Mexican Migrant Farmworker Women Organizing
Love and Work Across Rural Canada and Mexico

by

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Abstract

This is a transnational ethnographic study focusing on Mexican women in the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP), a temporary visa arrangement that annually employs an average of 40,000 Mexican and Caribbean migrant farmworkers. Migrant women defy patriarchal norms by migrating across borders to work, assuming the role of principal breadwinners in their families, and working in a masculinized labour force. I situate their intimate practices of love, sexuality, and carework in conjunction with the roles of states, the global economy and Canadian agriculture in a practice I term transnational storytelling to complicate the one-dimensional and masculinized lens of migrant labour in the literature and logics of the SAWP. I claim that migrant women not only work in Canadian agriculture but in the management of transnational family economies involving care and emotional labour. Similarly, as migrant domestic workers, Mexican migrant women form part of the global care chain organizing themselves with their non-migrating kin for household survival.

This study is rooted in community-engaged scholarship of several years in my role as a community-labour organizer and co-founder of the collective, Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW). Additionally, I used qualitative research methods, primarily convivir, or acompañamiento of migrant workers and their families throughout rural Mexico and Canada, to understand their lives.
Fundamental to this study is the importance of activist research that assigns critical value to knowledges of not only migrant workers and their non-migrating kin but also of community organizers and community-engaged scholarship in order to collectively build social justice projects that offset *transnational casualties* experienced through this labour migration. I detail how community-labour organizing is emotional labour as well, involving heartbreak, disempowerment but also resistance. Principally, this study seeks to make visible Mexican women beyond their work in Canadian farms and transnationally in relation to their families in *transnational labour chains*. It concludes with proposals for directions in organizing and research.
Acknowledgments

With much nostalgia, I remember arriving in Canada with my young mother when I was about 5 years of age. My father had come from Chile first as a refugee seeking asylum from the violent military dictatorship that had controlled the country since 1973. We spent years apart as a family with much uncertainty and at a young age. I could not understand why my father was not by my side. In Canada my mother, father, and I had to grow together in a foreign place that constantly contradicted our sense of selves. My family has always been working class and in Canada we lived and breathed the struggles of an immigrant/refugee family. In the cockroach-ridden apartment building that was our first home in Canada, we constantly reminisced about Chile and impossibilities of Salvador Allende’s and his Popular Unity Government’s revolutionary dreams. My academic and political work has been primarily fueled by all that I have lived with my family from Chile and into these lands of the North. I am the 1.5 generation, born in Latin America but grew up in Canada. My parents’ sacrifices, uprooting themselves, going through hardships and discrimination, to provide me with a better future motivated me to look closer at opportunities they never had, principally secondary education. Yet looking back none of us thought I was going to take this route.

As a child I remember my parents driving me to York University for the first time. The buildings looked huge and overwhelming. I just quietly thought to myself that this place was not for me but for others. I went on about my life, dreaming about career options such as being a truck driver, a singer, doing nails, or even becoming a bricklayer to defy gendered work proscriptions. It was not until my high school guidance counsellor, Bill Heffernan, put the most outrageous idea in my head did I believe that I had the intellectual capacity to go to university. Thanks to Bill I started to believe in myself and took to academia all my thirst for social justice.
He was able to guide me through post-secondary school when my working-class family could not. As a result, I took a different life course than the other women in my family.

In my mother, Viviana, father, Fernando, and younger brother, Fernando Claudio, I have found strength and courage to continue on my PhD journey. They have all supported me the best ways that they knew. Georgina, my second mother, who I love the most in the world, has also inspired me to finish so she could embrace me firmly on the day of my convocation.

I am indebted to so many people. After all it takes a village! In the academic world and community, I am forever grateful to Kari Dehli who has been supportive from the first year of my PhD program at OISE. I am appreciative of her patience and the challenging questions she posed that broadened my analytical lens. She would always ask me to dig deeper to reveal more depth and textures to my analysis. Kari and her partner Harry Smaller also allowed me to stay in their home one winter so I could focus on polishing up a few of my chapters. Working with Jennifer Chun has also been a blessing. She was the one who encouraged me to merge practices of love into my understanding of migrant women’s transnational labour. I constantly turned to her brilliant scholarship on precarious workers and organizing in South Korea and the USA as an organizer and researcher. Both Kari and Jennifer mentored and supported me to keep moving forward.

Then there is Min Sook Lee, who I drove back and forth to the farms throughout rural Ontario where she made her films El Contrato, Teo in Toronto, and Migrant Dreams. She was instrumental in inspiring the strength and courage I needed to keep writing about all that I have witnessed throughout the years on the farms and in rural communities in Mexico. Her work as an activist, artist, and academic moves me. I am also grateful to Stephanie Ross and Mark Thomas who were supportive of my work at York University. Little did I know that day I visited York
University as a child that I was not only going to go to York, but also teach there as I was finishing my PhD at the University of Toronto.

I also want to thank all the members of Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW). Our collective is quite small, but our impact has been beyond our size and funding. I have had the honour of working with incredible organizers who share an unrelenting passion and commitment for migrant justice. Chris Ramsaroop and I have grown up together politically in J4MW. I consider him to be an organizer among organizers and the one who knows more about migrant farmworkers outside of the farms than anyone else. He would always tell me how close I was to finishing these pages and encourage me to keep on writing. Also, I want to thank Adriana Paz Ramirez, co-founder of Justicia for Migrant Workers—British Columbia and now working with domestic workers all over Latin America. Both Chris and Adri are part of my soul family.

Jenna Hennerbry and Janet McLaughlin were always there along the way and their work woven is into mine in this dissertation. Janet was with me on my first trip to Mexico to visit and connect with migrant communities. Our work has expanded and grown since. I can always turn to Jenna and Janet for support on how to navigate the academic world and their valuable work convinced me of the importance of academia in advancing the rights of marginalized communities.

My dear friends Aaraon Diaz Mendiburo, Alejandro Hernandez, Farrah Miranda, Geraldina Polanco, Heryka Miranda, Jessica Farias, Vivian Jimenez, Jessica Ticar, Luz Minero, and Katherine Nastovski were always encouraging and caring, offering me the right words when I needed to hear them the most. Truth be told, I also lost friends along the way because I was too consumed with my work. They too are part of my journey and will never be forgotten.
I am wholeheartedly indebted to Blanca Velazquez Diaz who has been my main confidant in my field work and life in Mexico. She runs the Centro de Apoyo al Trabajador, (Workers’ Support Center) which was destroyed in 2012 and one of its organizers was kidnapped for hours that seemed like an eternity. After ensuing death threats, Blanca had to flee from her home state and rebuild her work and life in Mexico City. Despite these challenges, Blanca was always there for me whether I was in Mexico or in Canada. She is a wonderful human being and an unrelenting labour rights leader. Her family is another family that I count as my own beyond borders and bloodlines.

Last but not the least, I am indebted to all the families, communities, and beautiful places/lands throughout Mexico that have become a part of my life and spirit forever. For ALL the migrant workers I met over the last 16 years, and their families, this work is because of and for you. Espero que sirva para algo, no solo para que me otorguen un doctorado, que este trabajo sea un triunfo colectivo.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated with much love to …. 


Karen was killed, at age 17, by a bullet that punctured her heart. Her ex-boyfriend, her murderer, then took his own life. Karen’s mother, a migrant worker in the USA, had to return to Mexico to bury her. This tragedy left me unable to work for quite some time.

Karen and I had many intense conversations about life but mostly about the challenges she faced as a young woman who had to assume the role of mother for her younger siblings.

It was difficult to accept her passing at a time when she had just graduated with honours from high school and had a full life of hopes and dreams. She wrote me a letter in which she reminded me of my own strength and the importance of perseverancia. I will treasure her and her words for the rest of my life.

Blas Encalada, Rest in Peace, 1915–2009

My grandfather, who sold bread on a horse through the hills of Valparaiso as a child, was a proud communist and railway worker. He passed away in a distant place called Brampton.


Kerry was my beloved mentor who modelled community-engaged scholarship and the possibility that academia could create change in the lives of peoples across borders. She was unyielding in her advocacy and social justice work even in the last days of her life, supporting the sponsorship of Syrian refugee families in Guelph, Ontario. She was a part of my committee earlier in my work and we collaborated on many research projects. We even made a presentation together in Ottawa to an MP who later became the prime minister. Kerry trained and inspired me as a sociologist and I will forever live with the lessons she taught me through the example of her beautiful glorious life.

Karen, Kerry, and abuelito, you are here with me in these pages.
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CHAPTER 1
MEXICAN WOMEN LIVE AND WORK IN CANADA TOO

Transnational Storytelling: Palabra

Palabra is 10 years younger than me and has lived hardships that I cannot fathom. She is from Guerrero, one of the poorest and increasingly violent states in Mexico and, incidentally, the state of touristic Acapulco. Her mother tongue is Nahuatl, a centuries old language and the lingua franca of the Aztec empire that encompassed much of Mesoamerica in its time.

I could hear the rain pounding on the roof of Palabra’s mother’s house. I wondered where exactly I was calling and what her rancho (humble farm) was like. I knew that phone lines were hard to come by in many rural communities but luckily cell phones worked sometimes. This time Palabra’s cell phone would suffice to connect us both with her Canadian bank for a three-way conversation.

Before we made the call, Palabra explained to me that her rancho was an adobe house with an aluminum roof. She assured me that it was not as bad as before when she had to share it with 10 of her siblings. Lying down to sleep was a luxury. They all had to sleep in an upright position and accommodate themselves accordingly. Her father died quite early in their lives, leaving her mother to fend for herself and the children. “Crecí como una niña de la calle-abandonada. No quiero abandonar a mis hijos (I grew up like a girl of the streets—abandoned. I do not want to abandon my children).” Living in such abject poverty, the children had to indeed provide for themselves.

Palabra’s last name is unpronounceable to most. It means pineapple in Nahuatl. We would need much patience in our three-way call to her Canadian bank’s toll-free line to give her
full name and spell it letter by letter, with all the x’s and tl’s together that are part of the Nahuatl lexicon. On top of the security protocols we were also going to have to explain her situation.

Palabra had been trying to access her Employment Insurance (EI) maternity benefits for the last two months at ATMs in nearby cities in her state. I was shocked when she confessed that she did not know how to use an ATM. I assumed she did after all the hard work she had put into organizing the paperwork for her EI claim and all the seasons she worked in Canada. She explained that in Canada she had to rely on others to withdraw her money. Then I understood the reason she had to *alquilar un señor* (literally, to rent a gentleman) and take him to nearby major cities to find bank machines that would accept her card so that she could check her balance and withdraw as much cash as she could. This señor was a teacher who knew about such matters and machines. The *licenciados* (university educated professionals) at the banks in Guerrero warned her to stop trying and to return to Canada to settle her problem. They suspected the card had already been frozen and that eventually one of the bank machines would seize it.

I had all her personal information ready to initiate the three-way connection between her rancho in Guerrero, me in Brampton, and a call centre (presumably) in Canada to resolve this dilemma once and for all. But when her name had finally been spelled out, her birthdate and Canadian farm address cleared, the teller would not release any information because I was on the line. The teller informed us that it was the bank’s security policy and that she had to go in person to the branch to explain the situation. I pleaded, “she is in rural Mexico and does not know if she will be called back to work in Canada. She is responsible for providing for her children on her own and she urgently needs to feed them.” I rambled on, attempting to make a compelling case, yet tripping over my words with much emotion. Our conversation abruptly ended with me saying “thanks for nothing” in defeat.
Palabra heard my tears of frustration through the cracking of my voice. I had felt this way many times when I naively attempted to act as a bridge between the geopolitical Global North and South to mend the marginality and exclusion experienced by migrant workers, men and women alike, in Canada. In fact, these encounters have been countless in the more than 16 years that I have worked with migrant farm workers in Canada.¹ Migrant farm workers are caught between the worlds of the North and the South where they are disciplined and recreated as Third World subjects. Surely the borders of the Third World are not solely geographical but pervasively and tangibly re-enacted through differential sets of rights and life chances within nation-states between those who have been deemed to be deserving citizens and those who have not. Migrant workers, specifically those considered to be low-skill, racialized, and from the ranks of the working poor of the Global South, are loudly told by the Canadian state and concomitant institutions, including private, financial, and administrative, *we can use your labour and even induce your displacement, but will not permit your full membership or recognize your humanity.*

While living in the margins of Canada they are at the centre of the global economy as transmigrants, farmworkers, and global breadwinners created through the logic of neoliberal globalization, specifically the intensification of labour flexibility, free trade and the opening of markets in favour of transnational corporations, and degradation of labour/citizenship rights. Migrant workers earn Canadian wages, open bank accounts in the Global North, build houses and dreams in the Global South, and sustain entire family networks and even global food

¹This deadlock with the bank reminded me of the time I accompanied a migrant woman to a walk-in-clinic to obtain delicate medical attention in relation to her sexual and reproductive health. A simple visit to a walk-in-clinic among many of the migrant women can easily require the level of planning of a heist. We had to secretly plot her brief departure from the farm so as not to raise suspicion among her coworkers and employers that she had a health concern. Any illness could make her “deportable” and “disposable” as unfit for agricultural work. When we arrived at the clinic after all this meticulous planning, time and work, the receptionist turned us away and ordered us to return another day. Another time a migrant woman insisted that she should walk to a local plaza rather than have me pick her up at her housing to take her for a medical appointment to determine the weeks of her pregnancy. She was soaking wet when I arrived at the clinic since she did not have an umbrella to protect her from the rain on her long walk.
systems. Yet they are restricted in their lives and in their interactions within the global and transnational economies that they fuel.

Palabra, however, was undeterred. She was not stripped of agency by apparently insurmountable intangible borders. She wanted to count and she wanted to be heard. She told me that her baby daughter, Viviana, was ill and that she was worried about her. But she was determined to stop worrying so much because she was convinced that worrying would worsen her daughter’s condition. She then explained that her brother was steadfast against her participating in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers’ Program (SAWP or the Program). Even though he was in the Program himself he would not offer his sister any advice or information on how to apply. She nevertheless persisted and found her own way into the Program. He was very angry when she was destined to leave for Canada. “Para que no gane, no quería” (he did not want her to earn more than he did and get ahead of him), she claimed.

Palabra’s mother told her that she should have been a man because she is a hard worker and could have accomplished much more if she was. Her mother cried because she was leaving, and Palabra confessed that she feels her pain and anguish. Palabra motivated her mother to go on, “hay que seguirle. Aunque no se lo crea ella, pero hay que seguirle (even though she may believe or feel it, we have to go on).”

At the age of 12 Palabra left her home to venture into different types of work, such as selling tacos in fondas (small restaurants). She also lived and worked with various families as a domestic worker. She had been working since she was 4. At that age, she had to support her way through school by selling bread and chiles dipped in vinegar in the morning. “Mi vida ha sido fatal (my life has been awful).” She asserted that in her labour migrations to Canada she had
learned a lot, such as “andar sin miedo, con la mirada hacia el frente (to walk without fear and with her head held high).”

Her life had been full of struggle but she had learned to adapt and to survive. She had nothing, she said. She was poor. “Todavía soy pobre (I am still poor)” despite the seasons she had worked in Canada. And this is precisely the reason she wanted and had to return. She did it for her children, so that her children could say, my mother worked hard for us. Palabra does not want to worry her mother. Palabra was unmarried, had three children, and said that she preferred to stay on her own. That way she could come and go as she pleases. But in her community, she claimed, people were closed minded and judged mothers who leave. Palabra wanted a place of her own. There were too many problems living with family, she confessed.

I listened attentively to every one of Palabra’s words while attempting to subdue my anger, helplessness, and frustration that I could not bring her closer to accessing her EI benefits in Mexico. Nevertheless, detecting my frustration, Palabra affirmed with authority and grace, “no me enseñes a caminar hacia atrás ensename a caminar para adelante (do not teach me to walk backwards, teach me to walk forward—get ahead).” I blushed, abruptly came to my senses, and confessed “en vez de animarte a ti me animas a mi (instead of me encouraging you) [as a presumably empowered, older woman from the Global South living with citizenship and privilege in the Global North] you encourage me.” In this way, she embraced her power and agency, quickly awakening me to my own.

**Mexican Migrant Farmworker Women in Transnational Frontiers**

This is a transnational ethnographic study about Palabra and women like her from humble rural origins in Mexico who participate annually in the SAWP, one of Canada’s long-standing temporary foreign worker programs (see Appendix A for a diagram I created to
illustrate the federal government’s temporary foreign worker programs). I have been a part of this community for over 16 years as a community-labour organizer and researcher. I have learned enormously from migrant workers, their families, and how they forge survival at the margins of North America and the global economy. I have come to understand the SAWP as a complex universe unto itself, but one that is constructed not only by states and the global economy, managed by technocrats and employers, but also contested, lived, and understood by migrant workers and their families. While the SAWP functions as an axis of global capital and a labour management scheme within the global economy it is also a site of struggle, contradiction, and social organization for families, communities, and migrants alike. Migrant workers and their families assert themselves, create their own meanings, live, love, and resist.

**The Push to Leave**

Migration, now more than ever, is a key survival strategy for many rural families in Mexico. Surely the push and pull of migration to the United States has been a historical constant and the debt crisis in the 1980s intensified this pull. The Mexican state defaulted on its loans and proceeded to institute aggressive neoliberal reforms to repay its debts and minimize social spending. Central to restructuring was the modernization of agriculture favouring large producers at the expense of low-income rural families. This resulted in displacement from rural livelihoods and incomes (Binford, 2002, 2005; Boucher, Smith, Taylor, & Yúnez-Naude, 2007; Broughton, 2008; Hussain, 2010; Quintana, 2004; Roman & Arregui, 2015). Migration to cities, the USA and further north, became more of a necessity among many rural families. Most of the unauthorized and seasonal labour migration from Mexico to the United States is still highly masculine and considered to be low skill. Rural women, in turn, tend to participate in urban labour markets, *maquiladora* (export processing) zones in border regions (Landau, 2005; Taylor,
2010), and petty commerce and subsistence agricultural work in the countryside (Broughton, 2008; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Oftentimes women are dependent on remittances sent by migrant male breadwinners such as husbands, brothers, and fathers. Nonetheless, more Mexican women are finding themselves needing to migrate for work across borders, mostly into the United States as documented and undocumented workers. Dreby (2010) stressed “although rates of male migration still outpace those of females, Mexican women, especially those who are unmarried, widowed, and divorced are migrating in higher rates than ever before” (p. 6). The women in the SAWP occupy a unique place as seasonal transmigrants owing to three main aspects. For one, their experiences are vastly distinct from Mexican migrant men because of their gender. Second, all the women in my study were authorized migrants participating in a federal government guest worker program. Third, migrant women in the SAWP must contend with the particularities of exclusion and integration in Canadian rural and agricultural contexts, which are vastly different from those in the United States.

**Theoretical Interventions Into Migrant Women’s Lives**

In this work, I delve into the textures of Mexican migrant women’s transnational lives between rural Mexico and rural Canada. Based on innumerable hours of intimate and transnational ethnographic research in the provinces of Ontario, Alberta, and various states in Mexico, I complicate understandings of the Mexican migrant subject by infusing a gendered, specifically feminist intersectional, analysis of transnational labour migration shifting the focus to Mexican women who migrate as an extension of their household survival strategies. Previous studies have, for the most part, missed the role and agency of women in this labour migration, which creates a gap in understanding of the SAWP and immigration policies in Canada. I probe the ways women from the Global South organize life, love, and work through cyclical labour
migration to rural Canada. A central argument I make in this study is that the women who migrate are not the only ones who participate in the Program; their non-migrant kin who make their migration possible are participants as well, primarily their mothers and children. Women are engaged in a what I label a transnational family economy that has diverse implications for all kin involved and functions differently than households where men migrate through the Program as traditional breadwinners. From my observations of female-led transnational households, I seek to contribute to the literature on women’s migration circuits across the globe, temporary foreign worker programs in Canada, and community organizing through various interventions.

First, I argue that Mexican migrant women challenge patriarchal gender norms both in rural Mexico and rural Canada in an industry and labour mobility scheme that are associated primarily with men. Second, migrant mothers in the SAWP have to leave their children behind as an act of love that induces constant transnational heartbreak. As a result, I argue that migrant women engage in multiple forms of work; they are not solely agricultural producers but also transnational household managers, emotional labourers, and caretakers for their non-migrating kin, themselves, and other workers, including men and lovers in Canada. Migrant farmworker women are also part of the “global care chain,” a term originally coined by Hochschild (2000, p. 130); through their roles as active caretakers they re-invent the work of love and care across borders. They are constantly engaged in the laborious management of emotions and care directed towards numerous affective kin all while contending with the marginalizing and exploitative conditions of life and work in the Canadian agricultural industry as non-citizen, racialized women farmworkers. Third, in the interiority of their being and in the undertaking of their extensive roles and work, migrant women assert agency and power, and in the process, form new subjectivities as transnational agents. For the purpose of clarification, I ascribe to Adams St.
Pierre’s conception of subjectivity as “the ongoing construction of human beings in flux, in process—at every moment being disciplined, regulated, normalized, produced, and, at the same time, resisting, shifting, changing, producing (p.46).” In addition, Basok and Delanger’s (2016) working definition of subjectivity to explicate migrant farmworkers’ performances thereof is equally instructive, namely “the way they make sense of their daily world and their daily lives” (p. 140.) Applying these definitions to Mexican migrant farmworker women, I explore how women come to understand themselves and engage in a transnational life through their involvement in the SAWP. Women resist the curtailment of their mobility, commodification as units of production, and gendered proscriptions. They do so beyond the overt public manifestations of dissent commonly associated with the (male) organized working class. They reclaim and reformulate love, desire, and sexuality, and reaffirm their humanity by resisting the coercion of the neoliberal global economy in their very own ways. My analysis is entwined with migrant women’s transnational stories that I understand as a practice of transnational storytelling that explicates their transnational lives. This storytelling includes migrant women’s voices and the meanings they assign their lives along with my knowledge and involvement as a community organizer, ally, and researcher. Every global migration circuit is different and hence transnationalism is lived and experienced distinctly by those who take part in their roles as migrant and non-migrating kin. Through this practice I endeavour to contribute to the understanding of transnationalism within “the specificity of the Canadian context,” as urged by Goldring and Krishnamurti (2007, p. 21). This practice has to also include analysis of states, disciplining mechanisms of contemporary neoliberal capital, and the migrating and clashing cultural norms that shape the universe of the migrant women’s transnational lives.
Lastly, this work offers lessons and insights for those who perform carework through community organizing and activism. This frontline work is dependent on extensive emotional and often unpaid labour to reaffirm strength, perseverance, and solidity within the activists, the migrant workers, and the transnational families fragmented by borders. Migrant justice organizers tread and negotiate a world of intense emotions and must uphold ethics of the heart beyond research protocols imposed by academia to be effective allies. The work of transnational organizing has to be more than mobilizing power to improve material conditions. It must also consider the immaterial and affective dimensions of workers’ lives. The political and social justice project for migrant workers and their families has to be about reclaiming the full humanity and wholeness that is denied to them in a context of constructed commodification and statelessness within global capitalism. All of this and more happens and is revealed within the intersections of a controlled labour migration scheme between rural Canada and rural Mexico, the SAWP.

The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP)

The SAWP is a long-standing temporary foreign worker program (see Appendix A for a diagram of the country’s temporary worker programs) that started in 1966 with a Memorandum of Understanding between the government of Canada and the government of Jamaica. In 1974 it incorporated the Eastern Caribbean and Mexico. While a federal program, it is regulated according to provincial labour legislation. Conceived after intensive lobbying efforts on the part of Canadian growers, principally from the Essex and Niagara greenbelt regions of Ontario, and after failed labour schemes to attract Canadian citizen workers, the Program is seen as a model of

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2 Specifically participating countries include “Mexico, Jamaica, Republic of Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados and the Organization of the Eastern Caribbean states that include, Antigua and Barbuda, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts-Nevis, Saint Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines” (Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services, n.d.).
controlled labour migration that is advantageous for all involved, including non-citizen farmworkers and their families from struggling rural economies in the Caribbean and Mexico (Basok, 2007; Hennebry & Preibisch, 2012; Massey & Brown, 2011; Preibisch & Binford, 2007). Silverman and Hari (2016) emphasized that these labour schemes are:

> Positioned as so-called triple-wins: labourers can choose to enrol and earn Canadian dollars, perhaps to send back to their country of origin as remittances; the sending state can export an underemployed workforce and benefit from remittances in particular and the migration-development nexus in general; and the receiving country can fill its sector-specific labour deficit. (p. 93)

Weiler, McLaughlin, and Cole (2017) approximated that 40,000 migrant farmworkers participate in the SAWP and support diverse facets of agricultural production. Statistics for temporary foreign workers in Canada are difficult to obtain and the few data tracks that are publicly available online are not specific as to gender, rural townships, duration of contracts, and repatriations. One Parliamentary Report (Government of Canada, 2017) stated that temporary foreign workers comprised 53,303 approved positions in primary agriculture for 2013, which could include the SAWP and the Agricultural Stream of the National Occupational Classification (NOC) C and D Program. Overall, Weiler et al. (2017) suggested an average of 40,000 is a reliable estimate that accounts for the growth and importance of the SAWP across Canada. Further attesting to the importance of this program, Budworth, Rose, and Mann (2017) document that 71% of the SAWP workers and 66% of the farms participating are in Ontario and if the Program were to cease, the economic loss would amount to a minimum of $440 million for the province. However, Massey and Brown (2011) stated that Newfoundland and Labrador do not participate in the recruitment of workers through the SAWP.

SAWP workers were deemed to be a “structural necessity” (Basok, 2003, p. xix) in the $100 billion-dollar agriculture industry (Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, 2015), particularly in
the province of Ontario. Migrant workers are not just crucial for food production but also for the production of flowers, houseplants, honey, and tobacco. At times, migrant labour is also used by employers for non-agricultural tasks such as home renovations and greenhouse construction, work that is not permissible under their labour contracts. Without being able to refuse work out of fear of being deported or not being called back by their employers, migrant workers often comply with the illegitimate demands imposed by their Canadian employers. Since the 1960s, migrant workers have formed an important part of the social and economic landscapes of many rural townships in Canada.

Participating migrant-sending countries and Canadian employers coordinate the logistics of the Program. Agencies of sending governments are tasked with the recruitment of workers based on several general as well as specific considerations. Russo (2011) quoted from his interview with Lucy Luna, a union organizer in British Columbia, indicating the mechanics of the recruitment process:

It is ultimately the responsibility of the Mexican or Caribbean country’s government to recruit and place the workers. This is done in consultation with the individual workers themselves, since HRSDC/Service Canada does not provide any input regarding the determination of which workers are chosen to participate in the SAWP or their placement. (p. 138)

Recruitment and screening involves health exams, consideration of marital status, rural residency, and experience with and knowledge of agricultural work. Migrant-sending countries must also process necessary immigration documentation, match workers to Canadian employers’ requests and arrange travel. Once in Canada, liaison and consulate officials must support their respective nationals with documentation and assist when complications arise. The Canadian government in turn structures the Program through immigration and agricultural policies. Migrants are granted permission to enter the country with a work visa tying them to a single
specific employer forcefully restricting their mobility and prohibiting work with undesignated employers and in non-agricultural sectors. Work visas are granted for anywhere from a few weeks to the maximum of 8 months. All visas, Social Insurance Numbers and provincial health care officially expire on December 15 of every year. Employers are responsible for providing workers with housing, which is often located within the confines of the farm operations contributing to employer surveillance of workers beyond work hours. Employers send their requests for workers to privately run management organizations, Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services (F.A.R.M.S.) that was established in 1987 for the province of Ontario and also Fondation des entreprises pour le recrutement de la main-d'œuvre étrangère (F.E.R.M.E.) for Quebec, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, to facilitate the meticulous paperwork involved. Employers can name or rename a worker if they are satisfied with their performance and also repatriate at whim. See Appendix B for the Notice of Employer Form. This form is filled out by employers to explain any early repatriations and list workers being renamed to the farm the following year. In one particular case, a Mexican worker was being sent home before the end of his contract and had notice of his return flight to Mexico arranged by a travel agency serving employers, the Canadian Agricultural Travel Services. Employers are granted power as de facto immigration officials who decide on the arrivals and departures of their migrant workforce. They have the capacity to call on a travel agency to expeditiously dispose of their labour force. Yet the contracts that migrant workers sign stipulate that they are to be treated equally to Canadian workers including having to pay income taxes and have their wages deducted for Employment Insurance and Canadian Pension Plan programs. Workers also pay for part of their travel to Canada and cannot study or train in the country with the “low-skill” temporary work visas that they are issued.
Controlling Migration, Controlled Labour

It is important to understand how the SAWP came into being and the broader context. Before the start of the SAWP, the federal government tried to persuade the Canadian agricultural industry to offer better wages and working conditions so as to retain citizen workers. Agricultural labour laws are quite lax compared to other industries: food production and the interests of “Canadian family farms” prevail over the rights of farmworkers. In the province of Ontario, the agricultural engine of the country, farmworkers, irrespective of citizenship status, are not able to unionize despite working in one of the most lucrative and coincidentally dangerous industries in the country. It is therefore unsurprising that retaining workers had been an ongoing difficulty for the industry. Eventually the federal government succumbed to forceful lobbying efforts on the part of powerful growers’ associations, particularly in Ontario, to import labour from struggling rural economies in the Global South (Basok, 2003). The main arguments rested on recurring labour shortages despite successive labour schemes including, for example, the hiring of Polish immigrants fleeing war-ravaged economies (Basok, 2003; Satzewich, 1991, 1988), and the overall incapacity to retain workers who had social mobility to work outside of the agricultural sector in urban centres where pay and conditions of work were much more favourable. Importantly, Sharma (2005) cautioned that labour scarcity is not precisely the issue and asserted that “shortages do not always refer to a quantitative or actual lack of workers but the shortage of a particular kind of work force, that is, cheap, politically repressed and so on” (p. 67). Since the 1960s, Canadian growers have not stopped lobbying the government to address labour shortages by expanding the SAWP and other similar guest worker programs in order to secure a compliant labour force for the arduous and dangerous work of agricultural production (Binkley, 2016; Cotter, 2016; Curry, 2016; Dharssi, 2016a, 2016b 2016c; Furber, 2016; Stockford, 2017).
Satzewich (1988) offered a detailed analysis of the gradual acceptance and incorporation of the SAWP in Southwestern Ontario against the backdrop of racist immigration policies in Canada that were set on curtailing and prohibiting “coloured” (p. 289) settlement. According to his examination, the SAWP became a permanent experiment during an economic boom, because members of parliament (MPs) sided with powerful growers’ association lobbyists but mostly as a result of the assurance that permanent settlement and labour mobility of Black workers would be blocked. Since the institutionalization of the SAWP, migrant workers have not been able to acquire Canadian residency status in spite of their years of work and importance to the agricultural industry, nor have they been allowed to sponsor their families. Marrying a Canadian was one of the very few avenues available to migrant workers who wanted to stay in the country and attain mobility rights. However, the majority of workers who were recruited were married men with families, workers who are less inclined to want to stay in the country, which would mean abandoning their families back home. This is in complete contrast to the treatment of White European immigrants who were welcomed with their families. Restricting guest workers to agricultural work was deemed to be an “abnegation of human rights which cannot be justified in a democratic country” by a politician quoted by Satzewich (1988). But these constraints became the sine-quibus-non of the SAWP for Jamaican farmworkers in the beginning and all those to follow.

influenced understandings of the SAWP as a system of citizenship and labour *apartheid* (Justice for Migrant Workers, J4MW, 2016; Paz Ramirez, 2013; Sharma, 2005; Walia, 2010). Permanent Black settlement, particularly in predominantly White rural areas, was a persistent concern for parliamentarians when the Program was conceived in the 1960s. Interracial mixing and racist conceptions of who belonged and who merited status were disguised within a discourse of potential race-relations problems.

Another line of argument had the effect of devaluing the skills required to perform agricultural work (Satzewich, 1988). Gracida (2016), spokesperson for the Boycott Driscoll campaign in San Quintin, Mexico, asserted that farmworkers are “agricultural professionals” (*profesionistas del campo*). Farmworkers’ skills are considered to be low skills. As a result, it is argued, those who perform this work do not merit permanent residence status. Conversely, Satzewich (1988) contended that while tobacco workers from the American South and workers from Detroit were permitted to labour seasonally in South Western Ontario to address some of the labour shortages, the long-standing apprehension of the Canadian government “was not so much over the settlement of unskilled migrant workers in the country, but rather the settlement of ‘black’ unskilled migrant workers” (p. 295). Additionally, the Program was presented as a form of development aid, according to Russo (2011), in the form of wages and remittances expected to support local development in workers’ home communities. Based on a thorough Canadian newspaper media analysis, Bauder (2005) discerned that discourses of aid and of racialized migrant workers as problems for the rural townships were constant well beyond the inception of the SAWP. Overall, the Program has been in place with the same pillars of labour and citizenship immobility since it was conceived.
While Jamaican workers spearheaded the SAWP, the program expanded with the incorporation of Eastern Caribbean States, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Mexico in 1974. Due to a similarity in language, Italian-Canadian growers in Leamington started to take advantage of the entry of Mexico into the SAWP institutional framework in 1974. Yet it was not until 2001 that Mexican workers started to outnumber Jamaicans and all other participating countries according to available statistics highlighted by Binford (2013). Preibisch and Binford (2007) assessed the growing demand for Mexican workers resulting from the expansion of greenhouse operations as opposed to open field farm labour that was once dominated by Caribbean migrant men concluding that this was founded in gendered and racialized constructions over the suitability for agricultural tasks on the part of Canadian employers. Irrespective of the importance of Mexican labour, Mexican migrants too were denied citizenship rights and seen as undesirable for permanent settlement. The creation of this controlled migrant labour force echoes that of the state-sanctioned practices which confined the form, location, and wages of mostly rural Chinese migrants who came to work in Canada in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Li, 1998). Surely processes of labour and immigration regulation along the lines of race, gender, and ethnicity are not new to the formation of Canada.

The racist foundations of the SAWP also indicate that race-based immigration policies did not end in Canada with the introduction of the point system in 1967. By keeping non-White migrant farmworkers marginalized and disenfranchised as non-citizen workers, state regulations then and now provide a constant, reliable pool of exploitable labour, thus allowing the state to commodify and structure a workforce as a form of subsidy, through unfreedom and cheap wages, for, in this case, the Canadian agricultural industry. The SAWP is a manifestation of the institutionalized racism that continues to drive capital and state policies in Canada and the global
economy in varying degrees. In the words of a migrant worker, “it is not the program, it is the economy.”

The tenets of employment contracts in the temporary workers programs, along with restrictive immigration and labour policies for agricultural work, have produced a politically disenfranchised and immobilized workforce. Canadian employers are granted an unequivocal power to secure a captive, cheap, and flexible labour force that coincides with neoliberal economic imperatives of worker compliance through the temporary foreign worker programs, namely the SAWP, the Live-in Caregiver Program (Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, 2003; Pratt, 1999; Velasco, 2002), and the more recently created Agricultural Stream of the Pilot Project for Occupations Requiring a Lower Level of Formal Training NOC C and D (Faraday, 2012; Fudge & MacPhail, 2009; Hennerbry, 2010; Nakache, 2013). According to Hinnenkamp (2006), these immigration and concomitant labour policies allow Canadian growers to “socially engineer” (p. 151) their workforce based on quantity, nationality/race, sex, and even language. Since 2002, Canadian growers have had the power to turn to diverse temporary foreign worker programs in addition to the long-standing SAWP. These include the Low Skill Pilot Project (Preibisch, 2010; Rajkumar, Berkowitz, Vosko, Preston, & Latham, 2012) and the Agricultural Stream of the NOC C and D Program, and increasingly the pool of undocumented workers in the countryside.

**Themes in the SAWP literature**

The impacts and significance of the SAWP are multiple for Canada, the global economy, migrant workers, and their families. Since the 2000s, literature has expanded to cover a range of issues in the SAWP such as labour rights (Basok, 2004; Basok & Carasco, 2010); availability of proper health care (Hennebry, 2010; Hennebry & Preibisch, 2010; Preibisch & Otero, 2014); advocacy efforts (Basok, 2008; Choudry & Thomas, 2012, 2013; Gabriel & Macdonald, 2014;

In my research, I have come to understand migrant workers as the “precariat” (Standing, 2011 p. 11) par excellence who become essentially stateless in Canada and who work and live in the equivalent of agricultural maquila/maquiladora3 zones with lax and non-existent rights. According to Perry (2012), migrant workers are constructed as “barely legal” due to the denial of rights and freedoms as temporary non-citizen workers. Pacifying the migrant workforce through disenfranchisement from the law, limiting their mobility in the labour market, and devaluing their work through (low) minimum wages and racialized constructions of skill, commodifies migrant farm workers for the agricultural industry. Migrant workers from the Global South are also disciplined by the global economy through the displacement and dispossession from their livelihoods in their rural home economies that has forced them to migrate for work in the first place. In turn, they are recruited as cogs of a multibillion dollar agricultural machine without the right to break down. They are not recruited and seen as human beings with a multiplicity of needs, aspirations, knowledges, and experiences. One male worker in Leamington recently said to me, “in Canada we are just merchandise.” With just one phone call to the special travel agency serving the Program, employers and consulate officials can dispose of this merchandise in a matter of hours. Moreover, scholars have noted that continual migration without the right to residency and full-citizenship status despite years of work powering Canadian agriculture and the local economies in which they live and work render migrant workers “permanently temporary”

3 In Central America the term maquila is preferred over the term maquiladora used in Mexico. But both refer to foreign-owned export-processing plants that exploit the low wages and lax laws in Third World countries to compete in international markets.
(Hennebry 2012; Hjalmarsn, Bunn, Cohen, Terbasket, & Gahman, 2015; Nakache & Kinoshita, 2010). In consideration of family separation and restrictions on social connections in rural communities, Horgan and Liinamaa (2016) conceptualized the “spatio-temporal patterning of workers’ everyday lives” as “social quarantining” (p. 2).

Furthermore, migrant workers are erased in the imaginings of rural landscapes as eloquently elaborated by Mitchell (1996) in “The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape.” According to Mitchell, racialized and exploited labour is crucial in the formation of landscapes and economies yet absent in mainstream narratives. These erasures are critical in food campaigns that urge Canadians to buy local but do not include the images and voices of racialized migrant farm workers toiling in the farms and fields. One example is given in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Foodland Ontario advertisement depicting apple production and direct connection of local produce to the supermarket without migrant workers. (Ferguson, 2010)
In this Foodland Ontario advertisement only one person is visible, a young White woman, suggesting a Canadian family operation and unwaged labour as part of the farming family’s production. However, migrant farm workers, who are often the ones performing the labour of picking fruit in open fields, are noticeably absent.

Migrant workers are dehumanized as agricultural subsidies and commodified into purchasing power and labour surplus for the Canadian agricultural sector. This structure of commodification is premised on erasures and slight openings for seeing workers as people who are forging a life across borders in a situation of controlled and precarious labour migration. For instance, during the time of the swine flu outbreak, Mexican migrant workers became visible for brief moment as potential virus carriers, a public health threat for Canada (Ciarula Taylor, 2009). In 2009, a Niagara-on-the-Lake lifestyles magazine featured its first ever story about migrant workers in that community. The first line was a quote from a Jamaican migrant worker, “up here we are seasonal workers, not people with a name or identity” (Cowling, 2009, p. 45). The article’s author, Cowling, continued:

Spring comes and with our peripheral vision and consciousness, we know the Jamaican and Mexican farm workers are back; we see the old bicycles, the lines on Thursdays at the bank, the Virgil Valu-mart or the Grimsby IGA, the workers taking to the fields in the early hours, but there might as well be an ocean separating us. (p. 46)

Additionally, in media representations, literature, and imaginings of rural Canada, if migrant workers are ever featured or seen at all, they are generally seen as male. Migrant women, in particular, are rendered invisible. Gender, race, class, and sex are buried in the migrant worker or offshore worker labels. The voices, faces, and stories of migrant workers are strategically concealed.
Gender Constructions, Gendered Im/mobilities

Mexican migrant women also did not figure prominently in earlier literature of the SAWP. To be fair, studies were based on experiences and norms taken from the standpoint of migrant men because of women’s low participation rates (Basok, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2003, 2004; Binford, 2002, 2006a, 2006b; Irving, 1990; Knowles, 1997; Li Wai Suen, 2000; Pacheco Cómer, 2004; Preibisch, 2004; Smart, 1997; Verduzco, 2000; Wall, 1987, 1992). Women were largely out of the picture, yet they were participating nonetheless as non-migrating kin in their various roles facilitating the migration of men in their families, as documented by Hennebry (2014). It was not until 1989 that the Mexican Secretariat of Labour and Social Welfare (SLSW) started to recruit women to migrate to work through the Program. Initially 37 women participated, rising to 786 by 2016.4 Just like men, women are granted temporary work visas to work with a single employer throughout the year. Women mostly work in tender fruits, packaging, and greenhouse operations and are assigned tasks based on a gendered division of labour imposed by Canadian employers.

The women participating in this temporary foreign worker program share similar work and life trajectories with one another including Palabra, namely hardship and poverty. Most are from rural areas, many are sole/single mothers who have had to fight their way into a program that prefers male workers. Researchers started to make significant inroads in accounting for women’s experiences in the SAWP through a gender lens (Barron, 1999; Becerril 2003, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011; Barndt, 2002, 2008; Hennerbry, 2014; Hermoso Santamaria, 2004; Paciulan & Preibisch, 2013; Preibisch, 2005; Preibisch & Hermoso Santamaria, 2006). Yet there were still many aspects of the women’s lives that had been left unexplored.

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4 This data was obtained from an Excel spreadsheet of unpublished statistics I was permitted to use by Dr. Díaz Mendiburo and the Dirección de Movilidad Laboral de la Secretaria del Trabajo y Previsión Social (STyPS) titled “Mujeres Participantes a Agosto 2017.”
In contrast to the Live-in Caregiver Program, also seen as a model for controlled labour migration by the government, workers in the SAWP continue to be primarily male. The incorporation of women in the SAWP has long been suspect among state officials and employers. Initially the recruitment of Black men to work in agriculture was also seen as a concern among policymakers, showing that the ideologies that inform immigration and labour policies target the curtailment of sexuality and reproduction among non-White bodies. For instance, Satzewich (1988) noted that:

According to the Ontario Regional Employment Officer: These operations require a high content of female labour and to introduce Jamaican males into the plants and provide accommodation adjacent to that used by domestic female labour could create social difficulties. Moreover, the Jamaican male is adapted to field rather than factory work and while the processors felt that they could train them to the latter, it does not seem that they could hope to staff plants entirely with this labour. (p. 296)

The preoccupation with sexual and intimate relations among non-citizen, and between non-White workers and Canadian White women have shaped the SAWP and the social interactions and logics of many rural townships where migrants live and work. Hahamovitch (2010) noted that such concerns were shared by many states that used guest worker programs:

Female migrants represented a serious threat because they could both produce and reproduce. Thus the U.S., South Africa, and Great Britain all took pains to exclude women. U.S. Immigration officials learned this lesson the hard way. Bahamian women had been included in the World War II program that brought farmworkers to Florida. When women became pregnant, the managers of federal labor camps had to arrange for their deportation “because of their inability to perform heavy agricultural work, the hazardous conditions under which the infant would be reared and the question of [the] citizenship of the infant. Much to the dismay of camp managers, this resulted in “a considerable number of induced abortions,” according to the East Coast Field Medical Officer. Thus when the larger West Indian and Mexican programs were created a few months later, they were restricted to men only; guestworkers were not allowed to bring family members to the U.S. with them. And, as in South Africa, the men would be sent home at the end of the season. All-male migration also allowed employers to pay
lower wages because workers’ families bore the cost of their survival back home.
(p. 86)

Even though women work the land throughout the globe to feed their families, their participation in these contained labour migration schemes place them at odds with ideologies of nation, belonging, and claims for citizenship. Because of their potential to have children while working they are seen as potential distractions who can interrupt productivity among the male agricultural workforce. Constraints on women’s sexualities, bodies, and work follow Third World women migrants throughout the globe (Constable, 1997; Hilsdon & Giridharan, 2008; Jordal, Wijewardena, Ohman, Essén, & Olsson, 2013; Lan, 2008; Simon-Kumar, 2009; Smith, M., 2010). In this thesis I show how women step into a sea of men and give further life to the universe of the Program through particular expressions and practices of transnational homemaking, transnational love, agency, and resistance. Women’s lives are interlaced between rural Canada and rural Mexico where they forge a living and new expressions of loving.

**Defining the Research Project: Questions in Visibility Making**

Interestingly, throughout the course of my research some colleagues and professors have challenged the validity of my project because of the very issue of women’s low participation rate in the Program. Their doubts speak volumes to the gendered nature of temporary foreign worker programs in Canada, wherein the Live-in Caregiver Program is highly feminized and the agricultural schemes are masculine. For me, rather than minimizing their importance, this differentiation generates several questions about women’s experiences.

Embarking on a transnational ethnographic study, I started with basic guiding questions. Who are the women in the SAWP? How do they make sense of their transnational lives? How do they organize themselves around migration? How do their experiences differ from migrant men
in the SAWP? How are their lives impacted by being a numerical minority in a masculinized migrant labour force as racialized women? These questions marked my entry point into women’s lives and that of their extended families and rural communities in Mexico. I see my organizing and research as a feminist project of visibility making of women’s multiple forms of work and labour and as a way to accentuate their resilience, power, and humanity, which are often elided in economic studies of labour migration.

In my research, it was important to take the issue of invisibility directly to the migrant women to challenge my assumptions. First, I had to contend with the fact that my labelling them invisible had the effect of reinforcing their marginalization. At the same time, if they were invisible, what would visibility look like, and do they want to be made visible? Hubbard’s work (1999) considered the complexities of researching marginalized women, specifically sex workers in London, which posed similar dilemmas. Katz (1994, as cited in Hubbard, 1999, p. 235) remarked, “that there is a danger in making the practices of the oppressed visible to those who dominate and my limited conversations suggest that many sex workers want to remain invisible to protect themselves against legal repression and stigmatization.” Migrant women live within a particular precariousness in which some practices could certainly be taken out of context and used against them. In these instances, invisibility becomes necessary, strategic, and desirable.

Throughout the course of my study I have probed issues of invisibility with women on an individual and collective basis. What do they want to reveal and how do they feel about being seen? For instance, in a community research workshop in Niagara with several migrant women in attendance, the discussion moved towards the issue of invisibility in Mexico and in Canada:

Myriam (community worker based in Canada): When I talk to people about you [migrant workers in Canada] they have no idea.
Filo (migrant woman participant): In my case, people would ask me in my town because they know I come here...but there are some that have this idea because they say, what do you go there for, if we see TV programs and we never see that there are Mexican women working over there in Canada.

Luna (migrant woman participant): It is because we are not in the picture. [She laughed].

Even in their home communities they have to contend with invisibility because men are much more often the ones who migrate across borders to work. It is also more culturally acceptable for men to leave the home and migrate for work as an extension of their role as the main breadwinner. Women are not in the frame of reference of transnational seasonal migrants or main breadwinners. There is often suspicion in rural communities about the nature of women’s labour across borders. Then in rural Canadian townships in which they work, many migrant women feel that when they are seen it is not in a positive manner. Many of them report racism on the part of members of the local Canadian community. For instance, one woman working in Alberta expressed to me that they are seen as *bichos rarros* (bizarre creatures) in their comings and goings in the rural town. They also talk about feeling ignored in the sense that they do not count, in contrast to locals who possess tangible rights, access to services, and mobility as permanent residents. In the national imaginings of rural Canada and agriculture, racialized migrant women are unequivocally absent from the picture but they are everpresent and important.

**Deconstructing the Migrant Subject Through the Lives of Women**

In my interactions with women over the years it became obvious to me that migrant workers in general cannot be reduced to categories of migrants or workers. Like all human beings, farmworkers are complicated human subjects with diverse and contradictory identities.
Women, in particular, assume different subjectivities and identities owing to their transnational lives. From the women of the Program, I learned that my interactions with the men were quite limited. As a self-proclaimed activist, I had been more interested in the male migrant worker subject, one that I had reduced to the material aspects of their labour exploitation. I held particular notions of the migrant worker: rural, suffering, exploited, and poor. In effect I, too, had commodified migrant workers and their experiences. I had neglected the multiplicity and complexity of their transnational livelihoods and subjectivities. Over time I was able to appreciate, as a result of my interactions with women, that migration is an immense and collective effort involving multiple actors, factors, negotiations, and sentiments that are compelling forces in their own right. These understandings have shifted much of J4MW’s work with migrant workers and to this day we are one of the few community groups that has developed targeted advocacy efforts and workshops that are grounded in an intersectional analysis that considers migrant workers’ material and immaterial needs. Specifically, this approach entails situating migrant workers’ lives in the context of multiple systems of power and oppression including cultural stigmas and expectations associated with their labour migration.

We have come together in specialized workshops for migrant women where they have been able to recount their experiences and emotions associated with their transnational lives, being mothers at a distance, and confronting sexual harassment in their host rural communities in Canada and their workplaces.

While scholarship in the SAWP continues to evolve, the affective dimensions of this labour migration have not been sufficiently analyzed. In this thesis, I join feminist scholars who use a gender lens to delve into the affective domain of the SAWP (Becerril, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2009; Preibisch, 2004; Preibisch & Hermoso Santamaria, 2006). Doing so reveals more closely
how states and capital construct not only labour regimes as precarious, cheap, and flexible, but also a particular type of worker who is devoid of humanity, emotions, and needs. Accounting for the affective aims to strengthen and make visible migrant women’s acts of resistance: the assertion of the humanity, agency, and power that states and capital attempt to strip from them.

**Transnational Storytelling: Structure of the Study**

I conceive this research as streams of transnational stories piercing through the margins of the global economy and onto the farms and townships of rural Canada. These stories are the data, observations, analyses, collective knowledges, and longitudinal research in community-engaged scholarship with migrant women and their families in rural Mexico. I weave these stories through the following chapters and themes.

In Chapter 2, I elaborate my research methods: closeness, trust, and *convivir* (living and being with) migrant workers over the course of 16 years as a community organizer and community-engaged researcher. I detail the research sites and transnational ethnography that allowed me to trace migrant women’s transnational lives and their position in the social relations of agricultural work in Canada as temporary migrants. These methods in turn are informed by a community-engaged research that has an overtly activist orientation that seeks not only to make tangible improvements in the lives of migrants but also to challenge the ways knowledge and research are de/valued in academia. In Chapter 3, I chronicle migrant women’s arduous work of emotional management, which upholds their transnational families and households, to reveal that migrant farmworker women are also vested in the “global care chain” (Hochschild, 2000, p. 130). Hence, they not only work in Canadian agriculture but also engage in reproductive labour across and within borders in diverse ways. They engage in emotional labour to sustain themselves, their families, and even other migrants, principally migrant men who become their
lovers and affective community while they are away. Chapter 4 branches into migrant women’s sexualities, the ways they resist by loving despite prohibitions, and how their desires take form beyond their identities and roles as mothers. This chapter counters the notion that the self-sacrificing mother narrative is the sole driver of their continual labour migration. In the process of organizing and legitimizing their labour migration, migrant women claim new subjectivities, negotiate intimate relationships, and practise transnational love that is often precarious, temporary, and heart-wrenching yet expressive of their agency in the face of the power of state policies and demands of agricultural production. Chapter 5 contextualizes the affective dimensions of community organizing and makes a case for community activism as an extension of radical care work, one that not only focuses on improving material conditions but also catches and holds transnational heartbreak in all its manifestations among migrant workers. Emotions that are given form by the demands of survival through neoliberal globalization, by specific state policies that create unfree transnational migrant labour, call for labour organizers to do more than just fight for improved material conditions. I explain how, in the sea of tenuous emotions and heartbreak, I came to fully understand in mind and body what transnational organizing entails, much of which informs the work of our collective, Justicia for Migrant Workers. Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter that brings together the importance and lessons of this transnational storytelling for organizers, change makers, and migrant communities and their multiple allies. I propose a social justice project inspired by these transnational stories and detail the limitations of this study. Last, I describe how this research journey has changed the course of my political praxis and make a case for a transdisciplinary approach to advancing the rights of migrant workers and their families going forward.
Translating Transnational Storytellings Into Proposals for Change

The purposes of this study are to understand and translate the lives and struggles of migrant women and their families into proposals for change. This study is both an academic and a political social justice project. It represents an attempt to contribute to our knowledge of particular transnational livelihoods and also to use that knowledge to inform advocacy that seeks to mitigate some of the hardships involved in transnational survival in both Canada and Mexico. Through an explicitly activist research approach, I attempt to challenge the boundaries of scholarship by moving beyond knowledge for knowledge’s sake. How effectively can academic projects respond to the struggles of peoples? When does an academic project serve the academic ambitions of feminist scholars at the expense of women who are less privileged?

This study is also intended to counter the alienation between producers and consumers, the rural and the urban, the South and the North, and in the very notion of Canada itself. My aim is to bring to light the subjectivities missing from the official discourse of migrant/offshore workers and to document the lives of Mexican women who organize themselves for work in rural Ontario. Although not a victimology of the women who courageously transgress social norms in their fight for a better life, it is a call for recognizing and taking responsibility for Canada’s complicity in the dehumanization of peoples into labour imports and economic subsidies for agriculture. Through these pages I seek to tell stories that rarely find an audience and as an activist I seek to transform this knowledge into interventions for change.

Overall, this study confirms that, yes, Canada relies on imported Mexican labour just as the United States does. We need to look beyond the notion of the Canadian family farm and properly account for the importance of transnational families from the Global South in sustaining agricultural production in Canada. In essence this study acknowledges compressing and clashing
borders between Canada and Latin America and Canada and the Third World. It seeks to demonstrate that we are interconnected in a transnational world and explore what this means from within the Canadian context. The Rio Grande is not just lapping against our doorstep, it has flowed onto our kitchen table. Mexican migrant women work, live, and love in Canada too (see Figure 2).

*Figure 2. Mexican migrant women working in nursery operation in rural Ontario.*
CHAPTER 2
COMMUNITY-ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP WITH THE MIGRANT COMMUNITY

My engagement with migrant farmworkers began as a community-labour organizer intent on improving their labour rights. As organizers, allies, and activists who are outside of the social relations of the people we support, it is imperative to learn the particularities of the communities that we align ourselves with. Our work is dependent on continuous learning and research. As Kinsman (2006) noted, “social movement life is not separate from research” and “grassroots research” is always taking place (p. 134). Without a grounded context in the social relations that structure the lives and positionalities of the people we work with, we risk imposing our viewpoints and perpetuating oppressions as outsiders. Knowledge production is essential to community organizing and grassroots research fuels social movements (Choudry, 2013, 2015; Kinsman, 2006). Over time, I added the role of a community-engaged scholar through the doctoral research that has resulted in this thesis. In this academic research, I wanted to document all that I was observing and learning about the lives of migrant workers in rural Ontario through my involvement as an organizer. Academia provided me with structure as well as analytical and accountability tools to take part in and comprehend the lives of migrant workers, particularly migrant women. Academia also allowed me to immerse myself in the ample scholarly literature about migrant workers across the globe and to situate the lives of Mexican migrant women within global migration circuits.

In this chapter, I explicate how I merged my praxis as a community-labour organizer with critical sociology in academia. I make a case for knowledge acquisition by community

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5 I understand the term community-labour to encompass “unorganized” workers and multiple workplaces and labour to denote emphasis on the betterment of working conditions and rights. This is further explained in Chapter 5.
organizers acting as *organic intellectuals* as understood by Gramsci (1971) and defy the binary of academic and community research. Furthermore, I argue that we act as activist academics and interlocutors of various worlds in line with Mountz (2002) who argued that “in order to participate in political movements relevant beyond academe, academics must speak across worlds, play multiple roles, and communicate in more than one language” (p. 187). “Speaking across worlds” (Mountz, 2002, p. 187) entails accessing and moving through the multiple geographies occupied by the communities we work with. In my praxis, this has meant turning to academia as a space to amplify and translate my learnings as a community-labour organizer to a wider public while engaging in the movement for migrant workers’ rights in the multiple geographies of their transnational lives between rural Mexico and rural Canada.

I begin by telling the story of my entry point into the migrant community through the founding of Justicia/Justice for Migrant Workers (J4MW). This is followed by an account of how I gravitated towards doctoral research and how the research objectives of my thesis were generated. Then I offer a description of the nuts and bolts of the methodologies and methods I used in the course of data collection and analysis. I discuss how I navigated tensions in my porous research process and conclude by making the case that transdisciplinary community-engaged scholarship that values diverse knowledges is necessary to building effective social justice projects within and outside of academia.

**Social Dis/location and Emergence of New Personal Geography**

For a long time, I had known that Mexican migrant *men* worked somewhere in Ontario, but I had no idea that women migrated as farmworkers too. And never could I have imagined having the conversations, emotions, and observations of the sort that I had with Palabra (described at the beginning of Chapter 1). Migrant workers were distant from my reality living in
the Greater Toronto Area. Then, over a decade ago, when I was working part-time in a
department store in Brampton, I encountered a migrant worker for the very first time. With the
limited English he knew, he was able to ask for someone who spoke Spanish. That someone was
me. He was frazzled and apparently displaced. Everything about him suggested difference, a
difference that contrasted with a hegemonic notion of what it means to be Canadian—White,
middle-class and heterosexual. This man was brown. He was wearing clothes that neither
English Canadians nor the Latinxs I knew wore. He did not have any belongings with him; it was
just him with the shirt on his back and what appeared to be soiled jeans. My co-workers asked
me to figure out what he wanted. He explained that he had absconded from the Program. Lacking
knowledge of the “Program” he referred to, I directed him to the local Spanish parish in
Brampton and to Toronto where there were more agencies and services for people in his
situation. That was as supportive as I could be at the time. I never saw or heard from him again.

Looking back at this experience my stomach turns when I contemplate my insensitivity to
his reality. As a young undergraduate student, I had romanticized social justice in Latin America
but was oblivious to injustices occurring around me. Sending him away to Toronto and
downtown Brampton was a derisory response to someone who could not speak English and
who most likely did not know his way around the suburbs. I did not express any compassion or
empathy and instead kept a wall of distance between us. Sometimes erasure and distancing of
*others* protects us from acknowledging discomforting realities and our complicity in them. This
distance is a reflection of the borders that keep us divided and alienated from one another despite
our commonalities and interconnectedness as peoples. Organizing for Cuba, Colombia, and the
Indigenous Mapuche struggles in Southern Chile was easier for me than having to acknowledge
that marginalization is a feature of life in Canada as well. As an immigrant I was socialized to be
grateful for all that the country had given me even if it led to cognitive dissonance in the face of my own struggles and those of my family. Basically, Canada could do no wrong. Recognizing the reality of this man’s life and situation would have entailed recognizing my own racialization and difference as well as my complicity in a White settler colony, recognitions that I had long tried to suppress.

Many years later, in the spring of 2001, I came into contact with the migrant farmworker community again, this time in the context of rural Ontario. This encounter would change the course of my life in ways that I could never have imagined. I received a phone call from a friend, well-known Toronto community activist, Chris Ramsaroop. Chris asked if I could serve as an interpreter for an investigative mission to Leamington, Ontario to uncover details of the deportation of over 20 Mexican migrant farm workers. I had never heard of Leamington, but I quickly learned that it was considered to be the “greenhouse capital of North America” (The Municipality of Leamington, n.d.). Chris was working in the Toronto office of the United Farm Workers of America (UFW) at the time, which was focused on fundraising efforts to support the struggle for farmworkers’ rights in the fields of California. However, the UFW office had received a phone call from a union activist in Leamington who relayed the news of migrant workers organizing a wildcat strike in a major greenhouse. Lamentably, the courageous labour stoppage had resulted in the deportation of several workers in a disciplinary action ordered by the Mexican consulate in Toronto.

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6 Chris Ramsaroop worked with Stan Raper at the time. Raper passed away in 2016 and throughout his life he worked tirelessly for migrant workers rights. He was the coordinator of UFCW-funded Migrant Support Centres that were consolidated under the AgricultureWorkers Alliance, (AWA). In conversation with Preibisch, Raper provides his recollection of the moment when the labour movement started organizing migrant farm workers in rural Ontario (Raper & Preibisch, 2007).
At that moment in my life, I had just returned from a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) sponsored internship in Central America where I had worked with women *maquila* workers. I was also freshly tear gassed by the riot police during protest against the 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, an event that for me recalled Santiago, Chile in times of protest against the dictatorship. Even though the police repression in Quebec was nothing compared to what has been constant repression in much of the Americas and the Global South, it was enough to shake my foundations. The ideology of Canada as a benevolent nation that respects human rights and celebrates diversity of peoples and expressions was crumbling for me. With all that I was soon to witness and learn from Mexican and Caribbean migrant farm workers in rural Ontario, these notions would be shattered forever. Through community outreach and learning with the migrant community, I was brought to a new consciousness and awareness of my place in local and global struggles.

**Crossing the Border to the Mexican Paradise: Leamington**

It takes 4 hours to drive from Toronto to Leamington. The highway is full of huge transport-trailers and truck stops for people, goods, and money connecting Canada to the United States and, for that matter, Mexico. The more kilometres we drove, the more the landscape changed. The people around us, in their cars, in the truck stops, and in the communities where we stopped to fuel up were mostly White, and our contingent included Chris Ramsaroop, Marcus Saroop, Richard McKergow, Oriel Varga and journalist Tom Lyons, half of us identifying as people of colour. We arrived in Leamington at night when the moonlight shining on the greenhouses’ plastic made them look like odd gigantic metallic structures from a scene in a science fiction movie. It was a far cry from how I had envisioned rural Ontario. We were in a
different world, far from the multicultural city, in a foreign rural space with its own logic of segregation serving particular modes of production.

Our first stop was a bar named Mexican Paradise—*el Paraiso*—on Talbot Street. At the time, this was the major venue for Mexican workers attempting to escape from the toils of their work. It was a very masculinized space with pool tables and alcohol. No women were present save a few waitresses comprising resident Latinxs tending the bar. Nevertheless, I summoned up the confidence to inject myself into the flow of a regular Saturday night at *el Paraiso*. In Spanish, I started introducing myself and my *compañeros* (friends/comrades) Due to the urgency of our mission I went straight to *el grano* (the point) of our visit: who knew about the recent wildcat strike and the deportations? Who was involved? And who wanted to talk to us about it? Perhaps it was my insistence or maybe it was that we had parachuted ourselves in expecting too much, too soon as a group of strangers in a vulnerable community. Perhaps it was also the particular leisurely space and time in which we chose to take on this cold outreach approach. Either way, we could not get anywhere near the details of the wildcat strike. We learned that cold outreach is not always the most effective way to connect with precarious and marginalized workers. They did not know us and how exactly could we expect them to be forthcoming about their lives and work in Leamington? We gradually learned about, and even came to feel, the fear that many workers have of speaking out. When they eventually did speak openly with us it was in carefully negotiated spaces.

The next day, Sunday, the essence of Leamington became clearer to us. Mexican men riding bicycles were visible for miles on the margins of its roads. They seemed to prefer *charro*
sombreros\textsuperscript{7} over bicycle safety helmets. Low German Mennonite families could be seen in their four-wheel pickup trucks, or walking, particularly groups of young girls, in identifying homemade dresses. I did not see many of the picturesque open fields of vegetables and fruits that I had expected. The land was tamed and mechanized by greenhouses and modern technology facilitating production year round. And then there were the Euro-Canadians in their SUVs who dominated the streets and highways. Many of the local stores were owned by Arab immigrants and the busy motels were run by South Asian families. However, St. Michael’s Catholic Church, where dozens of bicycles were lined up against the walls, surely belonged to Mexicans on Sundays. In Basok’s pioneering book about Mexican farmworkers in Leamington, *Tortillas and Tomatoes: Transmigrant Mexican Harvesters in Canada*, she detailed the history of this racially divided milieu. Basok (2003) deduced the ethnic background of employers from a directory of greenhouse growers:

> Of the 75 growers listed in the directory, 31 had Italian surnames, 18 had German surnames, and the rest represented diverse ethnic origins including Portuguese, Chinese, Yugoslavian, British and French. Among those with German surnames, most were probably descendants of Mennonite settlers. (pp. 44–45)

Europeans who had been farmworkers in the past were now owners of complex and resource-intensive greenhouse operations. The new racialized and captive labour force in the Leamington area primarily comprised Black, Brown, and now increasingly East Asian migrant workers, many of whom were participants in the more recent agricultural stream of the Low Skill Temporary Foreign Worker Program that employers could access in addition to the SAWP.

The parking lot of the St. Michael’s church after Spanish mass allowed us to meet with dozens of workers. I nearly lost my voice interpreting all the complaints that workers had about

\textsuperscript{7} These are cowboy hats associated with the rural way of life and macho identity of the Mexican cowboy who tames the land and animals around him.
life and work in Canada. The wildcat strike was no longer on the radar because the 21 men involved had been repatriated to Mexico for their defiance. The men we spoke to volunteered their own experiences and opinions about ruthless employers, unsympathetic consulate officials, horrible housing conditions, overwork, and high payroll deductions. What I remember most from that weekend is a worker claiming, “señorita, they [employers] treat us worse than animals!” It was impossible not to be affected by that encounter. It became impossible to disengage from the realities that workers revealed about their lives in rural Ontario.

How different were the men from my father and the rest of the men in my family who worked so hard to come to Canada for a better life? I had thought I had made it in Canada by suppressing my difference and asserting my belonging after so many years of feeling dislocated. In the parking lot of St. Michael’s Church that day, I realized that if people who looked like me and my family were being treated as machines, then I had not made it at all. And if even if they did not look like me, how can we have successful lives if it means that those working to meet our basic needs for life such as food and care are exploited, erased, and rendered disposable? There is no difference in terms of the value of our lives as human beings, the need to be with loved ones, and the right to work to earn a dignified livelihood that is not premised on displacement, family separation, and exploitation. The primary difference between me and the workers in Leamington was that my mother and I arrived in Canada to be reunited with my father after he had been granted asylum as a refugee. We were permitted to enter a permanent settlement stream to re-unite as a family and to live in Canada. The migrant workers I had met in Leamington were only allowed into the country as disposable labour. They were seen and treated as disposable people whose presence in Canada is temporary, and who were unable to bring their families and settle in the country. As Sharma (2012) said during a lively and critical panel discussion at
Ryerson University, “migrant worker is precisely a state-created category” and I add, it is a category that is designed to legally bypass the human and labour rights legislation that we think this country upholds.

**The Emergence of the Migrant Farmworker Movement in Ontario**

This first informative mission to Leamington marked the entry of the Canadian labour movement into the working lives of Mexican and Caribbean migrant workers in Ontario. From there we extended our outreach to other rural communities, such as Simcoe, Delhi, and St. Catharines, while we continued our work in Leamington. We invited people based in Toronto who were in positions to effect a degree of change, politicians, lawyers, community advocates, and journalists, to see and hear for themselves the situation of migrant workers. We continued to learn from migrant workers and we also served as bridges to connect them with people in positions of power who could respond to their concerns. These investigative missions took a more formal tone through the establishment of the “Global Justice Care Van Project,” financed by the Canadian Labour Congress along with key unions, such as the United Food and Commercial Workers, Steelworkers, and the Canadian Auto Workers (at the time). Financing covered transportation costs to rural areas while volunteers such as Chris Ramsaroop, Sonia Singh, Jessica Farias, and I provided the volunteer labour to do the actual outreach work. The 2001 fact-finding missions in Leamington provided the foundations for an extensive report, “Status of Migrant Farm Workers in Canada,” that was presented to the federal minister of labour in that same year. The late Kerry Preibisch (2004) explained that: “the following year the UFCW opened a Migrant Agricultural Workers Support Centre in Leamington. The support centre was the first resource centre targeting migrant workers in Canada” (p. 227). I became the centre’s first coordinator and my work targeted the approximately 3,000 Mexican workers in the
area at the time. Chris Ramsaroop was hired by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) to do outreach among Caribbean migrant farm workers throughout the province. These promising developments reflected the momentum of community-labour organizing of one of the most marginalized groups of workers in the country that was finally taking hold in rural Ontario.

The 2001 wildcat strike and subsequent labour–community organizing marked an important historical moment that was made possible by one small group of defiant Mexican migrant workers. This moment has been documented by Becerril, (2007), Barndt (2008), Preibisch (2004), and Raper and Preibisch (2007). Becerril (2007), for instance, claimed that “although the work stoppage lasted for only a day, and almost half the workers were immediately repatriated to Mexico, it was this event that prompted the rise of today’s social and community organizations” (p. 169). Basok (2003) described the effect of this event in the postscript of her book: it allowed her to conclude with more “hope” (p. 150). Wildcat strikes organized by workers had occurred over the years, but these went unnoticed by advocates or the Canadian public. However, the strike in Leamington in the spring of 2001 prompted mobilization and cooperation among community, labour, and church groups to denounce injustices that had been occurring unnoticed in rural Ontario. Unfortunately over 20 Mexican migrant workers paid the heavy price of being sent back to Mexico and suspended from the Program for a year. Nevertheless, this incident proved that migrant farm workers could fight back and that unity is indispensable for change.

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8 A Toronto-based Latin American newspaper of the time, The Latino Post, covered the story of the wildcat strike and ensuing deportations. The headline of the story borrowed the expression “llamarada de petate” [flash in the pan] used by the Mexican Consul at the time to dismiss the strike and community response. The official response was that the incident was insignificant and that it had been completely blown out of proportion by community advocates.
Justice for Migrant Workers (J4MW) and Community-Engaged Scholarship

After collaborating with the formal labour movement for more than a year, core volunteers of the Global Justice Care Van Project decided to form a more grassroots collective called Justicia (Justice) for Migrant Workers (J4MW). J4MW aspired to be worker-led and fueled by the politics of possibilities among unorganizable workers that I further discuss in Chapter 5. Hinnenkamp (2006), a former member of J4MW now living in the USA, explained that:

J4MW is unique in its focus, which extends from the local to the global: members take up the cases of individual workers and advocate for worker-friendly reforms while always maintaining a long-term vision of a world of economic justice, in which people need not travel thousands of miles from their homes in order to earn a living wage. J4MW seeks to build trust in its relationships with agricultural workers and ultimately achieve a sustainable worker-led movement for change. (p. 148)

In the beginning we focused on learning about the lives of workers before intervening. This was a time when lawyers and experts on temporary foreign worker programs were significantly lacking.

At the start of our community work in 2001, we conducted cold outreach in several rural townships, meaning reaching out to workers in towns and contexts that we were unfamiliar with. These activities entailed mapping and dropping into a community we did not know in order to begin to make contact with workers. Oftentimes we arrived with pamphlets describing the organization’s work, contact names, and our phone numbers to secure connections with workers. This work had to be consistent. Once we made connections in a community we had to keep going to demonstrate to migrant workers that we were indeed trustworthy and impassioned about their rights. Cold outreach usually happened in public spaces and did not always work if employers or other Canadian farm staff were present. It takes a lot of time to build relations of
trust. As well, once ties were developed workers expected us to deliver, to demonstrate the effectiveness of our work to support them in their lives in Canada. From the outset, most of the issues that workers raised pertained to labour and housing conditions along with health and safety concerns. We strategized with workers about how to resolve their workplace issues with minimal risk of losing their jobs. Job loss and deportation were the main concerns workers had with asserting their rights.

From the moment we stepped into the worlds of migrant workers, we started to engage with them in the process of knowledge production. We could have been described as “organic intellectuals” as conceived by Gramsci. Carrillo Rowe (2012) explained:

Unlike the “traditional intellectual,” who builds consensus among the masses in ways that naturalize capitalism’s inequities, the organic intellectual draws on the knowledges of those “organic” groups to which she belongs—mobilizing political consciousness among the group and speaking on its behalf. (p. 799)

Although not members of the same socioeconomic class or citizenship location as migrant workers, J4MW organizers shared similar histories: racialization, displacement, colonialization, and forced migration. Thus we understood the need to learn in community to be able to act and make interventions in the relations of power subjecting and erasing migrant workers in rural Canada. “Organic intellectuals” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 5) are key to the building of social movements, elucidating class inequities, and countering hierarchies of knowledge that sustain the hegemonic power of the elites (Cox, 2015; Elliott, 2003; Levinson, 2001). In this case, hegemonic power was exercised by the Canadian state and migrant workers’ employers, at times aided by the Mexican government and its representatives in Canada. Before acting and working with the migrant worker community, we had to know and learn with the community. This approach centred migrant workers as organic intellectuals in their own lives. At the same time,
workers were often the last ones to know about policy changes even though they affected them the most. Although they knew and lived their consequences daily, not all were aware of the advent of economic restructuring that was set in motion in the 1970s ushering in the contemporary juncture of neoliberalism and globalization. Hence, activists and organizers had a role to play in triangulating the knowledges and experiences of marginalized workers. This was a symbiotic and dialectical process.

Outreaching to Migrant Women: From Troublemaking to Con vivir

It was not until our collective was invited to a summer picnic organized by a community group called ENLACE Community Link, INC, that was founded by Mexican women living in Toronto (Kukacka, 2005) that we started to meet and work with migrant women. ENLACE focuses mostly on the social and cultural needs of workers and organizes events such as soccer tournaments, bicycle safety workshops, and Father’s Day picnics throughout rural Ontario. They work in conjunction with the Mexican Consulate in Toronto and maintain contact with many employers to facilitate their access to workers. ENLACE does not claim a political agenda, whereas J4MW often gets confused with the union (sindicato) and politics (politica) which in turn are equated with problems (problemas) by some workers and the Mexican Consulate. Attending an ENLACE event is not risky for workers because they are supported by employers that see the events as apolitical. Therefore, it was not surprising to see many migrant women in attendance of that summer picnic. The initial contact I established with many of these women gradually flourished into meaningful exchanges and connected me, and by extension J4MW, to
their lives and families back in rural Mexico. Some of the women I met at the picnic became my friends, *comadres*,⁹ extended family, and research participants.

Stepping into the world of women in the Program required adjusting my approach as community-labour organizer. I could not be as politically aggressive with migrant women as I was with migrant men. When initially meeting migrant women, I had to be mindful of my language and emphasize *apoyo* (support) and refrain from immediately using political discourse of organizing or *unirse* (uniting) for the betterment of working conditions and labour rights. The latter was associated with troublemaking and the risk of losing their coveted contracts in the Program for the rest of the season or even for a lifetime. While migrant men in the SAWP faced this same dilemma, it was more pronounced for women. Thus, in 2016 the UFCW and a workers’ legal clinic based in Mexico, Centro de los Derechos Migrantes, filed a North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC) complaint about the systemic discrimination against Mexican women in guest worker programs in Canada and the United States, including the SAWP (Centro de Los Derechos Del Migrante, Inc, 2016). Women only account for an average of 3% of labour contracts in the SAWP. This has the effect of positioning them in heightened vulnerability compared to their male counterparts. In addition, when women are not named back by their Canadian employers for another season, they often lose their place in the SAWP altogether. In contrast, men who are not renamed can be assured that they will be placed in one of the hundreds of agricultural operations that exclusively employ men.

In order to understand and engage in the lives of women who were structurally vulnerable, I had to take on the approach of *convivir*. Being aggressive with my politics could have denied me access to them completely and could potentially place them at risk of being

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⁹ In English this translates to “co-mother” and in Spanish it refers to the relationship one forms with the parents of a child to whom one is godmother.
permanently ousted from the Program. In Spanish *convivir* means to live with, interact, engage and/or co-exist. It is a term that I had never heard until I began engaging with Mexican workers. Over the years many workers have said to me, *te gusta convivir con nosotros, los mexicanos* (you like to interact with us, Mexicans). In relation to research methodology, *convivir* is similar to but more than participant observation in that it entails being in and with community. For me participant observation is an approach undertaken as an outsider. However, I was already within the community through my involvement as an organizer. More so, it refers a genuine political commitment to walk with the community to understand and improve the lives of the people.

*Convivir* with migrant women specifically entailed stepping into a social world shaped by gender regimes, states, and borders. I accompanied migrant women to doctor’s appointments, often advocating for them if their concerns were dismissed or if we were turned away by frontline staff who did not comprehend the difficulties of arranging transportation and time off from their farmwork. I celebrated their birthdays, bought them cake, took them dancing, to La Molisan and El Paraiso in Leamington or the Canadian bar turned Mexican migrant escape in St. Catherines. I provided them with donations of winter clothing so that they did not have to spend so much of the money that they needed to remit back to their families buying clothes they would only wear in Canada. I brought some to Toronto to connect with live-in caregivers and attend wider community events. They showed me their love and connection through food they prepared for me in the portables, bunkhouses, and greenhouses in which they lived and worked. We talked for hours, mostly about the difficulties they were having with their children, their love lives in Canada, and the horizontal oppressions that arose among them. I took them to the *tiendas* (stores) and interpreted when needed. On our drives in my rental cars, we would sing along to Mexican love songs by the likes of Lila Downs, Ana Gabriel, Jenni Rivera, and K-Paz de la
Sierra. I ensured that all the women I knew in the Niagara region had an opportunity to see the falls at night and in the winter. I responded to various kinds of situations of women in crisis, including women being locked out of their farms for missing curfews and forced to sleep outside, being threatened with deportation, and dealing with serious health concerns.

When not present with them in rural Ontario or Alberta, I maintained my connection to migrant women through phone calls, text messages, and WhatsApp. They would call me about a range of issues and problems, and simply to connect and say hello. Oftentimes, I had to be on three-way conversations with them and their cellphone companies or their employers. I even acted as a love interlocutor, interpreting what they needed to communicate to their Caribbean migrant and Canadian boyfriends. I have often found myself on the telephone attempting to give advice on a range of matters, such as dealing with troubled teenagers back in Mexico, how to go about marrying a Canadian boyfriend, and the risks involved in leaving the Program and going underground in Canada. Once I received a distressing phone call from a woman who was suffering much angst because her Canadian boyfriend accused her of being a whore because she insisted on him using a condom. She had actually obtained some condoms for free at a sexual health workshop that we had conducted through J4MW. She did not have the English fluency required to explain where she had got them and why she wanted her boyfriend to use one. She passed the phone to him and I proceeded to have a very awkward conversation attempting to explain her position to him.

I also acted as a friend and counsellor by offering consejos (advice) and supportive palabras (words) and emotional support for the difficulties of their transnational lives. Sometimes, migrant women said I was like a mother who looked out for them in Canada.
Through *convivir*, as a practice of accompaniment, advocacy, and involvement, I understood and connected with migrant women in the universe of their transnational lives.

Critical to *convivir* was privileging women’s voices in their language and the ways they named their world. My Spanish fluency was instrumental in creating connections with migrant women without confusion and without intermediaries. However, I had to adjust my Chilean Spanish, learn Mexican lexicon and idioms that I had not grown up with as a native Spanish speaker. In this thesis, I use migrant women’s often poetic and heartfelt Spanish words in order to give importance to the meanings they assigned to their transnational lives. There are even some words that the migrant community have created in the context of Canada, such as *farma* for farm or *ridetero* for informal driver for hire. Mexican idioms and sense of humour abounded in my interactions with migrant women. I had to ask when I did not understand and incorporate new language into my lexicon to speak, understand, and be part of the universe of the SAWP through my own grounded praxis. The importance of language falls in line with Anzaldúa’s (2007) call to break silence, defy the shame of existing, and of speaking Spanish, declaring “I will have my serpent’s tongue – my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence” (p. 81). I had taken for granted language until I reread Andalzua’s (2007) and Freire’s (2000) work on language as mirrors of the social relations, cultural identities, and power among marginalized communities.

Through the process of *convivir*, I rapidly came to realize how different their lives were to migrant men’s. I was able to discern some of the most pressing issues they faced in negotiating their temporary non-citizen status in Canada *vis-à-vis* government institutions, employers, and consulate officials. I also realized I had been closed minded about an array of issues in their labour migration experiences in Canada (as explained in Chapter 1). Gender
constructions shaped the demand for their labour in Canadian agriculture, and this generated significant consequences for their lives. I detail these consequences in Chapter 3. Overall, women have to be more protective of their work than men. Most of the migrant women in my study were the primary breadwinners of their extended families and had few venues for income that could provide them and their extended kin with a livelihood in their rural communities. Within Mexico, many had left their families and communities at a young age to work as domestic workers in other regions. Some worked in maquiladoras, petty commerce, and seasonally for meagre wages as farmworkers in their communities. Some worked in family plots for subsistence. All in all, as rural women, particularly single mothers and breadwinners without male partners, they had limited recourse for economic sustenance and independence. By contrast, men inherit the property of their families and have more access to resources, waged work, and land.

Another issue that rendered migrant women vulnerable in the Program, was the significant distrust among workers. Anything could be used against a worker in retaliation for real or perceived offences, which included engaging in political work, advocacy or organizing, or attending politicized community events. Workers could report such activities to their employer or the Mexican Secretariat of Labour and Social Welfare (SLSW), which could lead to expulsion from the Program. I had to be cautious about and respond to their fears about troublemaking in my work with migrant women. This context compelled me to conceive of my research work as an extension of my community organizing and advocacy through the practice of *convivir*. Adopting this approached allowed me to learn about their lives in Canada and how they negotiated their structural vulnerability.
I shifted my PhD studies from a focus on neoliberalism in Chile to migrant women in the SAWP to provide continuity between my academic studies and my political learning and activism for migrant workers in Canada and Mexico. I also comprehended that one way to tackle the structural vulnerabilities of migrant women’s lives was not solely to understand them but also to document and mobilize this knowledge within and outside of academia. Academic study gave me structure and tools to facilitate my learning in the community. It also became another important space for social justice, a space where community knowledges could be valued and mobilized through and into government, the law, and media. For instance, academic studies undertaken through community engagement with migrant workers were critical in the Ned Peart and Presteeve Human Rights Tribunal cases. Importantly, Preibisch set the precedent for community-engaged scholars to be recognized as experts while advocating for changes to temporary foreign worker programs and working with unions and activist community groups. Preibisch’s and my study (2010) even made it into the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s (2014) position paper on discrimination against women in the SAWP. Overall, migrant workers, migrant women specifically, inspired another change in my political and academic trajectories and I pressed on to walk with them in their transnational lives and to produce this work, hence becoming part of the universe of the SAWP in my own ways.

**Research Methods and Tools for the Porous Field**

Expanding from my *convivir* knowledge and praxis as an organizer, I developed a transnational and transrural ethnographic study. By *transrural*, I refer to the spaces, time, and circuits marked by migrant women’s labour migration from their rural communities in Mexico to the rural townships in Canada in which they live and work. I weaved their stories, their words, and all that I was living with them through *convivir* along with workshops, fieldnotes,
interviews, focus groups, and print materials together. I collected photographs, some of which migrant workers had taken of themselves and each other throughout the seasons. The following section explicates these research tools further.

Recruitment and Ethics

Conducting research with migrant required the establishment and observation of careful ethics from the recruitment process onwards. I initially recruited participants from my existing networks, migrant women with whom I was close and had demonstrated willingness to talk openly about their lives. I explained the objectives of the research, that is was intended to trace their lives back to Mexico, promised protection through anonymity, and emphasized their right to withdraw from the study at any time. See Appendix D for the informed consent script. Equally important was explicating that refusing to participate would not affect our friendship nor any advocacy work on my part if they ever needed support. My participant pool grew through a snowball method beyond my close networks, particularly in my field research in Mexico. Ethics for the study went further than the requirements of the university. I had to be mindful of the tenuous relations among women on the farms and ensure that my work and presence did not escalate conflicts among them further. Moreover, I had to constantly gauge consent and check in with migrant women about what was making its way into my fieldnotes and analysis. Men also participated in my study, although peripherally. My focus was for the most part on the ways migrant women and their female kin back in Mexico negotiated their roles and exercised their agency in both sides of the migration spectrum. I did conduct formal interviews and focus groups with a few migrant men. The questions I used are listed in Appendix B. I also had a wealth of knowledge about migrant men’s experiences in Canada through my initial involvement with the
migrant community, which focused on Mexican men. This research was more about delving into women’s lives and filling the gaps in knowledge about their gendered and affective experiences.

Going Transnational

During the last years of my research, I moved and lived between Mexico and Canada. I organized my work, life, and finances around the employment contracts of the women in the Program. Thus, I came to know Mexico well from December to June, but from July to November I was always in Canada. December to June was when most of the workers in the Program and the women in my study were working and living in rural Ontario and Alberta. The month of July is particularly intense since it is the height of the harvest season in Niagara, where the majority of Mexican women are employed. It is also the busiest time for J4MW and the time when our workshops, developed and conducted for the migrant population, take place. The cycles of the contracts and seasons have marked when I am here and when I am there as a “transnational researcher.” Going transnational has afforded me much insight into the lives of migrants and their families.

Certainly not all transnational theorizing involves crossing borders. Transnational subjects and processes can be discerned from a single place and transnational subjects need not be im/migrants. For instance, in a study about Caribbean nationals living in Toronto and New York, Trotz (2006) challenged the binary notions that often underpin transnational theorizing which privilege place of origin and settlement as nodes of inquiry. She described circuits of movement among the Guyanese diasporic community, such as chartered bus trips organized by Caribbean women from the Greater Toronto Area to Caribbean spaces in New York, and the Last Lap Lime, an annual event that takes place around the Caribana festivities in Toronto. The Last Lap Lime attracts Guyanese from all over the globe and has nothing to do with travel to Guyana.
Trotz (2006) argued that transnational practices among Guyanese nationals are not bound to the route between North America and Guyana, but are instead expressed within various circuits of movement and “metaphorical crossings” (p. 42) between and within Canada and the United States.

Moreover, Levitt (2003, as cited in Trotz, 2006, p. 42) asserted that “movement is not a prerequisite for engaging in transnational practices and that many who stay in one place may also be enmeshed in transnational social fields.” My work involved tapping into transnational social fields created and occupied by migrants in rural Ontario and their non-migrating kin. I sought to understand the aspects of non-travel, non-migration, and the day-to-day life of non-migrating kin. I could only do so by travelling to their communities in Mexico. Like Trotz (2006), I suggest that family members who do not migrate are also engaged in transnational practices.

My study required much movement to traverse distinct realities within transrural settings in Canada and Mexico. Seasonal workers’ annual movement between Canadian and Mexican life is marked by leaving, arriving, being here, and being there. Through the Program, migrants become transmigrants par excellence according to widely accepted definitions. Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999) argued that transnationalism is discernable when:

a) the process involves a significant proportion of persons in the relevant universe (in this case, immigrants and their home country counterparts);

b) the activities of interest are not fleeting or exceptional, but possess certain stability and resilience over time;

c) the content of these activities is not captured by some pre-existing concept, making the invention of a new term redundant. (p. 219)

The lives of the migrant workers in the SAWP clearly exemplify the transnational life. All aspects of family life are organized around seasons of work in Canada. My research in Mexico
was precisely about discerning how movements within households and across borders produce transnational practices among non-migrants and migrants alike. What do households look like when migrants are away and what changes are experienced when they return? Where do migrants come from, what exactly do they leave behind, and what exactly do they take with them to Canada? Many of my research questions could only be answered by being there and here, that is, through a revolving multi-sited process.

**Interviews as Guides and Starting Points**

Formal interviews are key to much sociological research and many migration studies are based on data gathered in this manner (Mahler & Pessar, 2006). In my work, interviews served as important guides to the lives of migrants and their families, but they were not central, nor did they represent the last word from the subjects. For my study, specifically, I conducted 31 semi-structured interviews, including 21 with migrant women, 5 with migrant men, and 5 with non-migrating kin. Although the interviews served as an opportunity for reflection, and sometimes as a way to confirm or discuss specific information, I came to see that much that is expressed in semi-formal interviews is contradicted by everyday practices, and much is not expressed at all.

I often felt that the interviews I conducted were predetermined and prescripted fabrications of conversations. I had my questions ready on paper and in my mind. But when preparing the participants for the interviews, I first had to describe the research protocols, give a brief explanation of my research, and assure the subjects that their participation was voluntary and would not jeopardize their work in Canada. I obtained verbal consent, convinced respondents of the need for me to record the interview, asked them to choose a pseudonym, and then, at last, turned on an audio-recording device (the smaller the less intrusive, but still disruptive) to begin the conversation. After all of this preparation there were times when I was
stalled in my research tracks, so to speak. The step of asking respondents to choose a pseudonym was particularly perplexing to them. Some wondered why, if agreeing to be interviewed would not jeopardize their work, did they need to use a false name? I would have to explain the importance of anonymity and privacy again until the person became comfortable enough for me to turn on the recording device, at which point our exchange entered into the on-the-record space.

For illustration, after asking 4 men in a group interview in Leamington to come up with pseudonyms, one man offered the full name of a former co-worker who a year before had created problems for him with the Mexican Consulate. Speaking as if he were that person gave him license to speak his mind, but raised the possibility that the other person would suffer the consequences of his testifying about life and work in Canada. For me this was a tellingly complex before-the-interview moment in line with Warren et. al’s (2003) “after interview” discussion space (p. 93). This moment before the focus group interviews reflected the coercive power dynamics among workers in the divisive work environment created by the Program and their dependence on Canadian wages. It also revealed how some respondents perceive formal interviews. I communicated that the data would be guarded and handled responsibly. Interviews were seen by many in political terms, as an act of resistance, redemption, and revenge. I had to be overtly cautious with the data I gathered and the methods I used.

Along the way, I discerned an interesting development in my research. I no longer had to seek out new respondents; women started looking for me before they left for Mexico. They wanted to leave behind their testimonies in Canada and to have their stories heard, documented, and analyzed to serve as lessons to others. They knew of my work and that I was in a position to bring their stories back into my community work and research. Marisela, for instance, accused
her female housemates and co-workers of getting rid of her after she stole Patricia’s boyfriend. Marisela’s life at the house and at work started to worsen. She confessed that she cried at times because she had to take it all, the other women laughing at her, excluding her, and not giving her any direction or help at work. It was her first year in the Program and she was barely coping yet, according to her, she had not stolen anything from Patricia because the man did not belong to her. Patricia, powerful because she has been living and working in the same place for many years and has a strong connection to the managers of the farm, managed to pull the right strings to get Marisela fired. Marisela was transferred to another farm where her contract in Canada was cut from 8 months to 5.

Marisela did not want to leave without talking to me. It was a form of catharsis. I willingly listened and asked questions in order to better understand the situation and contextualize the power dynamics as expressions of structural divisions and vulnerabilities experienced by migrant women in a highly competitive work environment. Because of the closeness I was developing with the women, they started to reveal horizontal oppressions and divisions among them that had an intensity that I had not expected. I had witnessed migrant women turning to each other for support in order to handle life and the pressures of work in Canada. Many developed life-long friendships beyond their contracts on Canadian farms. Edmunds’ (2016) doctoral research also confirmed that migrant women turn to one another for emotional support, specifically observing “collective health promotive activities included talking to and supporting each other, having a sense of humour and being in regular communication with their families. One woman described the effects of sharing her experiences with her friends and colleagues as “feeling lighter” (p. 70).
However, divisions and tensions were quite real as well and the source of much tension and pain. Being close to migrant women meant that I was privy to these tensions, which were not sugar-coated nor dismissed in open focus groups or interviews. Part of the research ethics involved not taking sides but listening to their complaints and problems without judgement. I sometimes felt the need to discuss the context behind tensions to diffuse animosities and our workshops and charlas (talks) through J4MW always endeavoured to promote unity. However, these tensions could not be easily discussed away when migrant workers were living in tense situations every single day, with the overcrowding in their housing and the competitiveness in the workplace to be the fastest and most valuable worker. These tensions placed me in a tenuous position that I had to constantly navigate quite carefully.

I also found that some workers engaged in interviews to get close to me in case I came in handy one day to help them deal with problems they had in Canada. This raised the expectation that I would be available at their whim to return the favour, and turned some of the interviews into business transactions that left me with an emotional debt. Most of the issues afflicting migrant workers are logistically impossible for me to resolve because they are inherent to the structure of the Program.

Asking someone I was close with and who I knew well to participate in my research to witness and document their lives in Canada was one thing, but asking specifically for an intensive interview was another. The interview process introduced several rigidities, such as the reduction of friendship and comradery to a transaction. It made me feel as if I had an ulterior motive for being involved in their lives. Being involved as an activist and as friend seemed less invasive because in these capacities I was not asking for anything in return. Yet as a researcher, I set out to take a testimony, a piece of their lives, and then run away to deconstruct and
potentially decontextualize their words. Huisman (2008) shared these dilemmas at length when she was conducting research with Bosnian refugees. After several attempts to formally interview Mirsada, one of the women in the community, she was finally able to ask her questions and record Mirsada’s testimony. But then the respondent enquired, “Does this mean that you are not going to come visit me anymore?” (Huisman, 2008, p. 388). Huisman (2008) said, “when Mirsada looked me in the eyes and asked if I was going to visit her anymore, I feared that what I was doing ran counter to my commitment to feminist ideals of equality, reciprocity, and improving the lives of women” (p. 388).

Interviews did have an important place in my research, but I did not privilege them as the most important source of data due to their many limitations. I found informal conversations to be the most engaging, least intrusive, and most reliable source of data for my research. It was in these more informal interactions that many of the claims made throughout interviews could be corroborated and/or challenged. These moments, in settings such as the bailes (parties), dinner table in the greenhouses, drives in my rental cars, the grocery stores, and settings where life happens, were when I was better able to learn how the migrant women lived and understand their worlds. Conversations without audio recorders at hand rendered the richest, most in-depth, and most emotional testimonials. In Mexico, many times formal interviews were impossible because the women were constantly working in their ranchos (rural homes) and unable to sit down to talk. In these cases I had no choice but to rely on informal conversation and observations to gather data. I then recorded my observations in-depth in field notes that I kept either in hard copy or electronic format. All that I saw and heard imprinted me and broadened my lens on the lives of migrant women and their families. I also made sure I had permission to write about sensitive
topics after my informal conversations with women after I had reflected and processed their revelations.

More than anything, formal interviews brought up more dilemmas and challenges in my work with migrant workers as a vulnerable and divided population than the more fluid and porous process of *convivir*. Nevertheless, dilemmas and challenges became data in themselves to comprehend the complexities of migrant women’s transnational universe. I mostly relied on the method of *convivir*, which reflected more of who I was and the work that I had done with migrant workers from the onset. Overall I used interviews as guides to supplement or contrast with the data and knowledge I was gathering through the more fluid and porous practice of *convivir*.

**Focus Groups**

I experimented with focus groups to ascertain the quality of data I could gather and also used this method as a form of dialogue for community-building among migrant workers. In all, I conducted five formal focus groups that were recorded and transcribed, including one with Mexican and Caribbean migrant women working and living on the same farm. The focus group format had the advantage that it included a variety of voices around pertinent issues. In the focus group with Jamaican and Mexican women, everyone was generally diplomatic in their remarks. However, in one-on-one conversations it was clear that there were tensions and divisions between the two groups. Members of each ethno-racial group criticized the other. However, there was also conversation about how both groups tried to communicate and build unity with one another, principally through using a combination of patois, Spanish, and English. Focus groups are useful to discern relations of power when they are followed up with one-on-one interviews and conversations to reveal the strategic omissions among the focus group participants. When
undertaken with women who do not live and work on the same farms, the focus group had the effect of generating more openness and understanding among women because they were not antagonistically engaged. Hence it is important to continue these *charlas* and to include in them workers who do not work and live on the same farms to generate more discussion and understanding. I particularly appreciated bringing migrant farmworker women from the Niagara region to discuss their experiences with live-in caregivers in Toronto. They were able to learn from one another and see more of the issues that they were experiencing as structural ones shared by other racialized women in similar situations.

**Secondary Sources: Print Materials**

During many years of organizing and working with migrant workers I have collected government brochures, farm manuals outlining farm rules, and drawings and letters from migrant women’s children to complement the observations and interviews. One Mexican government brochure outlined how migrants should conduct themselves in Canada (see Appendix C). One set of farm rules demonstrated the difference in treatment of Canadian and offshore workers, despite the company’s stated allegiance to equal rights. Children’s letters and drawings are precious mementos for the women; they are a way for children to express their love and angst at a distance. Some of the letters I collected were written by a daughter of a migrant woman in Canada who took advantage of her mother’s absence to cross the border undocumented into the USA with her boyfriend. The daughter writes profound letters about her new life and young son born in the US and about how life used to be back in rural Mexico. Now mother and daughter contemplate distance and family spanning three borders through their own migrant experiences and engagements.
Rural Women Making Change: Reporting Back Research Results

Some of my fieldwork in Canada was part of Rural Women Making Change (RWMC), a Community-University Research Alliances (CURA) project financed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and based at Guelph University under the direction of Dr. Belinda Leach. RWMC’s mission was to understand and advocate for diverse rural women and girls and to strengthen capacity among community organizations that serviced and advocated for them in rural settings. I worked under the direct supervision of Dr. Kerry Preibisch and was given permission to use the 15 interviews I conducted with Mexican women working in the Program under the auspices of that project for my dissertation (see Appendix E for a list of the participants). My work for the project also involved mobilizing knowledge and reporting results to community service providers and migrant women. This innovative project enabled me to directly combine research with advocacy and further trained me as an activist researcher.

Specifically through this project I developed and conducted separate workshops for migrant women and for service providers in Leamington and Niagara with Dr. Kerry Preibisch. The workshops (one in each location) offered to Mexican migrant women were to discuss research results and to verify that we had properly understood their most pressing issues. I also created a pamphlet for them describing our preliminary findings and its first page included a moving corrido written by a Mexican migrant man about single mothers in the Program that most of the women loved. The pamphlet also included basic definitions of academic terms such as globalization and transnationalism to make the research more democratic and accessible. The workshop in Leamington was particularly productive because it was the first time the migrant women there had gathered in this way to discuss their life and work in Canada. This research was continued but in a smaller scale with Dr. Luann Good Gingrich’s (principal investigator) SSHRC
research project called, “Theorizing ‘Choice’ and Voluntary Social Exclusion: A Study of Transnational Livelihoods and Women from Mexico.” Though this research project focused on the particularities of social exclusion, I was able to gather, document, and utilize data that was directly related to my dissertation, namely data with respect to issues of resistance, love, sexuality, and emotion. Furthermore, this project enabled me to connect with migrant women in rural Alberta and compare the particularities of their lives with those of migrant women in Ontario.

**Fieldwork in Mexico**

In the winter of 2006, I travelled to several migrant communities in the states of Puebla, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz to conduct preliminary fieldwork. I was mostly interested in the logistical issues of conducting transnational research. The first forays into the Mexican field were about *desengañarme* (undeceiving myself) of assumptions I held before stepping into any migrant-sending community. I had an idealistic notion that I could combine this research with transnational organizing. I thought that it would be valuable to bring women, migrant and non-migrant, of these communities together to discuss some of the most pressing issues in their roles as migrants and in supporting the migration of others. I was quickly awakened by one of the migrant women in my study who said of the wives of migrant men: “those women hate us. They think we go to Canada to steal their husbands.” This was one learning moment among many that further shaped my work and understanding of the relations of power among women on both sides of the labour migration spectrum. Mexico was a terrain of which I was ignorant, and it took much time to establish good relations with migrants’ families and to learn to navigate the cultural and social contexts of migrant-sending communities.
Other issues were less difficult to manage. I needed to learn how to get to one place from another and to find strategic communities in which to undertake my research. Strategic communities were those in which I could reach a good number of migrants all in one place, which would make for the most efficient use of my time and financial resources. I also needed to get a sense of the openness of non-migrants to participating in this study. Moreover, the first visit was about testing the ground, so to speak, among migrants themselves to determine if away from the Canadian farms and in their home communities in Mexico they would be introspective about their lives in different ways. In Mexican sites migrants are no longer migrant workers. Because they are with their families, guided more firmly by their community’s social norms, and performing different types of work, their lives are organized in vastly different ways than they are in Canada. If I had conducted the study entirely in Canada, I would have missed the daily life practices that cannot be discerned through interviews alone.

In the winter of 2007, I formally started my fieldwork in Mexico and lived there for 6 months. I researched over 18 families who were connected in different ways to the SAWP. Most had a female family member working in Canada while others had husbands and/or brothers in the Program. Out of these families I conducted hours and hours worth of in-depth interviews with 4 migrant women who participated in the SAWP and who were, at the time, waiting to be called back to work in Canada. I also formally interviewed 5 of their direct kin. These included mothers and adolescent children of migrant women.

In my travels throughout rural Mexico, I also came across dozens of families and individuals who were directly affected by and connected to US migration circuits. These encounters allowed me to compare families bound to a guestworker program in Canada with
those affected by the more permanent yet precarious undocumented migration experiences of family members in the United States.

My engagement with families in various sites through rural Mexico was very rich. I lived with several families over the time I was there. I was taken to church services, local markets, and schools. I sat at their kitchen tables and shared delicious traditional meals with immediate family and their relatives. I observed the migrant women mothering their children and taking advantage of every minute they had together. Most of the women I interviewed in Mexico cried as they shared their stories of triumph and pain. Hours were spent engaging in daily activities and intimate conversations about life and work. The principal objective of my fieldwork in Mexico was to situate migration as a process of collective work, negotiations, and concessions among families for household survival.

Going to Mexico to visit women and their families in their communities has been vital as a test of my loyalty and commitment as an advocate and ally. Living and eating with them demonstrated my appreciation and respect for being in their homes. My presence also assured their families that their loved ones were not completely alone in Canada but had people outside of the Program who they could count on. During these visits, I was able to extend my advocacy work for J4MW. I met with women who I had only known from the constant telephone communication between Mexico to Canada in regard to diverse paperwork and cases I was managing through J4MW. I also met with widows who had lost their husbands through their migrant work in Canada. These tragedies marked their lives forever, unbeknownst to and forgotten by an invasive but distant Canada. In Mexico, women’s transnational ties were fully visible. Their children, mothers, sisters and brothers, and other extended family members gave tangible significance to their migration to heightened degrees. Their rural communities spoke,
too, of arid lands, precarious subsistence, unemployment, forced internal migration, and family support and survival systems.

**The field in Canada**

The field in rural Ontario is a terrain of contentious dynamics. Connecting with migrant women was not easy because of the control and fear they live under in the Program. However, connecting with them, principally in Niagara where the majority of Mexican migrant women of the Program work, was made possible by certain strategic factors. First, I was able to freely visit women’s housing in the area because most did not live on the same premises as their employers as the workers in many other regions do. The women who did live on the employer’s property stayed in houses that were quite separate from their employer’s. The housing provided for migrants was often located away from main roads because employers tend to hide foreign migrant workers staying on their property. Preibisch (2004) also noted this tendency in one of her earlier investigations. A Niagara resident she interviewed claimed that:

> Farmers are still very careful to keep the housing for the offshores out of sight because neighbours will complain. In some cases growers want their offshore workers not to be visible; they don’t even want anybody to know that they have offshores. (Preibisch, 2004, p. 218)

Within this tenuous context, one house in particular became key for our outreach to women. It served the role of makeshift community centre for those who did not go to the local UFCW-operated Migrant Support Centre in the community. A few years ago, it was quite safe for outsiders to frequent the house and safe for workers to have visitors.

In the summer of 2007, however, a warning sign appeared in that house (which I further detail in Chapter 4) and all the migrant houses belonging to that particular enterprise. This was a reminder of the surveillance workers have to live with in Canada. But it did not stop the constant
comings and goings at the makeshift community centre where I had strong ties. There seemed to always be ways to challenge or resist such farm rules. The curfew just meant people arrived earlier and did not park a car outside of the house that might attract the attention of the security company.

During my organizing work through J4MW, I lost access to women’s housing due to pressures among employers and migrant women. This meant that it was nearly impossible to reconnect with the women in those houses. Employers tend to exert more control over women’s bodies and mobility than over men’s. It is as if they believe women workers have to be protected like children. An employer who does not allow visitors usually also controls the movements of women outside of the farm. In the summer of 2006, Mexican women from a particular farm in Northumberland County urged me to intervene with their employer who was preventing them from leaving the farm after their shifts. In a telephone conversation with the employer, I tried to explain that the women were not bound to the farm and that they could go anywhere they pleased after completing their work day, as indicated in their contracts. He argued that the restrictions he imposed were necessary because he would be liable in the event that something happened to one of them off the farm. This is a common excuse that employers have used to legitimize excessive control of their workers.

It was absurd that I was attempting to convince an employer that he had hired workers, not captured slaves that he could release or not whenever he wanted. I ended our conversation by pleading for permission for the women to take walks around the farm, but he would not budge. The situation worsened to such a degree that the women were forced to call the Mexican Consulate, something that is seen as a last resort among workers. Workers avoid calling at all costs because reaching out to the Consulate directs attention to a farm as problematic and certain
workers as troublemakers. The last thing workers, particularly women, want is to be the source of a problem even when the employer is at fault. Many fear that they will not be called back the next year to work in Canada and the position they held would be assigned to someone else. Worse yet, women fear that they could lose their contracts to a migrant male workforce altogether.

Reaching out to women in a context of surveillance, dependence on Canadian wages, and disposability is highly problematic and risky. Meeting them in the town where they do their grocery shopping was out of the question since their employer or whoever drove them into town would observe them talking to outsiders, for which there might be repercussions. Being a woman, speaking Spanish, and being in a racialized body resembling some of the migrant women helped me significantly. I could identify myself as a friend or a relative. Due to my racialization and embodiment employers did not immediately assume I was a researcher and activist. But I did not want to be responsible for jeopardizing women’s work in Canada and I had to tread very carefully in my work. In Alberta, for instance, I had to make the difficult decision to refrain from contacting Guatemalan migrant women on a farm known for strict rules, which included forbidding workers to attend church on the weekends. As difficult and heartbreaking as it was, my solidarity sometimes had to be reduced to refraining from contact altogether. I also had to navigate and gently counter the concerns of Latin American-Canadians of a particular religion who happened to be visiting one of the women’s housing in rural Alberta while I was there and expressed suspicion of me and my intentions. They were acting as gatekeepers, again demonstrating the difficulty of accessing migrant women in rural Canada.

Although sites of surveillance and restrictions, some of the women’s housing provided a degree of safety. Often housing acted as protection from men in the Program that women
claimed were sexually aggressive and disrespectful towards them. As well, according to the cultural norms that women take with them from their upbringing in rural townships in Mexico being out and about is a male prerogative. This does not mean that women were not changing the how they interact in Canada or that women were always housebound. Rather, it suggests that the house/makeshift home/housing is of critical importance for women in ways that it is not for men in the Program. My access to these spaces has been crucial in strengthening connections to women. In women’s housing I was able to connect to a number of women in one place. When we have needed privacy to speak one-on-one, a woman could would take me to their sleeping quarters to communicate feelings and problems in relation to her transnational life.

Being a woman allowed me to undertake this intimate research. I could access their housing which in the majority of circumstances was forbidden to men. In rural Mexico staying in the homes of migrant women was easier to negotiate than staying with the family of male migrants. Many male migrants assure their wives that there are no women in the Program and that they do not know any women in Canada, period. Thus, showing up at the doorstep of one of my compañeros (friends/comrades) could bring about a slew of questions and marital problems despite my explaining who I was and what I do, and that I would rather not instigate.

The research for this thesis included a mix of methodologies, from convivir as a porous praxis of commitment to the migrant community, living and being with women and their families to the more traditional methods of sociological inquiry involving interviews and fieldnotes. I expanded my knowledge acquisition as community-labour organizer and embraced the community-engaged scholarship that is now accepted in the Human Rights Tribal of Ontario as legitimate expertise, a major feat in spaces of institutional power associated with Western epistemologies. I have encountered and engaged with a large number of migrant workers and
family members over the years beyond the list in my appendices and had a wealth of experiences and feelings that have framed my understandings of the universe of the SAWP. All that I lived, witnessed, and learned throughout the 16 years with the migrant community informs this study. Along the way, migrant women and their families trained and transformed me into the researcher and organizer that I am today. My goal is to merge knowledges from within academia and from their transnational universe to widen and expand research, theory, and action for the migrant women and their families.

**Activist Research: An Overarching Approach**

My overall methodological approach is guided by activist research as an explicit project. There is nothing new about this approach. Activism has, for instance, been at the core of feminist research and the feminist movement since the 1960s (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Many social research projects are inherently political initiatives that aim to understand, change, and act in the world. Activist research is understood and carried out by researchers who understand the close connection between the personal and the political and who appreciate the contextualized considerations their research projects give rise to. Not all activist research leads to the same place, nor does it have the same goals. Its effects vary and sometimes the most it can produce is a counter-hegemonic account of marginalized peoples that only a few will ever read. For me, the only way that my academic work makes sense is by embodying a holistic practice of activism, community engagement, and research within the porous boundaries of field sites, identities, and roles. This approach is an extension of how I was already involved with the migrant population.

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10 On Friday June 26, 2011, after I wrote these lines, I left Robarts Library in downtown Toronto to find two workers from Leamington right at the corner of Bloor and Spadina. They were in Toronto for immigration hearings. For a week I had been trying to find temporary housing for all five who had to come into the city, but then their immigration consultant had offered them a place to stay for a few days. When I unexpectedly ran into these two workers they explained that their immigration consultant had basically left them on the street and the rest of the women were waiting at Union Station. I could not believe that we managed to cross paths at the same time and in
in rural Ontario. In this approach, the field is never definitive despite the very tangible geographical concentration of migrants and their families in rural sites and settings in Canada and Mexico. The field stretches into the suburbs and cities through the phone; crises that cannot wait until the weekend, and even psychically through the emotions, personal connections, and preoccupations of the many individuals who are part of my community research praxis and therefore my life. I have embraced activism and academia as a unified political practice. This has entailed the negotiation of multiple challenges inherent to this journey, for example, being torn between academia and activism as opposite binaries. Along the way I have had to develop my own tools and praxis to sustain myself in this politically encompassing work.

This particular activist research, just like the core of feminist scholarship, defies positivist paradigms that compartmentalize and objectify the researcher, the researched, and the research process. Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007) explained that feminism has countered the essence of positivist social research that they describe as:

Rationalist thought, characterized by the Cartesian mind-body split and the privileging of the mind over the bodily, subjective and emotional realms, and empiricism, with its emphasis on objective observation and its origin in the scientific revolution combined to form the basis for the positivist paradigm in sociology. (p. 6)

As researchers, we bring who we are into our work: our bodies, our senses, our spirits, our emotions, and the socialization that structures how we see and act in the world. Just as we cannot

the city. This is an indication of how porous “the field” can be and how this work consumes my life. For me, the city, particularly the Bloor and Spadina area, is the universe that I inhabit and know in my life as a student. It is a space in which I am not accustomed to seeing the migrant workers with whom I work. Every year, through Justicia, we bring migrant farm workers from different regions into Toronto as part of our community organizing work and also as an act of defiance against state policies that make certain bodies mobile for work but immobile for social and political interactions. The Program, the agricultural industry, and immigration policies serve to geographically contain and isolate racialized peoples in rural sites. But migrants defy these boundaries in their own ways. In this case migrant workers outside of the Program (with precarious status) were using the immigration system to assert their belonging and did not allow distance or lack of familiarity to disconnect them from services and support in Toronto.
compartmentalize our minds, bodies, and spirits, we should not have to and cannot pretend to be able to do this in the research process. Thus our research methodologies, objectives, and products should seek to capture these complexities within our research and, most importantly, coincide with how we integrate the subjects of our research, who are more often than not people who are excluded, silenced, and marginalized in mainstream society.

Reflexivity is the key to capturing these complexities and, for that matter, the key to working with marginalized peoples inside or outside academia. Reflexivity allows for recognition of how and where the researcher/advocate seeps into the research/community engagement process to discern what is ours and what is theirs in terms of assumptions about and interpretations of a particular lived experience. In this regard, Fuller (1999) explained that:

There is a need for the researcher to consider his/her place within the research process, not least because inclusion in this process is both undeniable and unavoidable. Yes, there is a danger of over-stressing the importance of the researcher as person within our work. However, I would argue that such a danger is slight, compared with the false and misleading presentation of the researcher (and research itself) as inert, detached and neutral. (p. 224)

In attempting to ascertain what is mine and coming clean about what I bring to my research and community engagement, I have sought to be mindful of how I am situated and how it affects how I see and interpret the world. In this case, I refer to the world-universe of the Program, in which I live as an outsider/advocate/researcher. I am able to recall every season of the Program over the years according to the cases worked, workshops, organizing initiatives, interviews, and conversations I have had with people in rural Canada and rural Mexico. I, too, have lived the Program in my own ways through the multiple roles I fulfill, but this engagement has been structured and limited by my privileges. For one, even though I embody tangible class, gender, and racial limitations as defined by this particular White, hegemonic Western society, these are
mediated by privileges such as a university education, English fluency, and mobilities of different sorts due to my status as a Canadian citizen. These privileges have become apparent in many instances in my community research praxis both in rural Canada and rural Mexico among migrants and their families. For example, in some instances I am referred to as *canadiense* and not Latina. Other times I am referred to by my first name and the White Canadian women with whom I sometimes do organizing work are called the *canadienses*. Social location based on class, race, gender, occupation, and nationality, on the other hand, has greater consequences for migrant farm workers who are rendered stateless (without the capacity to claim full rights to any nation-state) by their transnational lives and temporary work visa status. Clearly, migrants and their families see and speak about the world differently than I. My intersubjectivity with the migrants and their families in the Program is limited by the lenses through which I interpret the world and thus necessitates a constant and rigorous reflexivity.

Reflexivity has been instrumental at every stage and for various purposes in my engagement with the migrant population. My initiation into the movement for the rights of migrant workers would have been impossible without a reflexivity that permitted me to acknowledge my own gendered racialization as a Latin American woman in Canada. We are challenged to see ourselves through the eyes of other people. Because of my interactions with migrant workers I could not run away from the reality that I am part of a racialized minority deemed inferior and exploitable. Reflexivity in this instance served to fuel my desire to construct an approach to bridge disciplines to amplify the voices of migrant workers, particularly those of migrant women and their female kin. In moments where I have wanted to walk away from this work, my spirit strengthened my determination to charge ahead. Reflexivity has powerfully swayed my consciousness outside of the traditional confines of academia and activism to reclaim...
and integrate the spiritual as part of my praxis by embracing deeper meaning and purpose in my work. Spirituality, one that is tied to my ancestry and life experiences, has functioned as another and certainly unconventional research tool in my work. As a tool it has given me the strength and perseverance to accept the multitude of responsibilities and deal with the tensions that are part of the journey of this community research praxis.

The intensive reflexivity afforded by an anti-oppression framework has allowed me to acknowledge that the framework is incomplete and imperfect. As researchers we are not all-knowing and as much as our knowledge is partial (no matter how close we think we are to the particular group of people with whom we are engaging) so will our reflexivity and intersubjectivity be. This stance is akin to the “critical reflexivity” that is proposed by Maxey (1999, p. 200):

By actively and critically reflecting on the world and our place within it, we are more able to act in creative, constructive ways that challenge oppressive power relations rather than reinforce them. (p. 201)

Critical reflexivity has also been useful for questioning whether and how my community research praxis further marginalizes and oppresses the people with whom I seek to align myself. I constantly have to negotiate what is useful, ethical, and beneficial research and how to mobilize my work to promote the well-being and human rights of migrant workers and their families.

These considerations are directly related to my accountability. For my work, accountability is as much a matter of political commitment as it is a choice about the way I want to live and engage with the Mexican migrant population. Speed (2006), who advocates for a “critically engaged activist research” in anthropology (p. 70), also found accountability invaluable in her work with an Indigenous community in Chiapas. She claimed that:
The question of whether a researcher of human rights should have a commitment to, or accountability to, his or her research subjects, especially when they are marginalized and disadvantaged, is not just one of anthropological ethics; in many cases, it is a practical one for the researcher of human rights. (p. 71)

Accountability to migrant workers and their families in my work has meant restricting my contact with employers in the Program, remaining as invisible as possible, and constructing relations with migrant workers that do not rely on employers’ permission. When dealing with marginalized peoples, our access depends on our allegiances and political commitments. Being connected with employers in any way raises suspicions among migrant workers that their expression of their viewpoints might jeopardize their position in the Program. Any perceived connection to employers is a difficult hurdle to overcome. The migrant workers and their families that I know well understand that I do not deal with employers except in crisis situations and that I am primarily interested in their particular lives and viewpoints.

Accountability also means being selective, careful, and ethical in conducting and presenting research. In the case of migrant women farm workers there are certain data that have to be treated as sacred and protected. These boundaries are particularly crucial when engagement with the community is so intense that the research subjects forget that research is taking place. In many instances, being ethical meant choosing not to reduce an engagement, particularly a traumatizing and personal moment with a migrant woman and her family, to a research moment to be documented. I have consciously not allowed some of the data to make its way to print. But it has a way of working itself into the research as a source of inspiration and a frame for the telling of the multiple stories forged across borders.

These measures aside, embodying clear intentions and practices around accountability does not render the research process with marginalized populations problem free. Our very
engagement, no matter how ethical we believe it is, has the potential to interrupt contentious power relations and in this way alienate some of the very people we are seeking to align ourselves with. Speed (2006) also had to come to terms with these contradictions since the Indigenous community she was working with in Chiapas was divided around land rights and cultural claims. By aligning with one faction and political project Speed automatically alienated another group in the community. Speed’s arguments (2006) seem to suggest that it is impossible to be a neutral researcher and observer particularly in communities that are ridden by tenuous relations and divisions. I faced similar challenges in my work since there are intense divisions among migrant women and significant horizontal oppressions at work that divide them. Yet I am convinced that the risks involved in these decisions are outweighed by the capacity of our work to move across worlds to produce tangible positive effects and interrupt contentious power relations from the global to the micro that otherwise serve to marginalize and divide.

As community researchers and activists, we become interlocutors of divisive relations within marginalized communities entrenched in complex matrices of power. This is yet another role we perform in the community research praxis. It is not always a conscious function, but it is one that is constantly performed by many activist researchers. For instance, in my direct interventions with migrant workers and their families (in informal conversations, case work, written materials, specially designed workshops, and so forth) I attempted to bring divisions and structures of oppression to the fore in order to inspire a collective and dialectical process of consciousness raising and finding solutions. I may not always have been successful in this endeavour, in fact success in this context is difficult to define, but it is one of the roles we assume and the contradictions we navigate as part of the community research praxis.
We are also constantly pushing through boundaries and challenges of all sorts in the research process. In the community there is constant suspicion that researchers will colonize and appropriate knowledge of marginalized peoples and run away without benefiting or being accountable to the people who have informed the research work. And in academe there is still suspicion about research that is informed by overt activist and political commitments. Stanley and Wise (1993, as cited in Fuller, 1999, p. 221), explained that there is:

A tacit notion that to be “committed,” to be inside the group and work with it, results in the wholesale adoption of an uncritical, unquestioning position of approval in relation to that group and its actions; thus the standard of the research becomes questioned, its validity threatened.

Attachment to a particular group or cause can become a liability and threaten credibility not only within academe but also among institutions and people who have the power to effect policy changes. Therefore academic work fueled by political commitment has to have a solid foundation in order to justify its findings about the knowledge and experiences of the peoples it is seeking to understand.

**Conclusion: The Third Space of Activist Research**

The research framework I have generated and used in this thesis is premised on multi-sited visibility making of activists as researchers, collective knowledge production with/in community, and the construction of a social justice project crafted from the varying positionalities of actors involved. Although not free from tensions or clashes from the demands of colliding worlds and spaces, ultimately my community research praxis is located in a *third space of possibility* in line with Routledge (1996 cited in Maxey, 1999, p. 202)

Certainly no simple opposition exists between academia and activism. Rather, occupying a third space of critical engagement enables research to become a
personal and reflexive project of resistance. Clearly such a space must be one’s own, not one prescribed, ordered, expected, enforced.

Moreover this third space coincides with feminist, Chicana, Indigenous, and decolonial epistemologies (Anzaldúa, 1999; Facio, 2010; Gill, Purru, & Lin, 2012; Gonzales, 2000; Mohanty, 2003; Naples, 1998; Soto, Cervantes-Soon, Villarreal, & Campos, 2009; Smith, L.T. 2013) that resist borders and binaries between academia and community. These counter epistemologies evoke change-making not only in community and the globe, where migrants and their families are pressed to the margins, but also within academia to challenge the still pervasive supremacy of Western epistemologies and their concomitant rigid scholarship metrics (Castleden, Sylvestre, Martin, & McNally, 2015; Huisman, 2008; Segura, 2003; Stanton, 2014).

Hence, I posit that activist scholarship is a vital practice of change-making that can powerfully merge community, activist, and academic knowledges. I advocate for a transdisciplinary approach that merges diverse ways of knowing, being and acting within social movements, and marginalized communities in the globe starting with migrant women and their families of this study.

Activist researchers have to constantly navigate colliding worlds and validate transdisciplinary knowledge. Problematic binaries and hierarchies of knowledges remain in various spaces of power, including academia. After being invited to prepare and present a workshop on migrant workers’ rights with Chris Ramsaroop, we were told at the last minute that an academic expert would be slotted in to ensure a more balanced analysis of the issues. Our extensive knowledge derived from an enormous amount of time spent organizing and researching at the grassroots was invalidated, even though the expert in question was an ally who often turned to us to connect them with migrant farmworkers and to clarify how policy changes were affecting the work and lives of migrant workers in Canada. It made me question, what
makes community-engaged research unbalanced? Who gets to be an expert and why? How is Whiteness attached to expertise and racialized bodies deprived of knowing? Although difficult to sustain and to embody in the everyday, it is a practice that comes from the core of emotion and political conviction. Community-engaged research is a political, academic, and social practice within and beyond the ivory tower that has proven to be a solid bridge into the intimate lives of migrant women and their families spanning multiple spaces, realities, and time across rural Canada and rural Mexico. It is from this bridge that a social justice agenda can emerge, from the probing of community knowledge that we all cultivate and inform together.
CHAPTER 3

TRANSCANATIONAL HOMEMAKING AND THE MANAGEMENT OF EMOTIONS

Migration, and circular migration in particular, requires continuous collective effort by families to organize and delegate labour during the pre-departure phase and when separated as a part of the particularities transnational household management. Through labour migration, Mexican migrant women and their families engage in transnational homemaking (Preibisch & Grez, 2013; Sandu, 2013) practices and strategies. According to Preibisch and Grez (2013) transnational homemaking refers to a “set of practices involved in caring for family relationships and maintaining household economies across borders” (p. 787). Much like men, women cannot migrate without the support of their non-migrating kin, but as women they also have to contend with gender-specific constraints in managing their households across borders. In this chapter, I expand on the understandings and implications of transnational homemaking practices for emotions. I discuss the concessions and negotiations that are made by women and their family members in relation to productive and reproductive work such as childcare and financial administration. Often overlooked in the literature on the SAWP, I argue that a central feature of these transnational homemaking relations is the management of emotions. Laborious care and emotional work underpin transnational households, yet this work has been largely erased and devalued in the economy of agricultural production and labour migration overseen by states in the interests of agribusiness.

This chapter aims to make visible the emotions infused in the economy of transnational households, labour migration, and Canadian agriculture overall. I start by situating the discussion within the literature on transnational families and gendered statelessness negotiated by migrant women pertaining to complications they encounter through weakened and non-citizenship rights
when carrying out their roles and meeting their responsibilities as breadwinners, mothers, and homemakers. I then explicate the discourse of “Canadian family farms” that obliterates migrant women and their families along with the arduous work they must do in order to supply labour and earn wages. Then I outline the significance of migrant farmworker women’s work and strategies as expressions of a “global care chain” (Hochschild, 2000, p. 130). Moreover, I show how this complex transnational homemaking produces a myriad of consequences, some of which I term transnational casualties, that women contend with in order to secure survival, care, and well-being for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Migration and Transnational Families

Family life and the human experience everywhere are fraught with painful challenges. Yet transnational families have added challenges due to their separation across borders. The roles and practices, including those related to productive and reproductive work, within such families fluctuate around the household economy. There is ample literature on transnational families tied to diverse global migration circuits. For instance, Gamburd (2008) detailed the lives of Sri Lankan domestic workers and how they understand their migration choices in relation to their children and families left behind. Gamburd cautioned against seeing transnational working-class families through a Western lens of heteronormativity with its expectation of a stay-at-home mother and provider father. Instead, Gamburd (2008) urged an emphasis on the economic context that shapes “parenting practices” (p. 9) and family composition. Transnational families are on the rise in a time of intensifying economic restructuring that pushes people to migrate from their home communities and families in order to survive.

The studies that most closely reflect the particularities of migrant farmworker women in the SAWP are those that address the conditions and experiences of caregivers/domestic workers
in Canada and the USA. The studies by Parreñas (2008, 2015), Bakan and Stasiulis (1997, 2003), and Pratt (2012) looked at gendered roles, care work and affect across borders. Literature on undocumented Mexican and Central American migrants in the USA have looked at class position, culturally specific identities/subjectivities, and the precarious integration of migrants, which are similar to the factors affecting women in the SAWP (Boehm, 2008; Dreby, 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Menjívar, 2012). Even though migrant farmworker women enrolled in the SAWP come to Canada through a controlled migration stream, they are integrated into the country as precarious, disenfranchised workers without full citizenship and labour rights, very much like the undocumented Latinx workers in cities and rural landscapes in the USA. As explained by Schmalzbauer (2008), they comprise a “transnational underclass” (p. 340) in the same way that the Honduran migrant workers do in the USA; In her study, Schmalzbauer (2008) detailed how Honduran migrants struggle with material deprivation in terms of wages and working and housing conditions while their non-migrating kin occupy a more privileged socioeconomic standing in their home communities because of their hard-earned remittances. In turn, families from this “transnational underclass” (a term utilized by Schmalzbauer 2008, p. 332, originating from Smith’s 2006 work) have added and particular constraints, such as constricted mobility and lack of full citizenship and human rights in the states that regulate every aspect of their lives, from the affective and economic to the sexual.

Based on her (2014) research on migrant mothers and their stateless children in Hong Kong, Constable argued that they exist in Biehl’s (2005) conception of “zones of social abandonment” (as cited in Constable, 2014, p. 12). Created by nation-states, in these zones, workers are arbitrarily denied the personhood and rights that accompany citizenship. Constable (2014) acknowledged that these zones are lived and experienced in ambiguous ways by the
subjects of her study while reinforcing that the *raison d'etre* of foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong is to improve the lives of their citizen employers at the cost of their very own.

Building on these ideas, I argue that the Mexican migrant women and their families in my study existed in their own particular zones of abandonment and that these zones were global and transnational in scope. Those who inhabited them existed in a space of transnational and global abandonment where no social workers were assigned to support them nor laws or institutions were available for them to rely on in order to care for and assert themselves, their rights, and their well-being. In the same way the laws in Ontario and Canada reinforce farmworkers’ “exceptionalism” (Tucker, 2012, p. 32). By excluding them from the protection of basic, key labour and employment rights, migrant women and their families inhabit zones of social abandonment. This impression is also congruent with McLaughlin’s (2010a) conception of “systems of exception” (p. 80) that she argued are inhabited by migrant farmworkers in Canada. I add that these zones act as forms of *gendered statelessness* for migrant women in my study who were citizens of Mexico but from poor rural areas wherein their citizenship affords them scant legal weight. In Canada as non-citizen workers their citizenship was further degraded to statelessness from which they could not affirm security or rights of their personhood and that of their families.

In my extensive observations as an organizer and researcher throughout rural communities in Canada and Mexico, I have witnessed how migrant workers and their families live in a *universe of exceptionalism* littered with transnational casualties of all sorts. I have also seen that migrant farmworker women do not passively conform to the exclusions and gendered statelessness that constrict their lives. Migrant farmworker women arduously undertake the work
of economic survival as transnational homemakers, work that extends beyond the farms, packaging plants, and greenhouses in Canada.

Migrant farmworker women undertake the work of care and management of emotions across and within borders. I therefore posit the need to include migrant women farmworkers and their families into the economy of care and hence expand understandings of the “global care chain” (Hochschild, 2000, p. 130) beyond the literature of domestic work. Indeed, migrant women workers outside domestic work also participate in the “global care chain” (Hochschild, 2000, p. 130). I situate migrant farmworker women and their work of care and management of emotions as a foil to zones of abandonment and as a contextualized example of transnational households and families headed by migrant women in the contemporary global economy, specifically families of the South that are tied to Canadian agriculture.

**Canada’s Family Farm: Creating and Erasing Transnational Families**

Segments of Canadian agriculture have come to rely on a migrant labour force, particularly in the province of Ontario. Yet, this reliance is not necessarily about labour shortages but the industry’s insistence on a compliant and unfree labour force. Operations that employ migrant farmworkers range from small to multimillion-dollar factory farms and are conveniently disguised and protected as Canadian family farms by industry and government. Erased are the transnational families and transnational labour chains that currently comprise the agricultural industry in Canada and the province.

The Dunmore vs. Ontario (2001) Supreme Court decision chiefly speaks to the structural erasure and devaluation of transnational families and farmworkers within the law and purview of the Canadian public (United Food and Commercial Workers Union, 2012). This case re-affirmed the exclusion of farmworkers from the most important tenets of the Industrial Relations Act, the
right to unionize and the right to collective bargaining. Instead farmworkers have to rely on the Agricultural Employees Protection Act of 2002, which granted the right to form associations to which employers are required to listen but are not legally mandated to comply with demands or deal with concerns brought forward (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, 2012). Dunmore vs. Ontario reinforced farmworkers’ long-standing legal exclusion (both Canadian and migrant alike) from core labour rights in the province of Ontario, the economic engine with the greatest concentration of migrant farmworkers in the country. Employers have absolute power over this workforce made up of migrant farmworkers who are structurally disadvantaged as non-citizen workers. Tucker (2012) surmised that this case demonstrated the “failure of the Court to engage in a contextual and fact-specific inquiry” through the reduction of a social context to a “tendentious exercise of statutory interpretation” (p. 47). The vulnerability and marginality of farmworkers were not considered by the Supreme Court in arriving at the decision. In actuality, farmworkers, migrant and non-migrant alike, were erased by the legal system, but so too were the transnational and global dimensions of farm work that includes families from the Global South that are unequivocally part of Canadian agriculture as transnational labour chains.

Although the case affected Canadian citizen farmworkers in the province of Ontario as well, it is non-Canadian citizen farmworkers and their families who differentially absorb the costs of this legal and economic disenfranchisement as the most precarious segment of agricultural labour. Ontario is unequivocally the province that employs the largest number of SAWP participants and a province in which the agricultural industry is substantial in its size and profits. Yet, the case is consequential beyond the borders of Ontario and the farmworkers themselves; it also affects migrant workers’ families: their non-migrating kin and children. The Supreme Court decision not only served to secure the agricultural industry a cheap, flexible, and
unfree labour force in the form of migrant farm workers and governed by lax labour laws, but also re-inscribed historical protections of Canadian “family farms” and hence the supremacy of Canadian families above the migrant workers and their kin who facilitate this labour migration. In a *Globe and Mail* article, Makin (2011) indicated that employers “contend that family farms cannot withstand the ill effects of strikes or other work action, and that the short planting and harvesting seasons can be easily devastated by a work stoppage” (para. 9). Historically agricultural labour laws have been lax due to the predominance of family-run farms (Faraday, 2012; Tucker, 2012), yet the industry has been restructured to comprise enterprises necessitating a larger workforce in order to compete in the global market. Binford (2013, p. 198) observed that “a number of farms inscribed in the SAWP are large, corporate entities with separate headquarters buildings, office staffs, unit divisions, and specialized workers (drivers, mechanics, agronomists, and others).” But migrant workers and the families that are part of the transnational social relations of agriculture are eclipsed in the law and concomitant foregrounding ideology of the “family farm.”

The ideology of the “Canadian family farm” is based on state-sanctioned hierarchies of peoples and families that have historically and continuously made and remade Canada as a nation. Nation-building continues to rely on the appropriation and devaluation of work, and the imposition of hardships on racialized, non-citizen, excluded others.11 Part of the exclusion is also about denying the humanity of workers as people with aspirations who are connected to families that they love, care, and provide for in multiple ways. The pressure of the agricultural industry and resultant response on the part of government to create unfree, just-in-time workers without

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11 These hierarchies are not new; they are continuously re-enacted by the Canadian state in its remaking of itself as a nation through political, legal, and psycho-social means. Since its inception as a nation-state, through genocidal practices against First Nations peoples, the Chinese Head Tax, Chinese Exclusion Act, gentlemen’s agreements, and outright refusal of entry to non-white immigrants, the “Canadian” nation has deterred settlement and fragmented families outside of its acceptable “White” citizen norm.
the right to citizenship or family reunification creates transnational families. In line with Shakir’s (2007) assertion that “transnationalism is the outcome of non-White immigrant experience in Canada” and a “product of degrees of racism and racialization experienced by immigrants in the country of their destination” (p. 68), migrant farmworkers and their kin experience transnationalism due to their non-citizen and temporary work status in the country that keeps them from their families.

This chapter therefore argues that Canadian family farms and a vast segment of the agricultural industry depend on more than just the extraction and erasure of the arduous back-breaking work of picking, packing, and harvesting in rural Ontario. This sector also relies on laborious emotional work required by families that are spatially fragmented by borders. I argue that migrant workers and their families have to be written into agribusiness and the ways we understand care work beyond the more common care and affective occupations undertaken by migrant women throughout the globe. To this end I begin by explicating the multiple strategies and forms of labour that comprise transnational homemaking through the phases and spaces of transnational labour migration mandated by the SAWP from the standpoint of Mexican migrant women.

Wrestling With the Gods of Uncertainty

Migrant women and their families who come to depend on remittances for household survival are not guaranteed continuous work in Canada. Those who migrate under the Program have to bear the brunt of the uncertainties and lack of security inherent. One migrant woman I contacted over social media about her return to Canada responded, “if the gods of uncertainty do not get their way, then I should be there in July.” Specifically, these “gods” include the Mexican Secretariat of Labour and Social Welfare (SLSW), the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City that
grants and processes work visas; Canadian employers who have the power to request women workers; and finally production processes that are in turn dictated by the environmental conditions and fluctuations in market demand within the complex supply chains of agribusiness. All these factors have to be properly aligned before women can return to work in Canada and their households and families can thus attain a level of economic stability. These gods of uncertainty are enmeshed but do not necessarily function in concert. Together they hold significant power over demand for and authorization of women’s continued work.

Another aspect of the powers of the gods of uncertainty is the leverage employers have to name a worker to return to work for them the following year. As aforementioned, employers can request particular workers by name and file number, or they can choose not to. Being an unnamed worker entails not having a secure contract or employer in Canada, thus being at the whims of the SLSW to be placed at an employer’s request. The naming, renaming, or unnaming process in the SAWP disadvantages women more than men because they are left without a contract whereas unnamed men are likely to find work elsewhere because there are more positions available to them. Demands for women’s labour is low due to Canadian employers’ gendered bias about women’s work and their suitability for diverse tasks and crops. For example, Preibisch and Binford (2007) drew from a conversation between Preibisch and a Canadian employer that speaks volumes about the degrees of racial and gendered justifications on the part of employers for the division of labour in production processes and labour recruitment:

We have the Mexican women who just strictly stay in the packing barn. I tried using Jamaicans in the vineyard and you know, you can call it stereotyping, but they don’t hold a candle to the Vietnamese. For tying and that, it’s unbelievable how fast they [Vietnamese] are, they’re just like machines, they’re really good. Jamaicans are better peach pickers. I mean I could take the Vietnamese and put them in the field, but they don’t like it, it’s [a] complete turn around, I’ll lose my shirt that way. I mean, as fast as they are at tying, they’re just so small and petite that they have no arms, no strength. (p. 18)
Available statistics from the SLSW confirm that Mexican women are mostly concentrated in fruit commodities (40%) that offer shorter contracts, and fewer are employed in greenhouse operators that operate year round. The latter requires physical agility and speed in accessing and picking from high tomato vines with metallic carts. Tomatoes and other greenhouse vegetables are produced throughout the year and require intensive labour. Being concentrated in fruits entail that women have less access to longer contracts thus earn less than men in their contracts in Canada by the mere virtue of their gender. Women can be sent home after the last peaches are packaged in the Niagara region, within four months or less.

Women strive to be named by demonstrating loyalty to the employer through working hard and ensuring they stay in line and do not crear problemas (create problems) at the farms. Doing so includes imposing a range of restrictions on themselves and their co-workers. Being unnamed is devastating, not only because it puts women at risk of losing their livelihoods, but also because many take it as a personal condemnation of themselves as workers. One year while visiting the State of Mexico, I talked to Caro, a woman who had come to depend on a particular employer in the Niagara region to rename her year after year, who was devastated to know she had not been named to come back. She explained that she was humiliated and embarrassed and she did not want any of her co-workers to know. Instead of vying for another spot in the Program and wrestling it out with the uncertainty gods gatekeeping Canada (field notes, March 2007), she opted to migrate to the USA without documents and leave her child indefinitely in the care of her elderly parents. She never returned to Mexico and continues to provide for her family by sending remittances from the USA.

Once in a crowded portable classroom turned migrant housing in Northumberland County, I visited a group of migrant women to bid them farewell before they returned to Mexico
after a season of arduous work in apple picking and packaging. That night they all had with them their employer’s evaluation letters to immediately hand in to the SLSW upon return to Mexico. The sealed letters, which were all in English, contained an unknown fate: would they be requested by the same farm the following year? Had they proven themselves sufficiently? Did they stay in line and not create problems? One of the women, who was from a marginalized Indigenous community in one of the poorest states in Mexico, could not wait until she presented herself to the SLSW. She handed me her employer’s letter in front of her co-workers in the cramped portable. She asked me to open it and tell her if she was returning to the farm or not. When I read the letter I was shocked and unsure how to tell her the truth in front of everyone. I knew that such things being known widely among other workers could be an additional strain on her emotional well-being. I am sure my voice quivered when, as gently as possible, I said, “no, Veronica, you were not renamed.” She took the letter from me and muttered, “It is okay.” Then, in front of us all, in a gesture of defiant anguish, she proceeded to rip the letter into pieces.

The naming process can be humiliating and painful for women and it subjects the survival of their households to the whims of the uncertainty gods. It is a devastating blow economically and emotionally when workers are not renamed, particularly women who have few options for work in Canada and in rural Mexico. Unnaming also displays a crass disregard and devaluation of women and their work on the part of employers. Later in the thesis I address some of the steps that should be taken to reduce the power that employers are able to exercise over workers, including the power to rename or not.

Renamed workers are in a better position than unnamed workers in terms of job security and re-entry to Canada. However, there can still be problems with the procurement of visas from Canadian immigration and renamed workers are susceptible to low or changing production yields
in the agricultural workplaces to which they are destined. When workers are renamed, they usually have a predetermined date to travel and therefore more time to organize themselves and their families for their departure. However, if they are placed on call by the Mexican Secretariat of Labour and Social Welfare (SLSW), they might receive notice of less than 48 hours to make their way to the airport in Mexico City to leave the country. Not all women are able to travel on such short notice, which depends on being close to the capital and having flexibility in the arrangements they must make to leave their families. Single mothers, for example, cannot meet these last-minute requests unless they are able to organize for the care of their children on short notice. They are considered just-in-time workers, as determined by Canadian employers and the production processes, in spite of their gendered responsibilities of family reproduction and care. These scenarios play out differently in the lives of migrant men who can count on women to perform the multiple tasks of household management such as cooking, cleaning, providing most of the care work in the family, and sometimes even the care of livestock and working the land for basic food staples such as maize and beans. The strict gender regime of the SAWP constructs men as the workers that this kind of flexibility demands.

Women are left in limbo without an employer to name them as the Mexican Secretariat of Labour and Social Welfare (SLSW) requires. Many women in this situation have asked me to connect them with employers who will name/request them and their close friends. Melinda, for instance, wrote to me over the internet (in Spanish, translated by me) and requested I ask her former employer to ensure he had requested/renamed her and two of her co-workers. She provided me with full names and SLSW file numbers along with her former employer’s contact information. Melinda also explained that starting in 2014 there was a new and added complication to their departure. She stated that, “now employer requests are not taken until we
have visas and that has meant that many workers cannot leave on time as we normally would.”

As requested, I called her former employer several times and was finally able to explain the needs of the compañeras (friends/comrades) who wanted to work for him. I reiterated that they were hard workers and also provided him with their SLSW file numbers. Melinda was loyal to him. She did not create problems and constantly worked hard to prove herself. She believed him to be an open, friendly, and reasonable employer. However, in my last conversation with him the employer related that he was better served by hiring Mexican migrant women who were already in the region and whose contracts with another farm had ended rather than investing time and money in requesting former or new workers who were in waiting in Mexico. Incidentally, the women who were transferred to this employer’s farm were also part of this study and I have followed and witnessed their lives for many years. Indeed, these women too needed to extend their contracts in Canada to earn more money to send back to their families to secure their homes and households in Mexico.

Being in the predicament of uncertain departure causes distress for women precisely because they know that there is little they can do to guarantee their return. Migrant women resign themselves when they are left in limbo by the uncertainty gods by conceding, *ni modos* (oh well/whatever), or *hay que aceptar* (have to accept), *si Dios quiere* (God willing), *a ver que Dios dice* (will see what God says) in this difficult time of not knowing what they will have to survive and how they will adjust. This predicament brings me to the stark words of a Guatemalan woman I visited at her home in the country’s rural highlands. She could no longer return to Canada as a migrant worker and was attempting to re-adjust to life without the wages from farm work in Leamington. She explained that she and her husband were depending on the strawberries they planted to get by for the following weeks. She said: “but what can we do? We are from here and
have to figure out how to survive.” If the strawberries did not fare well due to the weather or if sales in the local market were not good, the family was going to be at a complete loss. The mother of a Mexican migrant woman once explained to me that, “we Mexicans can handle going hungry” and “they [government and employers] know this.” Women and their families have to adjust to living with constant uncertainty. Many turn to their faith, leaving their fate in the hands of God. They pray to the Virgin of Guadalupe or the Virgin of Oaxaca, Juquilita. They also turn to one another to support each other moving forward, hungry or not. Sometimes women have had to pull their children out of school. They grieve for their dreams of social mobility for the younger generation. Some have risked their lives to cross the border into the USA to continue providing as best they can.

Some migrant women move in other ways and become resourceful in securing their return. They do not wait passively for an affirmative response from the SLSW. Rather they talk to other workers to investigate possible obstructions to their return to Canada (such as a report against them made by a co-worker or employer). Hence showing that migrant workers can sometimes count on each other for support. They also make it a point to talk to several employers before they leave Canada to ensure they have backups. However, the final decision is left in the hands of the uncertainty gods that operate in a complicated dance of fate. When women work hard and prove themselves to their employers, their efforts are not always rewarded. Most employers do not see names, lives, or faces. Instead they are focused on saving time and money and ensuring that they will have just-in-time workers. Women in turn have to prepare themselves for the possibility of delays and of not returning to the SAWP at all. The only certainty for the women is constant insecurity, an insecurity that they have to manage through innovative strategies for survival beyond migration to Canada.
Organizing Collective Caring and Mothering

Due to the recruitment criteria set out by the SLSW, the majority of the women in the SAWP are mothers. Their experiences are similar to those of other migrant mothers of the Global South who are torn away from their children while working abroad (FRESNOZA-FLOT, A. S. U. N. C. I. O. N., 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Hugo & Ukwatta, 2010; Parreñas, 2005; Sternberg, 2010). The most critical arrangement that they have to make before leaving to work in Canada is securing childcare. Most often migrant women rely on their own mothers to care for their children since many are separated and estranged from their children’s biological fathers. This arrangement is best for migrant women because of the trust between mother and daughter and because, for most, it means that the children will be able to remain in their home. In Emy’s case, her mother was older and suffering from several health problems. Her sisters were available to care for her two children, but she preferred her mother’s care:

What happens is that my mother … hmm … she is elderly and she … she suffers from a few ailments and … even she makes an effort to take care of my children. Because I have sisters that could care for them, but I know that if I leave them with my mother is like they are with me, or better, because my mother really takes good care of them. And so I pray to God so my mother will be around for a long time because I would not be able to accomplish anything without them [my parents].

For Emy and other mothers in the Program, their mothers serve as extensions of their own love and care. Indeed, Emy believed that her mother would in her absence offer better care than she could herself. Another migrant woman who took part in a Mother’s Day event in Leamington wrote the following about mothering from afar, “Thanks to our own mothers, we can transmit our love and warmth as mothers.” As such many of the children of migrant women rely on their grandmothers for mothering and co-mothering. Beyond a relationship of trust, migrant women
feel that their mothers have the capacity to deliver love, care, and connection to their children in their absence. Migrant men, in turn, count on the support of their wives, the biological mothers, to care for their children.

These care arrangements are not new to rural communities but have been part of the survival strategy of several generations. Many migrant women in my study were raised by their grandmothers while their own mothers migrated to work in urban centres in Mexico. That women migrate to Canada for work further reinforces the necessity and importance of this form of collective mothering, but one that is now transnational in scope. Moreover, due to the tenuous terms of women’s positions in the SAWP, collective mothering must be constantly negotiated both before they leave and during their absence. Many children of migrant women call their grandmothers, *mama*. Grandmothers are more than just substitute mothers, they are mothers to their grandchildren in their own right.

The migrant women in my study tended to trust their mothers to be the main recipients of their remittances. They trusted that the money they sent would be used for the care of their children. Remittances not only provided for their children but also for the basics of life for their extended families, which often included elderly parents and sometimes other elderly family members or siblings. Remittances were how migrant women demonstrated their care from afar, which is also consistent with much of the literature on the topic. Dreby (2009), who analyzed the role of transnational gossip about the infidelity of migrant men working in the United States noted that, “many husbands were able to overcome gossip by continuing to financially support their family members in Mexico” (p. 41). Men providing financially for their families left behind signifies that they still care for and love their families regardless of extramarital affairs. McCarty (2008) remarked that: “The emotional importance of remittances is also vital. They are tangible
proof that a family, though separated, still exists” (p. 115). In this context, remittances are tied to the responsibility assigned to othermothers for both the material and affective needs of children.

Women who cannot count on their mothers to care for their children rely on other women: sisters, sisters-in-laws, aunts, and, sometimes, female neighbours. After Lourdes’ four-year-old son, Diego, became gravely ill during one of her contracts in Canada, her sister, Maria, who had been caring for him refused to care for him again. When I visited the family in Mexico after that tumultuous year for Lourdes and Diego, Maria confessed to me that she had her hands full with her own children and it was too difficult to handle a child needing specialized care. And she did not want to be held responsible for his health in the event that it worsened. Lourdes, in turn, was torn about leaving Diego with her elderly parents when she was called back to Canada after that difficult year. She asked me how she could bring Diego with her. She insisted on showing up with him in her arms at the airport on her departure date. She reckoned that the only Mexican woman she knew in the Niagara region who had permanent residency would be able to care for him while she was working. Her insistence was a reflection of her being torn between the economic need to leave for work and the need to care for her child. However, within the terms of the SAWP workers cannot be accompanied by their children. Workers are brought to the country solely to work; there is no place for dependents who would make demands on their time. The care of dependents is left to othermothers and co-parents, the non-migrating kin who are therefore essential in facilitating this labour migration.

In some situations, children have to look after themselves: the eldest child assumes the role of the main caregiver and co-administrator of the household in Mexico. Belinda, for example, went from being the wife of a migrant worker, to the widow of one, to being a migrant worker herself. She asked the SLSW to grant her the place of her deceased husband in the
Program after he died in a tragic accident working the lands in their home community in rural Mexico. For five seasons she had been the one who assumed all the care and administration in the household while he was in Canada. Her husband did not permit her to work outside of the home. Upon his death she found herself in a desperate situation trying to support herself and five children. When she left Mexico to work in Canada, her eldest daughter, Benita, who was 17, had to take on the role of co-mother and co-administrator of the household. Like clockwork, before starting work in the greenhouse in Canada, Belinda would call her daughter every single morning to ensure the children were dressed, fed breakfast, and taken to school on time. The children had to care for themselves in order to permit their mother to make a living in Canada.

Being a co-mother as a child involves many sacrifices, such as having to leave school in order to care for younger siblings, doing all the housework in the home, helping siblings with homework, disciplining them, and ensuring their safety. The pressures of this care work can be tremendous depending on how the family organizes itself to mitigate the absence of the mother and depending on the life stages and comportment of the children and their caregivers.

Care arrangements require constant negotiation and approval among family members. Sometimes care arrangements fall apart at the last minute and women and their dependents have to be quite innovative to organize alternatives during crisis and while in another country. Trade-offs and deals are made with children in order to secure their approval to migrate. One woman described consulting her children over the decision to migrate, “They told me I could come, but they only gave me permission to come for 6 years.” These negotiations are also migrant women’s continual mobilizations of approval to allow them to continue to migrate to Canada. Belinda relayed that she first discussed the possibility of migrating for work with her family, parents, brothers, and father-in-law. But the ultimate consent had to come from her children:
You want to tell me yes it is fine or not? Can I leave or tell me if you do not want me to be away from you. “But yes,” I told my girl, “if you leave school then I would make you work.” And to the other, I said, “I would take you from school and put you to work as well.” And they told me, “Just as you please, if you want to be here with us, then that is fine too.”… I felt fine because they gave me their yes and they gave me their yes because I wanted to leave.

Negotiations around migrating are not always seamless or conducted in a context in which there are many options for survival. Children and family members give their approval in light of the difficulties and crises they have experienced in the household.

However, the nature of controlled, seasonal migration allows women to amass support for continuing to migrate. There is a promise that they will return and adjustments to the household will be temporary. In her study of the effects of undocumented migration to the USA among men from rural areas of Mexico due to the restructuring of rural livelihoods induced by the North American Free Trade Agreement, McCarty (2008) queried non-migrating female kin for possible solutions to the problems arising from the migration of their family members. She noted:

Not one woman talked about wanting a “path to US citizenship” for themselves or their family. They did, however, talk consistently about wanting “contracts” for work for their husbands and loved ones, contracts to protect workers and to keep them safe in the US. (p. 117)

Short-term labour contracts are generally preferred to long-term migration by migrants who do not have legal authorization to cross borders. Fees for smugglers (coyotes) increase every year and place families in debt, but there are also safety concerns about the associated gang and narco-trafficking violence. Women are particularly susceptible to being raped, kidnapped, and disappeared on the way North. Therefore many families prefer a temporary, authorized migration stream. One migrant worker from Michoacán I met in rural Alberta explained that her parents
only allowed her to migrate to Canada because governments were involved. Yet they were still worried when she left the first year because a group of young women in her fishing town had been lured to the USA with promises of good jobs only to be forced to engage in sexual labour.

Nevertheless, the labour demand from Canadian agribusiness mandates that migrant mothers migrate without their children so they have to contend with constantly preparing their children for their leaving on short notice as work becomes available. The mothers of migrant women and other female kin assume the role of just-in-time caregivers and administrators of the household. Sometimes migrant women’s fathers too have to step in on short notice to accompany their daughters to the airport or the SLSW to offer a degree of safety and respectability to their daughters who are already stigmatized in their community for migrating abroad. Veronica’s father always accompanied her to the SLSW and to the municipality to do any necessary last-minute paper work in order to secure her departure. Her sister reported to me that the women across the street called Veronica names and accused her of building her house by *prestar las nalgas* (selling her ass) in Canada. The ways that families reorganize and divide work in the household to release the migrant labour force are not recognized in policy or law in Canada. But we see that families, including children, have to discipline themselves, their needs, and their care for the demands of agribusiness.

**Mobilizing Narratives of Motherhood and the Need to Migrate**

Migrant women have to constantly mobilize socially accepted narratives to continue to migrate: narratives that will be accepted by children, extended families, and the SLSW. Many women talked about having to protect themselves from the social stigma of international migration and also from competition that could displace them from the SAWP entirely. In order to secure a contract in the SAWP, some migrant women have had to pretend they had children.
They do so by paying notaries and willing families to forge documents stating that those families’ children are theirs. Women who have found a way into the Program without having biological or fabricated children could only do so by claiming other dependents, such as elderly parents.

Migrants who are not mothers have a more difficult time justifying their continued participation in the SAWP, thus many prefer to lie to SLSW staff and their co-workers about being mothers. Women with grown children who are no longer dependent on them also find themselves in this quandary of having to make excuses to civil servants, their communities and other workers, for their desire to continue migrating to Canada. I have witnessed the same with migrant men and have heard many workers say that those without children should not be in the Program. The SAWP, after all, was first opened to women who were single mothers as a form of social assistance at the behest of the SLSW in Mexico. Migrant fathers, however, were considered ahead of them. The ideal migrant and provider is seen as male and this is reinforced through social discipline such as stigma, shame, and gossip in many rural communities in Mexico, and by state policies such as these restrictive labour migration criteria. Constable (2014) found that the migrant women in her study were entrenched in a “migratory cycle of atonement” (p. xxii) that forced them to continue to migrate on temporary contracts abroad in order “to escape the shame that single motherhood brings to them and their families” (p. xxii). Migration continues to be culturally, socially, and economically better for men than women in many respects.

Turning back to Gamburd (2008), tensions and inequalities surrounding the need and justifications to migrate have to be read within a context of persistent poverty induced by “neoliberal global capitalism” (p. 10). State policies and cultural expectations have not caught up
with the loosening of gender roles among men and women that the need for survival in the face of the economic restructuring that the contemporary global economy has fostered. The onus is placed on migrant women to strategize and justify their migration more and in different ways than men. This means that they must find ways to conform to gender roles in their interactions with state officials while simultaneously challenging them within their families and communities. Moreover, migrant women have to be inventive within a limited cultural terrain that enforces strict notions of respectability in a context of economic precarity. Respectable women and mothers are the ones who stay and certainly the ones who remain chaste if unmarried.

Many migrant women in the SAWP also continue to migrate beyond the narratives they construct. Many say that migration to work in Canada becomes a *vicio* (bad habit). Their lives in Canada are lived and experienced in seasons. Seasons in Canada are escapes from the strict gender regimes of their rural home communities. When their children are no longer dependent on them, many prefer to continue migrating to maintain connections in the communities they come to know in rural Canada, particularly the love and intimate connections they have formed in the universe of the Program. Their labour contracts in Canada give their lives structure and purpose, particularly if they are without children and grandchildren of their own. Migration also allows them to survive as single women without men to depend on. Overall, their lives and sense of self becomes dependent on their constant travel to and from Canada. The processes of constructing approvals, narratives, and justifications are perpetual. They are part of the mobilizations that women have to execute, plan, and regularly reconfigure in order to continue migrating. Curiously, they tread their social and gender escapes with precarious unfreedom that reinforces their status as racialized, non-citizen Third World women workers in rural Canada. At any
moment, all can go wrong in the SAWP. They can get repatriated, injured, or disciplined by arbitrary farm rules, banned, even excluded from the SAWP for life. Mexican migrant women’s unsettled degrees of liberties and escapes from gender proscriptions fall in line with Taylor’s (2010) findings about *maquiladora* women workers in the US-Mexican border region who migrate from rural regions of the country:

Migrant rural women have escaped the patriarchy and poverty to find freedom and independence; however, on the border they have found another patriarchal system, consisting of managers, supervisors, politicians and police who abuse them and define them as loose workers that have no decency. (p. 352)

Escape can be elusive. Migration among racialized, low-income rural women requires inventive calculations and difficult negotiations.

**Negotiating Physical Absence, Maintaining Frequent Communication**

Migrant women are tasked with preparing themselves emotionally to migrate and to complete their contracts. They must manage their emotions in order to be able to withstand the hardships of work in Canada in the absence of their children. Over the years women have commented on how they *se hacen la idea* (convince themselves of the idea) to leave. They start programming their departure so it is not so painful when it is time to leave. Even the way migrant women leave is quite telling. Many leave at night while their children are sleeping so that there are no excruciating goodbyes. One woman said that when her family, including children, were waving to her as her bus pulled out of the terminal heading to the airport in Mexico City, she was consumed with apprehension and regret. Seeing them crying and feeling the pain of separation, she wanted to get off the bus. But she stopped and reminded herself, “you got on the bus and there is no turning back, you can do this.” Departures at night, particularly for women with small children, are preferable because they ease the distress of leaving.
During women’s physical absence from their homes in Mexico, they engage in frequent communication to manage the difficulties of maintaining a transnational household. After women resolve the most pressing economic concerns, they often invest in improving their communication link with home, purchasing cellular phones for themselves and/or for family members at home or installing a landline. Women’s first year in Canada is often characterized by the difficulties arising from infrequent communication as many do not have telephones prior to their migration. Understandably, the first year of forging a transnational livelihood is the hardest for women and their families due to the difficulties of managing the household and mitigating the emotional strain caused by their absence when communication is not regular or reliable.

Women and their children’s locations, including socioeconomic class, the geography of their communities (often rural and lacking basic infrastructure), physical ability, and mobility impacts how transnational homemaking and care can be practised. Alma could not contact her disabled son frequently during her first year of work in Canada. She related the painful separation she endured as a result:

My mother had to push him in a wheelchair to take him to the only caseta. [A caseta is a small business in rural areas offering telephone services. Clients pay to make or receive calls in town] so I could talk to him. But imagine I would finish work at 11 o’clock and the caseta would close at 7 o’clock so how was I going to talk to him? That first year I only talked to him twice and that, for me, would drive me crazy.

At the time, a cell phone for Alma was out of the question because she and her co-workers were isolated in a rural community in British Columbia and were all under the control of a despotic employer who limited their contact with the outside community. Migrant women and those left behind, such as children and their othermothers and caregivers, have to be inventive and seek
ways to communicate as best they can. Some use public telephones in Canada and *casetas* in rural Mexico, while others have access to a phone belonging to a neighbour or relative and schedule calls according to their limited time off and across different time zones. In either case, the intimacy that transnational families crave is compromised. Another respondent, a child of a migrant mother, described these circumstances:

> She called us often and we would all be crying; it was a cry-fest, around the telephone. At that time we didn’t have a telephone, so we had to go to a neighbour’s house and it was sad because you couldn’t even cry comfortably because there was the neighbour, listening to the whole discussion: “Mommy I love you,” and your mother telling you things and you, just crying and crying. And the neighbour looking at you saying, “Are you all right?”

Women who had established good communication with their households described calling home every day to speak to their children, often briefly, to ensure that the household was running smoothly and that children’s needs were being met. Texting was also popular. For those who had access to a computer and who were computer literate, email, and messaging over WhatsApp and Skype were additional means of communication. One migrant woman I met in Alberta relayed that her younger sister and mother, who were taking care of her baby son, would Skype her every night. She could witness her baby being bathed and readied for bed every night. On her Facebook page she proudly displayed an image of her baby being bathed as a testament to her transnational tenderness and mothering through cyberspace. However, such a level of connectivity and technological fluency is rare among migrant women due to their geographical locations both in Canada and Mexico and their level of education. Nevertheless, while virtual mothering of this sort is a luxury, it is certainly not a substitute for touch and day-to-day presence and care.
Organizing long-distance communication is necessary work and central to the management of households and emotions. Migrant women need to hear their children and vice-versa to strengthen one another and regular communication is crucial to their transnational mothering practice (FRESNOZA-FLOT, A. S. U. N. C. I. O. N., 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2001). The implications of long-distance communication has been documented by many migration scholars in relation to diverse migration circuits around the globe (Bacigalupe & Lambe, 2011; Chib, Malik, Aricat, & Kadir 2014; Longhurst, 2015; Madianou, 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Wilding, 2006). Long-distance communication enables women to transmit words of love, encourage their children to do well in school, and remind them that they are indeed part of the family through their efforts at work. Yet migrant women have to be very careful with how they express themselves to avoid creating emotional distress for children who are not coping well with their absence. Children and their caregivers also have to be strategic with their communication.

**Diverse Roles and Responsibilities Assumed by Children**

Much of the work in transnational households remains constant, but those who perform the work change. Eugenia, who remits her Canadian wages to her sister, said that, “She becomes the woman and I become the man, because she pays for the electricity, the water, the food, [she does] the housekeeping, looks after boys, washes the clothes.” The mothers of migrant women all assumed the female role of traditional heterosexual households and families in Mexico, noting that they became the woman or wife while their daughters occupied the role of the husband. The wages earned in Canada assert migrant women’s power over the household economy and while non-migrating kin can make specific demands for certain material necessities, the main wage
earner in the family, the migrant woman, is the one with the power of the final say on how resources will be used.

Within these gendered dynamics, children have to assume particular roles and responsibilities to ease the management of the transnational family economy. One research participant, describing her transnational upbringing by a migrant mother, related:

We were a team—there wasn’t an eldest or a youngest—there we all were. Everyone washed his/her clothes, everyone made his/her bed, everyone organized him/herself [...]. There wasn’t anyone sitting you down and telling you “you have to do your homework,” but you knew if you didn’t put in the effort, you were going to fail that year. Thank God we never gave my mother that problem.

Not creating problems for their migrant mothers entails that children do their best to adapt to new living arrangements, discipline, and care by, for example, following the rules set by an elder sibling and doing their own housework. Even in the cases where children are under the care of adults, they are entrusted with diverse tasks and responsibilities. Eva, who assumed the role of breadwinner after her husband’s diabetes forced him to stop working, and who felt the need to migrate to Canada to pay off debts that she incurred for his medical treatment, had to prepare her two daughters well before her departure. Her eldest, Elisa, was the recipient of her remittances to pay for household expenses and she also had to deal with aggressive creditors and handle her mother’s debts. Eva had to talk to her youngest daughter, Juanita, to let her know that Elisa was going to be in charge of her, even though they were going to be with their father and elderly grandparents. Eva recounted assuring Juanita that Elisa:

Will not abuse the authority that I am entrusting in her, simply be conscious of this and do not misbehave so that she will not scold you, just do what you have to do, help and cooperate. Now that I am leaving you will have to organize
yourselves to wash, prepare meals, and you are going to have to learn how to run errands too because you know that your sister also works.

Transnational homemaking requires the shifting of roles and dispersal of the responsibility of care among not only care providers but the children themselves.

**Omissions and Silences as a Transnational Homemaking Practice**

Omissions, secrets, and strategic lies are also indispensable to homemaking practices on both sides of the migration divide. Communicating with and reaching out to children as an extension of care, love, and mothering entails many silences and omissions among migrants and non-migrants alike. We see a pressing need to lie as a way to manage emotions within transnational families. Caregivers are not always forthcoming about what is going on with the migrant’s children in Mexico. Migrant women and their non-migrating kin alike omit certain details to avoid creating anxiety and worry for the other. Rocio related a very compelling story from when she first started migrating to Canada under the SAWP:

I remember that during my first few years … maybe from the first to the third year since I started … I had dreams about my son. And I dreamt he was drowning in a river. And in my dream … I saw him … in the water like this. And I was standing in the water. And I … I was screaming, but I couldn’t grab him. I couldn’t get him out of the water. And I was just looking at him through the water, lying at the bottom. And the first thing I did when I woke up was … hmmm … I went downstairs to call. “Mom, how is my son? Is he ok?” And no one told me anything then. No one said anything until the eight-month contract ended and I went back.

Rocio’s intuition was quite acute. It turned out that her son had drowned in a nearby river. She kept on probing her mother but the truth was kept from her until she returned to Veracruz.
Señora Lupe, who I often stayed with in rural Tlaxcala, was tasked with caring for her
teenaged grandson. She often confided in me about what she was going through, missing her
daughter and assuming the responsibility of caring for her rebellious grandson and his adopted
younger brother. One year she was particularly stressed because the remittances that her daughter
was sending were just not enough. Señora Lupe struggled to make ends meet. She was already
making and selling food to her neighbours out of her home and was considering working in
another town as an industrial ironer for clothes sold at a huge national market. She did not want
to tell her daughter, America, that she was struggling and that she had no money for her
grandson’s overnight school trip. Struggling economically in spite of remittances was also the
situation of Ana’s mom, who not only had children working in Canada but also in the USA who
remitted to her household. She once said, “They cannot always provide; you have to get by on
your own, your children not always will or can.” Migrant workers’ families attempt to offset the
strain of the breadwinning role taken on by the migrants as much as possible, suggesting that
household survival among the families of the SAWP is not always secured by Canadian
minimum wages. The non-migrating othermothers often omitted that the remittances from
Canada were insufficient in their daily conversations with the migrant women. In the same way
that migrant women did not want to create problems for their employers, they and their families
did not want to create problems for each other for affective ends. These omissions and silences
also support their continued migration and transnational livelihood.

Many such omissions come to light once women return to their families. The first year
that Vicky left to work in the SAWP in Canada taking the place of her husband who was killed
in a bicycle accident, she left her children in the care of her mother-in-law. However, the
children were mistreated. They were locked in their rooms on the weekends while the rest of the
family enjoyed daytrips in the community, and they were badly fed. The children refused to share all this unpleasantness with their mother. Still grieving over the loss of their father and now contending with separation anxiety as a family, they decided to protect their mother by not revealing their hardship, at least until she returned to the country. One year, Señora Lupe omitted the devastating news that her daughter America’s grandfather, whom she loved as a father, had passed away. America found out during a telephone call to her uncle working in another part of rural Ontario. But her mother still denied it. America conceded that she would have likely done the same if she were in her mother’s shoes, but she still carried the pain of not being at her grandfather’s funeral. In conversation with me in Canada, she repeated, “Why didn’t they tell me?” Migrant women, in turn, prefer to remain silent about the hardships they experience in Canada in order to garner support to continue migrating and to protect the emotions of their non-migrating kin. Thus, America challenged me for showing her mother the film *El Contrato*. “Now my mom is worried, and I had to tell her that things are not like that for me.” I too had to do some damage control in this situation and assure Señora Lupe that America did not work or live in the way the film represented. So she did not need to worry about her daughter. Hence I, too, have been complicit in transnational lies. I discuss strategies of omission intended to lessen the pain of precarious and coercive life and work in Canada further in the concluding chapters.

In 2009, I met with two sisters who grew up in Mexico while their mother worked hard for several years in greenhouses throughout Leamington. They were able to enter Canada with visitors’ visas at a time before immigration regulations and visa restrictions were tightened for Mexican nationals. Knowing that the demand for labour was high in Leamington, they decided to work there like their mom in order to pay for the next stages of their careers. Their mother had already put them through university and now the sisters wanted to realize their professional
dreams by opening up their own offices and setting up their respective practices in medicine and accounting. However, they were working without work visas, a topic all unto itself in the universe of migrant work in rural Ontario. I asked one of the sisters what work in the greenhouse was like and she offered the following response, elucidating that she only really came to better understand her mother’s life by experiencing labour migration herself.

When I stepped in a greenhouse, but I wanted to grieve for my mom. I said, my God, what this poor woman has endured and definitely endured. You say "wow, poor people, really," never understand until you live it. Until we live is when you put yourself into it. My mom talked to us about how things were, but we never imagined.

These words were elicited by the realization of the hard work that migrant women have to perform and it also suggests the fine line between what they can and cannot share with their non-migrating kin. Through these experiences, both sisters became exemplary observers of their mother’s life. They stepped into the world of farm work and lived on the other side of the transnational underclass, performing the dangerous, dirty, and difficult work that had made their education and life possible.

**Circulating and Commodifying Love**

Migrant women also have to convince their children that they are absent out of love and the responsibility to provide for them. From a distance they transmit this love in different ways. Showing love to their children with material goods is one of the particularly discernable practices among women in transnational homemaking. The promise of new toys and electronics is one way to influence children’s behaviour. Interestingly, many of the women I met in my organizing and research consistently used the same words to describe how their children and families see them in their role as breadwinners—dollar signs and money machines. The need to compensate
for their absences and to justify their continued migration to Canada in material terms drives migrant women to exercise their newly acquired purchasing power in a strategic manner. But this means that, on one hand, migrant women are commodified by their employers and the Canadian state as subsidies for agriculture, and, on the other hand, they experience and practice commodification in their most intimate relationships. They commodify their love and themselves and their children come to expect this type of commodified exchange. In this equation motherhood is reconceptualized not only in terms of the role of breadwinner and distant emotional caregiver but in the expression of love itself.

**Transnational Casualties and Broken Hearts**

In the management of transnational households, care, and emotions many migrant women and their families experience what I call *transnational casualties*. Transnational casualties are the emotional, economic, and social costs that are unceasing facets of migrant women’s lives arising from engagement in precarious work and labour migration as women. Women migrate with gender proscriptions from their rural communities and then are subjected restrictions on their freedom in Canada, which often places them in impossible situations. For instance, women have to deal with sudden deaths among their children and their elderly dependants while working in Canada and hence incapable of being present for funerals or to assume the socially expected carework for the rest of the family and engage in collective grieving with them in person. These social expectations are not imposed on their male counterparts in the same way. For example, single daughters are expected to take responsibility for the care of elderly parents in ways that sons are not. Migrant women experience emotional coercion and disdain if they do not comply with the multitude of gendered roles that they can never fully escape in Mexico or in Canada.
Transnational casualties are shaped by gender, labour migration, and economic necessity and the scars remain beyond the women’s tenure in the SAWP, imprinting their lives forever.

One of the main transnational casualties is living with and managing heartbreak. Women leave Mexico and work in Canada in an agonizing and fluctuating quandary between leaving and staying. Unlike women from the provincias (rural areas) who leave to el otro lado (the other side, the USA) for usually long and undetermined periods of time, the women in the SAWP return every year. This significant difference does not lessen the pain or grief of having to leave children for long periods. Migrant mothers continuously balance the need to migrate with the yearning to stay with their children. Even though women board the plane to Canada, this quandary is not necessarily resolved. In moments of crisis, women are determined to stop migrating to Canada altogether. However, the harsh reality sets in that the only means to salir adelante (forge ahead) and to give their children better lives is work in Canada. Alma, for instance, whose teenage son had a difficult time coping with her absence, calculated that she could only earn $600 pesos a week in Mexico and this was not enough for her and her son to live. She was torn between needing to “reclaim” her family and attend to her son and being able to make ends meet. Wages for farm work in Canada are relatively low but are higher than wages in Mexico. Yet a season of farm work in Canada, whether 45 days or 8 months, does not provide women with the economic security that would give them the luxury to decide against migrating.

Women migrate with broken hearts and often keep migrating beyond the seasons (years) they promised to themselves, their children, and families. The women I spoke with attempted to resolve this dilemma by arguing that they were not necessarily choosing between being an emotional nurturer or an economic provider, because providing materially is a fundamental expression of love and care. Most of the migrant women I have met over the years have talked to
me about growing up in poverty in the provincias and the emotional pain associated with having to do without for most of their lives. None wanted the same for their children, clearly claiming “para mi hijos no” (not for my children). Belinda recalled an extremely painful and conflicted time in her life after the death of her husband. Her youngest child was ill, and she was not able to afford medical care for her. She never wanted to go back to that time of desperation and see her children go without the basics of life. However, while working in Canada, she suffered another major tragedy. Benita, her eldest daughter, died suddenly at 17. One morning, like all mornings, Belinda had spoken to her daughter to ensure all the kids had had breakfast and were ready for school on time. Then during the middle of the work day, Belinda was asked to go to the main office. A supervisor broke the news and Belinda’s transnational life imploded within her. I still remember waiting for her at the airport in Toronto while she made her way from her farm to go back to Mexico to organize her daughter’s funeral and care for her grieving children while dealing with her own feelings of grief and guilt. I embraced her tightly as soon as I saw her and she cried in my arms. After the death of a child, migrant women often have to return to work in Canada while they and their non-migrating kin are experiencing the initial stages of shock in the grieving process. In Belinda’s case, she had to re-arrange the logistics of the care of her family and then return to Canada to grieve for her daughter, to which the disapproval of her community for having left again was added. She charged back and said, “Evelyn, but will those people [in the community] economically provide for me and my children?”

Social stigma punishes migrant women for stepping out of traditional roles of gender and motherhood in order to work to provide the essentials of life for their families. The precariousness, poverty, and inequalities imposed by the neoliberal capitalist economy that restrict options for survival available to women and mothers are not seen in context. The women
are scorned, not the economy. Seasonal controlled migration does not protect migrant women and their families from becoming transnational casualties, and oftentimes it constructs and reinforces their gendered statelessness. There are no social services or social workers attending to the crises in transnational families. Families, in this case, women as principal breadwinners and caregivers, deal with all the work and challenges themselves.

Economic restructuring has devastated many rural communities in Mexico, and for women without the support of a male breadwinner labour migration becomes an important, if not the only, strategy for survival. In this context, staying and leaving are equally painful for an impoverished mother in the rural provincias. Women make sense of their transnational homemaking through a continuum of calculations and justifications with themselves and their loved ones and extended kin.

Casualties are borne by migrant women, othermothers, and children alike. Many grandmothers relayed their anguish about their grandchildren rebelling and neglecting school. In my many years of fieldwork in rural Mexico and hearing the stories of migrant women in Canada, I learned that many of their children wet their beds, got sick, and refused to go to school or do their homework. Angel, for example, was self-harming. He took to burning parts of his arm and became unresponsive to his grandparents’ interventions. In my visits to families in Puebla, Señora Margarita always complained to me about Miguel who did not respect any curfews and took to drinking at 13. She felt that she did not have any support in disciplining him and also did not want to worry her daughter who was working hard for them in Canada. She assumed all this angst on her own. Miguel ended up becoming a father at 15 years of age, before he finished high school. This pattern repeats itself among many children who are missing the everyday love of their mothers and seek to recreate the family they long for.
Migrant women and their family’s caregivers have to deal with grief and feelings of abandonment, resentment, and rebelliousness among children. Recently, Marlene relayed a revealing conversation she had with her 11-year-old son, Roberto. Marlene expressed her wish to have another child to her son. But he said, para que ma? Para que le digan pobreton como yo en la escuela, por no tener papa o mama? Para que si lo vas a dejar como yo (for what ma? So they can call him a poor loser like me at school, for not having a father or mother? For what, if you are going to leave him like me?). Marlene said she felt fria (cold) hearing his stern and shocking words and she sadly agreed with her son. For migrant mothers, this can be the most difficult of all, being placed in the impossible situation between work in Canada and providing emotional care and love in person, and living with lingering sentiments of betrayal among their children. Transnational casualties are hence irreversible costs assumed by migrant women and their families. Without the necessary community support to undertake the challenges of transnational families and households, migrant women have to assume most of these costs on their own. The state is unresponsive, global capital and the Canadian agricultural industry shifts all the burden of care and imposes transnational casualties onto the women entrenched in the SAWP on both sides of the migration divide.

**Strategies of Women in Zones of Abandonment**

In Mexican rural communities, I stepped into the world of absences, migration, and omissions. I often overheard mothers giving advice to the wives of migrants in both Canada and the USA on what to do with their pain and tears. “Distract yourself,” Ana’s mother once told a woman selling homemade ice cream in the village. Her husband and sons lived and worked in the USA and she lamented their absence and feared she would never see them again. Maybe this was why Ana’s mother kept herself busy and worked hard the entire day in multiple income-
generating activities even though she could count on the remittances from her own children in both countries of the North. Many transnational households headed by women in the SAWP not only involve Canada but also the USA, and hence household and emotional fragmentation is intensified by multiple borders and jurisdictions. Some migrant women in Canada need to travel to the USA for family emergencies, but cannot due to their ineligibility for visas as impoverished women. Yet they find a way to support their families beyond state jurisdictions through loving words, prayers, remittances, and constant communication to instill comfort and assert their role as caregivers as best they can. They have altars for the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Virgin of Juquila in Canada and in Mexico and rely on their faith to strengthen their spirits all the while feeling “fatal” (awful) and torn. Hence, the management of transnational families involves feeling and managing a myriad of emotions. It is much more than working abroad and remitting money. It is emotionally taxing care work on both sides of the migration divide.

**Cultural Constructs of Emotions and Feeling Transnational Casualties**

The term I heard most from migrant women contending with transnational casualties is *siente feo*, which literally means “it feels ugly.” The term refers to feeling awful. In times of wrestling with the uncertainty gods in relation to securing work and being away from their families and communities in times of crises, these words have been used by most of the migrant women of the SAWP I know. It encapsulates a range of emotions from *desesperación* (desperation) to grief and sadness. Women use these words in relation to different facets of their precarious transnational lives, such as the pain of being spatially separated from their children, other family members, and lovers. I further explore these dimensions in other sections of this study. In contrast, studies undertaken by England, Mysyk, and Gallegos (2007, 2008) found that migrant men in the SAWP utilized the term *nervios* (nerves) to capture the uncertainty of their
lives in precarious migration and its effects on their bodies and mental health. England et al. (2007) explained that, “In theory nervios is a process characterized by an acute or chronic array of physical, psychosociological or psychospiritual signs and symptoms, the eventual result of which may be illness” (p. 189). Finkler (2001, as cited in Mysk, England, & Gallejos, 2008, p. 395) further expanded on this cultural and bodily expression:

The symptoms cannot be reduced to any one life event or to any one stressor but must be viewed within an ongoing context of the life of each individual, [his] social relations, and the contradictions in which [he] is entwined that may result in life’s lesions.

For these researchers, migrant men in the SAWP are caught by the disciplining of the state and the economy in ways that affect their well-being and break down their very sense of self. Instead of fighting back, migrant men are conditioned to express the breakdown at the level of the body in the form of various debilitating conditions. Nervios closely resembles Standing’s (2011) 4As (anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation), subjective experiences of the “precariat” class (p. vii). As I show in this thesis, migrant women farmworkers from Mexico have their own language to express their struggles and emotions and their physiological manifestations.

In my witnessing, accompanying, and working with migrant women over the years I have heard them describe experiencing facial paralysis and seen them engage in the oppression of their fellow workers in order to release their angst, heartbreak, and frustration. Se siente feo and its multiple expressions can also be applied to the ways that migrant women embody powerlessness and the zones of abandonment. Señora Josefina told me that when she first came to Canada, all was well. Her husband was in agreement with her working in Canada and so, eventually, were her twin daughters. Later, feeling he had been overtaken in his role as breadwinner, her husband started pressuring her to return. When his threats over the phone did
not sway her, he took their daughters away from the house that they shared to live with his family and began seeking full custody. He started proceedings at the local state family services agency (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia-DIF) claiming that she had abandoned them to work in Canada. That season, Señora Josefina recalled, her face became paralyzed with all the tension, fear, and sense of powerlessness she felt. Her body and emotions expressed these feelings to the detriment of her health. Her experience mirrors many of the stories of women contending with the complexities of their transnational lives. One day, Bonita’s middle daughter was taken by her estranged partner after school. The teacher felt compelled to let him because he was her biological father and no other adult was there to prevent him. Bonita tried to keep herself going until the end of her contract and be ready to fight to get her daughter back when she returned home. Again and again she would repeat se siente feo.

Se siente feo does not express the entirety of migrant women’s experiences. I wondered why they could not further elaborate on se siente feo (it feels ugly). I asked many of them to clarify this expression yet there were few other adjectives offered. And I thought about the archetype of the always sacrificing Virgin de Guadalupe and the cult of Mother Mary or marianismo that women in Latin America, particularly Mexico, are socialized to embody. Dreby (2006) explained this well in relation to women’s role as “self-negating” (p. 35) mothers who place their children’s and family’s needs before their own. Women have to erase themselves, their words, and their feelings to carry out their social and cultural roles despite the complications of survival that force them to transgress them. Bloch (2011) discussed a similar quandary experienced by women in the former Soviet Union who had to undertake new survival strategies, but were culturally and ideologically shamed for transgressing what it meant to be a good wife and an ideal worker. The women were at odds with cultural narratives from the
communist era that did not correspond at all to practices needed for their families’ survival in the emerging market-based economy. The emotions and their management speak volumes about the way workers, women in this case, are integrated into the economy. The cult of marianismo in relation to migrant women also coincides with the discipline forced upon workers by capital under neoliberalism. Women, their households, and families assume transnational casualties, emotional work, and the distress of *se siente feo* privately without being able to hold capital or states directly accountable. Women also have much more at stake when they are primary breadwinners with limited options for survival. They cannot afford to break down, to be fully paralyzed, or they risk going hungry and abandoning those who depend on them for care. They are in survival mode and have to work arduously to prevent the paralysis of *se siente feo* as they wrestle with the uncertainly gods and transnational casualties underpinning their work as migrant farmworkers in Canada.

Migrant women have to amass incredible strength and perseverance to leave Mexico and complete their contracts in Canada. They contemplate the hardships that they experienced growing up and hold on to those moments of lack, unfulfilled dreams and opportunities as inspirations to keep working, to keep going for their children. Their children are their principal motivators and it is their love for them that fuels their strength and their sense of responsibility as the main breadwinners for their families. Migrant women who are not mothers are also motivated by their dependents and, just like migrant mothers, they are driven by their aspirations to be self-reliant and reliable providers.

Perhaps lacking adjectives for *se siente feo* when it comes to strength and determination, migrant women and their kin have an ample vocabulary that they mobilize to inspire strength in one another. One migrant woman explained “I had never been away this far and this long. I
would feel down and would cry—very sentimental, but then I would speak to them [her family] and they would say that they are all well and to *hecharle ganas.*” *Hecharle ganas* (apply yourself) is one of the central mantras intended to inspire strength and resilience, along with *seguir adelante* (move forward) and *yo si puedo, yo tengo que poder* (yes I can, I just have to do it). For these are more than words but emotionally determining mantras that express the fortitude of generations of women surviving in the Mexican countryside.

I have often reflected on these women’s words in times when the hardships of uncertainty want to overcome my spirit. I think of their drive and hard work and that of their mothers who had to provide for their children on their own because their male partners did not. Rosa, speaking about her first year leaving for Canada without her sister, explained that she almost changed her mind and was about to get off the bus to the airport in Mexico City and stay with her family that was in the station seeing her off. But she convinced herself to see the journey through. “I talked to myself: you just have to be strong, you have to be strong, and you have to be strong. Do not look back” (*Yo me hablaba a mi misma: es que tu tienes que ser fuerte, y tienes que ser fuerte y tienes que ser fuerte! Y no mires para atrás*). Just as Palabra expressed it in the quote in the introductory chapter of this study, “teach me how to keep walking forward,” to affirm resilience and strength, migrant women have a forceful voice in affirming their ability to transcend *se siente feo.* These mantras carry migrant women and their families onward and mitigate some of the coercive aspects of migrating to work in Canada that are detailed elsewhere in this study. Acquiescence and powerlessness are not their whole story. There are vast complexities to the lives of the women who find themselves at the centre and the margins of the global economy as transnational subjects.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the diverse strategies and practices that migrant women and their non-migrating kin employ to maintain a transnational family economy and household. These transnational strategies are shaped by economic and state discipline but also by power, resilience, and strength of transnational families. The migrant women in this study were in pursuit of a better life for themselves and their extended families. They worked together towards these ends across borders and time that is demarcated by seasonal contracts in Canada. However, the notion of the Canadian family farm eclipses migrant women, their transnational families, and all the work they undertake and organize to facilitate re/production for Canadian agriculture. I am not denying the existence of Canadian family farms. Rather, I argue that the agricultural sector in Canada comprises complex chains of work, ones that can be understood as transnational labour chains, and there is need to be cautious of the family farm discourse as an ideology that enforces invisibility and hierarchies among “farming families” of the North and South. In this chapter, I demonstrated how migrant women in the SAWP and their non-migrating kin form their own “global care chain” (Hochschild, 2000, p. 130) like the ones maintained by foreign domestic workers elsewhere in the world in response to their marginalization in the zones of abandonment within the global public. However, this framework does not provide the entire story of the ways that women strive for survival and well-being. Transnational families have to be situated and recognized in the equation of global capital and state policies and within the social relations of Canadian agriculture. Discussions about Canadian family farms therefore entail accounting for transnational families, the global economy, economic restructuring, transnational household management, and the casualties and possibilities they engender. It is clear that the management of transnational families involves much more than working abroad and remitting money. It involves emotionally taxing work on both sides of the migration divide.
CHAPTER 4
FORBIDDEN LOVE:
DESIRE AND RESISTANCE

Introduction

This chapter focuses on migrant farmworker women’s contestations over sexualities, desires, and transgressive sexual love. These affective dimensions comprise the most intimate aspect of migrant women’s agency yet few authors have explored their significance and implications (Becerril, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2009; Preibisch, 2004; Preibisch & Grez, 2010, 2013; Preibisch & Hermoso Santamaria, 2006). From the time of recruitment in Mexico, to incorporation into the agricultural labour processes and migrant worker housing in Canada, to their lives in between, in their home communities waiting for new contracts in rural Canada, migrant women’s bodies and sexualities are regulated. As Hilsdon and Giridharan (2008) contended, “in the process of overseas work … all women’s lives are sexualised” (p. 611) and this is unequivocally the case with the Mexican migrant women of the SAWP. Mexican migrant women’s sexualities and bodies are terrains that are covertly and overtly claimed by the institutions that govern their transnational labour migration. Women migrate with social codes governing love and sexuality set by their families, rural home communities, and sending governments, and then must contend with those imposed by receiving states, labour processes, and employers. Within the parameters of these transnational social relations, migrant women recreate, reinforce, and renegotiate their sexual agency.

In this chapter, I refer to the literature that centres sexuality, love, and desire in the lives of migrant women across the globe to explore the affective dimensions of transnational labour migration and specific local state and extra-state discourses that shape these experiences.
Existing literature on the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) has largely left the frontiers of love and sexuality unexplored. Unpacking contestations over sexuality not only speaks volumes about the subjectivities that migrant women affirm and negotiate, it also mirrors the policies, institutions, and labour production processes that de/sexualize them. When love is discussed it is generally in relation to motherhood and heteronormative relationships, and not in relation to the romantic or sexual love associated with gender transgression. Maternal and sexual love are discursively linked in competing ways by the engineers of the SAWP and by the women themselves along with the employers and states involved. It is permissible for migrant women to be mothers, specifically single mothers, but they are not permitted to be sexual outside of monogamous heterosexual relationships or to conceive children while working in Canada. Migrant farmworker women must navigate this contradiction along with a slew of other proscriptions as part of their transnational labour migration.

Before discussing love within the SAWP it is necessary to set the foundation by describing how and what kinds of love are forbidden and constructed as deviant and for what purposes. I detail migrant women’s love and desire beyond their role as mothers and how their practices of love become a form of resistance that leads to a new sense of self. Overall, in this chapter I connect migration to love, sexuality, and desire to demonstrate the importance of the affective in moulding the lives and subjectivities of migrant women across borders and to contribute to a more rounded understanding of transnational livelihoods facilitated by controlled labour migration. This discussion unveils the multiple subjectivities and experiences lived by migrant women and also the policies and institutions that prevail over women as migrant subjects. In order for an encompassing and effective social justice project to be developed among migrant workers and allies, the frontiers of the heart must be fully taken into account.
The restrictions on love, bodies, and desire demonstrate the extent of the power that capital and the economy vis-à-vis states and employers wield over workers today. Yet even workers in the most precarious situations are not passive; they resist control and practise new ways of loving and being. The right to be/long, the right to love, and the right to one’s own body should also be part of migrant justice projects.

**Situating Love**

There has been a proliferation of academic work on emotion and affect within the social sciences (Leys, 2014; Pedwell & Whitehead, 2012; Wetherell, 2015). There are varying definitions of emotions and affect drawing from neuroscience and focusing on corporeal perceptions (Shouse, 2005). In this study, I turn to both of these concepts to comprehend the ways migrant women intimately feel and experience their transnational lives in relation to the social relations, cultural contexts, and interpersonal attachments intertwined in their labour migration and livelihoods. I view affect mostly as an individually experienced and manifested practice, while I see emotion as a relational and culturally situated construct. Together, these concepts allow me to expand the lens of inquiry into labour migration and the integration of workers within the global economy into affective frontiers. Richard and Rudnyckyj (2009) drew on affect and the economy to propose the concept “economies of affect … to provide analytical purchase on the connection between economic transformations and affective transactions” (p. 58). Through their investigation of the NGO sector in Mexico and a newly privatized corporation in Indonesia they argued that affect is a medium for the circulation of cultural labour among people negotiating economic restructuring. This study is in contrast with Bloch’s (2011) study of post-Soviet women traders (*chelnoki*) in which emotions, principally shame and honour, were the main focus. Bloch described how the women traders defied Soviet socialist ideologies of what it
means to be an honourable worker, woman, and citizen in a time of nascent free-market capitalism. The women had to contend with social stigma associated with their new income-generating strategies while attempting to compensate for men’s loss of power as breadwinners in the family in various ways. Bloch (2011) emphasized the need to capture the complexities of gendered experiences of workers in the global economy by delving into emotions that are politically, economically, and ideologically situated. The two studies use emotion and affect differently but to the same end, to explicate how the economy, specifically the neoliberal global economy, is affecting how people manage their personal intimacies, kinship, and sense of themselves.

In migration studies affect and emotion figure prominently in research on sex (Kim & Fu, 2008) and care work (Hochschild, 2003) to underscore the “commodification of intimacy” (Constable, 2009). Migration scholars have also looked at affective transactions inherent to spatially fragmented transnational families (Baldassar, 2007) and intimate partnerships (Boehm, 2011). The intimate lives of Filipina caregivers have received considerable attention due to their prominence in global care chains and because they sell emotional labour while having to arrange for the care of their families left behind (Parreñas, 2005; Pratt, 2012). However, Manalansan IV (2006) pointed out that, “there have been very limited discussions of sexuality and pleasure (either heterosexual or homosexual) in the lives of these women” (p. 241). There is much more to be uncovered about the affective experiences of migrant women in the global economy. To this end, Mai and King (2009) rightly argued that we need to:

Recognise that migrations are rarely exclusively motivated by economic or political considerations, and that the full relevance of the decision to migrate and to continue living and working abroad can only be understood by bringing into the analytical equation the affective, sexual and emotional dimensions. (p. 297)
Mai and King (2009) proposed interrogations of the sexual and emotional to counter reductionist studies on migration wherein “emotional relations are regarded as something apart from the economic or the geographic, as something essentially private, removed from the researcher’s gaze traditionally fixed on spatial mobility patterns” (p. 297). Migrant workers are sexual beings and migrate with and through their sexuality, gender, love, and desire.

Accounting for love in migration necessitates accounting for notions of the self in flux across clashing cultures and borders. In this respect Faier’s (2007) work with Filipina migrant bar-hostesses in rural Japan is quite instructive. Faier explained that the Filipina migrant women in her study claimed to love their male patrons, many of whom became their husbands, in order to counter the social stigma associated with their work in both the Philippines and Japan. They used and mobilized the concept of love in diverse ways and for multiple ends. In their pronouncements of love the women asserted a “cosmopolitan and modern” (2007, p. 149) personhood that was intricately linked to their transnational livelihoods. Faier (2007) stated that:

Women who did not “love” their customers did not meet their quotas or get new work contracts; and if a woman could not “love” her husband, because, for example, he was abusive or would not let her send money home, she was constrained in her ability to support her family abroad. Love was an integral part of what enabled Filipina migrants to work in Japan on entertainer visas and what encouraged them to remain in Japan after those visas expired. (p. 157)

Faier argued that “love is a powerful condition of these women’s transnational lives, a term of global self-making that is made possible through and enables their transnational everyday practices” (pp. 157–158). Faier analyzed the discursive underpinnings of love that is structured by citizenship and the interplay of sexuality, gender, and power. Affectivity, sexuality, and love are at the foundation of many “stories” that are commonly ignored in migration studies. They are
fundamental to the story of new subjectivities and transnational intimacies that are formed in the
global economy due to labour migration.

**Expressions of Love in the SAWP**

The literature on love and migration points to the need to see love as a subjectively
personal, culturally determined, and socially constructed concept. It is contextual and based on
negotiations of the self in relation to other people as well as state and extra-state institutions. For
migrant workers in SAWP, practices of love are structured by immigration-labour regimes that
are crafted by states, employers, and the particularities of the labour processes that integrate
migrants into Canadian agriculture and the global economy. Love takes many forms in the
construction of workers’ transnational lives. First, love drives workers to migrate in order to
sustain their families. It is this same love that disciplines and coerces many into acquiescence to
the exploitative and restrictive labour conditions in Canadian agriculture. Love keeps migrant
workers transient; keeps them migrating for work cyclically. Love is also desire; the desire for a
better life for themselves, their children, and other dependents. Love is also desire to assert new
sexualities beyond the restrictive gender regime in rural Mexico. Love extends beyond borders to
non-migrating family kin but also flourishes among the workers in Canada. Migrant workers find
new loves and lovers in Canada, which also feeds their desire to continue to migrate for work.
Their new-found loves soften some of the hardships of the long-distance separation from non-
migrating kin in Mexico. These loves, however, are fraught with complications. They defy social
constructs of morality in Mexico and in Canada and the relationships have logics of their very
own in the third space of belonging and un-belonging in which migrant workers negotiate their
lives and sense of selves. Similarly Tsujimoto (2014) referred to this in-betweenness in her study
of Filipino women and men migrants in Korea as a “liminal space” (p. 750) that enables
transgressions of heteronormative relationships that are bound to family, marriage, and reproduction. Tsujimoto (2014 p. 170) argued that this space enables Filipinos in Korea to enact “deviant heterosexualities,” a term she takes from the work of Hubbard (2000). I now turn to specificities of the “liminal space” (Tsujimoto, 2014, p. 750) that is similarly constructed by the SAWP and the love stories lived and moulded by migrant women, states, cultural regimes, and institutions.

**On [Not] Falling in Love in Canada**

Migrant women’s transnational love stories transgress prohibitions to love. Canadian employers and the Mexican Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare (SLSW) that recruits the women attempt to circumvent practices of love. The SLSW prioritizes the recruitment of workers who have familial profiles and characteristics that will ensure cyclical migration and by extension also condition workers’ behaviour in Canada. Since the incorporation of women into the Program in 1989, as Becerril (2010) stated, the female labour force is primarily “single mothers, women with children and heads of households” (p. 8). Preibisch and Grez (2010) explained that women’s underrepresentation among migrant farmworkers is due to “a complex set of gender ideologies held by farm operators, civil servants on both sides of the border, migrants’ households and communities, and migrants themselves” (pp. 297–298). Gendered expectations about women’s lives and responsibilities anchor them to the home and to the family. Men’s gendered breadwinning role grants social legitimacy to their leaving the home for work and migrating across borders to fulfill this social expectation if necessary. Moreover, Canadian employers are required to provide separate housing for women, which most do not want to do because of the financial investment this would entail for farm operations that are already set up for exclusively male workers. The majority of men in the Program are married
with children; roughly half of the women are single mothers while the rest have a variety of marital statuses and children and other dependents who link them back to Mexico. Many migrant workers over the years have reported that they are given pre-departure talks at the SLSW, the content of which are determined by the SAWP, where it is stressed that they are to abstain from having any sexual or romantic relationships with one another or with non-migrant workers in Canada because their purpose for migrating is solely to work. These talks also warn migrant workers to refrain from political activity. Migrant workers’ social commitments, political expressions, and sexuality are suppressed in order to meet the exigencies of the Canadian agricultural industry. The prevailing recruitment logic is to engineer a just-in-time, flexible, and compliant workforce that will not resist the demands and conditions set out by Canadian employers.

The disciplining of the migrant labour force is orchestrated by a set of reinforcing practices on the part of the Canadian state through immigration policy, Canadian employers, and Mexico through the recruitment politics of the SLSW. Becerril (2009) also pointed to the moral codes enforced by a stringent Catholicism, which were particularly noticeable in her fieldwork in Leamington:

Some Catholic priests instilled sexual abstinence practices. The application of various sanctions for those who did not comply with the rules of sexual behavior was daily, the punishments could range from moral and public sanction in the Catholic Church, to the prohibition of encounters between workers, immediate deportation, non-hiring for the next season or the definitive withdrawal from the Program. (p. 4)

The curtailment of sexual activity among migrant workers manifests itself in diverse ways, culturally and economically. Overall sexual curtailment among migrant farmworkers is integral to agricultural production and conditions of unfreedom assumed to be needed to secure a
competitive labour force. However it is important to note that prohibitions on love and sex are not new for migrant women working in Canada. Bakan and Stasiulis (1997, 2003) also documented concerted attempts to control the sexuality of migrant women working as live-in caregivers in Canada in order to prevent settlement and the formation of new families, and contended that “negative eugenics, the discouragement of settlement and reproduction of members of ‘undesirable races,’ has (also) historically been an integral feature of Canadian immigration policy” (1997, p.16). The SAWP continues this legacy of desexualizing and sexually regulating the migrant women in order to maintain a disposable and just-in-time labour force dedicated to meeting the needs of agricultural production and not of reproduction or the needs and rights to sexuality, desire, and love.

Becerril (2003, 2007, 2008) and Preibisch and Grez (2010, 2013) noted that sexual repression is more heavily enforced on women, regardless of their marital status, than on men. Women are the ones who are penalized and policed for any assertions of sexuality. Sol’s testimony elucidates the control that civil servants exert during pre-migration. Every year before returning to work in Canada, Sol had to process her paperwork at her state’s local SLSW office. One year, Sol reported, she was appalled when a civil servant at the SLSW forced her to sign a contract agreeing to refrain from engaging in any political or sexual activities while working in Canada. She sent me the following email detailing all that she could recall from this disciplining moment and the substance of the document that remained in her file at the SLSW office.

She (a civil servant) who was assisting me at the Secretariat, I have the feeling that I am not to her liking, she just told me, in a not so friendly manner, “sign this paper.” And being very knowledgeable and curious, I read it carefully and then I guess my face started changing as I read further.

It said, I agreed to not belong to any political organization or any union,
not to have any romantic relationships with foreigners or Mexican men (in the SAWP) because we know that they are all married, not to allow any Mexican men to buy us our groceries, nor receive money, and to not undertake any work that is outside of the work contract. If this was the case, then I would be sent home and there would be further investigations. And we should not lose this opportunity that many would like to have because they send us to work to improve the quality of life for ourselves and our families and we should not lose this opportunity for misbehaviour.

And I was curious if other men signed this as well because if not I felt that it was a direct attack on women for being easy, aggressive, horny, insatiable, greedy, inhumane, sinful etc., etc.

This disciplining moment is reflects gender prescriptions in Mexico that seek to protect the families of migrant men who are recruited as husbands and male breadwinners. Single migrant women are seen as potential homewreckers and thieves by migrant workers’ non-migrating wives, Mexican civil servants, and sending communities overall. They are accused of stealing migrant men’s limited earnings, money that is earmarked as remittances to sustain their revered traditional heteronormative families. The control of sexuality and protection of heteronormative relationships and the institution of marriage are not unique to this migration circuit, but common to many migrations of women around the world (for instance, see Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, 2003; Gardiner-Barber, 2000, for Canada; Constable, 2004, for Hong Kong; Hoang & Yeoh, 2014; Lan, 2008, for Taiwan; Mahdavi, 2014, and Smith, M., 2010, for the Middle East; and Simon-Kumar, 2009, for New Zealand). Wages and heterosexual, monogamous relationships are intertwined and are protected and reinforced by state institutions.

Hence, sexuality is not only controlled for the sake of morality. Morality is tied to the functioning of the economy through a heteronormative family structure, a structure that states
attempt to control even when families as separated across borders. Just as poor working-class women have been historically shamed for their poverty and for not conforming to gender proscriptions by being unmarried or sex workers, migrant women in the SAWP are shamed, coerced, and stigmatized. In Constable’s (1997) study of Filipina migrant women in Hong Kong, she said that “as young women, foreigners, and outsiders whose moral position in the social system is not clearly defined, foreign domestic workers have also come to be viewed as dangerous and filthy” (p. 543). The “liminal space” (Tsujimoto, 2014, p. 750) that migrant farmworker women occupy destabilizes gendered and classed heteronormative sexualities and family structures that states and extra-state institutions endeavour to control under the guise of morality for the sake of the economy. M. Smith’s (2011) study elucidates how “monogamous heterosexuality, marriage, family and biological reproduction” (p. 389) are imposed on Sri Lankan migrant women by the sending state and civil society institutions, specifically the United Nations Development Programme, as a way to secure their continued migration to Lebanon, by muting deviant sexualities and desires and leaving the women unprotected by the state if they do not conform. Migrant women who assert power over their own sexualities and intimate relationships live outside the homes of their employers and often as undocumented workers. In Sol’s case, she commented that she had no choice but to resign herself and sign the paper in silence at the office. Her son needed financial support for university and she had other plans that depended on her employment in Canada. For her family’s economy, she accepted that disciplining moment, yet she did not subdue her sexuality or agency in Canada away from the policing of the Mexican government.

Once in Canada, migrant women do not completely escape sexual surveillance. It continues to be conducted by consulate officials, other workers, employers, and immigration and
labour policies. Employers have their own rules about sexuality that they communicate in both overt and covert ways. Becerril (2003) observed that:

Farms regulate not only the hours of work but also the time to eat, to go buy food, to rest, to wash, to cook, to go to mass and to have sex. Everything is regulated and controlled, as one supervisor said in a large farm operation, "Mexican workers are here only to work." Farms establish schedules for men and women to talk and after a certain hour, they cannot be seen together because the company enforces a penalty against them, including dismissal. (p. 7)

How migrant workers’ lives are organized for production cuts into time and space for leisure and social interactions outside of work. An overt example of the taming of workers’ sexuality and behaviour is evidenced by the spatial organization of workers’ housing. Men and women are often kept far apart, and many employers prohibit men from visiting women’s housing. In this example, an employer attempts to keep Jamaican men away from Mexican women (see Figure 3).
This farm employed Mexican migrant women and Jamaican migrant men in the hope that their ethno-racial and linguistic differences would keep them apart. This sign was placed in the entrance of Mexican women’s housing, which consisted of a large portable classroom outfitted with washrooms and bunkbeds. A light controlled by a motion detector illuminated the sign at night at any hint of movement, which explains the glow around the sign. I have worked in a hardware store and been to many in my life and never have I seen a sign of this sort being sold or made. It was undoubtedly custom made, which shows the lengths that employers will go to control migrant workers’ sexuality. It was a sign intended to keep Jamaican men away from Mexican women, particularly at night. It is commonplace for Canadian employers to hire

*Figure 3. Women’s bunkhouse with technologies of surveillance.*
migrant men and women from different racial and linguistic backgrounds to deter the formation of sexual bonds between them that might interfere with the production process. There was no similar sign in Spanish posted outside of the Jamaican men’s housing on that farm. Women policed each other and themselves and stayed away from the men’s bunkhouse to avoid the ultimate discipline: being repatriated and banned from the SAWP altogether (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Sign of farm rules in migrant women’s housing.

This sign, which was posted in all migrants’ houses, can be interpreted as the employer protecting and caring for the migrant workforce. It reads, “Visitors are strictly prohibited after 9:00 pm on weekdays and 11:00 pm on weekends. Company Policy # 4. 1. 1 Cantec Security is now reporting any violations and the privilege of visitors will be cancelled in any house that does not observe this policy.” The narrative of protection rather than policing and surveillance is often used by the women themselves because they hear it from their managers and employers. Many migrant women have explained to me, nos cuidan (they take care of us), in reference to their
employers. This narrative of protection and care is similar to the one used by the men in their intimate lives, fathers, brothers, partners, and sometimes even sons. It functions as a perfect veil for the control of the sexualities and desires of women. It is a constant reminder that they are not free even after their work is completed for the day.

One migrant woman reported that her employer told all the migrant workers that he did not care whether they had relationships in Canada as long it was with workers from other farms so that not everyone at the farm was tired. All he cared about, she explained, was that workers show up on time ready for a hard day’s work. The employer recognized workers’ sexuality yet attempted to set the parameters and terms under which it could be expressed. This example demonstrates employers’ overreaching efforts to control the migrant workforce. It would be inconceivable for an employer in another Canadian workplace to dictate if and how citizens in their employ could have intimate relationships. Since migrant farmworkers have to live on the property of their employers or in other employer-approved housing, control can be and is exercised in both the productive and reproductive realms of workers’ lives. Moreover, workers are dependent on their employers to be renamed, that is, called back, and allowed to continue to work in Canada, therefore these restrictions are reinforced by very real material manifestations and consequences for workers who defy the rules governing their bodies and sexualities.

Women bear the brunt of the suppression of sexuality. It is women who are deemed to be sexual transgressors and hence face more control and policing than men. One year, Margarita claimed that their supervisors stormed into all the women’s housing in a huge nursery operation on a weekend to inspect every bed to ensure that all the women were sleeping there and nowhere else. Mexican men, on the other hand, do not report incidents of this kind. The control of sexuality is, however, sometimes reported by Caribbean men in the SAWP due in large part to
the racist fear of the hyper-sexuality of the Black man in predominantly White rural host communities. In 2013, for instance, the mayor of Leamington publicly denounced Jamaican men for allegedly sexually harassing “local” women on the streets (Boesveld, 2013).

Interestingly, love, sex, and politics engaged in by women are condemned as prostitution. Indeed, many female community/labour organizers in Canada have been accused of being “prostitutes” by employers and any public expressions of sexuality among migrant women is also associated with prostitution by employers, Mexican officials (consulate and SLSW), and male co-workers. For instance, in McLaughlin’s (2009) dissertation she explained that:

When “outsiders” such as UFCW staff members and volunteers sometimes drive workers to their [medical] appointments, the difficulties of mixing political activism and support cause concerns among growers. While some growers are grateful for the assistance (in one memorable case, a grower accused me of being a prostitute after seeing me waiting outside the male workers’ residence; he later realized the purpose of my visit and gave me a basket of peaches in thanks), others are more suspicious. (p. 439)

Workers are allowed to love and have social commitments, but only within certain parameters, for example, in relation to families left behind in Mexico, but not in Canada among one another or the community outside of the official universe of the Program. The purpose of cyclical migration is to keep workers bound to the workplace and readily available to work. The engineering of this workforce depends on restrictions on workers’ intimate affective and corporeal expressions.

Pregnancy is the ultimate breaking of the strict farm rules of migration and production. Pregnancy, especially in later months, can interrupt women’s productivity and allow migrant women, racialized as foreign others, to make claims on the state for maternal care and benefits as well as citizenship for Canadian-born children. Pregnant women face deportation and permanent dismissal from the Program. One year Consuelo began haemorrhaging at work and, as workers’
contracts stipulate, her employer was responsible for facilitating her access to medical care. This stipulation gives supervisors, managers, and farm owners an unwarranted licence to breach workers’ right to privacy over their health and bodies. The female farm owner accompanied Consuelo to a local clinic where it was discovered that she was pregnant and needed to rest for two weeks to prevent a miscarriage. Consuelo’s employer was present during the examination as she was translating for her with her limited Spanish. The doctor’s orders resulted in Consuelo being deported to Mexico against her will. The same happened to Gabriela in British Columbia.

When I first met her in Ontario, she told me the following:

I did not know that when I arrived I was pregnant and so the first day that I … well, from then on … I began to feel sick and all of that. And I had already spent four years working at that farm … and there were difficulties, I am not denying that, but I always had the strength to keep going…. It was hard because of my pregnancy and it was frustrating, because of the fact everyone knew I was pregnant and I also felt like I was going to be sent back and everything.

So, I tried to hide it [the pregnancy] and everything. But I kept going, for my son and for my children when I was pregnant and everything [I did] was for my parents, for their well-being, and I kept going with my work. And mentally, I would say [to myself] I do not have to feel bad, no, I don’t have to [feel this way]. What really hurts is how many of the Mexican comrades [workers] would make fun of me without intending to because of the pregnancy, which, to me, is beautiful and there is nothing wrong with it. Being pregnant is beautiful; to have a human being inside of our body. But, yes, there were other people – I am not saying everyone, right? … in fact, this … when my boss found out … she asked me [about the pregnancy] and I was honest with her, that I was indeed pregnant. And so, she said that … that it was ok, and that she would send me back to Mexico. And so, 15 days later, so after four months and 15 days, she sent me back to Mexico. And she was nice to me because she helped me load my bags [onto a vehicle?] and she helped me … hmm … Actually, I have a really nice memory of
this, and she … she gave me $100 when I was at the airport.

Gabriela’s experience shows the complexities of transgressing sexual codes in the SAWP. The employer had the authority to not only fire her but to send her back to Mexico. Rather than accommodate her pregnancy by giving her less arduous work, she gave her $100 and took her to the airport to catch the next flight out to Mexico City. I met a woman in Alberta who explained that when she became pregnant while on a contract at a greenhouse, she told her employer, “I am pregnant. I am not sick. I can still work.” However, after years of witnessing and supporting migrant women, I have seen that most employers do not want to assume the responsibility for the accommodations and health care that a pregnant migrant woman might require and most also want a labour force that is flexible and capable of all facets of labour-intensive agricultural production.

Ironically, women are recruited largely because they are mothers, but they do not have the right to reproduction and the use of their wombs while in Canada. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Hahamovitch (2010) contextualized this prohibition as a historical one that has long affected migrant women engaged in guest worker programs for agricultural work in the United States, specifically through the example of Bahamian women workers in Florida. Women in the SAWP clearly know that if they become pregnant or are pregnant upon arrival to Canada they have to do their best to conceal it from their co-workers, SLSW officials, and employers alike. One finding of Rural Women Making Change is that Jamaican women participating in the SAWP are instructed to take a pregnancy test by government officials overseeing the Program right before stepping on a plane bound for Canada. If they are found to be pregnant, then they are not allowed to board. Discrimination against pregnant women is widely practised and associated

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12 This finding was communicated in a research meeting for “Rural Women Making Change,” SSHRC-CURA Funded Project, University of Guelph, 2004-2010, Principal Researcher, Doctor Belinda Leach.
with export processing zones around the world, most notably in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean basin (Faber, 2007; Smith, M., 1998; Swedish, 2005; Williams, 2005), but not with Canadian workplaces. In the case of SAWP migrant workers, encroachments on their bodies and behaviour are enacted transnationally by Mexico and Canada and in their workplaces and housing units in Canada. Given this, I have come to understand the farms as agricultural maquilas/maquiladoras that are segregated spatially and politically from the rest of the labour market by a lack of workers’ rights and environmental laws and by the overwhelming power employers have over the workers. These are just some examples of overt and covert farm rules that have to be read in a context where migrant workers are hired based on their having limited social responsibilities in Canada. Migrant workers are disciplined and reconstructed as units of production in whom sexual, affective, and political impulses are tamed from the recruitment process in Mexico to their employment contracts in Canada.

Also, Gabriela’s case highlights that female co-workers can be complicit in their oppression and reinforce punishment for pregnancies and transgressive sexualities. Gabriela was punished for transgressing heteronormative family structures by asserting motherhood and carrying a child out of wedlock. She also broke the unofficial but fully enforced farm rule against pregnancy.

Indeed, migrant women police and stigmatize each other for their sexual transgressions. For instance, single migrant women having sexual relationships with married migrant men in the Program are often scolded by older women who take on the role of their mothers while working in Canada. Similarly, migrant women who are known to have a husband or common-law partner in Mexico and engage in a sexual relationship in Canada are stigmatized and punished by other migrant women through confrontations and gossip, and by being ostracised from friendships and
intimate emotional support. Some migrant women reinforce the parameters of acceptable
sexuality by conforming to the demand for chastity and monogamy during the weeks and months
of work on the farms. The year that Sol signed a contract to abstain from relations with Mexican
men in the Program, I came to visit her one weekend but she was not there. One of her female
co-workers said: “We lost her. She is with a Canadian man now.” This too revealed that the
borders around sexuality and love are constantly contested by all actors that comprise the
universe of the SAWP.

The rural communities and families of migrant women also stigmatize women who
transgress sexual norms in Canada. They are often accused of being sex workers and taking from
married migrant men in return for sexual favours. The material manifestations of migrant
women’s work, such as new houses (that often take years to build brick by brick, inside and out),
are dismissed as the fruit of stolen wages from married migrant men and their families. The
wives of migrant men label the migrant women as whores and most insist accompanying their
husbands to the Mexican Secretariat of Labour and Social Welfare (SLSW) in Mexico City to
ensure that they will not court or be courted by the migrant women who they fear take their place
in their absence. Some women migrants change their names once in Canada to protect
themselves and their families from damaging gossip.

Dreby (2009) has also found gossip to be a disciplinary practice among transnational
Mexican families who are bound to the United States. Dreby (2009) explained: “transnational
gossip causes conflicts in families, and especially for mothers. It evaluates women and men upon
different criteria, and places the moral burdens of family separation on the shoulders of women”
(p. 17). In the universe of the SAWP, women are punished by coercive “transnational gossip” for
asserting their sexuality in their transnational homemaking. Migrant mothers are required to hold
motherhood above any other aspect of themselves. By migrating to Canada, women are able to assert themselves as mothers and breadwinners, and the sexuality that they exercise does not restrict their capacity to provide. In many cases, their relationships with men include monetary gifts and financial exchanges such as \textit{llenar los carritos} (fill up grocery carts). Men pay for groceries because the women cook for them. These exchanges allow women to have more disposable income to remit back to their families. Hence, it is not only states and Canadian employers, migrant workers and their home communities are also protagonists in the ways their bodies live and sense this universe.

\textbf{Defying Farm Rules}

There is more to the story of sexual policing and control. Despite coercive mechanisms of control inherent in the SAWP, migrant workers defy farm rules (broadly conceived) and assert themselves, their sexualities, and their desires. I contend that sexual transgressions and expressions among migrant women should be read as a form of political defiance. Moreover, I concur with Becerril’s assertion (2009) that “migrant workers develop new expressions of sexuality out of their migratory experiences in Canada” (p. 1). As migrant women, moreover, they have the most to lose when they defy farm rules due to the limited number of contracts set aside for women, gendered policing against them, and the constant threat of deportation and exclusion from the Program entirely. Political resistance does not only manifest publicly and in a concerted collective manner, but is also corporeal and sexual and asserted privately. In the “liminal space” (Tsujimoto, 2014, p. 750) where migrant women confront restrictive gender regimes imposed by their home rural communities and families and their host communities, they find themselves in a position to assert agency and reclaim their bodies and desires and in so doing conceive new subjectivities and ways of being and seeing themselves. As labour
organizers we would be amiss if we did not take into consideration the affective and intimate part of workers’ lives when seeking to understand how resistance happens, particularly within coercive labour regimes where the outlets of political expression available are vastly different than those available to workers who are less tightly bound by the regulation of production and reproduction.

Assuming control of their bodies is one of the ways migrant women assert their power, reclaim their subjectivities, and resist. In a similar vein Becerril (2007) posited that “the struggle to freely exercise sexuality simultaneously generates a recovery of identity as a whole human being” (p. 170). I suggest that there are few Mexican migrant women in union-sponsored “migrant support centres” throughout rural Canada for a number of reasons, but one of them is that they are already engaged in a politics of resistance and defiance of their very own that is scripted by gender, class, ethno-racial backgrounds, and status as temporary foreign workers. This is not to say that Mexican migrant women do not talk back to Mexican government officials and employers or that they always provide their labour power freely on the farms and in the packaging plants. They take part in labour stoppages and support one another in the event of arbitrary deportations ordered by the managers of the SAWP in Canada. I have also witnessed migrant women in the NOC C and D13 Programs from the Philippines, Thailand, Guatemala, and Indonesia denounce recruiters, refuse to pay them, and take to the rural roads in a 12-hour historic “Pilgrimage to Freedom” march from Leamington to Windsor that they organized collectively with “Justice for Migrant Workers,” J4MW. However, resistance within the universe of SAWP plays out in another framework with diverse actors and hence has particular features.

The NOC C and D is not regulated by sending and receiving governments, contracts are 2 years

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13 The NOC C and D refers to the Canadian government’s skill and experience classification system to assess labour market supply and demand. It stands for the National Occupational Classification and C and D are among the low-skill classes.
long, often involve private recruiters, and workers generally have more freedom with respect to their place of employment and housing. Each program shapes particular forms of resistance. And I contend that it is crucial to turn to the entanglements of love, sex, and the affective to comprehend the resistance, new subjectivities, and relations that are being constructed by migrant workers in cyclical controlled migration schemes such as the SAWP.

**Romeo and Juliet of the SAWP**

I now turn to a transnational love story intended to elucidate how women defy farm rules and assert themselves through love. I see America’s love story as the Romeo and Juliet story of the SAWP. I followed her life and journey in Canada and Mexico for several years. She always worked on one particular farm that had over 100 workers. America had had a boyfriend outside of the SAWP for several seasons. She would spend her coveted time off on the weekends with him like most migrant women who have partners. The relationship ended painfully. The following season she became involved with a Mexican worker who was battling alcoholism. She wanted to help him and got frustrated when all of her support did not heal his addiction. America decided to leave him and started getting close to one of her White Canadian supervisors, Bill. She was uneasy about being seen with him in public because of the punishing gossip that is often inflicted on migrant women who have partners in Canada, and she felt that after her more recent breakup she should hide her new relationship to prevent talk of her being an *easy* or *loose* woman. For America, discretion also came from her fear that gossip would get back to their employer who had stipulated that Canadian management and the migrant labour force should restrict themselves to collegial working relationships. However, a community event was taking place in the region where she was working and by this time America and Bill were head over
heels for one another. They attended the event with the migrant community in the region because they were ready to go public and assured of their commitment to one another.

Gossip about the couple quickly reached their employers at the event with consequences that would mark the rest of their lives. America reported that one day at work she was called to the main office and warned that if she continued to see Bill, she would be sent back to Mexico. Bill was similarly summoned and instructed to stop seeing America and warned that he did not really know who he was involving himself with because she was Mexican. America was offended by that remark and also became worried about Bill’s employment at the farm; and she had three dependents in Mexico who counted on her for survival and was also in the middle of building a house for herself and her family. She had much to lose, but Bill and America decided to stay together despite all the obstacles. They went back into hiding after the threats and asked me if I knew a trustworthy immigration consultant or lawyer they could see about getting married and processing America’s permanent residency. That season America got married and initiated her paperwork to live in Canada and leave the SAWP for good. This was the only way that the couple could find to stay together. They had to work in different workplaces, but most importantly, America’s status in Canada had to be separated from the work contract with their employer so that the employer did not have control over whether she stayed or returned to Mexico.

The wedding was small and intimate with America’s former female co-workers in the SAWP in attendance. She asked me to be a formal witness and sign her marriage licence in lieu of her mother. When the vows were exchanged and it had all become official, the pastor’s wife broke into song with lyrics that were made for Bill and America’s love story:
Join your voice with my voice
To shout that we triumphed
The world is already tired
And here the two of us are still together
Without giving up or hiding
Why hide our love?
It would be like covering the sun with a finger
The vast immense sunlight
To deny God's grace
Denying that white is black
My love, nothing could bring us apart
We fought against incomprehension
There is nothing more to tell in this story
We triumphed by force of love
Join your voice with my voice
To shout that we triumphed
And if love is sin
The skies can explanation
Because it's divine will

[Triunfamos by Los Panchos-from the Spanish translation]

At the reception each Spanish-speaking guest was given the lyrics of this song so that they could sing it together as America and Bill left for their local honeymoon. Getting married and staying with her partner was how America resisted. Sol is experienced the same predicament, having to hide a relationship with a Canadian supervisor. She, too, was called to the office as America was. However Sol denied the relationship from the onset. This relationship and stages of life of Sol and her partner are quite different from that of Bill and America. Sol has plans for herself in Mexico and enjoys the freedom of being a single woman while she is there.

**Precarious Love and its Casualties**

Migrant workers are dehumanized as commodities that exist solely for work. For employers and sometimes even workers, it is presumed that life happens in Mexico and Canada is all about work. But many migrant workers spend more of their lives in Canada than they do in their home countries. Their lives are compressed by time and space determined by the needs of
employers, seasons of the crops, and visa expiration dates. There is no division between work
and life when they are living on the farms constantly under the gaze of their employers and
supervisors. In this context of alienation and life compression, love, intimacy, and sex become
defiance and very real acts of resistance for the survival of the spirit and body. However, this
defiance and assertion of humanity is not without consequences.

The triumphant Romeo and Juliet story produced unintended casualties. America was
separated from her son, mother, and younger brother for over 2 years as her permanent residency
in Canada was being processed. It caused a rupture with her family and the household
management scheme that they had all worked together to construct. As a result, the work of care
and household management formerly based on her yearly cyclical migration had to be
reconstituted. Her son became even more rebellious and became a father at the tender age of 16.
Love kept America in Canada and her son felt unloved, abandoned, and replaced by the new
husband and potentially new family when she did not return. I spent a lot of time talking with
and counselling America’s mother who did not know what to do with her son. In visits to the
families in rural Mexico throughout the years, I have witnessed many children of migrant
workers feeling unloved, abandoned, and left behind. Many indeed seek the emotional support
and love they feel are lacking by forming new families of their very own to compensate.
Becoming parents at a young age, they often end up having to migrate as soon as they are legally
able to in order to provide for their premature families. Thus the cycle of migration repeats itself
generationally and with it comes the creation of more fragmented transnational families.

The love that the women engage in is transnational and also precarious since it is
seasonal, dictated by employers and the processes of production. Years are counted as seasons
and every season is different. Love is demarcated by the start and end dates of labour contracts in
Canada that are set by employers, immigration policy, labour production processes, and even the weather if they work in open fields. The love that migrant men and women negotiate depends on securing employment in Canada. Women cannot count on returning to their lovers since they might be separated by work contracts far away from one another in different provinces. One woman lamented that her lover was no longer in Leamington and she wanted me to help her find an employer in the area who would request him for the following year. Sometimes distance does not separate the women from their lovers. The men they have come to love in Canada often become their lovers over the phone. Aside from the list of people they talk to back in Mexico to maintain their transnational lives, lovers who end up in other parts of Canada also find themselves on the calling list.

More often than not, however, the love that women find with men in the Program is temporary just like their labour contracts. Many women experience this love in the same way their contracts in Canada construct them, temporary and disposable. Recently, one migrant woman from the State of Puebla, talking about relationships with men, explained to me, “We are replaceable, they can leave us and replace us with someone else.” Over the years I have had to counsel dozens of women whose men had left them to be with another migrant woman who they lived with and had to see every single day in their housing. Relationships with men can cause division among women and intensify horizontal oppression among them. Love causes ruptures of all sorts and necessitates constant work and the creation of strategies among women to adapt to their forbidden and precarious nature.

Often this means that love is hidden and forms the foundation of a secret life for many migrant workers living in Canada. For Isabel, Ismael was the world. He was one of the reasons she continued to migrate. Even though everyone knew that he was married with children in
Mexico, and that one of his older sons came to work in the same region, they continued their courtship throughout more than six seasons. One migrant women explained, “Here we live lives that do not belong to us,” referring to the “borrowing” of married men for the seasons of work. Many more women have said that in Canada they are courted and loved as they were when they were teenagers. In a sea of men they become goddesses. As one woman remarked, “Here in Canada there are no ugly [Mexican] women.”

After many years of life and work in Canada, Valeria had gained much wisdom and knowledge about transnational and forbidden love. She shared what she knew with other migrant women who were in love and involved with married migrant men:

It’s one of the things I tell the women here, “These are Canadian relationships and what happens in Canada stays in Canada.” It is rare that these relationships lead to marriage … maybe one or two percent. It’s hard because if a married man goes out with a married woman, you have to know exactly what you are getting into and stay grounded because you have to always remember that he is married and the relationship stays here.

Although the intention is to leave these loves in Canada, they can linger and produce angst and heartbreak.

When the seasons are over the love and affection remain, but most of the time as a passing memory. Some loves pause at the end of the contracts when everyone has to return to their own lives, as some women would argue, to the lives that are truly theirs as single women with their children and family in rural Mexico. Some loves wait in the expectation that the connection and support will continue upon the return of the lovers to Canada. However, a code of separation between life in Canada and life in Mexico resonates quite forcefully in the universe of the Program; these are “Canadian loves.” Many migrant women and men understand that what
happens in Canada stays in Canada, precisely as Valeria put it, “They are Canadian loves; what happens in Canada remains here.” While this split between life and love in Canada and in Mexico is understood, it is a cause of constant emotional pain and anguish for many women who on one hand have to leave their children and on the other are abandoned by men they come to love yet may never see or hear from again. Women constantly have to manage fragmented hearts, desires, and thoughts between work on the farms and sexual and maternal love.

Loving transnationally also takes place in the context of gendered expectations about the role of women as caretakers—both physically and emotionally—of men. Women are valued as desirable commodities for companionship, sex, and the basics of care by men. One season, Valeria had to console her married lover at the time of his father-in-law’s death. Many migrant women find themselves tending to men’s emotional wounds arising from their roles as fathers and husbands and their affective ties to their non-migrating kin. In a focus group, Teresa rationalized these arrangements based on mutual benefit beyond the sexual with a dose of humour. She explained:

The men get sick and here we are to help them. We feed them because poor things, they come home very tired. And when they return to Mexico, they arrive well, well taken care of. However if their wives find out about us, they get angry. Their wives mistreat us. But why, if they are cold, we go and cover them with a blanket and we go and warm them up. I do not understand why their wives get so angry at us.

Women and men find themselves separated from their spouses and romantic partners by immigration policies and the dictates of the just-in-time labour regime constructed by the state and the long-standing lobbying efforts of Canadian employers. Although the prevailing overt and covert practice is to prevent sexual and romantic relationships from developing among the
migrant population, migrant workers turn to one another for support to endure the months of isolation and strenuous work. They form arrangements to care for each other materially and sexually. On the set of the film *El Contrato*, I heard a migrant man explaining that he thought programs such as the SAWP were cruel and inhumane because they deprive workers of the love and affection they need to survive. Years later, I learned that after many seasons away, the migrant worker took a lover in Canada.

There are transnational loves that create tangible ripple effects across borders and within regions of Canada. In the course of three seasons, I witnessed two migrant workers who were married and had their own families fall in love. Amelia and Augustin’s love affair produced transnational consequences that lasted a lifetime. The first time I met Amelia, she swore by the love she had with her common-law husband, Victor, who was also a migrant worker in the same region of Southwestern, Ontario. She was a single mother when she met him and was struggling from missing her child and family when he started courting her and bringing her flowers every chance that he got. After avoiding men in Mexico for a long time in her life, she decided to give Victor, a younger man, a chance. Their family lives were reconstituted and her son in Mexico was taken in by Victor’s family. However, Augustin started taking notice of Amelia at her new workplace in peach packaging. They spent more time together at work than Amelia could spend with Victor during their limited time off. Little by little the love, and perhaps convenience, that held Victor and Amelia together began to wane. Augustin had five children, who were the reasons for his migration to Canada, but he had been having marital problems.

Augustin and Amelia finally became a couple, but it was a long time before they were open about their affair. Too many lives were intertwined in Mexico and Canada. The men in Victor’s family also worked in the region and had taken Amelia in as a daughter-in-law. But
finally, Amelia’s son had to return to live with his maternal family. As for Augustin, he became estranged from his wife and the five children who were his main motivation for migration. One day his wife called to berate me for not informing her of this love affair. She said that as an educated woman I had a duty to inform her. She wanted to be heard and seen. She asserted, that “As a wife, I matter; as the wife of a migrant man, I was damaged by this program.”

Transnational love produces casualties and heartbreaks spanning borders, jurisdictions, and families.

**Sexual Agency**

Women’s migration provides opportunities for them to fall in love, build relationships, and exercise their sexuality in ways that were formerly closed to them. In rural Canada, there are few Spanish-speaking women beyond those participating in temporary foreign worker programs. Immigration from Latin American remains low and most immigrants live in cities. Given migrant women’s scant numbers relative to men (in the SAWP, there are 27 men to each woman), women become, figuratively, mermaids in the sea of men. In fact, women’s scarce numbers have prompted men to revalorize them.14 As Naila related, “Here in Canada—Leamington to Niagara—wherever it may be, a woman is worth more than in Mexico. Here we are rejuvenated because men treat us better than they do in Mexico, whether they are married or single.” Similarly, Rosalba joked, “I tell my female co-workers that here there is no such thing as an ugly woman.” While constant sexual harassment is one side of this coin, the other is a competitive market where men devise ways to out-romance and out-seduce one another in order to secure a partner. This involves gifting chocolates, cut flowers, clothing, and even bags of groceries, as well as trips to restaurants, social attractions, and hotels. Migrant women claim that

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14 A common adverb to refer to the way women are valued is “cotizada,” (valorize) a term used to refer to the evaluation of prized stock or possessions.
they are pursued and seduced in ways that non-migrating wives and women in rural Mexico are not. Sooner or later, most women find themselves entering into romantic relationships and sexual encounters with men in the same temporary foreign worker program, the majority of whom are married.

Migrant women find that in this context they are able to exercise more power over men than men’s own wives are able to in Mexico or than they were able to exercise over their ex-partners in Mexico. Migrant women are breadwinners and lovers while the wives of migrant men are dependents who they do not often see due to their work in Canada. One migrant man said to me, “Surely migrant women are our wives’ rivals.” Many of the women confessed that having a lover rather than a controlling husband made much more sense in their transnational lives. As one workshop participant related, “Here I prefer to have a good lover than a bad husband.”

During a focus group, Palabra spoke proudly about falling in love in Canada and what she told her daughters, “I explained to them that Canada is where I was able to live a romance and my youth because they know that since I got together with their father it has been only beatings and humiliations for me.” Another woman remarked that es rico lo prohibido (what is forbidden is delicious), showing that women also create new meanings for desire and love in their transnational homemaking.

Heightened contact with men outside of restrictive gender norms results in the sexual empowerment of women. Since women find themselves in a better position to negotiate their relationships with men in general, they also find themselves with more power to decide when and how to reciprocate sexually. Women engage in sexual encounters that open them to pleasure and their bodies unlike their experiences with partners of the past. Although migrants’ romantic and sexual involvements are accompanied by moral anguish on both sides, men and women
justify their relationships as coming out of the loneliness and estrangement they experience as racialized migrant farm workers in Canada. Moreover, having a male partner grants a woman a degree of protection from the ongoing sexual harassment women experience in their work and living environment. Women thus engage not only in transnational homemaking but also transnational loving. They are love/re/making and homemaking at the same time as negotiating all the complex practices that these practices and expressions entail for global migrants.

**Conclusion: The Right to Love and Love as Resistance**

In this chapter, I have contemplated love and the ways it is lived, embodied, and practised by migrant women. These love stories are part of the SAWP transnational *telenovelas* (soap operas) where sexual love is forbidden and thus becomes a transgressive act and expression of resistance. Love is a complicated terrain for migrant women that produces a slew of consequences and necessitates various strategies and practices to love through. Love with all its cultural and economic implications is more complicated for migrant women who are non-citizen, racialized workers making a life for themselves at the margins of rural Canada and the global economy. Love is received, lived, and given precariously due to the transnational social relations that govern their lives. Migrant women in the SAWP are stigmatized in their communities for migrating and leaving their children and accused of being sex workers in Canada. They are penalized socially for forging a life across borders economically and sexually. However, women love, desire, and come to terms with themselves in Canada in ways they could not in Mexico. There are several love stories that make women’s eyes shine whenever they tell them. For instance, Valeria’s co-workers commented that her eyes shone whenever she spoke of Salvador. I knew that Valeria defied the public moral code of chastity when I saw her walking in the downtown core of Leamington where she could be seen by people from her own rural
community in Mexico hand-in-hand with Salvador. But there she was proudly displaying her affection on the street, which is uncommon in Canadian culture and certainly an act of defiance in rural Mexico and the transrural Mexican–Canadian space created by this migration.

Women in rural towns in Mexico do not commonly roam in public by themselves. It is very common for them to be accompanied by a man, such as a son or a father, when they leave the house. Valeria had this to say about Salvador:

He did not have a concern with family back in Mexico. He did not have to hide, or say to tell me we could not go there because people will see me. My children knew about my relationship with him. My mom, my dad, my sisters, and ... I will not hide anything. And never hide anything. Because, they say there, the world is so small, that ... everything is known. And instead of them finding out through other people, it is best that they know it through me.

Migrant women are always having to defend their love and desires, which speaks volumes about the very real ways that their love matters to the states, employers, and cultural norms that comprise their social locations.

This love was beautiful for Valeria and one that carried her to Canada with much desire. In Mexico she waited in anticipation to be with Salvador and relive a romance reminiscent of her teenage years. She commented:

I was with that person, lived many years, well not years, but seasons and seasons with him. I had a relationship with and why? I was seduced by the thought of returning to Canada because I had this illusion with him. To be with someone; someone who treats you well, that of someone who was observant of all these details with you. It is very sweet. That is something that calls you, and you say and feel that you want to be there.
Salvador was the lover she had never had, the one that was made possible by her migration to Canada. He was her support system and someone who treated her to gifts, attention, and affection in ways she has never known, not even with her husband. She felt like she was *quinceñera* (15 years old) when she was with him. The love that Valeria and Salvador experienced took place within a particular context, a cultural, economic, and political context framed by states and gender regimes. Not all the loves stories in the SAWP have happy endings. Many are the source of anguish and angst and some have produced children.

Exercising desire and sexuality can come at a high price. Employers have deported women for leaving the farm without permission, attending dances, having male visitors, having a lover, or getting pregnant. Furthermore, the power women gain in their personal relationships often comes at the expense of becoming sexually objectified. While men boast about their sexual encounters with women, sharing real and fictive details in the migrant community, women tread a fine balance between asserting their right to love and pleasure and protecting themselves in a context of intense sexual harassment and penalization of female sexuality by employers and co-workers. Even if women do not have a sexual life in Canada, they arrive stigmatized by their sexual pasts as single mothers and are labelled, as a group, in highly derogatory terms by a faction of migrant men (Preibisch & Grez, 2010; Preibisch & Hermoso Santamaria, 2006).

Women also pay the price for intimate encounters in other ways. While employers do not deport men because of a relationship with a woman, they have expelled an entire female workforce for the same reason. Moreover, women have little recourse in the face of inappropriate sexual advances made by supervisors or employers. Women have tolerated sexual harassment until the end of their contracts so they will get a positive evaluation from their employer that can be used as leverage to switch worksites once in Mexico.
A political project that did not consider love, the right to love and to be loved, would be incomplete and unable to sustain social justice among and with migrant workers. Capital vis-à-vis the state and long-standing lobbying efforts on the part of powerful agribusiness in Canada even have the power to regulate love among workers. This lens has to be applied to all workers if we are to understand how precarity and neoliberalism affects personal decisions, expressions, and practices of the body, sexuality, and intimate relationships. Love is lived precariously by migrant women in the SAWP. It is in this space of the frontiers of the heart that we can better understand how resistance and agency operates among marginalized workers. Building a social justice project with migrant workers and other precarious workers across the globe today requires the incorporation of the affective and recognition of the workers’ right to be fully human.
On the Frontiers of the Affective

In a Democracy Now (2012) online interview, Amy Goodman asked John Lewis, a legendary civil rights leader and long-time congressman in the United States, what had propelled him to defy state troopers’ orders to stop their march for the right of African-Americans to vote in Selma. He explained:

Well, my mother, my father, my grandparents, my uncles and aunts, and people all around me had never registered to vote. I had been working all across the South. The state of Mississippi had a black voting age population of more than 450,000, and only about 16,000 were registered to vote. On that day, we didn’t have a choice. I think we had been tracked down by what I call the spirit of history, and we couldn’t—we couldn’t turn back. We had to go forward. We became like trees planted by the rivers of water. We were anchored. And I thought we would die. I first thought we would be arrested and go to jail, but I thought it was a real possibility that some of us would die on that bridge that day, after the confrontation occurred. I thought it was the last protest for me. But somehow and someway, you have to keep going. You go to a hospital, you go to a doctor’s office, you get mended, and you get up and try it again. (Democracy Now, 2012)

In this testimony, Congressman Lewis invokes the spirit and force of organizing. His words speak to the poetics and emotions that energize social transformation. Many times there are no words. Community organizing can be indescribable, more intuited and embodied than rationally worded. Organizing is a defensive and active response against oppressive socioeconomic structures. It also has a logic and magic of its own, one that I have felt and experienced throughout the 16 years of my life in the practice of convivir with migrant workers as an ally, researcher, and compañera (friend/comrade).
In this chapter I delve into the affective complexities of community organizing that have allowed me to share the intimate details of migrant women’s lives. As a community-engaged scholar, I have witnessed and documented the lives of migrant farmworker women in relation to their transnational households, the economy, and their multifaceted subjectivities including their emotions, desires, and sexualities. It is in the frontiers of the affective where we stand to be the most transformed and fueled for migrant justice and status for all (as human beings) in the current juncture of late-stage capitalism. The knowledge I have gathered has strengthened my community-labour organizing with the migrant community. From intimacies shared, I have taken cues about what is being called upon by migrant justice organizers and those supporting the most precarious workers in the globe today. Community-labour organizing, in addition to securing better living and working conditions and providing rights education, is also about seeking wholeness, love, respect, and dignity for migrant workers and their transnational families. I posit that community-labour organizers and activist researchers alike circulate care and support within the zones of abandonment in which migrant workers and their families find themselves. Migrant women experience gendered statelessness wherein no state undertakes responsibility for their care and welfare. They live in a space of global marginality shaped by the coercive structures of the universe of the SAWP. At the same time, the SAWP and labour migration to Canada grants women a degree of mobility and power. To describe them as powerless would be an inadequate and incomplete rendering of their lives. Migrant women are global subjects and their struggles represent politics of the possible beyond traditional forms of resistance that collectives such as Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW) attempt to broaden and expand.

Community-labour activists are tasked to respond, witness, and support the migrant workers’ transnational heartbreaks that spill across borders. Community organizing is emotional
labour and also radical community carework to confront racism, exploitation, commodification, and dehumanization of migrant workers. Just as migrant workers and their families have to manage their emotions, organizers must manage and harness ours in order to do the work we do. When I return from the farms, I experience transnational heartbreak of my own. In the farms and in this political work, I give and receive. There is joy, sorrow, and grief for me as well. I have had to live with and negotiate emotional and material debts in order to help sustain this current of change due to the nature of my work as an unpaid organizer. My organizing work for J4MW is a response to my reading of the political and economic systems that structure the lives of migrant workers. It is also attributable to my own political dreams, and my emotional need for community and belonging as a mestiza who is not fully Canadian, not fully Chilean. Someone who is neither from here nor there and who has had to contend with displacement. Yet community organizing is not fully romantic and idyllic. It comes with burnout, breakdowns, and breakthroughs. As organizers, we are often taken by the force of change, and ride its waves that in turn crash against our very bodies and our lives. In this chapter, I give name to the sea of emotions and invisible labour that is part of the engagement and convivir practice within the universe of the SAWP. These emotions and labour further elucidate the transnational space and relations that are shaped by state policies and neoliberal globalization that underpin the logic of the SAWP. I also highlight crucial moments of transformation in my work with the intention of carving spaces for the politics of the possible within the SAWP, a manifestation inequity within contemporary neoliberal globalization.

**Political Histories, Personal Fuel**

In my very first outreach trip to Leamington in the spring of 2001 (detailed in the methodology chapter), I was completely moved by migrant workers’ testimonies and by
witnessing where they lived and worked. Listening to migrant worker after worker, I was shocked, saddened, and outraged. McKeown, quoted in Cox (2008), stated that, “outrage at the profound injustices created by existing conditions has to be a wellspring of social change movements.” Indeed emotions awaken and propel rebellion, dissent, and social movements (Goodwin & Jasper, 2000; Gould, 2009; Kennelly, 2014). Emotions are the precursor of movements and the initiation of activist learning and engagement. Gould, for instance, documented the emotions behind the AIDS movement in the United States to uncover:

> how political feelings are generated, sustained, and altered, or not; the ways in which power is exercised through and reproduced in our feelings; the processes through which ostensibly individual feelings take on collective character—articulate with more frequently studied factors that shape activism and movements (pp. 3–4)

Emotions move and transform individuals and collectives. Migrant workers reminded me of my family and the immigrant experience I had gone through as a child seeking belonging in a place that constantly reminded me of and constructed my otherness. After speaking to dozens of migrant workers that spring weekend, I could not leave those conversations behind. In the process, I was politically awakened and changed. All that they shared shattered the foundations of my identity as a Canadian and the liberal notions of success through meritocracy. Just when I had reached a point in my life when I affirmed belonging in Canada, as a Latina, *mestiza* woman, migrant workers’ testimonies of exploitation, racism, disrespect, and labour rights violations brought me back to my racialized immigrant working-class roots. In the middle of a master’s program, with the expectation that I would climb into middle-class earnings and social status, it occurred to me that success is impossible when our survival, our success is dependent on the exploitation of others in our community, especially people who looked like me. Years later, I
came across the following quote from Cesar Chavez, the leader of the historic farmworker movement in California:

    We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community. Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.

His words, which also inspired the foundation of Chicano studies, underscore the principles that I have followed in my own research and community praxis.

Being with migrant workers that weekend awakened my political consciousness. It also re-aligned my geographical compass. I started to identify with the migrant population through my immigrant family’s working-class struggles and roots. It was not just about me, and marching into the middle class while leaving my community behind would be betrayal of my own working-class roots. The social inequities I was adamantly seeking to eradicate within the Global South, existed quite forcefully in spaces of the Global North, in a country that many consider can do no wrong. What was different between migrant workers, my family, and me? Why did they have to live this way? How could I forget my own personal experiences growing up in a working-class immigrant family?

My father secured asylum in Canada from Chile and my mother and I were allowed into the country on a special minister’s permit to be reunited with him. I was taught to be Canadian at school. In a trip back to Chile in 2016, after 12 years of focus on Mexico and Mexican migrant workers, I met with a childhood friend I had not seen in 35 years. She had kept many of the letters and drawings I had mailed to her since I left for Canada. One of the pictures she kept was one I drew when I was about 6 years old. It was of me wearing a Canadian t-shirt, waving a flag, along with one of the first sentences I could write in the English language, “Ontario, yours to
discover.” These were words I often saw in public spaces and ads in my new home. In one letter I recounted, “mi mama me está ayudando escribirte porque se me está olvidando el español ahora que estoy aprendiendo inglés (my mother is helping me write because I am forgetting Spanish now that I am learning English).” Going through the letters and drawings brought me back to the child within that had had to shed her Chilean identity in order to belong in Canada. I lost my home and my language and had to reconstruct myself anew.

However, my work with the migrant community that commenced in 2001 entailed forming a new sense of self again rooted in a third space of belonging. First, migrant workers made me realize that my calling for social justice had to be enacted within Canada in order to challenge the myths of a benevolent nation. Instead of studying in Latin America, I started organizing with migrant workers, and consequently developed a sense of accountability to the community that had started to trust and depend on me as an ally. Workers came to trust and depend on me and other Justicia for Migrant Workers organizers, and looked forward to the weekends when we would make the four-hour trek to see them. We had to organize renting a car and securing donations to cover the rental and gasoline. We served as a bridge between the White mainstream Canadian society that migrant workers were alienated from, but better yet, which they had to serve through their labour and non-citizenship status.

This bridge served as a space for inclusion, bringing with us information and education about the rights and responsibilities of the workers, employers, and governments involved. It is also an in-between space of belonging. We acted as translators of not only language but the law governing their rights. Justicia organizers problem-solved with workers on the spot any issue that they were dealing with at the farms and followed up to ensure all was going smoothly with their cases.
Not fully part of Canada and estranged from Mexico since their Mexican citizenship loses all its currency in rural Ontario due to their incorporation as non-Canadian workers, we created community and sense of belonging in the margins. Not fully Chilean, not White or so-called “old stock” Canadians, as former Prime Minister Harper lashed out during his last federal election as leader of the Conservative Party, I could find myself and belonging in this third space with migrant workers. I started to see my identity through their condition, in relation to their incorporation as racialized temporary workers, ni de aqui, ni de alla (not from here, not from there). Moreover, many workers expressed to me that when they returned to their families, they experienced a honeymoon stage where all would celebrate their return, but after just a few days this phase would wear off. I remember in the state of Tlaxcala, the wife of a migrant worker ran over to talk to me after I had visited with her and her husband. She had more to say and ask, but in private. She was eager for her husband to return to Canada and implored to me to help her make it happen. It was not just purely economic, she explained that she was also not used to him being at home. Hence, migrant workers do not always fit back with their families since families learn to adapt without them and develop dynamics of their own in their absence. Their return disrupts dynamics leaving many feeling estranged from their own families. Then where do migrant workers belong? They belong in this third space, one that is carved out by capital and states, one that incites lots of pain due to alienation, but is also a space for possibility and recreating community and new subjectivities beyond nation-states. It is a space of transnational possibilities, a space of dreaming, and the politics of the possible.

J4MW works within a space of possibility that weaves and affirms place and belonging among migrant workers and their families. It is also a space that lends itself to political action
beyond the stagnant politics of industrial relations that dictate how workers can organize and resist within the formal legal context. Early in our organizing, in 2006, I recounted that:

Most members of J4MW are young organisers of colour who have not found a place or have been expelled from the labour movement due to radical politics. We have been basically told this is how it is going to be and this is how it is going to be done. The labour movement still too often approaches workers of colour as a static and homogenous group without an analysis of power and systems of oppression that structure their lives. When we have raised our concerns or offered our knowledge and experiences we have often been silenced for the official line. (Encalada Grez, 2006, p. 25)

We have had to go beyond union models of organizing since farmworkers cannot collectively bargain in Ontario irrespective of their immigration status. Furthermore, unionization does not address the structural conditions behind their displacement. I also questioned:

Can a Canadian—predominantly white and hierarchical—union serve the interests of migrant farm workers? Should a new union be formed by migrant workers to better reflect their diverse backgrounds and experiences? Would it be a union that is based in their home countries or can this union be more transnational in scope while bound to the SAWP? (Encalada Grez, 2006, p. 5)

Binford (2013) concurred with my critique and added that the long-standing leadership of UFCW, for instance, which claims to represent migrant farmworkers, is European Canadian and does not have the “internalized cultural habitus nor the linguistic skills” (p. 176) to connect with the Spanish-speaking workers who are the main focus of the union’s outreach. Moreover, in provinces where farmworkers are able to unionize, such as Quebec and British Columbia, union drives have not garnered much support and have failed to make a significant impact on the lives of migrant workers and their families. One migrant who had been working in Quebec confessed to me that “if we voted for a union then we get less hours from our employers because they would have to pay us more, and we came here to work.” Russo (2011) also questioned the strategy of collective bargaining to address the structural inequality for migrant farmworkers,
particularly in the case of British Columbia, migrant workers who were supportive of union drives were blacklisted.

Moreover, Paz Ramirez and Chun (2016) explained that in contrast to “white workers’ struggles, which often revolve around obtaining better wages and benefits under collective agreements, for migrant farmworkers these are not primary concerns” (p. 99). Instead, Paz Ramirez and Chun (2016) asserted that, “what ultimately matters is to preserve a sense of dignity and to regain their humanity as they [migrant farmworkers] struggle to support themselves and their families in an unjust global economic system” (p. 100). Migrant workers, like many workers in the precarious labour economy today, are pitted against one another, the unity for a successful union ballot count is difficult to achieve. All of this is intensified by the threat of deportation and blacklisting on the part of the Mexican government, which indeed has happened, specifically in British Columbia. Because the Canadian state does not have jurisdiction over the dictates of the Mexican government, little was done to protect and reinstate migrant workers working in British Columbia who were affected. Moreover, when workers complain they are threatened with fewer hours if they unionize and many have told me that they want to work as much as possible to make their time away from their family count for something tangible, and having days off is emotionally treacherous, since then they have more time on their hands to be depressed and anxious about the happenings back in Mexico.

The politics of the possible has entailed learning and developing organizing strategies and models beyond the antiquated and cookie-cutter methods employed by organized labour. A couple of us in Justice for Migrant Workers have worked with export processing workers in Mexico and Central America whose organizations espouse the politics of the possible among workers, principally women workers, who had been branded docile, subservient, and
unorganizable. Their allies, mostly feminist labour organizers who had, coincidently, been ejected from the mostly male, class reductionist, left-wing movements and unions in the region, started to develop organizing models of their own, and resisting in ways outside of the tactical methods of male workers employed in mass production during the post-war era.

**Pilgrimage to Freedom**

For nearly two decades, our collective has been at the forefront of the migrant rights movement in Canada and globally, engaged in the politics of the possible in a situation of virtually impossibility. None of us earn a wage for our community work with migrant workers. We do not have a multi-million-dollar budget like some unions and workers’ confederations. We are always scrambling for funds to support car rentals and buy gas so that we can travel to rural Ontario to see and connect with migrant workers. Yet none of the unions we know of have come up with campaigns and actions comparable to those we have undertaken, such as the historic Pilgrimage to Freedom in October 2011.

We might have dreams for acts of resistance, but if workers cannot meet us in those dreams then they are not collective ones. One of my dreams was to organize a Leamington-wide labour stoppage among migrant workers as a show of power and resistance to employers and the Canadian government and to bring pressure to bear to strengthen labour laws in agriculture and to grant migrant workers with status. However, not all migrant workers can risk losing their work and being blacklisted from entry into Canada through guest worker programs. My impossible dream reflected a lack of self-reflexivity and my privilege, not seeing and understanding fully the risks that can or cannot be undertaken by migrant workers.

However, during the G20 and G8 meetings hosted by the Canadian government in Toronto, some Filipina and Thai migrant women started to talk about the need for a huge
demonstration of people power in the farms similar to that in the city. We started to get more support and willingness among a new wave of migrant workers, primarily women outside of the SAWP (mostly in Agricultural Stream of the NOC C and D) to join us in public displays of resistance by taking to the streets of rural Ontario. Gradually, the dream of a work stoppage turned into a 12-hour march from Leamington, Ontario to Windsor, Ontario that was open to migrant workers who were willing and able to march. Bandanas were provided for those who wanted to minimize the risks of participation. The worst-case scenario for participating migrant workers was being seen and recognized by their employer in media coverage and being considered troublemakers, which would ultimately secure their loss of work and deportation out of the country. Hence the price to pay for overt and public resistance is high among migrant workers, principally women.

During the march, there was a moment when migrant sisters from Thailand and the Philippines led the crowd of organizers, media, and activists who joined us from Toronto, surrounding regions, and even the United States. Tears ran down my face from the exhilaration of realizing the dream of impossibility, the politics of the possible among migrant women who are constructed as docile and subservient and disciplined by global capital in conditions in which survival and fighting back seemed impossible. This moment reminded me of Chang’s (2004) work wherein she noted:

Third World women migrant workers have always been many steps ahead of us in formulating and articulating these analyses of globalization, perhaps because of its direct and dire impacts on the conditions of these women’s lives. They have much at stake to develop strategies to resist these conditions effectively and it is only fitting that those who have suffered first and worst under globalization will lead the way of from under its oppressive forces. (p. 232)
Among the sisters in front of the line was Gina Bahiwal, who won a huge victory years later. On Friday January the 13, 2016, her deportation order was cancelled due to concerted community mobilizing led by our collective and efforts on the part of her legal defence team. This political moment not only signaled the agency of migrant women in fighting back and articulating the politics of the possible despite and due to their very own structural vulnerability, but it was also a moment of political rehabilitation on the part of us at Justicia. Personally, Gina’s and the political defiance among the accompanying migrant sisters served as an injection of political fuel. It was a testament to the realization of political dreams and the manifestation of an alternate world in formation, one defiant of capitalism and exploitation and one informed by community and unity. For me, it felt like a multi-million-dollar grant that would support me in the work for another decade. Moreover, this political moment and the organizing beyond the industrial relations framework undertaken by migrant women falls in line with Chun’s (2016) work of inspecting “how social identities based on race, migrant status and other axes of social domination have promoted solidaristic identities and communities” (p. 144). Further, Chun (2016) points to the necessity of accounting for the “transformational politics of the precariat” (p. 144) expressed by migrant workers and the most excluded in global capitalism today. Migrant workers’ struggles and acts of resistance spill beyond the legal framework that constrains their rights and lives as a response to their exclusion and assertions of their humanity.

Gina’s victory in staying her deportation elated me and again brought me close to revolutionary emotions, those emotions that are given form by dreams that another world is possible. Hence in the politics of the impossible, we not only engage in developing and establishing new organizing models, but we are also building the emotional fuel needed to sustain us in our work (see Figure 5).
Organizing With Emotion

In the intensity of emotions, those held and felt by migrant workers, and mine as an organizer, is the space where I came to understand the essence of J4MW’s work and of community organizing. It was not through the reading of academic texts or a revelation outside of the geographical spaces occupied by migrant workers, it was in a precise moment when I had to place my own emotions aside to be fully present to a migrant worker contending with a transnational heartbreak that I came to a definition of our work and what we do.

It started as a beautiful love story. Two people coming to Canada under the same program finding love and companionship with each other. They were seen as the lucky ones who could also be together in Mexico and not just during labour contracts in Canada. Both were available and unmarried in Mexico, but told all the other workers that they were indeed together.
and married to one another and that their love was real in Canada and in Mexico where they lived together.

Victor called me after falling out of his bunk bed at his greenhouse and breaking his arm. I drove four hours to see him and to find out if I could support him to make a Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) claim. Yet when we finally had a chance to speak without anyone else present, all he wanted was to know more about Amelia. “Tell me is the baby that she is carrying mine?” It is there that I saw that I also had to be complicit in transnational secrets. I was going through my own issues of the heart at the moment and here I was having to build internal strength to be there for Victor. This moment brought me to all the other times I had been a witness to tears, pain, anguish, and bliss from transnational love. The truth was that Amelia had moved on and no longer loved him. It was not my place to speak about the feelings and relationships of a migrant worker who had confided in me. There were multiple families involved and a lot of pain spanning borders, and Victor was one of the casualties of Amelia’s new-found love in the farms and the one person from the love triangle I had before me. First, my community research ethics prevented me from opening up about Amelia. It was not my place. Nor was it my place to inform the wife of Amelia’s new love about the affair. Second, it was clear to me that my work was more than about WSIB claims and broken arms, it was about broken hearts too, and these are common in the lives of migrant workers who are kept apart from their families for long periods of time and who turn to each other for emotional support, belonging, sexual love, and desire. I cried on the way to Leamington because I, too, was experiencing a heartbreak at the time, and through this emotionally turbulent meeting with Victor, the definition of community organizing came to me. Community organizing is not only about putting the community back together again within a capitalist system that exploits,
displaces, and fragments. It is about defying the illusion that we are incomplete and broken. It is about delving into our spirit, power, and wholeness as individuals in order to strengthen the collectivities that we form within and across borders, and about defying borders of all sorts. I had to be there for Victor and put my emotions aside to support him to reclaim strength and certainty. I had to firm up my body and ground myself in strength and conviction. Eventually my own heartbreak felt distant and Victor seemed to be calmer than when I initially approached him outside the greenhouse.

**Reconceptualizing Resistance Through Emotion**

In 2001, when I started working with migrant workers, I was seduced by resistance as a public expression. For me, resistance is like the foreplay of the revolution. I thought that resistance was concerned with the material conditions that migrant workers are faced with, starting from awful working conditions to housing. These are the material realities of their lives. But what about their emotions and their transnational heartbreak?

I realized that I catch workers’ transnational heartbreak. It is heartbreak that spills across borders and fragments the sense of being that holds workers together. I am here to remind them of their wholeness and the strength that they already have.

In this work I have also seen that I have to be careful with the way that I reach out and hold these heartbreaks. Co-dependency can emerge on my part and the part of migrant workers. I cannot always be there as I have to also care for myself. And I have to be careful of creating any feelings of dependence and exploiting emotional vulnerability to serve my ego and grant me a dangerous and erroneous sense of power.
Community Organizing as Radical Social Work and Care Work

Community organizing is radical social work and care work. We deal with structural conditions that complicate the lives of migrant workers and their families. We are often called upon in situations of crisis, and in those times, we have to hold ourselves together and be solid. I have had to counsel migrant women about heartache in relation to their children and to their partners in Mexico and in Canada. I have had to counsel women who have undergone abortions and miscarriages. Sometimes, I am the one reading and interpreting their pregnancy results over WhatsApp and giving them news that they are not fully ready to hear. My phone rings at night with a crisis situation and there goes my sleep until the problem is resolved. Oftentimes, situations are unsolvable, which induces heartbreak, stress, and anxiety that paralyzes me.

Community carework involves efforts to change structural conditions that induce emotional pains and angst along with material deprivations and exploitations and efforts to be fully present to workers who are not seen by mainstream Canada.

I derive my strength from the politics of the possible and from my spiritual practice that I particularly cultivate when I am in migrant workers’ rural communities in Mexico and Guatemala. I trust in the knowing that my work is beyond me as an individual and that I am contributing to the historical current and process of change and checks and balances. Yet the work can become quite debilitating, especially because I am torn between two worlds, that of academe, set by deadlines and publications, and community organizing, dictated by crises, consumption of time, and lack of wages and security. Compassion fatigue leads to disempowerment, resentment, and even illness. Hence community carework and activism should not be idealized. It takes a toll. It is often emotionally brutal and thankless. There have been many moments when I have broken down and wanted to leave the work for good. Yet there has
always been something that draws me back. The following story details further the kinds of breakdowns and breakthroughs that I see as part of the logic, serendipity, and magic of organizing, which is similar to force and drive evoked by John Lewis at the beginning of this chapter.

**Betrayal and breakdowns in community organizing**

In documenting the lives of migrant workers, I have had to write myself into some of their stories as a compañera and ally. Laura and I have experienced a lot since her accident and what felt more like an escape from her apple orchard farm in rural Ontario in 2007. Laura suffered an accident on her farm in which she broke her leg in several places. She needed ongoing treatment and further surgeries, but the Mexican Consulate and her employer would have none of it. They endeavoured to deny her treatment in Canada and the Mexican Consulate even threatened to call her elderly parents in Mexico and berate her if she did not sign forms agreeing to renounce further medical attention in Canada. The last thing Laura wanted was for her parents to know of her accident, which would cause them anguish (another example of transnational secrets as a form of transnational management of emotions). As soon as I heard about Laura’s accident, I borrowed my father’s car and drove two hours to see her. On the way there, I remember Lila Downs’ song (1998) about maquiladora workers (La Niña) striking my emotions particularly forcefully:

> Desde temprano, la niña reza, pa’ que su día no sea tan largo, y con la luz de madrugada, hace limpieza de sus encargos, cierra los ojos pa’ no mirarse, que en el espejo se va notando, que su trabajo la está acabando y es que su santo está en descanso, todos los días, todas las horas, en esa espuma de sus tristezas, uñas y carne, sudor y fuerzas, todo su empeño, todos sus sueños, se van quedando en sus recuerdos, en la memoria de sus anhelos.

(From early in the morning, the girl prays that her day won’t be so long and with the light of daybreak, she gets herself ready for the day's work. She closes her
eyes so that she won't see herself, for the mirror reveals that her work is bringing about her ruin and her saint is not paying attention, every day, every hour in her bath of miseries, fingernails and flesh, sweat and effort, all of her persistence, every one of her dreams gone away but remaining somehow in her recollections and in the memory of her yearnings.)

The song released all the tears I was holding back so as to stay calm and make the long drive on my own. I thought of all of her hard work and the promise of a better life that can quickly shatter in the SAWP. I also loved her and her family to whom I had become quite close over the years.

The following is an excerpt of the raw and original email that describes what transpired the day I went to see her at her farm after she was discharged from the hospital:

Tonight we experienced something none of us have ever lived before. During the day Laura was given a form to sign by the employer that had come from the Mexican Consulate. She would release IAVGO (Industrial Accidents Victims Group of Ontario) from representing her for WSIB (Workplace Safety and Insurance Board) claim and give full control of her case to the Mexican Consulate with no mention of any benefits. She told the patron that she would think about it but did not want to sign it at all.

I arrived at 5 to see her with Rene from Justicia. The patron stormed into the bunkhouse within half an hour into our visit and demanded to speak to me. He started accusing me of going behind his back and that I should have talked to him and that he is responsible for her WSIB claim and that I was ruining her life and her chances of returning to Canada through the Program. He also said that the consulate assured him that Laura was going to get all the necessary treatment in Mexico and that they would pay for everything and that there was even a WSIB office in Mexico! Laura got up and tried to intervene by saying, “Evelyn, no problem.” She was in tears saying that all she wanted was to come back to Canada next year. It was awful, but he never kicked me out and so we both stayed. I talked to Laura in private and she said she wanted to leave and she believed Friday was a good option because by then things would cool off. I told Laura
luckily he did not tell me to leave and she said if he did I would have left with you right that minute.

At the end of the night at around 8 pm the employer was waiting for Rene and I to leave and he started charging against us. First he said if I wanted to come back I had to call him and then said that I was not allowed on the farm ever again and that he was going to tell the Mexican Consulate that I was not to return. I said fine, ok we are leaving now. Rene closed the door of the car and the employer banged on the window and opened the car door and lunged towards him, grabbed his shirt and jacket as if he was going to extract him off the car. I grabbed Rene and pulled him back into the car and yelled at the employer, “Don't touch him!” The employer got startled and withdrew. Rene said that he smelled like alcohol.

To make a long story short, we had to contact the OPP. We had 2 police cruisers and community member all in 4 cars go back to the farm to talk to Laura. The two women who say everything that happened with the employer did not tell her. I told her as calmly as I could and Laura insisted on leaving with us right away. It was awful. The women in the farm were terrified and in tears. She is being criminalized and she has done no wrong. Sadly some of the women in her farm informed the employer we were there and then another went to tell other workers with all this power that we were taking her out of the farm so that they could inform the employer. I told the police we had to go otherwise it could get uglier, and one said he did not think it could get uglier than that. And another said an apple is surely going to taste different after tonight!

This incident highlights several power dynamics including the threats and coercion migrant workers are subjected to and the ways those who support them are criminalized. When Rene and I were walking back to the car at the end of the night, two migrant women accompanied us, but as soon as they saw their employer, they froze in their steps and then apologized saying that they had to run back to their bunkhouse. I completely understood and told them so. And I could not
help but see the resemblance to domestic abuse and economic dependency on the abuser. The women had to return to their bunkhouse and dissociate themselves from us to protect themselves and their jobs and status in Canada. The other tragic part of this story is that some of the migrant women sided with the employer and called him to bring to his attention that troublemakers were on the farm. These divisions and divide and conquer tactics have debilitating consequences. It caused a stir among all the women and complicated Laura’s recovery and status on the farm and in Canada. We had to remove Laura with the assistance of the OPP and take her to a safe place. That first night she stayed with a local community ally, but the next day she said that she feared that her employer and the police were going to come for her to deport her.

As a result of our intervention, Laura was able to stay in the country and receive the medical treatment she needed. We did everything by the book, but the employer called Border Patrol claiming that Laura had absconded from the farm. She was then penalized by Canada and the Mexican government and not allowed to return to work in the Program for several years. I blamed the system for this injustice and stayed connected to Laura and her family. However, the following year, after returning from living in rural Mexico for 6 months with migrant workers and their families, including Laura’s, I still had not finished my dissertation. Other tragedies had transpired for the families I was with, and I started to hear rumors among migrant workers that I was a troublemaker and that it was my fault that no more women were called to work on the farm where Laura had her accident. The last thing I ever wanted to do in my work was deprive a family of a living wage. I do not earn money from my own work, but being appreciated by migrant workers and their families along with being part of a social movement that creates ripple effects for the world are how I am compensated and fueled in my work. But my dissertation and my academic work were again stalled, and it did not seem I was getting anywhere in my life.
One night, after the rumours and the guilt became unbearable, I had a breakdown. I could not stop crying, nor could I get myself to sleep no matter how tired I was. I thought my life was stagnant. I had nothing in terms of economic security nor any hope of finishing my dissertation in the timeframe dictated by the university. I wanted to know if giving and doing all this community work was in vain. I took to my spiritual practice and asked from the depths of my soul to be given a sign; was I throwing my life away?

The next day, I awoke after about 2 hours of sleep, with swollen eyes and paralyzing lethargy. As usual, I went to my computer to check my emails and found one from the project Rural Women Making Change inviting me to attend the first ever commemoration of International Rural Women’s Day at the United Nations in New York, all expenses paid. It was precisely the next day, not a few, not a month, after my breakdown. If that was not a sign, I do not know what would be. I took Laura’s story with me and shocked the US-based audience that believed no such atrocities occurred in benevolent Canada with it. My work received significant media attention and I was even asked to develop and teach a course on migrant rights. Hence this turbulent moment paved the way for my academic teaching. It was a breakthrough in the midst of a breakdown and indicative of the magic that I do not always understand and cannot rationalize. I just knew that this was my journey and I had to do this work.

Circulating Knowledge and Care in Organizing

In my work I have learned that organizers acting wholeheartedly have resources that are beyond the material and that have to be made visible, named, and claimed. We have conviction, passion, knowledge, creativity, and the capacity to dream beyond “industrial pluralism” (Smith, C. W., 2012) of industrial capitalist-labour that coincided and confined White male workers of the distant Fordist regime. We also have the strength and the ability to be with and in the
community. We may not have the multi-million-dollar budgets, but we know how to work with
and listen to our ethno-racial communities, and how to incorporate their historical trajectories
and voices. Our work for Justicia for Migrant Workers is limited in many respects due to a lack
of funding and small scope. Although we claim to be worker-led, it is difficult for workers to
indeed take the lead due to the associated risk of repatriation and being barred from the Program
altogether. We still make mistakes, but the community sets us back on course. I was trained by
migrant workers to be a community organizer and educator. I organize with heart and our
collective has managed to undertake monumental tasks beyond our size and limitations, such as
supporting Human Rights Tribunal cases, the recent Harvesting Freedom tour, and interrupting
the national myths of benevolent Canada. There is so much that community can teach. Yet the
value of academic work is to provide a space to explore our communities’ knowledge and
experiences and attest that they are here and that they belong.

Because of this community work, I also have been able to see the importance of a
collective to providing the emotional support to keep on going; in this context one is able to
debrief and share the work to lessen the illness and depression inherent to compassion fatigue.
Justicia for Migrant Workers is my emotional cushion. I have particularly depended on Chris
Ramsaroop, who I consider to be an organizer among organizers, to keep me strong and defiant
in the work.

Yet community work also produces emotional dependence and toxicity. Giving without
fully receiving in balance creates depression and a very real financial deficit. I have had to pay a
high price for my political dreams. All the unwaged work has manifested itself as a debt in the
thousands of dollars. I do not have a life partner and through the years many migrant workers
have told me never to get married because I would stop going to see them if I did. I have
resented these comments since I have been fighting for their right to love and be loved. My dissertation has taken years to finish due to the burdens of community work, the work of being with and in community rather than in solitude with my computer. But I have had to write and finish these lines because all these years, these stories, and these knowledges have not been made visible. Interestingly, in my work, I have not been fully seen just as migrant workers have not been fully seen. In a screening of Min Sook Lee’s *Migrant Dreams*, one of my professors was in tears during the question and answer period. She was finally able to speak and the first thing she said was, “Evelyn, I cannot believe the amazing work you have been doing all these years and how invisible it is in our community.” I then realized that these stories are also my stories and the stories of Canada and the stories of those seeking to survive beyond the dictates of capital. One migrant woman said to me, “We also have the right to be loved and to be happy.” In attempting to defy hierarchies in our society, I realized that I created one of my very own. I was all about community and forgot about myself in the process. Migrant workers have taught me that I, too, matter and that I am part of the whole. In the global economy today, as organizers we have to dream not only for others but collectively for our security of life, all peoples, and the planet. We have to be whole and responsive to the emotions engendered by this late-stage capitalism while empowering and re-creating healthy interdependence.

Writing this work has taken longer than I originally anticipated. I write for my community, but at the end of the night, I am writing alone. Hence the realities of academic work that I also seek to change to make it inclusive of diverse ways of knowing, being, and learning in this world.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION:
TRANSNATIONAL STORYTELLINGS AND PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

In the only Tim Hortons in town, I sat down with America over coffee to formally interview her one last time for this thesis. We contemplated her forbidden love story and all that she had lived and experienced in her time in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). Still living in rural Ontario, but as a Canadian citizen and with a new child born in the country, her life had changed drastically from the time she was renting a house in Puebla. She was hardly ever home those days as she worked long hours sewing in a garment factory that produced clothes for sale in the largest tiangis (market) in central Mexico. She had no idea then how her life was to unfold through the SAWP: that she would leave her home in Mexico, manage a transnational household, and eventually make a new home in rural Ontario; that she would defy the orders of her employer by marrying her Canadian boyfriend, and then become a citizen of the country that she could previously only enter under a temporary work visa.

I followed America and her family for many seasons, like countless other migrant workers and their families, through the wholehearted practice that I call in this thesis convivir. Over the years, I witnessed her son growing up, rebelling as a teenager because of feelings of abandonment, and then becoming a father at a young age. Her little brother had become a young man, and her mother had a house of her own in another Mexican state thanks to America’s remittances and hard work on the farms of rural Ontario. I stood beside America on her wedding day and signed her marriage license as an official witness, taking the place, symbolically, of her mother who could not attend due to Canadian visa restrictions. Reminiscing about all of this and more, America said, me gustó ser parte del programa (I liked being part of the Program).
America’s viewpoint was initially surprising given the transnational casualties she experienced and the lack of freedom within SAWP. Yet in her declaration she revealed agency and power in the context of exploitative labour extraction and restrictive gender regimes. She utilized the SAWP in creative ways to survive, to support her family, and even to love. She created her own meanings out of the difficulties she experienced and lived as a woman migrant farmworker. It is questionable whether the rest of her family would assess the SAWP as she did. There were emotional losses and costs for everyone involved at different stages. Also, America continued to be separated from her family in rural Mexico until this day. Moreover, she continued to depend on farmwork for a livelihood, but is not legally tied to agriculture or to one employer. Surely, not all women in the SAWP have similar stories to tell. Not all have fallen in love with a Canadian citizen who granted them an escape from the conditions suffered by temporary foreign workers for the agricultural industry.

The SAWP is a universe of divergent narratives and experiences for migrant women and their families, ones that they give form to through their own subjectivities, agency, and emotions. Seasons of work are also quite different, often producing mixed feelings and outcomes for migrant women and their non-migrating kin. Silence about difficulties are common and experienced differently depending on which side of the migration divide they are lived. While the Program changes, moulds, and strengthens women in their pursuit of transnational livelihoods and dreams, it also heightens their vulnerability. It has granted many a degree of social mobility, access to post-secondary education for their children, a home of their very own, earnings to support medical care for their loved ones, and voice and power. Attainments for the women and their families varied, and none have come easy through a labour migration scheme that enforces compliance and structural vulnerability.
SAWP Transnational Storytelling Findings

In this study, through a practice of transnational storytelling, I have interlaced the experiences of migrant women and their families. Through this storytelling, I have attempted to contribute to the understanding of transnationalism within “the specificity of the Canadian context,” as urged by Goldring and Krishnamurti (2007, p. 21). Every global migration circuit is different and hence transnationalism is lived and experienced differently by those who take part as migrants and non-migrating kin. Although migrant women and their families do not use or know the word *transnationalism*, as Viswanathan (2007) also found with the South Asian and other racialized communities she works with in Ontario, it is a useful and continuously evolving scholarly concept used to comprehend the mobilities, linkages, networks, and cultural landscapes that are being delineated through complex power shifts in the globe today.

Far from constructing a victimology, I have shown how migrant women embrace new subjectivities and senses of themselves through their labour migration to Canada. While many of them have never walked alone in their rural townships in Mexico due to restrictive gender regimes, they suddenly find themselves working and living in a distant world in rural Canada. Through the SAWP, they become breadwinners, head transnational households, and experience a range of emotions such as grief, contentment, and love. I have used transnational storytelling to uncover and name the transnational universe structured by the SAWP along with concomitant emotions, complex social relations, and spatial fields. The SAWP organizes not only a migration circuit tied to Canadian agriculture, but also brings together multiple worlds, feelings, and experiences among participants on both sides of the migration divide.

Central to migrant women’s and their kin’s stories are states, labour, and immigration policies, along with the dictates of the agricultural industry interested in subsidy and profit
through a compliant, unfree migrant labour force. The global economy and the push and pull of migration as a form of survival are fundamental to the structure and depictions of my participants’ particular transnational universe. In line again with Goldring’s and Krishnamurti’s (2007) calls for further inquiry in the study of transnationalism, I have brought forward the importance of civil society in “shaping transnational engagements” (p. 13) through the example of Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW) and activist academic knowledges in the political and social geographies constituting the SAWP. Through this study, I make the case for the need to also account for emotions and the ways that they are specific to global migration circuits as transnational practices. In addition, my work adds to understandings of Latin American transnationalism linked to the Canadian context that Goldring and Krishnamurti (2007) argued are “scarce compared with that on immigrants from Asia and other parts of the world” (p. 3).

There is a world of heterogeneity and specificity to migrants from different parts of Latin America. Rural Mexico represents diverse cultures and gender regimes that Mexican migrant workers bring with them to rural Canada. While there is a wealth of studies on Mexican migrants in the USA, due to the proximity of history and location, there are fewer studies of Mexican women living and working in rural Canada. This study is particularly important to regional trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, that integrate the economies of cities, countrysides, and the lives of migrants. The NAFTA trade negotiations that were initiated in 2017 have at the time of this writing failed to include labour rights and gender equity. Canada and the USA function as a fortress upholding borders against Mexican workers that leads to the fragmentation of families and transnational casualties that I discussed in this work.

In these pages I have reconstructed the world inhabited and created by migrant farmworkers, their families, and states in the context of neoliberal globalization. Every time I
drive to Canadian farms to see migrant women, I am astonished to feel the tangible presence of the borders of the fortress North America in their lives. I can almost pierce the sphere of their world with my fingertips. I conceptualized the universe of the SAWP as an alternate world set apart from the rest of Canada by a range of material conditions, social relations, geographies, and arbitrary rules, including rules forbidding love and sexuality. Migrant women mostly live in cramped housing and they are isolated in rural areas with few other Spanish speakers to bridge cultural, racial, and linguistic divides. Furthermore, as I have discussed in this thesis, migrant women have to contend with tense antagonisms among each other and surveillance on the part of their employers and their families at a distance.

The SAWP is smaller than guest worker programs in the USA, such as the historically significant Bracero Program and contemporary agricultural worker programs. Its relatively small size and logistical management from the Mexican state creates a sense of cohesion, familiarity, and belonging among the migrant workers who participate. As numerical minorities within the Program, many of the women know each other. This, in turn, has a multitude of consequences for their lives, such as an intensified structural vulnerability in comparison to migrant men, invisibility in mainstream Canada, and visibility to each other in rural migrant communities. Their small numbers grant them a degree of power and desirability in a sea full of (migrant) men. Migrant women see each other in the rural Canadian townships in which they live and work at the bailes (dances), community events, and grocery stores where they are driven by their employers. They also see each other when they process their paper work in the central and regional offices of the Mexican Secretariat of Labour and Social Welfare (SLSW). The SAWP produces a transnational gendered world and community among migrant workers. As I drive away from the farms and back into my life in the working-class suburbs of the Greater Toronto
Area, I feel as though I am crossing several borders. The transrural Canadian–Mexican space, however, remains intact.

It is a world that also demarcates time and space in accordance to the exigencies of agricultural production and turnover among just-in-time workers. Time is compressed into temporadas (seasons) and seasons are determined by agricultural production processes and gendered and racialized determinations enforced by Canadian employers. Migrant workers and their families often discuss and experience years as seasons. I can show up to a farm in a new season and coincidentally reconnect with migrant women who I had met many seasons prior in another province. While in Mexico with migrant women, it was easy to lose the sense of place and speak together as if we were in rural Canada.

I see transnational storytelling as a multilayered and evolving practice that details the transnational relations and geographies that are being re/created by neoliberal globalization. It is another way to comprehend the global migration circuits that are tied to specific regions, industries, and occupations. Central to the stories I document in this thesis is the contrast between the type of worker and labour regimes that are demanded by the exigencies of capital accumulation and the multitude of ways that migrant workers and their families counter and defy their commodification and dehumanization. Canadian employers and participating states attempt to commodify migrant farm workers as units of production, and strip them from social entanglements and emotional needs, but this neoliberal project is not absolute. While conditions of restricted mobility and labour discipline may be predetermined by the needs of capital accumulation, workers’ and their families’ humanity, relationships, and agency far exceed the imposed restrictions. Migrant farm workers are among the army of quintessential neoliberal labourers across the globe who work and live outside of full citizenship and labour rights. I argue
that they occupy zones of abandonment and exceptionalism in the socio-legal jurisdictions in which they pursue a livelihood, yet there is much more to the script.

To these ends, I broadened the analytical frame of the SAWP literature beyond precarious immigration status, labour conditions, and occupational health concerns through the exploration of emotions, carework, and sexuality among migrant women that allows them to assert their humanity. I delved into women’s intimate lives through a transnational ethnography undertaken by a practise of *convivir*, that is, fully engaging with the women and their families to discern how neoliberal capital is inducing their migration and affecting their livelihoods while disciplining their emotions and structuring the ways they love and care across borders. In Chapter 3, I argued that the management of emotions is fundamental to transnational household practices. I situated migrant women’s emotional and care work as part of what Hochschild (2000) has called the *global care chain*. Parreñas (2015) explained that the term was originally derived from her early doctoral research on the “reproductive inequalities” (p. 30) among women across the scales of globalization. The concept has been useful in my work to make visible the reproductive work that migrant women perform because of, and in addition to, their productive labour in Canadian agriculture. They engage in more than the already taxing work they do in the packaging warehouses, greenhouses, and fields in rural Canada, they also manage their own hearts, emotions, and care of others, their kin and even their lovers in the Canadian context. I also showed how migrant women, their kin and allies organize to fill the void of zones of abandonment and circulate care in the absence and neglect of states.

I foreground migrant women’s emotional labour because it is erased by government and the agricultural industry’s insistent representation of rural Canada through the optic of the family farm. Used strategically by the farm lobby in Ontario to defeat proposals that migrant workers be
given collective bargaining rights and union representation, this optic also obliterates the work and significance of migrant workers and their families to Canadian agriculture. In this way, the Canadian family farm ideology enforces a hierarchy of White citizen families versus non-citizen racialized workers in agricultural production. In this thesis, I undermine this ideology by stressing the importance of transnational families that are integrated into transnational labour chains for the multibillion dollar Canadian agribusiness.

Visibility making is indeed one of the core political and academic objectives of this study. I set out to bring migrant women into the picture of temporary foreign worker programs, the SAWP, and rural Canada. Their low participation rates, compared to men, speak volumes about the gendered nature of controlled labour migration and agricultural work. It shows that Canadian immigration policy remains stubbornly androcentric, preferring skilled male immigration with few avenues for women to migrate independently. However, visibility making is complex and becoming visible in political terms is neither harmless nor always desirable among migrant women. There are risks involved in being seen. Politics are associated with troublemaking by many women in the SAWP who fear the risk of losing the much coveted work in Canada. This quandary prompted me to inspect the forms of resistance and agency that migrant women undertake in their own terms, ones that are not necessarily associated with traditional forms of protest and dissent among more privileged workers in the global economy. It also meant that I had to change my own aggressive stance as an organizer focused on public and overt forms of resistance to challenge labour violations. Mexican migrant women started to reveal that there was much more to their stories and struggles.

Through the research and community practice of convivir, I stepped into the world of women in the SAWP, learned their language, and connected with them more profoundly, and
transformed my praxis in the process. I spent endless hours talking about love and their transnational heartbreaks. I found myself giving consejos (advice) and counselling the women the best that I could to support them through the seasons despite the emotional turmoil they were experiencing. I often gave emotional support to migrant women who were in the SAWP and Canada for the first time and experiencing the shock of strenuous endless work, antagonisms with co-workers, and homesickness. I also had to be ready at any moment if they needed my help to defy their employers. Oftentimes I found myself in messy hostile power relations among them that I had to navigate very carefully, without taking sides. I shifted my outreach and focus to migrant women because I understood women’s heightened vulnerabilities and the intensity of the emotions they had to navigate in their lives in rural Canada. In their home communities, many of the women were stigmatized for migrating and accused of being sex workers, a characterization which in predominantly Catholic communities in rural Mexico has the most negative of connotations.

I realized that my role as a community organizer was also about supporting transnational heartbreak and accounting for the specific set of emotions that they had to contend with as a result of the labour-migration regimes of which they formed a part. One of the most common phrases I heard from women was se siente feo (it feels ugly or awful) to describe an array of transnational casualties and I felt compelled to respond in the limited ways that I could as an organizer and researcher.

In Chapter 4, I detailed the terrain of love and sexuality as a site of coercion and struggle dictated by the capital interests of Canadian agriculture and gender regimes operating across borders. I argue that women’s acts of loving and being sexual beings are forms of resistance and testament to their humanity, agency, and power. The disciplining of sexuality by Canadian farm
employers and the Mexican state officials who recruits the women are extensions of labour control that are made possible by their lack of rights as migrants and their need for work for survival. Additionally, migrant women also migrate due to their desires, passions, and love. They do not abandon their children, but migrate as an extension of their love to provide for them along with their other non-migrating kin such as elderly parents. They also want to migrate to step outside of regressive gender regimes and assert their sexual agency. Many fall in love in Canada, and desire to continue to be reunited with their partners in the universe of the SAWP. The push and pull of migration is tied to the economy and also entangled with the migrants’ multiple identities and subjectivities as mothers and sexual beings.

In Chapter 5, I write myself into the transnational storytelling and detail my work through Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW) as an extension of care work filling the void of the zones of abandonment experienced by migrant women and their families. My praxis is a form of radical social work that deals with migrant women individually but also structurally by organizing to amend coercive state policies that induce family separation, acute labour controls, and broken hearts. My community and research praxis has induced emotional anguish, pain, and heartbreak in my life as well. My work has cost me financially and emotionally over the years as I have undertaken this work mostly as an unpaid organizer. This is by choice, but nevertheless difficult to carry over the course of several years. Caring for the community has also meant postponing completion of this important doctoral work. In the final phase of my writing I had to stop caring for migrant workers in order to finish this. Moreover, no matter how hard I tried to navigate antagonism between the women, I was caught in the middle, and became the subject of gossip myself when I supported a migrant woman to prevent her deportation. The incident broke my heart and it demonstrated the intense complexities of working intimately with a divided and
vulnerable labour force. As activist and organizers, we often engage in omissions of our own, by keeping private lamentable heartbreaking experiences and instead publicly articulate narratives of strength, triumph, and defiance. I make a case to speak to one another about the emotional work and toil of our organizing in order to share strategies. I argued that it is important to see such incidents as moments of learning of the structures that induce unequal power relationships and antagonisms within our communities. Furthermore, I argued that as community-labour organizers working with, not only migrant workers, but also with other precarious workers around the globe today, we have to include immaterial needs along with material needs in our social justice projects to exalt the full humanity of people who are stripped of it by the exigencies of neoliberal capital accumulation. But we have to depart from where and how communities are already resisting and amplify their forms of defiance from our social locations as outsiders within.

My study starts and ends at the crossroad of multiple worlds, from academia, community, and the farms in rural Canada, to the ranchos and homes in rural Mexico. In my 16 years of organizing, learning, and convivir with migrant workers, specifically women and their families across borders, I have walked into university panels and lectures where I am seen not as an expert but as a biased activist. My knowledge has often been questioned for its scientific validity. Yet, the knowledge I have acquired along with my colleagues in J4MW has strengthened the grassroots migrant rights movement in Canada and has been recognized in international spaces and captured in documentary films. It is perhaps the multiple signifiers of oppression that I embody—racialized, female, non-white Canadian English accent—in addition to the label activist, that have not always allowed me to stand alone at the front of the room to speak what I know and to have my knowledge fully count. In this study, it was crucial for me to defy the
binary of being an organizer and academic. I am both and more in between, such as community-engaged scholar and teacher. I have sought to carve out a third way, one that expresses more of who I am, and towards this end I have found Anzaldúa’s (2007) work instructive and uplifting.

I have long identified as a *mestiza*, meaning partly European and partly Indigenous, in the Latin American context. I am a *mestiza* without a definite home. When I have returned to Chile, I have felt out of place and imagined that if I were to settle there again, I would have to live the immigration experience all over again, in reverse. In the universe of the SAWP, I have found a third space of belonging and possibility for my *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa 2007) as a practice. In Mexico, I found myself in between the so-called First and Third Worlds, the space that separates Anglo North America from heterogeneous Latin America. It is in these third spaces that I feel most at home, and through my research I have tried to collapse binaries through the *mestiza* consciousness as Anzaldúa (2007) envisioned:

> La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized as a movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (p. 100)

In my research I have brought my whole self to *convivir* with migrant women and their families and incorporated their ways of knowing, speaking, and being in my understanding of their worlds. I have brought my *mestiza* self and praxis to collapse multiple worlds into one. Whenever I could, I brought migrant workers and their voices into the frame of documentaries and the university. For example, during a conference in Puebla (Encalada Grez, 2010) I fought to carve out a space for a panel discussion between migrant women and women working in export processing zones. The *mestiza* praxis is all about transdisciplinarity that values diverse knowledges and expressions within and outside of academia and brings them together in
comprehensive social justice projects. I am not an organizer over an academic. I am a community-engaged scholar and all in between.

**Defining the Social Justice Project for Migrant Women and Their Families**

So what then is the social justice project for migrant women and their families? It is one that constantly has to be negotiated and defined. Central is the claim to *status*. In J4MW we use the concept of status as the right to have rights and the right to be fully human. Migrant women and their families cannot be differentially burdened to support agricultural production at the cost of their lives and well-being. Migrant women need to work, and they should be granted more opportunities to do so in Canada and in their home communities. Social justice projects then have to incorporate organizing, learning, and building in workers’ home communities around the right to migrate and the right not to migrate and still be able to survive and thrive with dignity. In one of my visits to a rural community, I supported the widow of a migrant worker to Canada by selling Justicia for Migrant Workers tote bags to provide money for her and her son. We sold a significant number of totes in Canada, so many that she no longer needed to migrate to work in Canada through the SAWP and was able to open a small store in her house to cover her household expenses. However, workers should also be supported in their mobilities and should have the right to move in the world in the same ways that citizens from Western powers can. Demanding status upon arrival and changes to immigration policy are still pending claims that we have to continue pressing as we have done through J4MW since 2001. Critical to this is challenging the notion that migrant farm workers are low-skill workers. They perform work that we depend on for basic survival and the produce and agricultural industry cannot take precedent over their lives. In my talks and lectures, I often ask who has the skills needed to work in greenhouses and in rooms of highly educated students and academics no one raises their hand.
Also, migrant workers and their families should be supported by radical social workers who address the individual impacts of transnational casualties and organize to change them. I am not advocating for a new profession to benefit from the casualties and suffering of others, but rather support for those in the frontlines already doing this work in Canada, such as J4MW, Radical Action for Migrant Workers in Agriculture (RAMA), Migrante Canada, and No One Is Illegal. Grassroots groups must retain their autonomy from government in order to continue organizing and challenging government policy. Yet it cannot be done sustainably when organizers are experiencing constant burnout and precarity in their very own economic survival. Union and social justice grants should be sought and made available within Canada and globally. We should also develop transnational co-operatives to support former migrant workers and to add to the social justice funds to continue our advocacy. In a context where migrant workers are granted status many of these issues will recede, but our work will still involve assuring the rights, protections, and equitable life chances of our communities.

**Limitations of the Study**

In contemplating limitations of this study, the immediate dilemma that comes to mind is that no Canadian employers or government officials were interviewed to add to the layers of the universe of the SAWP. This is principally because I sought to prioritize women and their families in my work and grant them a space to articulate their impressions and experiences. I also interpreted existing policies as expressions of employer lobbying and power and wrote them in through migrant workers’ accounts along with secondary research studies and texts. Moreover, the nature of my practice as an organizer and all in between meant that I could not reveal myself to employers except in extenuating circumstances when I had to defy them in order to support women in crisis situations such as a pending deportation. Revealing myself could have meant
being denied entry to their properties. There are some researchers who have accessed migrant workers through their employers, but with the effect of compromising their testimonies and interviews. I wanted to create as safe a space as possible for migrant women away from the gaze of their employers even when I was on their property. Also, being racialized and Latinx/mestiza allowed me to occupy those spaces with few questions about my role and intentions on the part of employers. I was often marked as an academic and researcher. And there were many moments in the bailes (dances), principally in Leamington, when employers talked to me openly about migrant workers in a condescending and paternalistic manner as if they owned them. My strategy was to be as invisible to employers as I could to make visible the hidden transrural Mexican–Canadian worlds they upheld.

Men do not figure prominently in my study because I focused on female-led households where men were largely absent. Aunts and other mothers cared for the children left behind and older men in the family worked on the land or far away in Mexico City during the week, and were only present on weekends. However, my analysis of women’s lives was supplemented by many years of work with migrant men, which marked my entry into the migrant community in Leamington and Niagara. I also conducted a few interviews and focus groups among Mexican migrant men that I recorded and transcribed for this research. Moreover, migrant women gave me in-depth insights into the roles of migrant men in their lives that made it into this write up.

**Future Directions**

As aforementioned, transnational storytelling is a continual process. There are constant shifts in agricultural production due to the environment and market conditions that change the logics of the universe of the Program. Also this universe involves numerous actors, including migrant workers from other Caribbean countries, and from the Agricultural Stream of the NOC
C and D Program. I propose future studies with Guatemalan Mayan migrants and how they negotiate their Indigenous identities in rural Canadian cultural landscapes, and on the complexities of the division of labour among Asian, Caribbean, Central American, and Mexican migrant workers in rural Canada. Then there is the need to account for the undocumented population that supply their labour to farms and how they were affected by the 4 and 4 year rule that was instituted by the Harper government. I have also discerned that women who are in the NOC C and D Agricultural Stream are having children in Canada since the 4 and 4 year rule has been eliminated, and they are not all being deported when their employers realize that they are pregnant. These women qualify for Employment Insurance maternal benefits and often have financial support from their partners to provide for their Canadian-born children. But what happens to their status? What are the social and emotional implications of being trapped in permanently temporary status in rural Canada while their children are full citizens? What happens to their citizen children growing up and attending school in White rural communities?

During my last visit to Guatemala, I reconnected with many former migrant women in the rural highlands who could not secure their return to work on Canadian farms. They were forever changed in their worldviews and subjectivities by migrating to work in rural Canada and their families had become dependent on their Canadian wages. How then do they rebuild their lives in rural Guatemala after Canada disposed of them? More studies on Caribbean workers, particularly women, are also needed to explore the divergence of experiences along racial and gendered lines. Every migrant community embodies its own cultural and historical trajectories, Many Caribbean workers, for instance, point to slavery in their discourses about their lives in Canada as migrant workers. Studies on migrant women’s children in Mexico and the Caribbean are urgently needed. Since I have been involved in the community for so long, I am now seeing
migrant women’s children start their own lives as migrant workers in rural Canada and this usually entails that their lives will forever be determined by the seasons and demands of Canadian agricultural production processes. Are there programs that can be instituted in rural Mexico to provide children with a range of options beyond precarious labour migration that Canadian academics can support through research and transnational collaborations? Also, some migrant workers from the SAWP are finding themselves working with young professionals from Holiday Work Visa programs picking cherries and strawberries. We then need to account for new temporary foreign worker programs and visa schemes and the ways they are framing the conditions of life for workers in Canada. Recently, I have discovered that many Chilean professionals are migrating to work through these programs and I am curious to know how these experiences are framed by their class, racial, and gender identities.

There are more frontiers that the literature of the SAWP and migrant agricultural work in Canada can explore. There is also a wealth of facets and conditions that have already been documented since Basok (2003) paved the way with her pioneering book, *Tortillas and Tomatoes: Transmigrant Mexican Harvesters in Canada*. At the same time, we have to mobilize what has already been covered at length. Many migrant workers have research fatigue. They cannot be subjects of endless studies, including master’s and doctoral theses, that support middle-class careers while their lives remain the same. It is time we get more creative with all the work we have been doing in academia and community organizing. I see a lot of promise in cultural production and art such as Miranda’s (Harris, 2017) *Speaking Fruit* project, Perry’s (2015) doctoral work that combines pedagogy and theatre of the oppressed with migrant justice, Lee’s films such as *El Contrato* (2006) and *Migrant Dreams* (2016), and Mendiburu Diaz’s films (2011, 2014). Miranda’s Brock University master’s thesis (2017) about movement therapy to
express and counter loneliness and isolation among migrant farmworkers is also an example of new creative and transdisciplinary directions that fully involve workers and give back to academia and community at the same time.

It is long overdue that our research spills into the consciousness of Canadians. As a country we are still undergoing reconciliation of 150 years of colonialization, yet we continue to engage in projects of erasures and differentiation of the value of life among peoples. We need a new consciousness and political geography where we acknowledge injustices in our food system and erasures of transnational families tied to Canadian agriculture. One of my dreams is that one day the Canadian government will officially apologize to migrant farmworkers and their families. Until then, I hope that this thesis adds to the mirror through which we see our worlds and interconnections. It is a snapshot and testament that Mexican migrant workers live and work in Canada too. Es más, mujeres migrantes mexicanas y sus familias le hacen ganas, expresan su poder y agencia en Canada. Pero sus vidas no deben de ser telenovelas de constante lamentos de sentirse feo. Nos urge otras posibilidades para vivir y comer y tenemos que construirlas juntas, empezando con escuchar las múltiples voces de los y las trabajadoras agrícolas migrantes. (Moreso, Mexican migrant women and their families forge ahead, express their power, and agency, but their lives should not be telenovelas of constant sentirse feo laments. We urgently need other possibilities of life and food, and we have to build them together, starting listening to migrant workers’ multiple voices.) Si se puede! Yes we can!
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Binford, L. (2013). Tomorrow we’re all going to the harvest: Temporary foreign worker programs and neoliberal political economy (1st ed.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.


APPENDIX A
TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER PROGRAM DIAGRAM

Agricultural Stream
Occupations Requiring a Lower Level of Formal Training (NOC C and D)
The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP)
Stream for Lower-Skilled Occupations
Requiring Lower Levels of Formal Training (NOC C and D)
Live in Care-Giver Worker Program (changed since 2014)
Higher Skilled Occupations
Film and Entertainment
International Students
Federal Skilled Trades
Information Technology
Academics

From the most to the least precarious however with variances in between

"Low skill"
Process of deskilling justifying lack of citizenship status & human rights

"High Skill"
APPENDIX B

NOTICE FROM THE EMPLOYER FORMS

With the purpose of improving the selection process of the seasonal agricultural workers program, Mexican Authorities request detailed information of the worker’s performance during the season 200_.

WORKER’S NAME: ________________________ FILE NUMBER: __________

1. He has been working in my farm Since __________ until __________

2. Total hours worked: ________________________

3. Did he come from Mexico? [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Or was he transferred? [ ]

4. He is returning to Mexico because:
   - Working contract expired.
   - No more harvesting to be done.
   - Worker shows signs of health problems
   - Worker has family or personal reasons
   - Other.

5. Airplane fare from Canada to Mexico is being paid by:
   - The employer [ ] The worker [ ] The Mexican Government [ ]

6. Would you like this worker to return next year?
   - Yes [ ] Yes [ ] What month? __________
   - No [ ] Please specify your reasons ________________________

7. Your opinion about the worker: ________________________
   - Is a good worker who I would like to see return next season.

Employer Name: __________
Farm: __________
Date: __________
Signature: __________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Termination Notice (JP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employee Name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Last Day to Work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reason</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C
MEXICAN MINISTRY OF LABOUR PAMPHLET

EN EL AEROPUERTO MEXICANO.

- Llegue al aeropuerto una hora antes de su cita.
- No se presente con alcohol en el cuerpo. Evite la cancelación de su salida.
- Una vez registrado, asegúrese de tener su pasaporte y el pase de abordar o boleto.
- Verifique que los documentos sean tuyos.
- Si se siente mal o tiene algún problema de salud, INFORME al personal de Relaciones Exteriores que lo atiende. Se puede arreglar su salida en fecha posterior.
- Si está muy cansado y se puede quedar dormido, o si desea ir al baño o a comprar algo, informe a sus compañeros para que le avisen cuando suban al avión o para que reporten que usted falta.

EN EL AEROPUERTO CANADIENSE.

- Si el personal de Relaciones Exteriores le asignó un sobre para las autoridades migratorias, por favor entreguélo.
- El empleador lo esperará y lo llevará a la granja.

EN LA VIVIENDA.

- NO LLEVAR A LA CASA A PERSONAS DEL SEXO OPUESTO.
- Es muy necesario el RESPECTO a las pertenencias de sus compañeros, a su tiempo de descanso (escuche música con audifonos), al espacio en el refrigerador y en la despensa, al tiempo para cocinar y para bañarse de cada persona, a las reglas de convivencia y de seguridad en la granja. También es importante la COLABORACIÓN en la limpieza de la casa, no sólo en el aspecto físico sino también para mantener limpia (rolase las labores). Es básica la SOLIDARIDAD con sus compañeros enfermos o con problemas. NO ABUSÉ DE LOS NUEVOS.
- No salga de la granja sin la autorización del empleador.
APPENDIX D
INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

In volunteer work with Mexican migrant workers I will not be soliciting formal consent for observation. However, I will ensure that all the workers that I come in direct contact with know about the research I am doing. I will ask them if they grant me permission to take notes of what I learn about my topic through this work. I will also encourage workers to voice their concerns about my work and to withdraw from my participant observation at any time. This entails not being able to use any of their experiences and or comments for my research, but solely referring to them as a volunteer and not as a researcher. (See Appendix D for scripts on obtaining informal consent for participant observation in community work in rural Canada and Mexico)

For interviews and focus groups I will obtain consent from all research participants. (See Appendix E) However, there is a high probability that many of my research subjects will not be functionally literate. I will have to read and fully explain the consent form to avoid awkward situations. Signing a form may not always be appropriate depending on the level of literacy and acceptance of Western norms of formality. It is quite common in Latin America for oral consent to be equally important to signed contracts of any sorts. This consent process will have to be negotiated depending on the person involved. My main objective will be to fully explain the research and the risks and benefits involved for workers to make an informed decision. I will certainly be seeking the written consent of government officials in Mexico and Canada.
## Appendix E

**Rural Women Making Change: Listing of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Originating Mexican State</th>
<th>Place of Work in Canada</th>
<th>Years in the SAWP</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Jessica’</td>
<td>Tlaxcala</td>
<td>Virgil</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Lupe’</td>
<td>Morelos</td>
<td>Virgil</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Rosa’</td>
<td>Tlaxcala</td>
<td>Leamington</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Separated with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Maria’</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Virgil</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Xunixca’</td>
<td>Federal District</td>
<td>Colbourne</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Separated with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Vanesa’</td>
<td>Tlaxcala</td>
<td>Colbourne</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Separated with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Tomasa’</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Milton</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Separated with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Citali’</td>
<td>Oaxaca</td>
<td>Leamington</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Gisela’</td>
<td>Puebla</td>
<td>Leamington</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Shadira’</td>
<td>Hidalgo</td>
<td>Leamington</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Divorced with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Cecilia’</td>
<td>Oaxaca</td>
<td>Leamington</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Magali’</td>
<td>Veracruz</td>
<td>Leamington</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Separated with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Felipa’</td>
<td>Hidalgo</td>
<td>Leamington</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Gloria’</td>
<td>Puebla</td>
<td>Leamington</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Mari’</td>
<td>Guanajuato</td>
<td>Salem</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Angelina’</td>
<td>Veracruz</td>
<td>Leamington</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td>Separated with children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MEXICAN MIGRANT WOMEN

Tell me about yourself ...
Basics-Growing up-Marital Status
How old are you?
Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
Is it the same place where you live now? Is it the same house?
How do you remember your childhood? Was it a happy childhood?
What was the most beautiful and most difficult about your childhood?
Do you believe you were ever poor in your life? What does poverty mean for you?
How many brothers and sisters did you grow up with?
What did your parents do for a living?
Did you help around the house?
What types of duties or tasks performed at home as a child?
Did everyone contribute in this way?
At what age you started to work outside the home?
What kind of work were you doing?
What is the highest level of study that you have completed?

What is your current marital status?
How many children do you have? What are the ages?
At what age did you become a mother?
Did you have the support of “your partner”? How long you were together?
Do you keep in touch with the father of your children?
How did you manage being on your own with your son/daughter/children?
How many seasons have you come to Canada? How long have these contracts lasted?
Have you always worked in the same farm and province?

Tell me about your family and home back in Mexico ...

Who do you live with? Do you rent or own?
Tell me about your house, is there always running water? How many bedrooms do you have?
How many phones / mobile phones are at home?
Where do the shopping for the house?
What kind of transportation do you use?
Where do you go for medical care?
Do you have health insurance in Mexico?

Family Economics

What are the major expenses within your household?

For example:
1. Food, clothing, shelter -
2. Investing in a home / house -
3. Children’s school fees-
4. Training for adults-
5. Electronic goods, TVs, luxury items
6. Personal medical costs (eg, medicine, doctor visits) -
7. Family medical costs
8. Agricultural investments (such as buying land, equipment, tools, animals, cattle) -
9. Investing in non-farm business
10. Other:_________________

Who contributes to household expenses?
How do you manage the household expenses?
Is there enough money?
What is the annual household income?
What is your annual income in Canada?
How much of this income makes it to your household in Mexico? Or do you simply keep the money until you go to Mexico?
Who do you send money?
How to manage your money?
Do you have bank account in Mexico and Canada?
Do you have any problems managing your money? Do you do know how to work the bank system in Canada and Mexico?

What do you do with the income you earn in Canada?

For example:

Basic living: food, clothing, shelter
Investing in a house
Education of children
Adult Training
Electronic goods, TVs, luxury items
Personal medical needs (eg, medicine, doctor visits)
Family medical needs
Investing in agriculture (such as buying land, equipment, tools, animals, livestock)
Investing in non-farm business
Other:_________________

Re/productive Work & Daily life in Mexico

Describe a typical day at home here in Mexico. What time you get up? What do you have to do in the morning when you wake up when you go to bed?

In the house who is in charge of the following?
Preparing food  
Fix and clean the house  
Caring for children  
Caring for the elderly  
Helping children with homework  
Buying food  
Washing clothes  
Washing dishes  
Responsibility of household finances  
Assist in collective workdays  
Assist in school meetings  
Assist in community meetings  
Other?

What happens when you go to Canada? Who performs all these duties?  
Who will take care of your children?  
Do you work outside of the home when you return from Canada? Where and why?  
What do you do in your free time over here?  
Do you have time to do everything you need to do when you come home from Canada?

**Before the program ...**

How did you manage financially before entering the Seasonal Agricultural Workers’ Program?  
Who contributed financially to the household? Was there enough money?

**To Canada:**

How did you find out about the Program?  
Why did you choose Canada to work over the USA?  
Did you have to consult your family to make your decision?  
How do your family react? How do your children react?  
Was it difficult to enter the program?  
How are you treated by the civil servants at the Labour Ministry in Mexico City?  
How was your medical examination?  
Did you have an HIV test?

**Experiences in Canada...**

What kind of work do you do at the farm in Canada?  
Is it difficult to do your work?  
How did you learn to do your job? Was it difficult to learn? Who taught you?  
Who supervises the work?  
Do you know your boss (owner of the farm) well? What is (are) the supervisor(s)/manager(s) like at the farm? Where are they from? How do you communicate with them?  
Do you work outside the farm as well? How did you get this job?  
Who do you work with? How many men and women and where are they from?
Does everyone do the same type of work? Can you describe a typical day in Canada? What time you get up and go to bed? Please describe a typical day in Canada.

**Housing and living in Canada...**
Tell me about your housing conditions in Canada. Where do you live? House / Trailer / Other? How many people live there?
Do you get along well between with all your housemates? Do you communicate or visit with them here in Mexico?
Is there jealousy or fights among women?
Are there bedrooms?
Where do you sleep? bed / bunkbed?
How many showers do you have? Do you have washer and dryer? How many phones / mobile phones are at home? Is there air conditioning and heating? How many stove tops are there to cook? Is there enough room for everyone’s food in the refrigerator?
What kind of transportation do you use in Canada?
How do you and our housemates organize to cook, do laundry, shower, and talk on the phone?
Are there aspects of your housing conditions that can be improved?
Have you discussed your concerns to someone? What happened?
Can you get the food you like in Canada?

**Health**
Do you feel good physically?
Do you have any health concerns here in Mexico and Canada?
How do you feel? Do you feel happy, quiet, depressed, worried, tired?
How does your mood change in Canada? How do you feel there?
Have you needed medical care during your stay in Canada? Can you talk more about this?
How did you communicate with medical professionals and how did they treat you?
Have you done the pap or breast exam?
Do you have the medication and traditional herbs you need in Canada?
What do you need in Canada to make you feel better?

**Sexuality, intimacy, gender relations**
What methods of contraception do you know of?
Are they at your disposal in Mexico and Canada?
Do you think many women have boyfriends in Canada? What do you think about that?
Do you have a partner in Canada?
Are you in love?
Some women keep their relationships in Canada a secret. Do you think that having a boyfriend in Canada can create problems? Why do you think some women keep this a secret?
What do you think your family and children would say if you have a boyfriend in Canada?
Is it possible to maintain a relationship with another man in the program?
Do you think it is possible to maintain a relationship with someone in Mexico while in the program?
Would you marry a Canadian or other person living in Canada?
What do you think of abortion?
What do you think of homosexuality? What if you have a housemate in Canada who sexually prefers women?
Is there a lot of gossip at your farm?
Do you think gossip impacts women’s lives more than men’s?

Tell me about your free time ...

Do you take days off?
Where do you go?
Where and when do you shop? How do you get there?
With whom do you share your free time?

How do you think “Canadians” see and treat you?
Have you experienced or seen racism in Canada?
Do you have services / support in Canada in Spanish?
Do you see movies in Spanish-TV-radio shows?
Are there community events for Mexican migrant workers in Canada?
Do you have friends who are not farm workers? Who are they? Where did you meet them?

How often do call to Mexico? Who do you talk to the most from Canada to Mexico?
What kind of things do you talk about? If I listened to one of your conversations what would I hear?
Do you tell your family about everything you go through in Canada?

Do you ever communicate by mail or the internet, too?
Do you know where there is a post office in Canada?
When you have a problem how do you solve it?
Do you have people around you to support you in Canada?
Can you count on your family’s support in Canada?

The Program in Perspective...

What are the positive and negative aspects of this program?
What would you change in the program?
Have you changed due to your participation in this Program? How or why not?
Do you think men and women have the same concerns/challenges in the program?
What was it like when you first left for Canada the first time? How was it for your children/family?
How long do plan to continue working in Canada? Is your family in agreement with this?

Perspectives of a Transnational Life

How does your life here and there compare?
Do you think you live a double life-different in Canada and Mexico? How do you make sense of this?
What are the differences between Canada and Mexico?
Do you feel part of Canada? Do you feel that you belong there?
If you never return to Canada in the Program do you think that you will miss life there? What would you lose and what would you gain, do you think?

Would you be supportive of your daughter / son to work in Canada in this program just like you? Why or why not?
What advice would you give to your sisters / brothers / friends / as in Mexico who want to work in
What kinds of advice would you give to your daughter / son about work and life in Canada?
How do you think that men and women in your town perceive women who migrate in this program?
Do you consider yourself a “migrant worker”?
When people ask you what you do, what do you say?
Do you think you are invisible in Canada? What does invisibility mean to you?

Future Aspirations
What are your goals and dreams for the future?
What would you like to change in your life?
What are you grateful for in your life?

Interview Guide Sample Questions for Non-Migrants

General Demographics-Family History

· What name would you like me to call you for this research (pseudonym)?
· How old are you? Current marital status?
· Where were you born?
· Have you always lived in this community/colony?
· What was it like growing up?
· Did your parents and family always have enough money to get by?
· Are all your relatives living in the same community?
· How many children do you have? What are their ages?
· How many people live in this household? Who leaves and who stays year round?
· Who contributes to the livelihood of this household (in terms of wages, domestic and care work)?

Nature of transnational livelihoods:

How long does your loved one(s) leave for work in Canada?
What is it like for you when your loved one(s) are away working in Canada?
What does it mean for your household and your household responsibilities?
How do you cope when they are away?
How much do you rely on their remittances to get by?
Is it enough?
How is remitted money spent, and who decides?
Are there other ways that you think remitted money would be better spent and managed?
How does remitted money help, and how does remitted money make things difficult in your family or community?
Are you engaged in activities to generate income?
Do these practices change when they return?
Does the household management look different once they are back?
What is it like for you when they return? What do you think it’s like for those who migrate when they return? (What is nice about their return? What is difficult about their return?)
What has surprised you (pleasant surprises and disappointments) about your life with your family member migrating for work?

_Gains/losses – Social inclusion/exclusion:_
How has the migration of your loved one(s) made life better or easier for you here in Mexico?
What have you gained because of their migration?
How has migration made your life more difficult, and what losses have you endured?
How are these gains and losses the same or different for those who migrate?
Are these gains and losses the same or different when men migrate?
How are migrant women viewed in the community? How are migrant men viewed?
How satisfied are you with this way of making a living for your family? What works well? What is difficult and what do you wish could be different?

What happens when you have a problem? Can you get the support of your loved ones even though they are in Canada?
Do you confide all your challenges to your loved one(s) when they are away?
What family or community supports do you find helpful?

_For the Mexican population: Children:_
How do you think that this labour migration impacts your grandchildren/ the children? What gains and losses do they experience with a migrant parent? How do they cope when their parent is working in Canada? How are your grand/the children doing at school...and overall in comparison to other children whose parent (mother/father) do not migrate?

_Cross-border regulation:_
What work program is your family member participating in?
How do people hear about this program?
What do people have to do to get a job in Canada? How hard or easy is it?
What do you think is good about the program? What works well?
Do you have any worries about your loved one(s) in Canada?
Have you heard worrisome stories about other workers in Canada and any problems other families have faced with their loved ones working there?
If there were to ever be a problem with your loved one(s) in Canada would you know where to turn to for support?
Do you feel like your loved ones are treated well in Canada by their employers, community and (only for Mexican pop) consulate officials?
Choice/aspirations:

How were you involved in making the decision with your loved one for them to migrate? Were you supportive of this decision? Do you think migration is a choice or a necessity? If your loved one did not migrate to Canada to work what do you think your lives would be like? What do you know now that you wish you knew when your loved one was thinking of migrating to Canada? Do you think you would have influenced your loved one(s) in a different way? How do you make the decision about whether they should return to Canada? Is the decision to return different than the decision to go the first time? How? How would you advise other women and men and their families who are thinking about working in Canada? How do you hope this pattern of labour migration might change? What would be the best way for you and your family to make a living? What do you hope for your children and grandchildren?

Conclusion:

How do you think migration to Canada has impacted the community (such as the local economy, the children, elders, social welfare infrastructure)? What have been the gains and losses for families and the community as a whole? What advice would you have for the Canadian government (or Mexican government, or employers, or migrant workers) about improvements that could be made to the program? (Refer to losses described earlier.) How? Do you think that migrant’s families and children are considered by Canadian society and government? Are there ways that families and children could be included and taken into consideration by Canada?
APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MIGRATING MEN

Tell me about you …
Where were you born?
How is it over there?
Where you grew up?
How do you remember your childhood?
Is it the same place where you live now?

For how many seasons have you come to Canada?
How long have these contracts lasted?
Have you always come to the same pharmacy?

What is your marital status?
How old are you?
What is the highest level of study you have completed?
Do you speak other languages or dialects?

Tell me about your family…
How many children do you have? How are they called? How old are them? Who cares for them?
How old were your children?
Who do you live with in Mexico? What are they doing? Who contribute to the income of the family?

Tell me about your life in Mexico:
I want to know about your experiences before entering the program to work in Canada …
How did you keep your family before coming to Canada?
Was there enough money?
What were your responsibilities in Mexico to your family?
Where do you work in Mexico when you return from Canada?
Can you describe an ordinary day in your life back in Mexico? At what time do you get up and the rest of your family, what do you do, and at what time do you start working ……… until you get home to sleep?

Towards Canada:
Tell me which led your participation in the program …
How did you find out about the Program?
Why did you choose Canada to work and not the United States?
How did your family react?
I want to know more about the steps you had to take to work in Canada …
Tell me about your experience with your first medical exam. As was?
What kind of information about Canada do you give to workers in the Labor Secretariat?
What are they talking about? In the talk they gave you, were there women or only men?
Was there a talk about AIDS?
Did they give you advice about your family?
Did you give advice about women here in Canada?

What kind of information do they give to workers at the airport?
What are they talking about?

Experiences in Canada
Now I want to know about your experiences in Canada. I want to understand what life is like for a person working on the program here in Canada ...

Tell me about the first year you came to Canada.
What was different here in Canada from your life in Mexico?
How did you feel to be separated from the family?
How did you do it to prepare your food? Did you have experience in cooking?

Now I want to know more about your work. What type of work do you do in the pharmacy where you are?
Can you describe an ordinary day? At what time do you get up and what do you do and at what time do you start working and what do you do until you get home to sleep?
Is work always like this?
Is the work you do different from the rest of your classmates or is it the same?
In the pharmacy where you work, how many workers are there? How many men and women are there? Are there other workers? Where they are?
Do men and women work in the same, and Mexicans and Canadians, or do different jobs?
Describe to me how it works.
Was it difficult to learn the skills needed for your job? Did you already have experience doing this type of work in Mexico?

Health: Do you have any concerns about your health and safety at work?
Have you needed medical care during your stay in Canada? Can you talk more about this?
Who did you tell that you were sick / injured?
Did someone take you to the hospital / doctor?
Tell me how you found this experience?
How did you communicate with medical professionals?
Do you think men and women have different health and safety concerns or share the same? (Yes, yes ... can you talk more about this?)

Housing: Now I want to know a little more about housing. Tell me about your living conditions. As they are?
How do you do to prepare your food?
Can you get the food you like?
Are there any aspects of your housing conditions here in Canada that can be improved?
In what type of housing do you live in Mexico?
How do you compare your housing here in Canada with the ones you have in Mexico?
Have you told anyone about your concerns? What happened?
Support:
Have you ever needed to talk to someone at the consulate?
What are your impressions of the Mexican consulate?
Have you ever had a problem here in Canada?
Who supports you and how do you solve your problems?

Tell me about your free time and community life ...
Do you take rest days? What do you do on your rest days? With whom do you share your time?
How do "Canadians" treat you? Do you think Mexicans are welcome in this community? Do you think there is racism? Do you have friends who are not farm workers? Who are they? Where did you meet?

Affective and economic transnational ties:
How many times do you speak to Mexico?
Are they talking about Mexico?
Do you have difficulties talking to the house?
Who are you talking to? How often do you talk to your family? If I listened to some of your conversations, would I hear?
Are there things that hide them, which ones and why?
How often do you send money home?
To whom do you send?
How do you determine how much money you send?
Do you face difficulties when you send money home?
Does the money reach now?

Effects of Life Outside Mexico
How has it affected you all the time that you work / live here in Canada?
Do you think you have two different lives, one here in Canada and another in Mexico?
What does it feel like to live in two countries?
Has Canada changed you or is it the same as always? Would your family say the same?
How has your time in Canada affected your children?
Explain to me what it's like to be a father in the distance. Do you think he is a good father?
How has your migration affected your relationship with your wife / partner, your marriage?
What does your family think about your departure to Canada? They support you?
What would you feel if your daughter told you that she wanted to participate in the program?
Your wife? Your sister? Your son?
I have heard that moving to Canada has costs for the family. What do you think?

Women
We know that there are very few women in the Program. Do you know why?
How are the women participating in the Program? What do you think of them?
How are most of the workers seen in the Program?
How do you think they are seen by your wives in Mexico? I have been told that they are seen very poorly, is it true? And because?
How are married men who walk with them seen?
Conclusion

Are there other things you want to tell me about your work / life experience in Canada?
Do you have a special event or story in mind that you want to share that has impacted you during your time here? Please tell me.
What kinds of advice would you give to your sisters in Mexico who want to work in Canada?
What kind of advice would you give to migrant labour activists so they can improve your experience?
What kinds of advice would you give me for other interviews with Mexicans?
What are your plans for the future?
APPENDIX H
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR NON-MIGRATING KIN

Interview Guide Sample Questions for Non-Migrants

General Demographics-Family History

· What name would you like me to call you for this research (pseudonym)?
· How old are you? Current marital status?
· Where were you born?
· Have you always lived in this community/colony?
· What was it like growing up?
· Did your parents and family always have enough money to get by?
· Are all your relatives living in the same community?
· How many children do you have? What are their ages?
· How many people live in this household? Who leaves and who stays year round?
· Who contributes to the livelihood of this household (in terms of wages, domestic and care work)?

Nature of transnational livelihoods:

How long does your loved one(s) leave for work in Canada?
What is it like for you when your loved one(s) are away working in Canada?
What does it mean for your household and your household responsibilities?
How do you cope when they are away?
How much do you rely on their remittances to get by?
Is it enough?
How is remitted money spent, and who decides?
Are there other ways that you think remitted money would be better spent and managed?
How does remitted money help, and how does remitted money make things difficult in your family or community?
Are you engaged in activities to generate income?
Do these practices change when they return?
Does the household management look different once they are back?
What is it like for you when they return? What do you think it’s like for those who migrate when they return? (What is nice about their return? What is difficult about their return?)
What has surprised you (pleasant surprises and disappointments) about your life with your family member migrating for work?

Gains/losses – Social inclusion/exclusion:
How has the migration of your loved one(s) made life better or easier for you here in Mexico?
What have you gained because of their migration?
How has migration made your life more difficult, and what losses have you endured?
How are these gains and losses the same or different for those who migrate?
Are these gains and losses the same or different when men migrate?
How are migrant women viewed in the community? How are migrant men viewed?
How satisfied are you with this way of making a living for your family? What works well? What is difficult and what do you wish could be different?

What happens when you have a problem? Can you get the support of your loved ones even though they are in Canada?
Do you confide all your challenges to your loved one(s) when they are away?
What family or community supports do you find helpful?

For the Mexican population: Children:

How do you think that this labour migration impacts your grandchildren/ the children? What gains and losses do they experience with a migrant parent? How do they cope when their parent is working in Canada? How are your grand/the children doing at school...and overall in comparison to other children whose parent (mother/father) do not migrate?

Cross-border regulation:
What work program is your family member participating in?
How do people hear about this program?
What do people have to do to get a job in Canada? How hard or easy is it?
What do you think is good about the program? What works well?
Do you have any worries about your loved one(s) in Canada?
Have you heard worrisome stories about other workers in Canada and any problems other families have faced with their loved ones working there?
If there were to ever be a problem with your loved one(s) in Canada would you know where to turn to for support?
Do you feel like your loved ones are treated well in Canada by their employers, community and (only for Mexican pop) consulate officials?

Choice/aspirations:

How were you involved in making the decision with your loved one for them to migrate?
Were you supportive of this decision?
Do you think migration is a choice or a necessity?
If your loved one did not migrate to Canada to work what do you think your lives would be like?
What do you know now that you wish you knew when your loved one was thinking of migrating to Canada? Do you think you would have influenced your loved one(s) in a different way?
How do you make the decision about whether they should return to Canada? Is the decision to return different than the decision to go the first time? How?
How would you advise other women and men and their families who are thinking about working in Canada?
How do you hope this pattern of labour migration might change?
What would be the best way for you and your family to make a living?
What do you hope for your children and grandchildren?
Conclusion:

How do you think migration to Canada has impacted the community (such as the local economy, the children, elders, social welfare infrastructure)? What have been the gains and losses for families and the community as a whole? What advice would you have for the Canadian government (or Mexican government, or employers, or migrant workers) about improvements that could be made to the program? (Refer to losses described earlier.) How? Do you think that migrant’s families and children are considered by Canadian society and government? Are there ways that families and children could be included and taken into consideration by Canada?