



The agribusiness industry in northwestern Mexico and the health of female farmworkers: a proposal for study

El campo de la agroindustria en el noroeste de México y la salud de sus jornaleras: una propuesta de estudio

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ABSTRACT This article seeks to outline the structure of the export-oriented agribusiness industry in northwestern Mexico, so as to analyze the conditions of vulnerability of female farmworkers in terms of their access to health services and the medical attention they receive. Using a qualitative approach, focus groups and interviews were carried out with farmworkers and subject experts pertaining to academia and civil society. Their narratives were then analyzed using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *field*. The primary results demonstrate a lack of access to health services and social security, and describe the main actors and their positions with respect to the vulnerability of this population.

KEY WORDS Agriculture; Pregnancy; Social Security; Medical Sociology; Women's Rights; Rural Workers; Mexico.

RESUMEN El artículo busca delinear cómo se conforma el campo de la agroindustria de exportación en el noroeste de México, con el propósito de analizar las condiciones de vulnerabilidad de las jornaleras agrícolas, respecto al acceso a los servicios de salud y a la atención médica que reciben. Desde un enfoque cualitativo, se realizaron grupos focales con las jornaleras y entrevistas con expertos en el tema, tanto de la academia como del ámbito de la sociedad civil, cuyos relatos se analizan a partir del concepto de *campo* de Pierre Bourdieu. Los resultados muestran la falta de acceso a los servicios de salud y a la seguridad social, y describen a los principales agentes y sus posicionamientos frente a la vulnerabilidad de esta población.

PALABRAS CLAVES Agricultura; Embarazo; Seguridad Social; Derechos de la Mujer; Sociología Médica; Trabajadores Rurales; México.

INTRODUCTION

An object of research, however partial or fragmented, can only be defined and constructed in terms of a theoretical problematic that makes it possible to conduct a systematic questioning of all the aspects of reality that are brought into relationship by the question that is put to them.

Bourdieu, Chamboredon y Passeron^(1 p.54)

In northwestern Mexico, the agribusiness industry is a million-dollar business activity in the region comprising the States of Sonora, Sinaloa and Baja California. It is worth noting that this region also includes the U.S. border. In 2009, 88% of the grapes destined for export were produced here⁽²⁾, and just the intensive tomato production accounts for 20% of the wages^[a] in Mexico⁽³⁾. Due to its dynamic economic activity, the region is also a pole of attraction for workers throughout the country, especially those from the States of Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas and Veracruz. Many of the migrants settle in the areas located near the agriculture companies^[b] where they work. Living and working conditions may be precarious, thus affecting their health, though differentially in men and women. This situation has worsened due to problems in the access to health services and the violation of the right to social security and of a number of rules regulating this activity.

This work aims to outline the structure of the agribusiness field in northwestern Mexico, highlighting the conditions of vulnerability of female farmworkers, particularly those related to the access to health services and the medical attention they receive. We are interested in addressing the issue on the basis of the concept of *field* proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. By problematizing this concept, we question the rationale that explains and transforms the relationships among the agents involved in the field of the agribusiness industry and the existence of constants, regularities or correlations among facts, phenomena and processes: who the agents are, the relationships and networks among them, what those

relationships and networks are like, the social interaction – both individual and collective – and the capitals and powers at stake, within a framework and a sociohistorical moment that particularly and specifically shapes them.

We start from the premise that the *field*, which is essentially relational, is made up of agents, capital, powers and *habitus*, and therefore, we here outline the network of relationships that constitute the agribusiness industry, particularly focusing on the medical attention received by female farm workers as an indispensable asset for the operation of the field. The relational aspect of the field implies links and intersections with other spaces that may be analyzed as other fields in themselves on the basis of their own rationale, such as the field of social security in Mexico. However, in the case under study, we are interested in highlighting them as agents that participate, compete and make alliances in pursuit of the capitals at stake.

The main agents operating in the social field of the agribusiness industry are the employers (and the chain of actors at their service, such as the contractors and *enganchadores*^[c]) and the farmworkers, particularly female day laborers that are placed in one of the most vulnerable positions in this struggle for obtaining benefits. Other agents involved are the State, operating through health institutions, particularly, the *Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social* (IMSS) [Mexican Social Security Institute] and the Mexican Secretariat of Health, as well as the bodies that regulate the economic activity and labor relations, such as the Labor Secretariat, and other entities in charge of providing legal protection (public ministries). Furthermore, other agents, such as trade unions and community-based organizations, are identified.

General Background

Analyzing the field of the agribusiness industry and the access to medical attention of female farm workers implies describing the precarious situation affecting the population of agricultural day laborers, which has been

widely documented in the last years^{(3),(4),(5)}; however, only a few works give an account of health-disease-care processes in poles of attraction such as northwestern Mexico^{(6),(7)}.

Barrón and Rello⁽³⁾ reported that temporary migration in Sinaloa generates important employment opportunities for the survival of migrant farmworkers, and concluded that migration is fundamental for the tomato agribusiness industry, although it reproduces the poverty patterns of its workers and their places of origin. The authors documented that the labor force for the agribusiness industry comes from poverty-stricken regions.

There are periods when the companies require a high concentration of day laborers, mainly belonging to the migrant population, which is mostly indigenous and from the State of Guerrero, but also from Oaxaca, Chiapas and Veracruz⁽⁸⁾. Hundreds of workers are housed on the company premises, in spaces that are intended for production rather than for daily coexistence, and over periods that can last weeks or may extend up to ten months in a year⁽⁹⁾.

The main agents of the export-oriented agribusiness industry in Mexico are the employers and the agricultural workers; both agents position themselves at opposite ends of the scale of power, the day laborers being the most vulnerable. Most of them settle in the region, while others, including men, women and families, are in constant movement.

The National Day Labor Survey [*Encuesta Nacional de Jornaleros*]⁽⁸⁾ estimated that in Mexico in 2008, there were 2,040,414 families involved in agricultural day labor (about 9 million people), 21.3% of whom were migrants; 81% were men and 19% were women and most of them were aged 16 to 39 years (66%). An important factor leading to this migration has been the long history of violence undergone by many of these communities, and it is worth noting here that female farmworkers have not been spared from this violence in their destinations, where they have experienced gender discrimination^[d], sexual harassment and a double work load, a problem that has been previously documented^{(10),(11)}.

Since 1995, authors such as Sara Lara⁽¹²⁾ have reported the feminization processes within the internal migration towards work in the agribusiness industry of this region, and have commented on the poor living conditions in the workplace. The author described the companies as having drinking water availability in rare exceptions, emphasizing the higher vulnerability observed in female day laborers compared to that of men.

The employers are owners or lessees of vast extensions of land, they belong to the upper social class and often reside in the cities near the agricultural communities, such as Hermosillo (state of Sonora) or Culiacán (state of Sinaloa). Their social networks allow them to connect with other regional, national or international business, commercial or political sectors. They aim to maintain their position in the international markets and to sell their products on a large scale to retailers such as Walmart or Costco. Company owners hire agricultural engineers for the management of technology in the cultivation processes, as well as other reliable staff to handle the production and daily social organization, such as *mayordomos* [supervisors in charge of the field, and of controlling hired workers], *cuadrilleros* [in charge of hiring and supervising work groups or *cuadrillas* for performing certain tasks], supervisors for the meal room, the stores, the packaging area and the living facilities. Their tasks are directly related to the company and their responsibilities represent a position of power over the day laborers as well as of subordination to the owners. They are generally hired through a formal recruiting process and have access to social security through the IMSS. Other actors are the *enganchadores* or contractors, who hire day laborers for the agricultural fields under different recruitment modalities.

The large companies have specialized departments to establish connections with the certification companies that check the safety of the export products, a mandatory requirement that has to be complied with; furthermore, there is a growing number of companies that have ties with the entities in charge of certifying

their investment in corporate social responsibility⁽¹³⁾. Particularly, access to European markets strongly depends on these certifications⁽¹⁴⁾ and, according to Rojas Rangel, just a small number of companies offering limited benefits to their workers “had been forced to invest in adequate infrastructure and the provision of some social services, mainly regarding education and health promotion, to their day laborers and their families, some actions which ultimately guarantee an increase in their profitability”^(4 p.35).

Agricultural migrants organize themselves in different ways. Velasco⁽¹⁵⁾ reports that in Southern Baja California, in the late eighties, social mobilization efforts sought to demand better wages and working conditions; later, in the nineties, their aim was to demand proper housing, and recently^[e], social security and the right of women to a life without violence. The most recent social movements in Baja California give an account of the extreme conditions of labor exploitation undergone by day laborers, which have been denounced as human rights violations. Although strong trade union control has been evidenced, the international press has reported the impact of migration on the strengthening of social networks and on the awareness developed among some social organizations such as that between the San Quintín and Florida movements⁽¹⁶⁾.

The official agricultural trade unions representing the majority of day laborers are other agents playing a role in the agribusiness industry field. In the present work, we acknowledge them as partners of the employers and the State in the political control and management of their members, although it is worth noting that we did not work with the leaders of these organizations.

Other agents of the field are the contractors that hire workers for the large companies and assume labor obligations, and the truck drivers that play an important role in the mobilization of workers.

The State is a central participant involved, acting as a regulating and normative apparatus of the agricultural economic activity and a guarantor of the social rights of

the most vulnerable sectors of the population, through different bodies, such as health care organizations (IMSS and the Secretariat of Health^[f]) and the Labor Secretariat that has direct responsibility in the regulation of the labor relations between employers and workers. It is worth mentioning here that there is a very close relationship between agricultural farm owners and public sector management. These agricultural farm owners are sometimes appointed as public officers, or public officers become owners of agricultural companies, thus building alliances between political and economic actors, mutually reinforcing themselves. It is difficult to clearly delineate the boundaries among all the forces that establish alliances, confront with one other or compete; most of the organizations have their own objectives and position themselves at different levels of competition or interdependence.

All the agents described here share a broad framework: the national or the international market, where the products are sold and the profit-making goal is ultimately accomplished. Furthermore, it is within this framework where other power relationships are objectified and employers become co-participants also responsible for their reproduction, maintenance and transformation.

In the following sections we will proceed to outline, by way of illustration, some relationships existing among the positions of power within the field of the agribusiness industry, especially focusing on how the provision of medical attention, despite having the legal status of an indispensable and compulsory benefit, may become dispensable in corporate operations.

Framework of analysis: field, agents, capital and *habitus*

Briefly, the concept of field⁽¹⁷⁾ refers to the relations of power that are generated among agents or institutions in the struggle for obtaining the greatest benefits and specific forms of domination and monopoly of a type of capital. In each social field there are

specific capitals and powers at play, which make each one of them special. Each field has a set of rules and a logic that can be complied with or transgressed by each agent, from the position they occupy in the game they play in the field, where alliances are established among the different members, and at the same time, the differences and distances among the positions are kept: the dominant position seeks to obtain the greatest benefit and to impose as legitimate the principles that define them as a group.

The position of each agent depends on the type of capital and on the legitimation of the capital with which such agent plays, as well as on the *habitus*, all of them factors that are reflected in their perceptions and the implementation of practices in the social relations within the field. Thus, *habitus* and capitals vary in accordance with the socio-historical moment⁽¹⁷⁾. A part of the specificity of a field is its relative autonomy. Bourdieu argues that field, capital and *habitus* are intricately linked concepts. In this work, we intend to apply such concepts in the analysis of empirical data, focusing on the overall specificity of the agribusiness industry.

When Bourdieu defines the concept of *habitus* as the system of lasting, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, he refers to socially-constructed dispositions that predispose agents to act, feel, think and perceive in accordance with a specific context and the social position they occupy in the field. *Habitus* is not an innate capacity. A dialectical relationship is established between field and *habitus*, since, according to the author, the agents depend on the cultural conditions and dispositions of their environment, but also participate in them, contributing through their practices and capitals to their own structures of maintenance and/or change⁽¹⁷⁾.

When we acknowledge how the *habitus* of those participating in the agribusiness industry is expressed, we identify the extreme positions of the field as the most tangible ones (employers and day laborers; dominant and dominated positions). However, in the intermediate positions we find agents whose

capitals make it possible to maintain the *status quo* or to transform the field – such as, for example, State institutions. Bourdieu, theoretically, uses the concept of capital alluding to various contents, in terms of the agents that own such capital, the level at which they participate and the effects they achieve in social relations, as well as of the maintenance or change in the social structure. However, we could state that the capital, or strictly speaking, the capitals, are equated with the power/s, which are characterized by their volume, structure and history.

According to Bourdieu, there are three necessary and interconnected moments to study a social field:

First, the position of the field should be analyzed in terms of the field of power. Second, it is necessary to map out the objective structure of the relations among the positions occupied by the agents or institutions that compete for the legitimate form of specific authority of which this field is the site. And third, it is necessary to analyze the *habitus* of the agents, the different systems of dispositions that they have acquired by internalizing a determinate type of social and economic condition, and which finds in a definite trajectory within the field under consideration a more or less favorable opportunity to become actualized.^(18 p.159)

In the case under analysis here, the capital and the economic power of the employers of the export-oriented agribusiness industry are predominant over the others. We understand that agribusiness is a powerful machinery in the national and international markets that is based on the premise of profit-making, and the agents position themselves with this premise in mind, by working to obtain a share of these profits for themselves, abiding by its rules and developing practices that would enable them to move closer to their objective or to assure success in achieving it. According to Bourdieu, economic capital is the most tangible of all the different capitals, but not always the most powerful.

Economic capital and symbolic capital are so inextricably intertwined that the display of material and symbolic strength represented by prestigious affines is of such nature that is in itself likely to bring in material benefits, in a good-faith economy in which a good repute constitutes the best, if not the only, economic guarantee.^(17 p.189)

The social field of the agribusiness industry intercepts interests from other fields, and, in turn, forms part – both by competing or by complementing itself – of larger fields of power, such as the national or international markets, as well as politics and national state agencies that regulate its specific activities.

Due to the fact that the State concentrates a set of material and symbolic resources, it is in a position to regulate the functions of the different fields, whether through financial interventions (such as public subsidies to investments in the economic field or aids to different forms of tuition in the cultural field) or by way of legal interventions (such as the different rules governing the function of organizations or the behavior of individual agents).^(19 p.50)

We have previously mentioned that the frontiers among the spheres of influence of the agents that participate in the agribusiness industry are very difficult to establish, and much more when these frontiers are not described in fields anchored in empirical cases. Bourdieu argues that the frontiers of a field are established precisely where their influence, capitals and rules are no longer valid; they are dynamic as they characterize the struggle for the most powerful capitals within that field but they cannot be delimited *a priori*, but only after being elucidated in an empirical research, seeking to identify the specificities of that field as “relatively autonomous social microcosms, spaces of objective relations, which constitute the basis for a logic and a necessity that are specific and irreducible to those that regulate other fields”^(18 p.150).

However, as previously mentioned, we also identify the lack of this type of power in the weakest link of the group of day laborers, especially in women, as the most extreme position in the scale within the agribusiness industry. Despite this fact, day laborers in general and women in particular, even with their precarious positions, bring their labor force to the field, a capital that is indispensable for the operation of the field. Therefore, as a result there are a series of “intermediary management” positions – such as contractors, *enganchadores*, professionals (engineers, physicians, paramedics), officers, among others – who, although playing with the rules of the field for the benefit of those who hold the greatest share of the capital, seek ways to keep up the influx of this group of day laborers that ultimately carry out the primary work in agribusiness industry production. It is precisely here where the relations are built in complex networks of tension and complicity, in such a way that those lacking the necessary *habitus* required by the game will not be able to understand its significance.

Furthermore, within these networks there are regulations and agreements that affect the most vulnerable positions. We assume in this work the necessary distinction between women and men from a gender-based perspective^{(20),(21)}, due to the fact that, although day laborers as a whole occupy the most vulnerable positions in the field of the agribusiness industry, it is the women that face a series of conditions that deeply inflict violence upon them on a daily basis; therefore, we believe that female day laborers undergo a triple kind of subordination: for being women, for being poor and for being indigenous. This condition is a vulnerable and dominated position *per se*.

METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

The information analyzed here is part of the database used for the work entitled *Estudio nacional sobre las fuentes, orígenes*

y factores que producen y reproducen la violencia contra las mujeres⁽²²⁾ [National Study concerning the sources, origins and factors that produce and reproduce violence against women], conducted in 2012, and funded by the *Comisión Nacional para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres* (CONAVIM) [National Commission for preventing and eradicating violence against women]. Mercedes Zúñiga was the coordinator of the work team in northwestern Mexico^{(10),(23)} and one of the authors of this work was part of the research team in charge of conducting the interviews with the day laborers. For the purpose of this article, we were authorized by the project coordinator in the northwestern region to analyze the database that was developed by the team. The report delivered in 2012 is a preliminary analysis of the information concerning violence against women; regarding this aspect, several texts were written in 2014^{(11),(23),(24)}. In this document, violence is analyzed in the places where the female farmworkers reside, circulate and work⁽²³⁾.

Using a qualitative approach, 10 focus groups were carried out, including a total of 61 female farmworkers working in the colonies or towns located near the agribusiness industries. Each meeting had an average duration of two hours. The participants came from the state of Oaxaca, located in the southern part of the country, an area that is characterized by its high levels of poverty and inequality; half of the participants spoke an indigenous language apart from Spanish. Moreover, 18 interviews were conducted with subject-matter experts pertaining to the academic field, civil society or government services.

Eligibility criteria for the focus groups were the following: female farmworkers, migrants to San Quintín, Baja California, to Villa Juárez, Sinaloa or to Estación Pesqueira, Sonora (these three federative entities are located in northwestern Mexico); one year of labor experience in agribusiness companies, participation in some kind of social organization through which they could be contacted (there were no restrictions as to the

type of organization where they participated) or contact through academic communities so as to facilitate the possibility of awareness and sensitivity towards the issue in a short time.

For the organization of the focus groups, we used previous contacts with the academic experts that had worked in the areas where the interviewed women resided. Participation was voluntary and was arranged at times where the women could be available in other spaces, where privacy was especially respected. The experts checked that no representatives of the groups the women participated in were present in the interviews. In Sonora, the women were part of a government project that connected them to the health and education sectors. In Sinaloa, the participants were acquainted with a professor and were related to trade unions, and in Baja California, participants were connected to a non-governmental organization that worked in support of the farmworkers.

Eligibility criteria for the experts were the following: participation in academic communities in the three entities where the female farmworkers were contacted; publications on the subject or recognition for their work in the sphere of civil, academic and government organizations.

In the present work, the information was reorganized into subtopics that had not been analyzed in the previously published works. The accounts from the interviews and focus groups were coded under more specific topics using the NVivo 10 program, through codes and thematic nodes to analyze the group narratives and comments in the light of the questions we asked ourselves in this work.

All participants were briefed on the research objectives. They gave their consent verbally and accepted that the interviews be audio-recorded. They were informed about the confidentiality of the information and were ensured that their anonymity would be preserved. In the case of the female farmworkers, neither their names nor any other data that could link them to a specific workplace were recorded. Moreover, the names of NGO members and trade unions as well as those of their organizations would

be omitted. With regard to the academic experts, their institutions and programs were not mentioned, and when we referred to them, we did so in general terms, as academic experts or specialists.

THE AGRIBUSINESS INDUSTRY: A FIELD IN DISPUTE

The agribusiness industry in northwestern Mexico is a complex field due to the presence of economic, social and political forces in competition. We start from the premise that, in this field, economic power is the most forceful and contributes to maintaining unequal power relations and inequalities by ignoring gender-based differences and prioritizing productivity and profitability; however, the other capitals are no less significant, since they contribute in different ways and from different perspectives to the maintenance of the field. It is thus a multidimensional space where the participants assume different positions, and form themselves and are formed by others as agents, as makers of specific social relationships with regard to shared problems.

In the agribusiness industry field a dispute for the economic and political benefits takes place because of the symbolic power that they represent. So far, we have tried to illustrate the participation of the agents that reproduce and sustain the field, referring to the first two analytical moments put forward by Bourdieu to unravel and study the field. We are now interested in focusing on the third moment.

Using the words of the female farmworkers, of the specialists on the subject-matter and of the members of the non-government organizations that work in support of this population, we will analyze a specific issue: the access to medical attention and social security of female farmworkers, particularly during pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium, as well as the payment of maternity leave.

At the end of the 1990s, the *Reglamento de la Seguridad Social para el Campo* [Social

Security Regulations for the Countryside] came into force, granting protection to farmworkers equal to that of any other worker under the mandatory Social Security scheme.

However, it has been documented⁽²⁵⁾ that the legal obligations related to the labor rights of day laborers have been a subject of dispute, on the one hand within the State, which regulates labor relationships, and on the other hand on the part of those involved in the agribusiness industry, who have implemented strategies of evasion, omission and violation on a recurring basis so as not to comply with those regulations, either by directly negotiating with the government bodies to ignore the rules altogether, or by maintaining informal hiring channels in the recruitment of these laborers.

In accordance with the diagnosis of the *Programa de Atención a Jornaleros Agrícolas* [Farmworker Health Care Program] of the Secretariat of Social Development:

The main obstacles that farmworkers face in accessing the social security services related to their work, are job instability due to their temporary employment and the *informal hiring system* that prevails in this sector. Given these conditions, this type of services only benefits some of the workers in medium- or large-sized agriculture companies, leaving out those workers that are hired by several employers within the same week, those who are subcontracted by *coyotes* [contractors] or those working for small producers due to the fact that, among other factors, the process of assignment of a social security number is long.^(26 p.33) (Italics added)

Furthermore, it should be noted that the majority of the population of seasonal farmworkers belong to indigenous communities and often lack the documents required by the institute for their affiliation.

The *Programa de Atención a Jornaleros Agrícolas*⁽²⁷⁾ reports that 40% of farmworkers have no access to health care services whereas 83% of them have no access to social security.

This has been a demand of farmworkers and civil organizations over the last decades, leading to significant mobilization in the State of Baja California (northern Mexico). The amendment of the Social Security Law established the access of farmworkers to the “mandatory social security scheme” starting in 1995, covering the following situations: I) labor risks; II) diseases and maternity; III) disability and loss of life; IV) retirement, dismissal at an advanced age and old age; and V) child daycare and social service benefits. Before this amendment, farmworkers only had limited access to health care⁽²⁸⁾.

This law provides minimum periods for coverage access. Female farmworkers should have paid to the IMSS 30 weeks of contributions in the last twelve months to be granted the maternity leave benefit and to receive a subsidy, meaning that they should have worked under an employment contract. However, in the event of disease it is required to have contributed six weeks in the last four months to receive care.

Female farmworkers and their health: both indispensable and expendable

Gisela Espinoza Damián, in collaboration with Ana Carmen Luna, documented the way in which female farmworkers share the same labor injustices as male farmworkers; however they also experience gender-based social inequalities, such as not receiving medical healthcare coverage in major life events such as pregnancy and childbirth⁽²⁹⁾.

Despite not having economic capital, female farmworkers constitute an important asset within the structure of the agribusiness industry field due to the multiple tasks that they perform, which represent human capital for the care, support and reproduction of the family group. It is at this point when they become indispensable. At the same time, they are the most vulnerable agents and seem to be expendable, as reflected in the narrative of one of them, which we recovered from our research work:

As a woman farmworker, you get up in the morning, prepare lunch for everybody, go to work and after a long day's work you keep on working because you have to wash the clothes, fix dinner; that is, you don't have time to listen to the radio or to read the paper. (Female farmworker and NGO promoter, San Quintín)

In spite of their contribution to the field through the different tasks that they perform, this situation is sustained on the basis of the conformation of a subordinate *habitus* in which the place they occupy at the bottom of the ladder of the hegemonic powers of the field is taken for granted. This dimension gives to the subjects a perspective of the world and of their possible expectations, which they accept as *natural* for their specific group⁽¹⁷⁾. As part of their *habitus*, they identify the things that they will be unable to achieve in the field where they participate, due to the place and the characteristics of the positions they occupy there. The construction of those expectations is the result of the incorporation of social structures, in which the relationships of power and strength are considered natural by those holding the economic and political power, a consequence of the appropriation of the objective structures through which the subject positions him or herself and others. This perception is confirmed by the context and the material conditions under which the individuals develop. In Bourdieu's words:

*...social games are forgotten just because they are games and the *illusio* is the enchanted relation to a game that is the product of a relation of ontological complicity between mental structures and the objective structures of the social space.^(19 p.141) (Italics in original)*

From a gender-based perspective, sex discrimination should be included, which emphasizes and adds to the naturalization of this situation. In this regard, Bourdieu argues:

The particular force of the masculine sociodicy derives from the fact that

it brings together two operations: *it legitimates a relation of domination by embedding it in a biological nature, which is in itself a naturalized social construction.*^(21 p.37) (Italics in original)

In this sense, we highlight the triple subordination of female farmworkers: for being women, for being poor and in many cases for being indigenous.

A comment that was repeated in almost all the interviews was that both male and female day laborers are not affiliated to the IMSS, although it is mandatory by law. One of the interviewees commented:

Here, in the valley of Culiacán, there isn't a Social Security health care center... [although] many workers are not affiliated. We could say that almost nobody is affiliated... (Male academic expert, Sinaloa)

Rivera notes that the medical services of the IMSS that are offered near the workplaces are reduced if the target population is not affiliated⁽⁷⁾. Temporary employment, which engages most of the day laborers, is not covered by social security, a situation that has remained unchanged with the support of many agents and entities of the field. The organizations that work in defense of the basic labor rights of the farmworkers, and particularly of women, implement strategies to approach those entities, but from a position of scant recognition and strength. This is how a female interviewee described the situation:

We also had some problems with the Secretariat of Labor. They were asked to participate in a discussion forum two years ago... we always ask them, sometimes they don't show up. On that occasion they were invited once, then they were invited again for another activity that we had organized, [but] again they did not show up; this is worrying because they are consultants and supports for the female day laborers and their role is to participate, to guide

and speak, to explain; sometimes they don't do it. Now, two years later, our organization has gained more recognition from the institutions, now that we are doing accompaniment, they are becoming more supportive, they give us counsel, they say "yes," both the employers or the Social Security. But when it is about the affiliation to Social Insurance or dismissals, they do not work 100%, they just don't do it. (NGO Participant, San Quintín)

Social security and medical care constitute an arena of struggle among the social actors having the greatest power in the field. The owners of agriculture companies negotiated with the Vicente Fox administration (2000-2006) the staggered payment of their debts to the IMSS and the registration of temporary workers, and once the terms expired, most of them refused to cover the costs and they negotiated again. Thus, the employers with the support of the institutions and entities in charge of the regulation, continued to violate the obligations. They deny affiliation to the IMSS, arguing that they are preserving the employment sources of thousands of male and female day laborers, and as a result, medical care and maternity leave coverage become expendable:

...when the "mayordomos" realize that you are pregnant... [they tell you] "you know that you are pregnant and you can't work, so go home, get some rest and when the child is born and you feel recovered, you get back to work," [...] the women say: "the 'mayordomo' is indeed a good person, he tells me to go home and get some rest, and I will get back to work as soon as possible." (Indigenous female day laborer, Sinaloa)

In the companies the women are told that they will be "given a rest" for a time until the baby is born and they recover. This way of addressing the termination of employment has been analyzed by Arellano⁽²⁴⁾ and we agree with her that this situation is a

disguised dismissal that is part of an attempt to normalize and position the reproductive process as an individual issue, which calls for personal care but does not confer any rights whatsoever. This situation is not only supported by the employers, the agents holding the greatest amount of capital, but also by health care and labor organizations, trade unions and the female day laborers themselves, who accept these situations and justify them as acts of good will on the part of those holding the dominant position (“*the ‘mayordomo’ is indeed a good person*”), thus, the symbolic violence proposed by Bourdieu is exercised. In the case of gender-based domination, this kind of violence “is exercised through an act of knowledge and of absence of knowledge that goes beyond –or beneath– the controls of consciousness and the will, in the darkness of the schemes of *habitus*, which in turn are generic and able to generate, that is, a product of and producers of gender”^(18 p.245). A female interviewee from an NGO explained:

... when they get pregnant while they are at work, they have no rights, when in fact they do have rights but they don't demand them or they simply don't know that they are entitled to maternity leave benefits for 42 days before and after childbirth. These are the most common problems that we face... Besides, there are no translators in the institutions... By agreement, there is a mixteca translator, in the IMSS-Oportunidades [there are] very few indigenous people working for the government. (NGO representative, Baja California)

In the focus groups of Estación Pesqueira, Sonora, there were some situations discussed in which the employers and trade unionists acted in collusion against the employees, by charging them an alleged medical attention but without them having access to the health services.

Farmworker 1: Oh, yes, in some of the fields, they are taking away one or two pesos for the trade union.

Farmworker 2: And they take away your money for the insurance, they say it goes to the insurance but it never gets registered.

Farmworker 1: They take it away, it is never registered

Farmworker 3: And the trade union turns a blind eye and nothing happens, nobody does anything about it. (Farmworkers, Sonora)

The work carried out by civil organizations may be categorized as “the work of an ant” in view of the size of the problem, since their services are limited and depend on the agency of the women who dare fight for these rights. A local activist from Southern Baja California commented:

[Farmworkers] are subject to very unfavorable conditions just because they are women and farmworkers: low wages, abusive treatment, unsafe working conditions; they don't have access to the rights set forth in the Constitution and the laws for any worker, male or female... a 10 or 12-hour work day, because they are going to be paid more if they work extra, but their rights are not respected at all; for example, there are many cases of women who have no social security, when in fact, their employers have the obligation of enrolling them in the healthcare services, so, this is a matter of injustice, also of labor injustice... which seems to be absent in the working world of these farmworkers. (Female academic expert, Sonora)

For Social Security, the indigenous women who work in the field have to exhibit a permit granted by their [employer] to get medical attention, in which it is attested that they are working in the field, that in fact “they worked that week,” so the permit is granted. But, what happens during weekends? People don't work then...so the permit cannot be granted. (NGO Member, Sinaloa)

Despite the prevailing legislation, in practice, employers have obtained concessions to exempt themselves from paying social security benefits to their male and female farmworkers, and they do so by using different strategies; the most common is by promoting, through different agreements and modalities, that those wanting to be hired should be enrolled in the *Seguro Popular* [People's Health Insurance]. This modality of social protection of the population (aimed at those people without a formal labor relationship) is a resource to lower the costs of corporate medical care and to guarantee a profit margin. The interviewees mentioned that a requirement prior to their hiring was that they be already enrolled in *Seguro Popular* or if not, they should enroll as soon as possible. They also reported that the contractors and the *enganchadores* of laborers participate in these strategies and urge the employers hiring day laborers to also comply with this requirement. A female farmworker gave this account:

Interviewer: *Do you get Social Security benefits?*

Farmworker: ... *Not in [the company]. We are covered by Seguro Popular, the only thing that we get because we have our own insurance [Seguro Popular] and we need it to get the job, to be hired and to be able to work...if you don't have it, they don't hire you and then you have no Social Security...we are covered by our own insurance.* (Farm worker, Sinaloa)

With this demand on the farmworkers, the companies avoid the control and sanctions that the IMSS may impose when supervising the agribusiness companies. In Sinaloa we found that farmworkers are required to be enrolled in the *Seguro Popular* to be hired. Another strategy of evasion and at the same time of compliance is that, in case of an accident, employers pay the medical care costs of male and female farmworkers to the services and hospitals of the Secretariat of Health.

The government has still a long way to go, at the three governmental levels, as well as in the field of health; ill women that require medical assistance through the Social Security scheme or Seguro Popular, simply don't get the attention, because, [due to language problems] they are not understood when they explain their symptoms, and they have to leave without receiving any care; the same happens with their work, many times they are treated unfairly, and they are dismissed when they get pregnant. (Female academic expert, Sinaloa)

As it may be seen, the most powerful agents establish alliances, as well as situations of complicity, simulations and omission among themselves regarding the enforcement of the farmworkers' rights. The Secretariat of Health, the body in charge of protecting the farmworkers' interests, is part of this situation. An expert on the subject commented the following:

...The Secretariat of Health is not doing its job either, because it is assumed that there are inspectors that have to ensure that the workers are enrolled in Social Security, that their contributions are paid, but they don't show up, so the employers don't worry, and have no interest whatsoever in enrolling their staff in Social Security. (Female academic expert, Baja California)

In San Quintín there are social organizations that get the support of some institutions and have a local radio station, whose effort in the defense of women's rights gave rise to a broader movement. One of the interviewed activists mentioned that there are no formal complaints because of the possible consequences of being fired.

...there are several institutions that support women, such as the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, the Public Ministry, to name a few, they all support women, but these women are afraid of

filing complaints, because if they do so, if they dare report what is actually happening, they are fired. So they remain silent, they just endure. (NGO Activist, Baja California)

The demands of female farmworkers in northwestern Mexico are still weak and are just emerging; however, in a way, they are reaping the benefits of the efforts of the social organization promoters that made visible the problems of violence and the rights of women and the day laborer population in general. As agents in the field of the agribusiness industry, both the NGOs and the women themselves participate in the field, on the one hand, for the need of survival and on the other hand, as part of their *illusio*: the belief that the game is indeed worth playing^(19 p.141), as long as it represents a source of resources that may help in their survival. However, within a social field, those attempting to question the rules with greater forcefulness recognize themselves as being in a position of greater vulnerability and less capital.

TO CONCLUDE

In these last paragraphs, we would like to highlight two general conclusions of this work: one that has to do with empirical data, and the other, of a conceptual and methodological nature.

On the one hand, the agribusiness industry is a powerful machine that functions under the premise of generating profits in the national and the international markets and the agents position themselves by working in such a way that they can get a share of those profits for themselves. In Mexico, the large capitals that are strengthened by the agribusiness industry negotiate the deferment of the enforcement of the social security legislation, which limits the access of women to medical care during pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium, since they lack any employment benefits. The problem of the situation of vulnerability of day laborers,

despite its recognition by all the institutions, has not been sufficiently addressed. In an official document, one of the arguments put forward for not affiliating workers to the IMSS is because they are temporary workers; a similar document provides that the affiliation process “takes longer than the time they are hired for.” Both arguments are sustained in the first place by the economic power and in a complementary manner by the political and symbolic power of agribusiness entrepreneurs, which stand as the dominant actors within the field and remain hegemonic thanks to the support of other capitals. Despite the importance of the farmworkers in sustaining the field of the agribusiness industry, their capacity to produce changes in the power relationships and in the structure of the field itself is very limited due to the weak position they occupy in terms of the hegemonic capital at stake. In spite of this fact, it is worth highlighting the struggle of male and female farmworkers of Southern Baja California during the first months of 2015, in which they demanded better working conditions, including salaries and Social Security benefits.

Furthermore, as an exercise in problematization, we have shown that the concept of *field* proposed by Bourdieu offers broad possibilities for the study of the agribusiness industry to unravel and understand the forces that operate in the field. Due to its complexity, this study requires further analysis of its multiple dimensions, which have only been outlined in the present work. One is the need for delving deeper into the identification of the different capitals at stake in the agribusiness industry. For example, we stress the need for studying the capacity of the State to promote and enforce the regulations and decide on the public and economic policies, transforming the State into a highly-valued objective within the social fabric, particularly for the dominant powers of the field. However, in view of the empirical complexity, the methodological exercise was merely outlined in this work.

In the agribusiness industry, it is true that, in numerical terms, the group of female farmworkers represents the smallest group of

workers, yet they are nonetheless essential for the operation of the field considering all the tasks that they perform. Their position of poverty and vulnerability (social and gender-based) place them in situations of violence especially related to the medical care of their reproductive health, since their rights to medical attention are not respected during pregnancy and they are not paid during the weeks before and after childbirth.

In theoretical and methodological terms, we acknowledge the scope and limitations of Bourdieu's original contribution, which he himself admitted when he claimed that concepts should not be fetishized but be put to work in the service of the comprehension of social problems, which is precisely the goal that we aim at in this work. In that regard, we must admit that when we had to confront those concepts with the complex reality and interpret it, we made decisions, and in this sense, we can also state that this theoretical framework is relevant and pertinent for the study of this problem.

The problematization of the issue here anticipates greater implications, such as defining the dimensions of the participation of all agents involved that are thus defined in

general terms, when we know for certain that there are differences in the capital that each of them contributes. Female farmworkers, as we have mentioned, constitute a minority group that occupies a subordinate position, which seems to be dispensable in the operation of the agribusiness industry field. However, a greater implication would involve the dimensions of justice and ethics, which have clearly been absent in the relationships between dominating and dominated *habitus* in the agroindustry.

We would also like to mention that, during 2015, the farmworkers organized themselves into a social movement, strongly activating their participation as agents looking for a change in the agribusiness industry field that could be beneficial and fair to them. In Bourdieu's words:

When the dominators manage to crush and annul resistance and the reactions of the dominated, when the movements go exclusively from the top down, the effects of domination are such that the struggles and constitutive dialectic of the field cease. There is history only when the agent rebels, resists and acts.^(18 p.157)

FINAL NOTES

a. "Wage" [*jornal*] refers to the daily payment to a farmworker, who known as a day laborer [*jornalero*]. In the agricultural sector this work is associated with labor instability and is related to peasants having no land of their own, who are then forced to migrate so as to get a job in large and medium-size companies, such as those engaged in agroproduct exports.

b. "Agricultural field" [*campo agrícola*] is usually known as the place where day laborers cultivate, work and live. However, in order to avoid confusion with respect to the concept of "field," which is central to our analysis, we will refer to this space as "agribusiness industry" or "agriculture company" instead of as "agricultural field."

c. "Enganchadores" is a term used to refer to the people who recruit farmworkers in their communities of origin

or in their migratory trajectories to work in agribusiness companies. They can be the same people who make arrangements with the company owners, as contractors, employees or intermediaries from the places of origin. Their work consists of locating and recruiting ["*enganchar*"] workers throughout the country and taking them to the workplaces.

d. One of the demands of the recent social movement in Southern Baja California is to draw the State's attention to the serious problem of gender-based violence.

e. As a result of the conflict of the last two years in the San Quintín Valley in Southern Baja California, the Alliance of Organizations [*Alianza de Organizaciones*] was launched as an independent trade union, which positioned itself in opposition to the official trade union represented by the Confederation of Mexican Laborers (CTM) [*Confederación de Trabajadores de México*], the

Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants (CROC) [*Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos*] and the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM) [*Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana*].

f. In Mexico, the Secretariat of Health is the regulatory body of public health institutions and cares for the population that has no right to social security through their employment. The IMSS is responsible for the social security of workers in the private sector, including day laborers in the agricultural sector.

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