

Ethnic niching in a segmented labour market: Evidence from Spain*

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Abstract

Using the Spanish National Immigrant Survey (NIS-2007) we identify the ethnic niches where workers from five main immigrant communities concentrate. We then implement logit models in order to assess how structural factors and human and social capital variables affect the odds of working in these niches. We observe that the strong segmentation of the Spanish labour market strongly favours the concentration of immigrants in certain occupational niches. Nevertheless, variables related to human and social capital still play a significant role in the placement of immigrant workers in different niches, all of which are not equally attractive.

Keywords: ethnic niches, Spain, migration, segmentation, human capital, social capital.

Introduction

It is well known that immigrant workers are unevenly distributed in the labour market (Model, 1997). The participation of immigrants in certain occupations sometimes becomes markedly asymmetrical, confirming the existence of ethnic niches. Model (1993) proposes defining an ethnic niche as an occupational activity or category in which the average participation of a particular group is greater than 50%. It has also been confirmed that patterns of ethnic concentration vary in relation to economic, social and institutional conditions of each country or region (Hudson, 2003). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that men and women concentrate at different levels and in different sectors of the labour market (Wright and Ellis, 2000). In this sense, ethnic niching reproduces and reinforces inequalities in occupational and sectorial distribution between men and women, generating a double segregation: by ethnicity and gender (Bradley and Healy, 2008; Schrover et al., 2007).

The Spanish labour market has ethnic concentrations in specific areas of economic activity and certain occupations within each area. As occurs in other receiving countries, the majority of immigrant workers in Spain are concentrated in the lower rungs of the occupational ladder, with fewer opportunities to improve their positions or salaries, which also generates significant inequality between the male and female immigrant population (Cachón, 2009; Del Río and Alonso-Villar, 2010; Vidal et al., 2009).

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Despite the fact that migration to Spain is a relatively recent phenomenon, interest in the processes of concentration and segmentation among immigrants in the country has increased considerably over the past few years (Alcobendas and Rodríguez-Planas, 2009; Bernardi et al., 2011; Domingo et al., 2007; Simón et al., 2008). However, there are still aspects of this issue that require examination. Along these lines, our work sets two objectives: 1) to better understand the patterns of ethnic concentration in Spain by identifying the labour niches occupied by the most important immigrant groups; 2) to identify factors that determine the concentration in ethnic niches in a heavily segmented labour market. As observed in a number of studies (Ferrera, 1996; Kurz et al., 2008), the Spanish labour market is fragmented between the primary and secondary sectors, dividing the working population between “insiders”, well protected by employment legislation, and “outsiders” who have unstable contracts in positions with little perspectives for promotion. This situation should strongly favour the concentration of immigrants in particularly undesirable occupations regardless of their individual characteristics. Our aim is, therefore, to evaluate the extent to which other factors such as human and social capital still play a relevant role in the placement of immigrant labour in different occupations within this structural context.

Theoretical approaches and hypothesis

Given the variety of patterns in which ethnic concentration occurs, different explanations for the phenomenon have been considered, the most interesting of which are based on market segmentation, human capital and social capital. According to the segmentation theory, the labour market is divided in at least two segments which differ greatly in organisation of labour, work conditions and the mechanisms of assigning positions and occupational mobility. The primary market offers stable jobs, relatively high salaries, acceptable work conditions and the possibility of promotion. In contrast, the secondary sector is characterised by the intensive use of low wage workers, unstable contracts and limited opportunities for promotion (Piore, 1979). Immigrants are relegated to the secondary sector, regardless of education or prior work experience, leading to concentration in occupations such as domestic work, construction and agriculture (Pedace, 2006). The segmentation approach also maintains that ethnic segregation in labour markets intensifies during periods of strong economic growth, when native workers are more likely to find higher paid and more prestigious jobs, leaving positions in the secondary market free (McGovern, 2007). Some research based on this approach emphasise the government’s role in segmenting foreign workers; in order to satisfy the demand of a certain business sector, government regulations and practices create a “discriminatory institutional framework” (for example, by restricting access to work and residence permits) which makes it more difficult for immigrants to access work outside of the secondary sector (Cachón, 2009).

The human capital theory suggests that niching is an indirect result of educational and other human capital deficiencies. Poor proficiency in the native language, less education and limited transferability of skills are the main disadvantages. From this point of view, ethnic niches simply reflect the adjustment between supply and demand in the receiving labour market. Therefore, ethnic concentration in certain sectors should suggest that a particular ethnic group possesses a comparative advantage (or disadvantage), in terms of skills or knowledge, in satisfying the requirements of jobs in that sector (Hudson, 2002).

The social capital approach offers a complementary explanation of ethnic niching. Social capital refers to access to different kinds of resources (information, economic aid, psychological support) through various types of social relationships (Portes, 1998). Such resources are essential for integration into the receiving country's economy, especially when immigrants do not speak the language or have human capital that is limited or of no use in the receiving country's labour market (Sanders et al., 2002). Personal social networks are a crucial factor in ethnic niching in certain sectors of the labour market, because they are an important source of information on employment opportunities. The resources available to immigrants emerge from networks of family and friends as well as participation in less immediate social structures, including ethnic associations, religious groups, and other such organisations (Massey et al., 1987). In this context, we can observe that less heterogeneous social relations based on a smaller number of contacts increase the probability of entering ethnic niches (Ooka and Wellman, 2003).

We developed the following working hypotheses based on the three theoretical approaches that have just been summarised:

(1) The market segmentation theory suggests that the dynamics inherent in this process tend to lead to ethnic niching among immigrants regardless of their individual attributes. In other words, segmentation reduces the importance of human and social capital. In this context, the two circumstances that decisively impact the risk of ethnic niching in Spain are irregular status and arriving during an economic boom.

(2) According to the premises of the human capital approach, we expect immigrants who received little education in origin, have not studied in Spain and have a poor understanding of Spanish to be at higher risk of concentrating in less prestigious labour niches with lower salaries.

(3) Finally, following the social capital approach, we expect immigrants who had the support of relatives and friends when they arrived in Spain to be less likely to work in the less desirable niches. Moreover, immigrants with broader social resources (for example, social networks that are more ethnically and socially heterogeneous) should also be less exposed to concentration in occupational niches with worse working conditions.

Data and methods

The analyses presented in this study are based on the National Immigrant Survey of Spain (NIS-2007) and, to a lesser degree, the Economically Active Population Survey (1st trimester of 2007)¹. Although NIS-2007 surveyed 15,465 people, our sample was limited to 6,552 cases, as we only included people who were employed at the time of the survey, were between 20 and 65 years old and had arrived to Spain after 1989.

The main analytical tool used to test the working hypotheses was a multinomial logit regression. The dependent variable was established from occupational categories included in the NIS-2007 database. An odds ratio was applied to establish the level of concentration in each of the 19 categories. This measure was applied because it is particularly useful in comparative analyses between groups with different characteristics and sizes (Wang and Pandit, 2007). Its efficiency has been confirmed in previous research, particularly in North America (Rosenfeld and Tienda, 1999; Wilson, 1999). The odds ratio for ethnic concentration was obtained by calculating the coefficient between the probability that a member of the immigrant group was working in a certain occupational category and the same probability for employed people who did not belong to the group:

$$OR = (E_i / E_{1-i}) / (O_i / O_{1-i})^2$$

The value 1 indicates that an ethnic group's level of participation in an occupation is similar to the rest of the population as a whole. It is necessary to establish the value at which the over-representation of an immigrant group in a certain job denotes an ethnic niche. Following Model's aforementioned definition, 1.5 was set as the minimum odds ratio³. Additionally, in order to prevent a bias resulting from very small numbers in some of the categories, we follow the suggestion of Wang (2006) who stipulated that an ethnic niche has to have at least 50% of the average number of immigrant workers across all employment categories.

We used four categories in each model: agricultural labourers, hospitality workers and domestic workers in the model for women; and agricultural labourers, hospitality workers and construction workers in the model designed for men. In both cases the reference category was "all other occupations". We

¹ The data provided by both NIS-2007 and EAPS-2007 have been used in conjunction to calculate the ratios of labour concentration and to identify ethnic niches. In contrast, the multinomial models in this study are based exclusively on the data provided by NIS-2007.

² In the formula, the numerator is the ratio between the number of immigrants of a group in a certain occupation (E_i) and the number of immigrants of the same origin employed in other occupational categories (E_{1-i}). The denominator represents the ratio between workers belonging to other groups (natives and other immigrant groups) that are working in a certain occupational category (O_i) and workers of these origins who work in other occupations (O_{1-i}) (Wang and Pandit, 2007; Wilson, 2003).

³ This is the most commonly used value in analyses of ethnic niching (Logan et al. 2000; Wang 2004; Wilson 2003); however, in some studies the threshold at which they define an ethnic niche is set at 1.2 or 2 (Hudson, 2003).

have focused on studying the five largest groups of immigrant workers in Spain: Romanian, Moroccan, Ecuadorian, Argentinean and French⁴.

The predictors of ethnic niching derived from segmentation are legal status and the period of arrival. First of all, we assume that irregular status is a proxy indicator for “discriminatory institutional framework”. Second, we as-

Table 1: Occupational distribution of natives and immigrants (%)

	Spain		France		Romania		Morocco		Ecuador		Argentina	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Direction and management (<10 employees)	3.5	1.5	6.4	7.5	0.4	0	0.2	0.5	0	0	3.2	2.6
Business management (0-10 employees)	5.6	4.9	9.9	2.1	0.5	0.1	2.4	1.9	0.2	1	5.3	3.9
University level technicians and professionals	11	18.1	14.7	17.4	0.6	0.9	2.3	9.1	0.7	1	13.4	16
Support technicians and professionals	12.3	14.4	11.3	20.9	1	1.3	2.6	2.1	1	0.9	11.5	12.9
Administrative employees	6.2	16	6.9	14.5	0.8	3.3	1.9	8	2.1	8.2	5.1	12.4
Hospitality workers	2.6	4.5	6	5.5	2.4	13.9	4.5	16.8	5.2	11.2	12.7	13.2
Homecare workers	0.9	8.4	2.9	8.4	0.8	6.3	0.3	4.3	0.7	9.5	0.8	6.9
Shop salespersons and demonstrators	2.4	9	2.5	9.5	0.1	4.7	2.6	5.9	3.1	7.7	3.6	11.2
Self-employed skilled agricultural workers	3.4	1.4	0.9	0	1.3	0.1	3.8	0.9	0.8	0.4	0.4	0
Construction workers	17	0.5	10.2	0.7	56.7	0.5	39.9	1.1	45.4	0	15.9	0
Skilled workers – heavy industry	8	0.2	3.9	0.2	9.7	0.1	4.6	0	7.5	0	6.4	0
Skilled workers – light industry	2.6	1.9	2.5	1.9	1	2.8	2.2	3	2.8	2.7	1.4	2.6
Industrial operators, assemblers and installers	5.6	2.9	5.1	1.1	2.2	2.8	4	1.8	5.1	4.5	4	0.2
City/highway transport drivers	6.6	0.4	6	0.1	6.6	0.4	2.6	0	6.1	0	6.9	0
Domestic workers	0	3.3	0	3	0	43.1	0.1	14.4	0	26.5	0.4	12.5
Office/hotel cleaning personnel	0.6	7.4	0.4	2.2	0.6	12.4	2.9	14.6	1.8	15.4	0.4	4.2
Agricultural labourers	1.2	1.3	2.7	1.5	8.5	4.6	14.8	7.3	7.1	4.6	1.6	0.5
Industrial labourers	2.5	1.9	3.3	1.8	3.9	2.7	3.3	6.1	6.3	5.3	1.9	0.1
Others	8.2	1.9	4.4	1.5	3	0.1	5	2	3.9	1.1	4.9	0.7

Source: National Immigrant Survey (NIS-2007) and Economically Active Population Survey (1st trimester 2007)

⁴ According to the Spanish Municipal Register statistics (2010), Romanian workers account for 11% of the immigrants in Spain, Moroccan 10.2%, Ecuadorian 9.7%, Argentinian 5.3% and French 4.5%. In order to diversify our sample in terms of geographic areas of origin, we decided to exclude Columbians (who represent 7.3% of the immigrant population) and include the French (4.5%).

sume that immigrants who arrived during the economic boom in Spain (2002-2007) were more likely to work in an ethnic niche⁵ because during such periods native workers tend to take jobs in the primary sector, leaving openings in the secondary sector which are occupied by immigrants. The fundamental aspects of human capital are covered by education level and stated understanding of Spanish. Transferability of skills is measured through a variable which includes the validation of academic degrees obtained in the country of origin. To measure the impact of social capital on ethnic niching, a variable was used which includes the contacts that an immigrant had when they arrived in Spain. Another social capital indicator included in the models is participation in entities or associations open to the general public. We assume that people who participate in this kind of activity have more diverse social resources available to them, which could reduce the risk of placement in a labour niche.

Results

Table 1 shows the occupational distribution of the working population by country of origin and sex. A comparison between Spanish nationals and the other 5 nationalities under study indicates that the distributions of the French and the Argentinians are the most similar to that of the Spanish population. On the other hand, Romanians, Ecuadorians and Moroccans are heavily concentrated in construction (men) and domestic and cleaning services (women). A more precise indicator of niche concentration is provided by Table 2, which displays the odds-ratios that each immigrant group will work in a given occupation in relation to other workers. This table allows us to determine which jobs are specific niches for each nationality. Shaded boxes indicate occupational categories that meet the criteria of an ethnic niche.—French immigrants concentrate in white collar jobs, with the only exception of hospitality services which have become an ethnic niche for French men. Argentineans tend to concentrate in hospitality services and domestic work. There are significant similarities between Ecuadorian, Moroccan and Romanian immigrants, both in the niches that they occupy and the patterns of occupational segregation by gender. The males of these groups are niched in construction, while “typically female” niches are hospitality services, domestic work and office/hotel cleaning (note that Moroccan males also specialise in this kind of activity). The only niche shared by both men and women of these three countries is unskilled agricultural labour.

⁵ Here it must be pointed out that the period of greatest economic prosperity is also the most recent (in relation to the date of the NIS-2007) which could suggest that ethnic niching is conditioned not so much by the economic climate but rather by the fact that the last immigrants to arrive suffered a greater risk of ending up in certain occupations. Regardless, this effect is controlled by the variable which includes the question: “Is this your first job in Spain?” (See Stanek and Veira, 2009). Models contain also other control variables, namely: work experience prior to migration and cohabitation.

Table 2: Ethnic niches in occupational categories in relation to the origin and gender of immigrants (odds ratios)*

	France		Romania		Morocco		Ecuador		Argentina	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Direction and management (<10 employees)	2.03	5.59	0.12	0	0.06	0.32	0	0	0.98	1.8
Business management (0-10 employees)	1.94	0.47	0.09	0.02	0.44	0.4	0.04	0.22	0.99	0.86
University level technicians and professionals	1.5	1.07	0.05	0.05	0.2	0.51	0.06	0.05	1.35	0.96
Support technicians and professionals	1.01	1.76	0.07	0.09	0.2	0.14	0.08	0.06	1.02	0.98
Administrative employees	1.24	0.98	0.13	0.19	0.32	0.5	0.35	0.51	0.9	0.82
Hospitality workers	1.89	0.9	0.72	2.57	1.4	3.17	1.61	1.99	4.39	2.39
Homecare workers	3.24	1	0.88	0.73	0.31	0.48	0.71	1.14	0.84	0.8
Shop salespersons and demonstrators	0.99	1.11	0.05	0.51	1.02	0.66	1.25	0.87	1.47	1.33
Self-employed skilled agricultural workers	0.26	0	0.41	0.1	1.22	0.77	0.25	0.32	0.13	0
Construction workers	0.47	1.41	5.68	0.98	2.85	2.43	3.55	0	0.79	0
Skilled workers – heavy industry	0.49	0.8	1.32	0.34	0.58	0.19	0.99	0	0.83	0
Skilled workers – light industry	0.99	0.97	0.36	1.44	0.87	1.33	1.09	1.36	0.55	1.32
Industrial operators, assemblers and installers	0.96	0.41	0.39	1.04	0.75	0.65	0.97	1.45	0.75	0.09
City/highway transport drivers	0.97	0.31	1.07	1.03	0.4	0.14	0.98	0	1.12	0
Domestic workers	0	0.44	0	12.14	1.98	2.43	0	5.49	8.94	2.06
Office/hotel cleaning personnel	0.57	0.27	0.78	1.71	4.37	2.06	2.55	2.22	0.6	0.52
Agricultural labourers	1.36	1.09	4.9	3.54	10.07	5.77	3.95	3.59	0.78	0.33
Industrial labourers	1.24	0.93	1.46	1.36	1.22	3.27	2.46	2.88	0.68	0.05
Others	0.55	0.81	0.36	0.04	0.62	1.07	0.49	0.6	0.61	0.38

* Shaded boxes indicate occupational categories in which the odds ratio is 1.5 or greater and whose size is at least 50% of the average size of all occupational categories in which the specific immigrant group is employed. Source: National Immigrant Survey (NIS-2007) and Economically Active Population Survey (1st trimester 2007)

The results of the multinomial analyses displayed in Tables 3 and 4 show how independent variables affect the odds of working in each of the ethnic niches compared to the odds of working in a non-niche occupation. Table 3 summarises the results for men in occupations related to hospitality services, unskilled agricultural labour and construction. Table 4 summarises the results for women and indicates the impact of different factors on the odds that they work in hospitality services, unskilled agricultural labour or domestic service.

Our analysis has revealed evidence of the importance of structural factors, which we relate to the segmentation of the labour market. For men, arriving in Spain during periods of greater economic growth favours placement in all niches studied, although in the case of women it only favours placement in domestic work. Furthermore, irregular status increases the odds of men working in construction or agriculture and women in domestic work. It is worth noting that the three sectors mentioned are highly involved in the underground economy, which reaffirms the connection between government regulations and segregation in the labour market. In other words, results confirm that the discriminatory legal framework regulating the arrival of immigrant workers is the most important mechanism (though not the only one) that channels immigrants into occupations in segments of the Spanish economy with high demand for labour that native workers are unable or unwilling to satisfy.

Table 3: Results of multinomial analyses for male immigrants (log odds ratios)

	Cases	%	Hospitality		Agriculture	Domestic	
Country of origin							
France	66	2.0	0.412		0.419	-1.779	**
Romania	433	13.1	-1.312	**	1.130	**	0.855 **
Morocco	397	12.0	-0.556	+	1.187	**	0.282 +
Argentina	203	6.1	0.152		-1.814	+	-0.658 **
Ecuador	433	13.1	-0.601	+	1.289	**	0.654 **
All other immigrants (ref. cat.)	1779	53.7					
Live with spouse or partner?							
Yes	2126	64.2	-0.594	**	-0.894	**	-0.152
No (ref. cat.)	1185	35.8					
Occupation in origin							
Hospitality	179	5.4	2.261	**	-0.895		0.173
Agriculture	191	5.8	-1.093		1.630	**	0.426 *
Construction	578	17.5	-0.402		0.470	*	1.465 **
Other occupation (ref. cat.)	2363	71.4					
First job in Spain? - No (ref. cat.)			2227		67.3		
Yes	1084	32.7	-0.512	**	0.079		-0.284 **
Education - Upper secondary (ref. cat.)			1304		39.4		
None	371	11.2	0.035		0.841	**	0.629 **
Primary	528	15.9	0.138		0.929	**	0.424 **
Lower secondary	506	15.3	-0.075		0.327		0.158
University	602	18.2	-0.817	**	-1.056	**	-0.678 **

Table 3: continued...

Studied in Spain or validated degrees?							
Yes	305	9.2	-0.069		-0.416	-0.775	**
No (ref. cat.)	3006	90.8					
Fluent in Spanish?							
Yes	2721	82.2	0.200		-0.596	**	-0.142
No (ref. cat.)	590	17.8					
Contacts upon arrival in Spain?							
Yes	2583	78.0	0.256		-0.253	0.177	+
No (ref. cat.)	728	22.0					
Participate in entities open to the general public?							
Yes	428	12.9	-0.289		-0.760	*	-0.423 *
No (ref. cat.)	2883	87.1					
Legal status in Spain							
Legal resident	2960	89.4	-0.236		-1.495	**	-0.626 **
Irregular (ref. cat.)	351	10.6					
Period of arrival in Spain							
1990-96	378	11.4	-1.022	**	-0.303		-0.732 **
1997-01	1417	42.8	-0.566	**	-0.425	*	-0.146
2002-07 (ref. cat.)	1516	45.8					
Constant			-1.225	**	-0.235	0.183	
Total cases		3311	3311		3311		
Men employed in each niche		216	239		1229		
Pseudo-R²	0.373	**Sig. At 0.01 level		*Sig. at 0.05 level		+Sig. at 0.1 level	

Despite the evidence of the heavy impact of the segmentation of the Spanish labour market on immigrant labour allocation, our results also confirm the hypotheses based on human capital. Both men and women with less education (no education or primary school) are at greater risk of working as agricultural labourers, construction workers or domestic workers. However, considering that these three niches are based on physical labour and tasks that do not require a great deal of education, this could simply indicate that the average education level of the workers is adjusted to the demand for unskilled labour. Similarly, the fact that the ability to speak Spanish has an influence on female immigrants working in domestic service could be interpreted as an adaptation to a specific demand of this niche, as such work requires continual contact with members of the household (Martínez, 2004).

The hypotheses related to the role of social capital have been partially confirmed. Results show that having contacts is not highly significant in finding work either in or out of ethnic niches. Nevertheless, having contacts upon arrival in Spain does help both genders avoid agricultural labour (the least attractive niche) and favours the placement of men in construction and women

in domestic work. In addition, our assumption that access to more heterogeneous contacts reduces the risk of ethnic niching has also been confirmed.

Table 4: Results of multinomial analyses for female immigrants (log odds ratios)

	Cases	%	Hospitality		Agriculture		Domestic	
Country of origin								
France	53	1.8	-1.452	*	<i>a</i>		-2.380	*
Romania	379	12.9	0.224		0.920	*	0.513	**
Morocco	73	2.5	0.093		1.658	**	-0.351	
Argentina	156	5.3	0.016		<i>a</i>		-0.773	**
Ecuador	403	13.7	-0.227		1.017	**	0.089	
All other immigrants (ref. cat.)	1873	63.8						
Live with spouse or partner?								
Yes	1739	59.2	-0.415	**	0.474		-0.688	**
No (ref. cat.)	1198	40.8						
Occupation in origin								
Hospitality	234	8.0	0.925	**	0.587		0.276	
Agriculture	47	1.6	0.844	+	1.972	**	0.647	+
Construction	131	4.5	0.269		1.119	*	0.888	**
Other occupation (ref. cat.)	2525	86.0						
First job in Spain?								
Yes	1020	34.7	-0.275	*	-0.054		0.517	**
No (ref. cat.)	1917	65.3						
Education								
None	187	6.4	0.158		0.917	+	0.440	*
Primary	368	12.5	0.086		1.579	**	0.421	**
Lower secondary	394	13.4	0.320	+	1.314	**	0.215	
Upper secondary (ref. cat.)	1229	41.8						
University	759	25.8	-0.352	*	-0.296		-0.732	**
Studied in Spain or validated degrees?								
Yes	352	12.0	-0.724	**	-1.464		-0.870	**
No (ref. cat.)	2585	88.0						
Fluent in Spanish?								
Yes	2654	90.4	0.066		-0.477		0.463	**
No (ref. cat.)	283	9.6						
Contacts upon arrival in Spain?								
Yes	2473	84.2	0.157		-0.564	+	0.365	**
No (ref. cat.)	464	15.8						
Participate in entities open to the general public?								
Yes	382	13.0	-0.339	+	-1.185		-0.337	*
No (ref. cat.)	2555	87.0						

Table 4: continued...

Legal status in Spain							
Legal resident	2513	85.6	0.338	+	0.325	-0.421	**
Irregular (ref. cat.)	424	14.4					
Period of arrival in Spain							
1990-96	292	9.9	-0.342		<i>a</i>	-0.606	**
1997-01	1170	39.8	-0.139		-0.506	+	-0.381 **
2002-07 (ref. cat.)	1475	50.2					
Constant			-1.380	**	-3.624	**	-0.632 **
Total cases			2937		2937	2937	
Women employed in each niche			413		66	807	
Pseudo-R²	0.228						
<i>a</i> There are no cases of individuals in this ethnic niche							
+ <i>Sig.</i> at 0.1 level ** <i>Sig.</i> At 0.01 level * <i>Sig.</i> at 0.05 level							

The results of the analysis also reveal that the mechanisms leading to ethnic niching are different for men and women. Our analysis indicates that undocumented men with less human capital are concentrated in agriculture. In contrast, having documentation and lower secondary education does not protect women from the risk of working in this niche. However, the fact that placement in gender-exclusive niches (construction for men and domestic work for women) is linked to almost the same group of predictors (with a few specific differences) confirms that there are other segregation factors in the Spanish labour market that influence how labour is divided by gender (Balcells, 2009; Ibáñez, 2008).

Our study also reinforces the idea that ethnic niches are not equally “desirable”, revealing a hierarchy in which agricultural labour seems to be the least attractive. The results of the models show that women who have contacts and speak Spanish tend to work in domestic service and agricultural labour. Furthermore, women with proper documentation and some labour experience in Spain are more likely to work in hospitality services. Therefore, we can assume that immigrants climb the social ladder by changing occupations, improving their situation first within the hierarchy of these niches and later outside of them. However, the data only allow us to propose this as a hypothesis because the majority of the immigrants have not been in Spain for very long.

Conclusions

In Spain, the institutional framework (employment protection legislation and migratory policies) and the peculiar pattern of economic growth (based on the expansion of labour intensive economic activities) have greatly exacerbated the segmentation of the labour market by channelling large numbers of undocumented immigrants to the secondary sector as “outsiders”. Among the immigrant populations examined in Table 1, only the French, who are pro-

tected by EU legislation, and to some extent the Argentineans, are not at high risk of being channelled into less socially desirable occupations such as domestic work and agriculture. However, during the economic boom that lasted until 2008 immigrants also found employment in sectors that are not particularly undesirable to Spanish workers, primarily construction and hospitality, because demand grew beyond what native labour could supply. In other words, labour shortages in these economic activities were primarily caused by increased demand rather than natives abandoning these sectors. Therefore, variables related to human and social capital are also found to play a significant (though secondary) role in the placement of immigrant labour. Because, not all ethnic niches are equally desirable, immigrants with higher levels of human and social capital are more likely to escape from the least attractive ones (namely agriculture), either to work in a more desirable ethnic niche (construction or hospitality) or in a non-niche occupation.

Our results also confirm the great importance of the gender gap, which is detrimental to women, as they are more likely to be employed in less desirable occupations. It can be argued that the negative aspects of segmentation affect women more strongly than men because women require higher levels of human and social capital in order to escape from the less desirable occupational niches.

Finally, we would like to point out that because migratory flows to Spain are quite recent our analysis covers a relatively short period of time. We assume that as immigrants increase the length of their working life in Spain, gaining employment experience, contacts and legal rights, their ability to accumulate human and social capital will play a more important role in future employment. However, given the current crisis and stagnation of employment opportunities, this may take place rather slowly.

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