure their documentation through family ties, marrying the woman on paper and paying a lawyer to defend the case. This was not commonly heard of in Lepe, but that didn't stop many of those who passed the hours on the couches in ASNUCI to say that one day they will marry a Spaniard and then they will have their papers.

6.3. Concluding remarks

Immigrant-occupied spaces give rise to a system of micro-politics that supersedes statuses of documented and undocumented. Physical proximity dictates certain relations, creating a purposive and mutually beneficial trust between adjacent *chabola* neighbours. This trust is built and maintained through meal-sharing practices. The lack of trust in relations of proximity heightens precarity as personal security is at a heightened risk. A money-driven mindset creates feelings of suspicion and, again, mistrust in response to support offered to immigrants. Both immigrant- and state-funded aid was considered to profit off immigrant desperation. Authorities are generally indifferent toward immigrant desperation and suffering and any engagement on their part appeared to be a superficial alliance.

Several immigrants feel threatened by *Leperos*, unsure if at any given moment they will be subject to physical or verbal abuse. Relations with locals, characterised by hatred, pity and disrespect, further lower the quality of life in a miserable town where there is nothing to do. This contributes to a greater spatial and social segregation as immigrants avoid occupying space in the town centre. Accumulated interactions with *Leperos*, both first-hand and second-hand accounts, widen the divide between the two groups and contribute to increased mistrust.

7. Discussion

Reflections on precarity. Precarity can be understood as conditions of heightened vulnerability, where one experiences disproportionate exposure to harm and an exclusion from social and political protection (Butler, 2004; van den Hemel; 2008). Immigrant precarity is contemporarily characterised by a pending threat of being disposed of for being the unproductive Other who cannot participate in a consumerist society (Bauman, 2004; Yonucu, 2008). Immigrants working in the agri-food industry are further excluded from social and political protection by the stereotypes of 'dirty' and 'uncivilised' associated with their line of work (Duruiz, 2015; Holmes, 2013). Overlooked in the perpetuation of these stereotypes is that undocumented immigrants do not always wilfully choose the agri-food industry as their desired place of work. Rather, the paradox of being necessary but unwanted renders it one of few industries they can enter, as their precarious legal status creates an inbetweenness that limits where and when they are accepted to be visibly present. In other words, undocumented immigrants have few options other than to work in the fields where they are hidden amidst rows of fruit trees, 'illegal' but inoffensive to the public eye.

The exploitative conditions of farmwork and shelter, which contribute significantly to precarity, are justified on the basis of essentialist beliefs about the immigrant Other (Duruiz, 2015; Holmes, 2013). In my research, several participants talked about attitudes authorities held toward them, referring to them as 'savages' and treating them like animals. Creating a social hierarchy, where the immigrant ranks at the bottom, legitimises, firstly, mistreatment at work and, secondly, exclusion from the housing market. In discussing mistreatment at work, several participants used animal metaphors to convey *jefe*-worker relations, for example being 'run like a donkey'. One participant even remarked that dogs are treated with more love and respect than undocumented immigrants are. It is under such socialisation that interactions between the dehumanised, undocumented worker and the superior-ranking *jefe* take place. Undocumented immigrants work overtime, are rarely given breaks, and are verbally abused, all as to increase farm productivity. Literally worked to death in some cases, the undocumented face extreme safety risks due to dehydration and exhaustion of endless hours working in the intense heat. These conditions represent heightened vulnerability and exposure to harm. In the event that an undocumented worker becomes unwell and in need of medical care, their legal status complicates such access. Workers I know to have presented at medical centres in need of urgent care were always accompanied by a Spaniard. As if the medical practitioner's and the Spanish companion's mutual awareness of the immigrant's undocumented status legitimised both parties' 'turning of a blind eye'. A similar pattern was evident in interactions with police authorities. The day one inhabitant passed away inside his *chabola*, Abdoulaye asked me to join him to question the police about the details of the case, saying that only with a White person present will the police treat him respectfully. Social and political protection is clearly lacking for undocumented immigrants, however this can be mediated through social circumstances, namely via the presence of an in-group member, a White person. This illustrates van Houtum's (2021) argument that an ontological border resides within the immigrant. If you are mistreated at work, suffering health issues or labour rights exploitation, social and political protection that is usually withheld from undocumented immigrants can be accessed via the appropriate social relations, making the ontological border permeable under certain circumstances. Harsh working conditions were, in some instances, a

result of workers engaging in self-exploitation, agreeing to extended hours or weekend shifts as a way to earn more money. Moreover, *jefes*, concerned with nothing more than high yields and productivity, would tyrannise workers, coercing them to run along the rows by threatening to penalise the least productive workers. Those with the lowest yield were kicked off the harvest for three days, replaced by someone willing to work harder and faster. With the looming threat of being kicked off the farm, disposed of for being the unproductive Other, many workers adhered to the animal Other subjectivity, obeying the orders of the *jefe,* relentlessly pushing their bodies to harvest high yields of agricultural produce.

The second instance of legitimised mistreatment concerns housing. Several participants reported being refused rental leases on the grounds that they 'did not have the head' to take care of an apartment. The blatant paradox in Lepe of accepting the undocumented as workers but not as town residents illustrates van den Hemel's (2008) argument of being included but not belonging. Beyond the confines of the agricultural fields, undocumented immigrants are not recognised as valuable or deserving members of society (Butler, 2004); they are 'out of place' in Lepe's town centre (Bauman, 2004). 'Uncivilised' and rejected from formal housing, the undocumented are forced to find alternative solutions. In so doing, derogatory stereotypes are reinforced by the living conditions at the alternative, informal settlements, the *chabolas.* Without a waste disposal system, the *chabolas* are surrounded by growing heaps of rubbish. Furthermore, *chabola* inhabitants are unable to maintain hygiene practices due to the lack of running water. The spatial living conditions reinforce the othering of the *chabola* inhabitants; the 'imported waste' resides amidst the locally produced waste, with the distinction between the two ever-more blurred (Bauman, 2004). The othering and suffering of *chabola* inhabitants is further compounded by the extent to which inhabitants normalise their conditions of shelter. They mediate their suffering by reminding themselves of their personal advocacies and the short-term nature of their stay: they are in Lepe for four months to earn as much money as possible and then get out. Life in the *chabolas* is temporary. At least it's believed to be so. And that's what makes the four months of suffering bearable. While the conditions of the inhabitants' lives are unstable and uncertain, the perceived certainty that soon you will leave the *chabolas* offers strength and comfort.

Enhancing the understanding of precarity, the present research identifies an additional, social dimension that plays an influential role in determining the vulnerability of undocumented immigrant workers. Within the agri-food industry, precarity is arbitrarily defined according to the goodwill, or lack thereof, of the *jefe*. A 'good boss' will cooperate to help workers become documented. However, goodwill is not the only factor at play. Pressure from police authorities also influences the *jefe's* cooperation. One participant remarked that in Almería, another region with large scale agricultural production, *jefes* are more likely to offer contracts because they want to avoid police fines. Circumstances are different in Lepe. Local police are shy to administer fines to *jefes*, with one participant reporting that he frequently saw his *jefe* and a local police officer meeting for beers in the town centre. Relations of proximity across local authorities and employers mean that the risk of being caught, and fined, with undocumented workers is much lower. In turn, the incentive to document workers by providing the required contracts (after which workers can freely leverage worker rights to claim legal pay) is greatly decreased. As such, while *jefes* and police officers remain faithful chums, the likelihood of becoming documented is arbitrarily diminished. This distinction between undocumented immigrants in the agri-food industry in Huelva versus in Almería speaks to a broader concern within academic literature, namely the caution with

which researchers can generalise across context. Social and spatial circumstances exert great influence over grievances, opportunities and subsequent affairs.

Politically (dis)engaged? Exploring immigrants' navigation of precarity, I focused on activities through which demands were made against a specified target in response to a perceived threat to one's values, interests or identities; *claim-making* (McAdam et al., 1996). Additionally, I was interested in everyday activities of disguised resistance through which social and political alternatives could be actively created; *claim-living* (Lundström, 2017). Broadly speaking, I wanted to know more about how agri-food industry workers formed alliances and acted in concert to challenge exploitative *jefes* and oppressive authorities (Ataç et al., 2016; Butler, 2011); the *contentious politics* of undocumented immigrants.

Captivated by the success stories of immigrant political participation and mobilisation across Mediterranean Europe (Agustín, 2020; Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Bauder, 2021; Bazurli & Delclos, 2021; Papadopoulos et al., 2018; Russell, 2019), I set out to research the dynamic, political relations undocumented immigrants engage in. One case that continually emerged was *Top Manta*, a workers' union formed by undocumented African immigrants, working as street vendors in Barcelona. Leveraging networks and relations at the municipal level, *Top Manta* is the manifestation of immigrants' political participation and mobilisation, achieved largely through the arts (De Heusch, 2021). The success of *Top Manta* can be understood through contentious politics, wherein "differently positioned participants come together to challenge dominant systems of authority, in order to promote and enact alternative imaginaries" (Ataç et al., 2016, p. 530). Through my research, I expected to find similar patterns of political engagement by undocumented worker alliances in Spain's agri-food industry. In Almería, undocumented workers were engaged in street protests and occupations, in seemingly comparable conditions as those to be found in Huelva. However, the social and spatial context of Lepe did not offer fertile ground for formal, concerted political action. Firstly, Lepe, the right-wing governed town, lacks an enabling political environment and "the alignment of extra-local political actors and activists [to offer] institutional and organisational support" (Papadopoulos et al., 2018, p. 207). Moreover, the impermanence of workers' stays in Lepe, arriving at the start of the season and leaving three or four months later, is one contributing factor. Another is undocumented immigrants' priority to earn money and the reported time constraint to engage in political action as a result of this financial pursuit. In other words, the undocumented are there for just a few months, intent on working hard to earn as much money as possible and then leave again. Organising protests for the betterment of workers' rights is not a priority, especially given that the workers aren't there for the remaining eight or nine months of the year to reap the potential reward of such efforts. Workers in Almería live and work on-site year-round, given the industry there is concentrated in greenhouses and the production of off-season fruit and vegetables, and so have greater incentive to claim better living and working conditions.

Formal manifestations of contentious politics, an organised protest to make a claim for change to a dominant authority structure for example, were non-existent during this season's harvest in Lepe. The continuity of a resistance narrative, however, was maintained through story-telling and the recounting of past cases of open confrontation, such as the occupation of the town hall square in 2020. That said, no manifestations materialised or were even proposed during the time I spent in Lepe. Undocumented and living in highly vulnerable circumstances, with respect

to both social and physical safety, workers were not concerned with political action attempting to achieve a collective sense of worth and rights. Rather, people created superficial relations of mutual benefit, for example befriending your *chabola* neighbour so you can each act as a security guard, alarming the other of potential threats and protecting the area in the others' absence. However, my sense is that everyone had an 'every man for themselves' attitude, wherein nobody can truly be trusted and you can only really count on yourself. In such an environment, people were not willing – nor had the time – to put themselves out for the benefit of the greater good. Commentary from Seydou and Amadou, both documented and dedicated to rights activism, shows attempts of collective framing and the formation of a political subject (Lundström, 2017), as they strive to unite all immigrants and fight on behalf of the undocumented for the greater good of all immigrant workers. However, their efforts are thwarted by mistrust and suspicion between the documented and undocumented, and by the tunnel vision of the undocumented in Lepe to earn money and keep a low profile in the meantime. It is as if the conditions under which workers in Lepe have to live cause them to dissociate from collective action and abstain from claiming their rights.

And yet, while initially disappointed by the lack of a political spectacle I had expected (and hoped) to find in Lepe, Butler's (2011) perspective broadens the scope for interpreting political action. Building on the work of Arendt, on the right to have rights which comes into being when it is exercised, Butler (2011, p. 5) suggests that "political claims are made by bodies as they appear and act, as they refuse and as they persist under conditions in which that fact alone is taken to be an act of delegitimation of the state". Being undocumented, yet simultaneously living, working and creating conditions of a dignified life in Spain, are in and of themselves a delegitimation of the state. Adopting this perspective, understanding the bodily appearance and speech of the undocumented to be political acts, immigrants are indeed in on-going contentious conversations. Standing up to their *jefe* constitutes a demand for a political alternative. Cooking traditional meals and proudly celebrating Ramadan rituals constitutes enacting a social alternative. In the absence of formal collective political action, the everyday, 'invisible' politics of individual – or groups of individual – undocumented immigrants were illuminated. Daouda's case, the undocumented worker who will take his exploitative and deceitful *jefe* to court next January, exemplifies the 'politics of hope' that Brambilla (2021) argues for, saying that agency can be found amidst the most precarious conditions of life. Claiming basic workers' rights and formal legal protection, Daouda is reimagining political life from the margins, allied with a local lawyer who volunteered to head his case, together they are navigating uncharted territory for undocumented immigrants. A case of individual claim-making, one could argue, however the success of Daouda's court hearing would likely have positive implications for the collective undocumented immigrant. At the very least, Daouda's decision to take legal action promises that the *jefe* in question will never try to take advantage of a worker in a similar way in the future.

Daouda, with such initiative and courage, was the exception to the rule. Most workers remained silent in the face of mistreatment and exploitation. Reluctance to engage in formal claim-making, individual or collective, often went hand-in-hand with fear. Undocumented immigrants internalise their 'illegal' status. They fear being deported if they are found to be working without documents. They fear losing their income if they're kicked off the harvest for standing up for themselves. Many of them are unaware of their rights and would rather keep their heads down, not ask questions and maintain a low profile. These immigrants silence themselves. They

transform themselves into docile workers, enduring admittedly awful conditions, galvanised by the duty to return to their home country with relative riches. The expectation to return with said riches is another reason to avoid open confrontation. Familial pressure to send financial remittances and to fulfil the 'European dream' dictates the priorities of many workers. Many relay a false narrative to their families, ashamed to admit that they are living *chabolas* without basic amenities. Consumed by the responsibility to provide for relatives at home, the vision many wish to achieve is one of financial stability and comfort, not of political engagement and representation. Here, Lundström's (2017) agents, activities and advocacies trio can shed light on the varying strategies employed by undocumented immigrants. Specifically taking advocacies, the goals that drive an agent's activities, we can begin to understand the reasoning behind some decision-making. For those driven by a financial advocacy, dignity is derived in consciously choosing to endure extremely hard work, despite disrespect from the *jefe* and severe health risk to your body. For others, breaking their backs is not worth the extra money, certainly not if it ends up spent in the hospital curing the bodily aches and pains of the harvest. With notable pride in their voices, a few undocumented workers recounted being thrown off harvests for speaking back to the jefe, deriving dignity in standing up for themselves, with an advocacy to never lose their self-respect. The vision to achieve respect, rights and dignity for immigrants across the board was a luxurious advocacy, seemingly reserved for the documented.

Challenging dominant authorities was not commonplace in Lepe, despite cases like Daouda's offering hope for its potential at least at an individual level. The spatial, and simultaneous social, segregation of immigrants and non-immigrants in Lepe meant there lacked a diversity of alliances with leverage in the local authorities. According to participants, this partially explains the lack of collective claim-making in Lepe. However, the very same spatial and social segregation created an enabling space, the *chabola* settlements, for practices of individual and collective claim-living. Within the confines of the *chabolas*, inhabitants live undisturbed by local authorities and residents of Lepe. It was at the *chabolas* where religious rituals were freely performed, where traditional meal sharing practices took place and where the culture and identity that cause immigrants to otherwise be othered can be honoured. Altering one's behaviour once inside the *chabola* settlement, beyond any condescending or threatening outsider gaze, speaks to Scott's (2021) argument that bordering is a cognitive process, a result of embodied interaction with the urban environment. In other words, in shared urban spaces where immigrants face non-immigrant counterparts, their mobility and freedom of expression is limited, bordered. Yet, crossing the dirt path into the *chabola* settlement, they are once again freed of this socio-spatially formed border, unseen and uninhibited by the statuses of 'illegal' and 'immigrant'.

The main theoretical takeaway regarding contentious politics firstly concerns the distinction between claim-making and claim-living. Before arriving in the field, I assumed it would be easy to identify activities that belonged to each process, with the clear difference being that claim-making involves a direct target. In practice, the difference is not so clear and indeed not very helpful. One could argue that any claim-making activity – demanding better wages from the *jefe* – is in effect also a claim-living activity, as the result is you enact the desired alternative. Similarly, any claim-living activity – celebrating Ramadan despite widespread disapproval – can indeed have a target, in this case the disapprovers, thus making it a claim-making activity. At the individual level, whether one is *making* or *living* a claim is not hugely important, rather the more general act of *doing* claims and the resultant social or political alternative is what matters. Where

the distinction may become more useful would be in investigating claims across scales and geographies, something that was not relevant in the case of immigrants in Lepe. That said, the theoretical distinction of claim-making and claim-living is helpful in understanding two influential processes in Lepe. Firstly, the opportunity to successfully *make* a claim against a specified target was arguably less accessible in Lepe due to the temporal dimension; the short-term nature of workers' stays in the town. Without a long-term vision to follow-through with and achieve a claim, the likelihood to pursue it decreases. Secondly, the potential to *live* a claim was greatly facilitated by the spatial dimension; being physically removed and isolated from the town centre meant that inhabitants were free to promote and enact social and political alternatives.

One final learning on contentious politics in practice concerns the recurrent assertion that concerted action to challenge dominant authorities requires a diversity of differently positioned actors. My research engaged heavily with ASNUCI, the day centre run by immigrants' rights activists. In its endeavours to rally political engagement in the face of oppressive and exploitative authorities, ASNUCI's dual identity of NGO and activist created suspicion from above and below, causing relationship breakdown. The town hall began to withdraw from its cooperative relationship with ASNUCI, having accused ASNUCI of initiating the 2020 occupation. Members of the day centre would err on the side of caution when availing of ASNUCI's services, claiming that it is nothing more than a profit-making entity. This calls for attention to the social and political relations between the supposedly-allied actors if an alternative is to be successfully promoted and enacted. While a diversity of actors is necessary for political leverage, hierarchies and disproportionate benefit within an alliance foster mistrust and suspicion.

8. Conclusion

For the conclusion chapter, I return once more to my research objectives. Firstly, I set out to present the agency and everyday politics of undocumented immigrants. Presenting the strategies employed by immigrants in navigating precarity and doing so from the perspective of the immigrants themselves, the present research makes the immigrant voice hearable - hopefully empowering those who participated and shared their stories - and makes immigrant suffering read and heard - sensitising the reader to the conditions of undocumented immigrants' reality. I consider this a relatively small though important contribution to the discussion of issues of migration and human rights.

Secondly, I aimed to document the strategies and struggles of immigrants, contextualising them within the social and spatial conditions. Applying a relational lens to the immigrant experience in Lepe shed light on the freedom, or lack thereof, of mobility and visibility of immigrants across various settings. For example, the uncurbed, and even welcomed, presence of the 'illegal' and undocumented immigrants on the farms of Lepe harshly contrasts with the merciless attempts to inhibit immigrant occupancy of Lepe's town centre. In this sense, applying a relational lens offers insight into the dynamic relations that uphold the paradox of being included but not belonging.

My third and final objective was, following Aris Escarcena's (2022) lead, to argue for the productive dimension of precarity, demonstrating how precarity can generate new forms of being political (Ataç et al., 2016), thus challenging the binary of 'citizen' and 'non-citizen'. My research undoubtedly demonstrated forms of being political that arose from precarity, a clear example being Daouda's pending court case against his *jefe*. This same example challenges the (non-) citizen binary and the social and political protection available to (non-)citizens. Providing contextual depth to the lived experience of undocumented immigrants and the services they succeed in accessing illuminates cracks in this binary and in social categorisation more broadly. Reflecting on the research - and considering the definition of 'to produce' to be 'to bring something into existence' - I cannot convincingly argue for the 'productive' dimension of precarity in the case of Lepe. Indeed, individual creativity and resilience emerged from the precarity of farmworkers and those living in the *chabolas*, however collectively producing a new political being was not evident in Lepe to the extent it was in Almería and Barcelona. Processes relating to this were elaborated in the discussion chapter. Nevertheless, undocumented immigrants in Lepe have a conscious understanding of their current position, a clear vision of what they want to achieve and are taking intentional steps towards making progress on their goals, avoiding any obstacles they encounter on route. Undocumented immigrants negotiate social and political relations as a means to navigate precarity in Lepe.

Answering the research questions. My main research question was the following: *How do undocumented immigrant workers in Spain's agri-food industry engage in claim-making and claim-living to navigate precarity?* To address this question, I formulated three sub-questions, each of which I will answer separately in what follows. The sub-questions were organised loosely according to the dimensions of a relational approach: the spatial (sub-question 1), identity (sub-question 2) and the social (sub-question 3). The interplay of the spatial, identity and social has been crucial to my research, however conceptually separating the three is beyond the scope of

the present work. The remainder of this chapter will address the three dimensions simultaneously, as appropriate.

What strategies do (un)documented immigrant workers employ, as a means to navigate precarity in Lepe? The main findings regarding the strategies that undocumented immigrants employ can be divided into two camps: invisibilising strategies and visibilising strategies. Invisibilising strategies include accepting and normalising your suffering as a means to endure it in the short-term. If you consider your unstable housing conditions and your uncertain work hours and income to be something 'normal' then you remove its chokehold and salvage your sanity in the face of oppressive stagnation. Employing an invisibilising strategy, immigrants do not speak out against hardship, instead they silence themselves, unlikely to challenge authority or pursue change. Additionally, invisibilising strategies reduce the risk of bureaucratic or physical harm by avoiding authorities or escaping drink- or drug-related environments. Conversely, employing visibilising strategies, despite sharing in the fear of being deported, immigrants take concrete steps towards securing their documents and claiming their rights. Strategies include sharing stories with others about conditions of work and legal wages, maintaining self-respect and standing up for yourself and fellow workers in the face of mistreatment. Other visibilising strategies include attending Spanish classes, making use of free lawyer services, building a network of contacts, and forming relations beyond the farm and the *chabolas*, within the town of Lepe. Broadening one's network and capacities, undocumented immigrants occupy space and work towards stabilising their legal status by leveraging social relations. Crucial in the understanding of strategies employed by undocumented immigrants is recognising that both invisibilising and visibilising strategies are accessible, however is it the interplay spatial and social dimensions that determines when and where each strategy can be employed. As discussed in the previous chapter, undocumented immigrants pursue divergent objectives, some financially motivated, others primarily driven by self-respect. Yet, while each navigate toward distinct personal ends, one commonality across participants was a shared understanding of where to navigate *away* from. The people who sat all day at the centre, who went everyday to the *comedor*, who never found work, who didn't learn Spanish. These people were not blamed for ending up in a relatively hopeless situation, but they represented a clear indicator of failure to navigate precarity, a position that participants consciously aimed to avoid finding themselves in. If documented was the end goal, the people who hopelessly pass empty hours were the antithesis of that goal.

What identities do (un)documented immigrant workers subscribe to, as a means to navigate precarity in Lepe? As elaborated in chapter 5, there are two relevant identities to consider for undocumented immigrants navigating precarity in Lepe. The cultural Other and the illegal Other. These are two intersecting categories that undocumented immigrants are placed into, from which they must negotiate their position. Identity is not a fixed or stable condition, rather it is performed in our actions, speech, and interaction with others. It is a dynamic process that, crucially, hinges on relations with others, as the identity we are performing needs to be recognised and validated. In the case of the cultural Other, traditions and practices associated with this identity are at times harnessed to create a sense of belonging and collective self in the face of social exclusion and a clear-cut 'us' and 'them'. Such practices help create a sense of 'home away

from home'. For immigrants yet to become documented, legal recognition represents achieving a sense of worth and value as an immigrant, as illustrated in participant quotes from section 5.2. Internalising the characteristics of the illegal Other results in a loss of freedom of mobility and of visibility. However, not all undocumented immigrants internalise this identity. Moustapha, four years in Spain and still undocumented, subscribes to the identity of the documented, behaving as one would if they did indeed have their papers. He is performing as the legal Other through his everyday actions, driving a car without an officially recognised licence for example, which mask his undocumented identity, leading many to believe he is documented. For the majority of the undocumented, they remain unrecognised and unappreciated. Degrading working conditions, poor language skills and dilapidated living conditions are challenges that hinder the recognition of undocumented immigrants as valuable members of society. As outlined in the previous sub-question, accepting these conditions is among the strategies chosen by immigrants to navigate their precarity. Conforming with exploitative workplace norms and expectations is part of the longer-term strategy to build a relationship with the *jefe* and secure papers, to achieve the ultimate recognition. However, this strategy contains the seeds of its own destruction, causing the immigrant to become ever more invisible.

What network relations are (un)documented immigrant workers engaged in, as a means to navigate precarity in Lepe? Relations of physical and cultural proximity are leveraged in the daily navigation of precarity, from unspoken pacts between *chabola* neighbours to warn the other of danger, to securing refuge at the day centre even without paying membership because the majority of members are national kin and predisposed to favour you. This dynamic also works in reverse. Without membership and not being from Senegal means that such relations-based leverage is not available to you. Advantageous for grounding oneself in a new context, these relations are little more than shallow relations of circumstance and mutual benefit. Under the surface, people rarely trust one another, even their own kin. Trust, and the widespread lack of it, was something that emerged again and again throughout my research. "Don't trust anyone", I was regularly warned. On top of the tangible instability of work and living conditions, relations represent a layered uncertainty of never knowing if someone is trying to help you or to deceive you. This was most clearly manifest in the relations several had with ASNUCI and its staff members. ASNUCI was believed to be profiting off immigrants' desperation but disguising as support. In response to this mistrust, many people kept their distance and avoided building relations of dependency with entities such as ASNUCI and the *comedor*. Superficial protection from, and racist persecution by, police authorities erodes any potential for trust. As such, undocumented immigrants disengage with authorities, avoiding them where possible.

Societal relevance of the research. The scientific relevance of this research was outlined in the reintroduction of my objectives. However, there is one last societal aspect that makes the present research particularly relevant in contemporary Spain. As illustrated in the stories shared by select participants, becoming documented can profoundly change the course of your life. And yet, there were a number of participants who had indeed secured papers but continued to find themselves living from unstable paycheck to unstable paycheck, sleeping in *chabolas* or in their car. The fear they continue to feel living as an immigrant in Spain, albeit documented, continues to govern decisions about engaging in power relations and demanding

dignified conditions of work. Conversely, there are undocumented immigrants claiming their rights, despite their 'illegality'. This begs the question, how important really is it to obtain the coveted papers? How much does your life materially change once you've become documented? The reason for its societal relevance in contemporary Spain is in the context of the ongoing *#RegularizaciónYA*[7] (#RegularisationNOW) campaign. The campaign began in 2020, when supporters took to the streets, collecting signatures to petition the government to publicly debate and vote on a blanket regularisation of all undocumented immigrants currently living in Spain. The necessary minimum of signatures was well exceeded and at the time of writing a date for the public debate is in the process of being set. However, even if the campaign, which has a mass social media following and nationwide support, achieves what it sets out to do and the undocumented become documented overnight, what material changes will they see in their lives? Will local landlords suddenly be happy to rent them a flat? Will the police stop seeing them as savages? Will *jefes* stop treating them like animals? While documenting immigrants is an important step, especially regarding the recognition as a worthy and valuable member of society, it is not a silver bullet to immigrant precarity.

[7] https://regularizacionya.com/

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Appendices

Appendix 1. List of interview participants, date and locations

Participant pseudonyms	Date	Location
Amadou	06 March 2023	Lepe, bus station
Ayoub	13 March 2023	Lepe, café in town centre
Abdoulaye	20 & 23 March 2023	Lepe, park in town centre
Ousmane	28 March 2023	Lepe, bus station
Abdulai	7 April 2023	Lepe, bar in town centre
Adama	14 April 2023	Cartaya, park in town centre
Moustapha	19 April 2023	Lepe, ASNUCI car park
Mohamed	24 April 2023	Lepe, bench outside ASNUCI
Mamadou	24 April 2023	Lepe, car journey to Huelva
Ahmed	27 April 2023	Lepe, ASNUCI day centre
Oumar	28 April 2023	Lepe, ASNUCI car park
Moussa	9 May 2023	Lepe, *chabolas*
Seydou	11 May 2023	Lepe, car journey to Huelva