

“Operation Espasmo”: Structural Homelessness and Criminal Labour Exploitation in the Rioja Wine Harvest

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1. INTRODUCTION & AIM

Seasonal migrant labour sustains much of Southern European agriculture, yet harvest campaigns often depend on severe housing exclusion.

In DOCa Rioja (Spain), the 2024 grape harvest exposed the intersection of homelessness, irregular status and criminal labour exploitation

AIM:

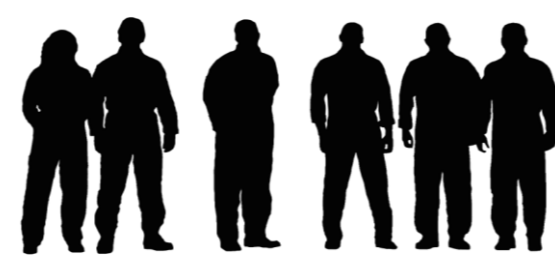
To analyze "Operation Espasmo" (Villamediana de Iregua, October 2024) to examine how coercive accommodation arrangements can enable exploitation in seasonal labour markets.



3. RESULTS

THE OPERATION

Villamediana de Iregua,
October 2024



60

Male workers identified



At least 15 in an irregular administrative situation

ACCOMMODATION AS A CONTROL DEVICE



Illegally occupied property lacking basic habitability conditions



They paid between 120-140€ per month for the space for the mattress.

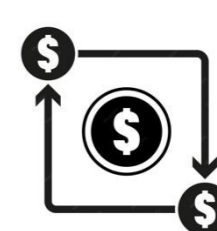


Additional charges (e.g., transport to vineyards)

LABOUR EXPLOITATION PATTERNS



Long working days during harvest



Wage deductions by intermediaries



Intimidation and threats

Severe Violence Reported:

Assault and running over of a worker who resisted a pay cut.

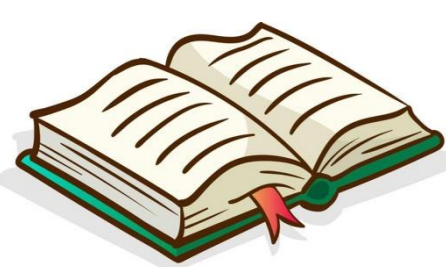
2. METHOD



Documentary analysis of publicly available sources



Three informal first-hand testimonies from Villamediana residents



The analysis is framed by:
-FEANTSA/ETHOS typology of housing exclusion
-Loic Wacquant's account of the punitive management of poverty

Focus: how legal vulnerability and residential insecurity increase dependence and reduce effective access to protection mechanisms.

HOUSING EXCLUSION (ETHOS TYPOLOGY)



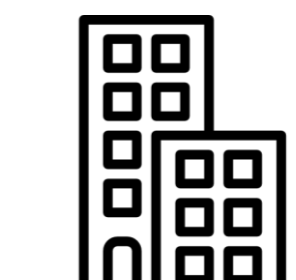
1
ROOFLESS
Living rough



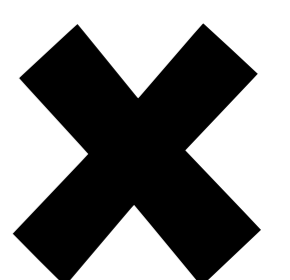
2
HOUSELESS
Emergency accommodation, shelters



3
INSECURE
Temporary, precarious housing



4
INADEQUATE
Substandard housing



5
INAPPROPRIATE
Not suitable for households (e.g., overcrowded)

The Villamediana case spans the INSECURE, INADEQUATE, and INAPPROPRIATE levels of the ETHOS typology, creating a coercive environment where exploitation thrives.

4. CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE WORK

Housing exclusion structurally enables labor exploitation by maximizing employer control over vulnerable workers. To counter this, future research must expand qualitative fieldwork to map worker trajectories alongside civil society, while institutional lines must move from reactive policing to active labor inspections and safe public housing alternatives.

5. REFERENCES

FEANTSA. (2017). ETHOS Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion.
Wacquant, L. (2009). Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity.