“Everything I know is Canada”: Migrant Farmworkers and the Making of Homes Across Borders

by

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Abstract

Canada is wholly reliant on migrant farmworkers who provide cheap labour while being barred from a wide range of rights and services, including pathways to permanent residency (Sharma, 2012; Satzewhich, 1990; Basok, 2002). Whereas most of the research on migrant farmworkers follows a deficit model, my thesis focuses on collective agency by asking: how do migrant farmworkers create a sense of home in Canada while unable to settle permanently in the country? Drawing from interviews and participant observation conducted in Guatemala and Canada, I show how migrant farmworkers exceed the boundaries of the farms where they live and work, forging their own modes of social organization using Indigenous Mayan cultural logic. Framing migrant farmworkers as strategic boundary-crossers, I highlight how they breach farm borders and, through the exchange of ideas across nation-states, inspire new migration journeys.

Keywords: migration; home-making; borders; transnationalism; community-engaged; advocacy

Dedication

Para cada migrante en busca de un mejor futuro (incluyendo a mi mamá).

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List of Acronyms

AGUND	Association of Guatemalans United for our Rights
BC	British Columbia
BC Feds	BC Federation of Labour
CPP	Canadian Pension Plan
EI	Employment Insurance
IOM	International Organization for Migration
SAWP	Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program
SFU	Simon Fraser University
TFW	Temporary Foreign Worker
UFCW	United Food and Commercial Workers Canada
US	United States

Welcome Statement

Hello. My name is Regina Baeza Martinez. First, thank you for taking the time to read my MA thesis. Before I delve into my research, I wanted to start by introducing myself so that you, the reader, can familiarize yourself with my own personal context and background. This introduction is inspired by Indigenous research methodologies, wherein rather than pretending to be a distant observer, the researcher implicates themselves and their positionality within their work (Kovach, 2021).

I was born in 2000 in Guadalajara, in the state of Jalisco, Mexico. On my father's side, my grandmother (last name Sanchez) was the first to be born outside the state of Chihuahua, where my ancestors lived in mining towns along the Sierra Madre Occidental on the lands of the Rarámuri/Tarahumara peoples. My paternal grandfather (last name Baeza) was born in Guadalajara, but his ancestors lived in the Los Altos region of Jalisco, home to Nahua peoples. Los Altos is a rural lowlands region in eastern Jalisco and is culturally distinct due to the large numbers of European immigrants and colonizers who settled in the region. The area is largely composed of ranching communities. My maternal grandfather (last name Martinez) was born in the state of Sinaloa, but his parents were originally from Los Altos. Meanwhile, my maternal grandmother (last name Marquez) was born in Lagos de Moreno, a town in Los Altos, and migrated to Guadalajara at the age of eighteen. In other words, although Guadalajara is my motherland, most of my ancestors come from outside the big city.

At the age of seven, I migrated to the territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, part of what is colonially known as Vancouver, in the province of British Columbia (BC), Canada. In Vancouver, I lived with my mother, sibling, and stepfather. My stepfather (last name Almendarez) was born in Lima, Peru, but has lived in Canada and Mexico for most of his life. After living with precarious immigration status for many years, I became a Canadian citizen at the age of sixteen and continue to live, work, and conduct research on these lands. I begin with this description of the land to show my relationship to place and my familiar history with rural-to-urban and international migration.

Although I migrated to Canada as a child, my migration experience facilitated my research. One of my main struggles as a child migrant was the emotional trauma of

family separation – as I left behind my father as well as an extended family network that helped raise me in my early childhood years. As I will discuss in my methods section in Chapter 1, my personal migration journey played a major role in my research, as I met with interview participants and introduced my personal history prior to requesting verbal consent. Further, the semi-structured interviews served akin to a conversation, where as well as inquiring about migrants' stories, I shared equal anecdotes about mine. In other words, although I may not write in-depth about my own experiences, know that these have facilitated and shaped every facet of my work.

As a Mexican-born immigrant, this research was also facilitated by my fluency in the Spanish language. Until the age of seven, I only spoke Spanish. When I migrated to Canada, I learned English through school and ESL lessons. Even after English became the language by which I navigated most of my public life, I continued to speak Spanish at home until I graduated high school. Post-high school, I continue to speak Spanish daily, ensuring that I retain the language so that I can communicate with my beloved relatives in Mexico. Recent economic independence has made it possible for me to return to Guadalajara yearly to pay my family a visit – a dream I longed for as a child. Establishing a frequent return to Guadalajara has continued to strengthen my ties to my family and homelands. Although I have lived in Canada for the vast majority of my life, I still think of my trips to Mexico as a return home.

Another key component about my identity is that although I am a *mestiza,*[1] I am socially perceived as white. Further, unless one hears my full name or meets my nuclear family, I am generally assumed to be Euro-Canadian. As a student conducting research with racialized and/or Indigenous Mayan migrants from Guatemala, my relationship to participants was always mediated by my whiteness and the power I am consequently able to exert over them. Throughout this thesis, highlight not only what I have learned from participants – but also my experiences in the field. Rather than being merely a performative recognition of my power and privilege, I intend for this introduction to serve as an invitation for readers to join me in considering how a researcher's own identity and positionality inform their experiences in the field and the subsequent findings they generate. Indeed, there are many other aspects of my identity – such as class, gender,

[1] As will be discussed in chapter 3, *mestizos* are people of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry who do not belong to either group but instead make up a third category.

linguistic abilities, and university affiliation – that inspire introspection and could be fleshed out more thoroughly in future writings. With that, let's begin.

Chapter 1.

Introduction

It is a bright fall day in Metro Vancouver, Canada, as I sit in a café with Jonatán,[2] a Kaqchikel Mayan migrant farmworker from the Department of Sacatepéquez, Guatemala. Part of the province of British Columbia (BC), Metro Vancouver is home to 2.8 million people and is made up of twenty-one municipalities, one electoral area, and one treaty First Nation (Metro Vancouver, 2025).[3] In 2012, at the age of twenty-two, Jonatán was recruited to work in Metro Vancouver and, twelve years later, he is still employed at the same farm. Drinking a hot cup of chamomile tea, Jonatán describes how he feels about life in Canada:

> "I learned everything I know here. I came from nothing. I was a simple cook and agriculturalist … I feel at home. I like my job. I love my job because I also depend on it … Believe me that when I go back to Guatemala, I am hit with a feeling of sadness. Yes, I miss Canada … [but] I can't stay in Canada. I don't have the opportunity … For me Canada is my home. It's everything to me right now … Canada has given me experiences. I can say that all the experience I have is because of Canada. Everything is because of Canada. Everything I know is Canada."[4]

According to Federal policy, migrant farmworkers are temporary laborers – yet Jonatán's quote reflects a profound attachment to Canada. In this thesis, I ask, how do migrant farmworkers like Jonatán create a sense of home in Canada while being unable to settle permanently in the country? I explore this question by focusing on migrants' social lives, noting how they construct spaces of belonging through everyday exchanges that cross visible and invisible boundaries. I use the term 'borders' to describe the boundaries that

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[2] For all interview participants, pseudonyms are used in lieu of names.

[3] In 2021, 12.27 (34,360 ha) of Metro Vancouver's landmass was farmland, including 2,000 farms of an average of sixteen hectares (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 2021). More than 72% (24,999 ha) of this farmland was used for crops including field crops like potatoes and sweet corn, fruits like blueberries and blackberries, and hay crops like wheat and barley (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 2021; British Columbia, 2025). While only 1.34% (335.30 ha) of all farmland in Metro Vancouver was used for greenhouse production (including for flowers and vegetables), Metro Vancouver has more than 50% of all the greenhouses in the province (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 2021). In other words, Metro Vancouver has the highest concentration of greenhouses in BC, even though the vast majority of farmland is not used for this purpose. See Appendix A for a map of the area.

[4] All interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated into English by the author.

migrant farmworkers cross while creating a sense of place in Canada.[5] Using the border as a metaphor makes visible the physical and structural boundaries that restrict the lives of migrant farmworkers and shows how they cross these borders in the process of creating a sense of place in Canada.

Based on my extensive survey of the literature and fieldwork in Guatemala and Canada, I make four key contributions. First, I provide a spatial analysis of *fincas* (farms) in Canada, showing how migrant farmworkers engage in systems of social organization drawn from Indigenous cultural logics. Second, I highlight how community organizers infiltrate the *finca* walls, inviting migrant farmworkers into spaces where they are considered more than just laborers. I then provide yet another example of how the *finca* is crossed – this time centering migrants' own social relationships, highlighting how these friendships are maintained across time and space. Finally, I conduct a transnational analysis, showing how narratives and ideas exchanged from Canada to Guatemala inspire new migration journeys. These findings show that even though Canadian policy legislates the disposability of migrant farmworkers, this population draws from collective agency to assert their own sense of belonging.

I begin with a brief introduction of labour migration in Canada, followed by a review of literature and a description of the methods employed in this research. In Chapter 2, I introduce the Guatemalan context, highlighting its ethnic landscape and discussing some of the contemporary living conditions that inspire migrants to seek employment outside the country. In Chapter 3, I outline social organization within and outside the *finca* walls, showing how migrant farmworkers organize themselves according to Mayan cultural logic and how they escape the bounds of the *finca* through the efforts of community organizers and their own friendship ties. In Chapter 4, I look at social exchanges across settler states, illustrating how these reflect migrants' aspirations and perhaps inspire new migration journeys. Finally, I conclude with a summary of my

[5] Discussions on borders often focus on the US-Mexico borderlands as this space symbolizes the line between the Global South and the world's most powerful economic and political nation (Alvarez, 1994). In contrast, there is significantly less of a focus on Canadian border regimes. One influential figure who theorizes on and about the US-Mexico border is Chicana feminist poet Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). Anzaldúa applies the concept of the borderland as a metaphor to encapsulate the ambiguity of straddling or existing between two separate spaces, using it as a metaphor to describe not only her ethnic and cultural identity, but also her sexual orientation and gender. Anzaldúa's use of the borderland as a metaphor inspires me to consider other borders beyond the nation-state – namely farm borders, which I explore in chapter three.

findings, recommendations for community organizers, and messages from migrant farmworkers.

1.1. Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program

As a migrant farmworker, Jonatán is considered a 'Temporary Foreign Worker' (TFW), a category created by the Canadian state to describe those who are allowed into Canada through the TFW Program (Sharma, 2012). The TFW Program is used to recruit workers in sectors such as agriculture and care-work. These workers inhabit a kind of legal third space as they are neither citizens nor immigrants. Through the TFW Program, migrant workers are granted closed work permits, which means that they are tied to one employer during their temporary stay in Canada (Satzewhich, 1990). Being tied to one employer means that migrant farmworkers cannot look for other work in Canada, often forcing them to accept unsafe working conditions (Basok, 2002; Encalada Grez, 2006). Workers who become sick or injured are often deported back to their home countries without any form of compensation (Basok, 2002; Stasiulis, 2020; Encalada Grez, 2006). Considering these asymmetrical conditions, the United Nations has declared that closed work permits are a breeding ground for contemporary modern slavery (Obokata, 2024). In sum, the TFW Program is a highly controversial employment model that, through closed work permits, restricts the labour mobility of migrant farmworkers.

Migrant farmworkers bring decades of specialized knowledge in agriculture – including the refined mechanics of manual labour and deeply personal relationships with food production; yet, the Federal Government dismisses the legitimacy of this knowledge, characterizing migrant farmworkers as 'low skilled' and barring them from pathways to permanent residency. Instead, the only way that migrant farmworkers can hope to achieve permanent residency is if their employer sponsors them as part of the Provincial Nominee Program – an application that costs at least $1,525 CAD and takes a minimum of twenty-months to process (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025). While few migrant workers are ever actually sponsored by their employers, this promise is used as a tool of discipline and control (Polanco Sorto, 2016). In sum, the state's characterization of migrant farmworkers as low-skilled contributes to the devaluation of Indigenous and land-based knowledge, forcing them into disposable labour structures.

Migrant farmworkers in the TFW Program are recruited through a number of sub-programs with different rules and regulations that shape their lives in Canada. The first of such programs was the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), which was developed in 1966 to solve an ongoing problem in the agricultural sector: the retention of cheap workers (Encalada Grez, 2006). Following the Second World War, low-wage agricultural jobs were taken by European immigrants who, after becoming permanent residents, sought more stable and higher paying employment in other sectors (Satzewich, 1990). To address the ongoing loss of low-wage agricultural workers, the Canadian Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Jamaican government that established the SAWP, ensuring a never-ending supply of cheap labour. Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and the Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States eventually became part of the SAWP, as well (Encalada Grez, 2006). Further, employers have the power to choose the country of origin and gender of the workers recruited to their farms (Encalada Grez, 2006), giving them extensive control over who is allowed to enter Canada. In sum, the SAWP was a reimagining of the recruitment and retention of low-wage labour.

The TFW Program expanded in 2003 when the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – a United Nations organization – launched a poverty-reduction program that allowed Guatemalan migrant farmworkers to work in Canada for up to six months (Pellecer, 2007). The project was deemed successful and absorbed into the Agricultural Stream of the TFW Program – another avenue by which employers can hire migrant farmworkers. Appendix F compares the SAWP and the Agricultural Stream in-depth; however, there are three key differences. First, whereas SAWP workers are allowed into Canada for up to eight months per year (Encalada Grez, 2006), under the Agricultural Stream, employers can hire workers deemed 'low-wage' to work in Canada for up to two years. (Government of Canada, 2025b).[6] Second, in both the SAWP and the Agricultural Stream, migrant farmworkers live in employer-provided housing. However, under the Agricultural Stream, employers are able to claw back expenses by charging migrant farmworkers for rent.[7] A third distinguishing detail between the two programs is that

[6] According to the Federal Government, low-wage agricultural workers in BC are those who earn less than $34.62 per hour (Government of Canada, 2025b).

[7] Under SAWP, employers are not allowed to deduct any housing fees – except for in BC, where they can charge up to $5.85 per day, or $902.17 per year (Employment & Social Development Canada, 2023; Government of Canada, 2025a). In contrast, under the Agricultural Stream,

under the SAWP, sending countries play a principal role in the recruitment and administration of migrant farmworkers (Government of Canada, 2025a); in contrast, under the Agricultural Stream, these roles are carried out by private for-profit agencies with their own regulations. The Agricultural Stream thus has significantly less government oversight than the SAWP. Building on the work of my co-supervisor, labour scholar Dr. Evelyn Encalada Grez, my thesis focuses on the experiences of Guatemalan migrant farmworkers employed under the Agricultural Stream.[8]

In 2023, there were more than 70,000 migrant farmworkers in Canada (Government of Canada, 2024b).[9] Notably, from 2018 to 2023, the population of Guatemalan migrant farmworkers in Canada has nearly doubled, from just over 10,000 to nearly 19,500 (Statistics Canada, 2025). During this time, Guatemalans overtook the number of Jamaican workers, who dropped from 17% (9,402) of the migrant farmworker population in 2018 to only 11% (8,121) in 2023 (Statistics Canada, 2025). This change marks a move from the SAWP towards a system with nearly no government oversight. By focusing on Guatemalan workers, Encalada Grez's research – and my thesis by extension -- provides insights into this emergent population.

1.2. Indigenous Migration & Transnationalism

Within a Canadian context, the concept of an Indigenous migrant from outside the nation-state is likely understood as contradictory, as Indigenous identity is almost always conceptualized within a national framework. Contesting this assumption that Indigeneity is always localized, my project builds on the work of my co-supervisor Encalada Grez on the experiences of Indigenous Mayan migrant farmworkers in Canada. Indigenous migration covers movement within and across nation-state borders

employers are allowed to charge up to approximately $1,560 per year for on-farm housing, or up to 30% of the workers gross monthly earnings for off-farm housing (Government of Canada, 2025b). While migrant farmworkers must pay for employer-provided housing, researchers have long documented that these housing conditions are often poor, with workers living in crowded and deteriorating trailers or modular housing units (Encalada Grez, 2006).

[8] Encalada Grez is currently spearheading a research project that looks at the experiences of Indigenous Mayan migrant farmworkers, connecting labour precarity to processes of settler colonialism. Encalada Grez' project is funded by an SFU/SSHRC Small Explore Research Grant and the Understanding Precarity in BC project.

[9] Over 40% (29,048) of these workers were in Ontario, followed by 33% (23,295) in Quebec and just over 15% (10,970) in British Columbia (Government of Canada, 2024b).

and is often motivated by a search for jobs, healthcare, and/or education (Trujano, 2008). Encalada Grez's work is timely, responding to calls from the IOM for more research that looks broadly into the experiences of Indigenous migrants (Trujano, 2008).

In Canada, scholarly publications recognizing Indigenous migrant farmworkers were first published in 2022 (Caxaj, Cohen & Colindres, 2022a; Caxaj, Tran, Mayell, Tew, McLaughlin, Rawal, Vosko & Cole, 2022b). For instance, a few studies on the impact of COVID-19 on Mexican migrant farmworkers identify that most participants are Indigenous (Caxaj et al., 2022a; Caxaj et al., 2022b). One of these studies, based out of the Okanagan region of British Columbia, found that 88% (125) of participants identified as fully or partially Indigenous, with most being of Maya, Nahuatl, Zapoteco, and Otomí ancestry (Caxaj et al., 2022a). One article on the emotional lives of migrant farmworkers in Quebec noted that Yucatecan and Chiapanecan migrants from Mexico reported instances of racism from their employers due to their nationality and Indigenous ancestry (Campos-Flores & Rosales-Mendoza, 2023). While these publications mark a turn towards recognizing Indigenous migrant farmworkers, more work is needed to recognize the breadth of their experiences. In contrast to growing recognition of Indigenous migration in Canadian scholarship, the Federal government and non-government organizations have taken a highly national approach at Indigeneity, focusing almost exclusively on internal issues. In fact, only a few organizations support Indigenous immigrants and refugees, such as PODER, a grassroots group based out of Ontario that serves Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ Latinx community members (Cahuas, 2023); and the City of Vancouver's 2010 Dialogue Project, which established connections between First Nations people and immigrants, including Mayan refugees from Guatemala (Suleman, 2011).[10] Only in these few occasions are the Indigenous identities of immigrants and refugees recognized; yet this recognition is rarely extended to migrant farmworkers.

Work out of the United States has focused more on Indigenous migration, with a significant number of publications highlighting the experiences of undocumented Mayan migrants (Pellett, 1994), as well as established Mayan migrant communities in cities like

[10] As part of the City of Vancouver's 2010 Dialogue Project, Mayan and First Nations participants bonded over shared histories of colonization, food, music, and stories (Suleman, 2011). As an outcome of the project, Mayan participants were permanently invited to use the Friendship Center – indicating their belonging as part of Vancouver's urban Indigenous community (Suleman, 2011).

Los Angeles and Houston (Rodriguez, 1987; Peñalosa, 1986).[11] While researchers in the 1970s and 1980s theorized that Mayan migrants would assimilate into non-Indigenous cultures (Peñalosa, 1986), descendants of the Mayan diaspora have maintained a distinct identity (Boj Lopez, 2017), even while away from traditional territories and governance structures. Findings on Mayan migrants in the United States provide examples of Indigenous community-building in the diaspora. In a podcast hosted by Daniel Denvir (2019), historian Nick Estes of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe argues that outside of academic circles in the United States, however, Indigenous migrants are often racialized as 'Mexican' or 'Central American' and targeted by white supremacist immigration policies. In other words, while xenophobic policies position Indigeneity as a threat to white dominance, Indigenous identities are made invisible through processes of racialization. The study of Indigenous migration thus does not necessarily translate to a public reckoning of Indigenous peoples' rights to movement and autonomy.

In anthropology, Indigenous migration is often studied through a transnational framework, highlighting that rather than assimilating to new contexts, migrants exert collective agency – through, for example, social and economic exchanges across borders – that change the landscape of the nation-state they settle in (Rouse, 1991; Schiller, Basch, Blanc, 1995). According to anthropologist Roger Rouse (1991), one output of the transnational circuits nurtured between Mexico and the United States is the expansion of borders – including the borderlands encompassing both nation-states, and the expansion of export processing zones facilitating the exchange of capital and labour. In other words, transnationalism offers an alternative perspective to migration that considers how migrants maintain – rather than abandon – ties to their sending communities. Transnational research on Indigenous migration – which has emerged since the late 1990s – looks at how digital technologies now allow for instant communication, whereas in the 1980s it was difficult and even expensive to communicate via phone calls or letters (Velasco Ortiz & Pombo, 2014; Rivera-Salgado, 1999). Rather than assuming ethnicity is fixed, this work argues that it is something that is developed relationally and can change over time (Velasco Ortiz & Pombo, 2014; Rivera-Salgado, 1999). However, because migrants work on crossing social and political

[11] First, in the late 1970s, Mayan migrants established distinct communities in Los Angeles where Indigenous languages were spoken more prominently than Spanish (Peñalosa, 1986). Years later, in the mid-1980s, Mayan migrants formed communities in Houston, replicating forms of social organization found in their villages in Guatemala (Rodriguez, 1987).

borders is far more complex than the mere bypassing a national boundary, anthropologist Lynn Stephen (2007) proposes using the term ‘transborder’ rather than transnational. The term transborder draws particular attention to how migrants make sense of and exist in new racial landscapes (Stephen, 2007). Inspired by Stephen’s (2007) emphasis on centering exchanges beyond state borders, I highlight how migrant farmworkers in Canada cross *finca* and ethnic borders.

The vast majority of Indigenous transnational research out of the United States focuses on Indigenous Mixtec and Zapotec migrants from the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. These peoples have historically identified with their hometowns instead of with broader categories denoting ethnic or linguistic association (Nagengast & Kearney,1990), even establishing hometown associations in California during periods of mass migration in the 1980s (Rivera-Salgado, 2015). However, extended periods of labour organizing among undocumented migrant farmworkers in California brought Oaxacan migrants from different hometowns together under one shared struggle, resulting in a new embrace of linguistic-identity markers such as ‘Mixtec’ and ‘Zapotec’ (Nagengast & Kearney,1990). In 1991, Mixtec and Zapotec migrants began organizing together as Oaxacan people to support political efforts in Mexico and the United States – a form of transnational organizing that challenged Mexican hegemony by expanding political participation to include Indigenous peoples and migrants living outside the state (Rivera-Salgado, 2015). Mixtec and Zapotec migrants are therefore transnational not only because they inhabit another nation-state, but because they collaborate with other Indigenous peoples (Velasco Ortiz, 2005). The formation of transnational Oaxacan multi-ethnic communities has facilitated even more migration to the United States (Rivera-Salgado, 2015). This rich collection of research on Mixtec and Zapotec migrants propels me to pay attention to the role of ethnicity and identity among migrant farmworkers in Canada.

1.3. Home & Belonging in Transnational Migration

Migration scholars do not only study the movement of people; they also explore the kinds of activities migrants engage in after arriving in host communities, including how they create a sense of home through processes of ‘homing’ or ‘home-making’ (Boccagni, 2017; Perry, 2021). Homing involves material processes like relationships to land and the configuration of a house, and social processes like friendships and family-relations (Boccagni, 2017). The sense of place that emerges from material and social

homing practices is not static, as understandings of what constitutes home change across time and space (Boccagni, 2017). Notably, while the concept of home can be used to describe how migrants create a sense of belonging, the term is also invoked within xenophobic political discourse to characterize migrants as invasive or out of place (Boccagni, 2017). For instance, dominant media and the Federal Government have scapegoated newcomers for the prevailing housing and affordability crises (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2024; Tasker, 2024), drawing on the argument that cities are being overtaken by foreign populations who are straining all resources.[12] In this thesis, I explore how homing practices produce new spaces of belonging for migrant farmworkers, redefining what it means to live under exclusionary immigration policy.

Research on homing is most common within the discipline of geography where researchers study how marginalized populations create a sense of place while under systems of oppression. For instance, in Canada, geographer Catherine Nolin (2006) explores how Guatemalan refugees create transnational social spaces. Nolin (2006) highlights that the homing practices of Guatemalan refugees in Canada are largely shaped by immigration policy, resulting in 'transnational ruptures' that disconnect refugees from their communities of origin. Nolin (2006) also notes that these processes are gendered, with women frequently sequestered within the domestic spheres. Further, Latina feminist urban scholar Madelaine Cahuas (2024) uses the concept 'unsettling Latinx sense of place' to speak to how Latinx people create their own spaces through everyday actions that challenge structures of domination such as settler colonialism and neoliberal capitalism.[13] Cahuas (2024) analyzes films by Indigenous Kichwa artist Samay Arcentales Cajas on the experiences of Latinx people in Toronto, emphasizing that unsettling Latinx sense of place involves refusing normative assumptions about space and belonging that exclude marginalized people from urban areas and, more broadly, the nation-state. Canada's TFW Program exemplifies such a structure,

[12] In 2024, the Federal Government made significant cuts to the number of migrant workers, international students, and new permanent residents allowed into Canada for the following years (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2024). These changes coincide with the 2025 Canadian Federal election, which resulted in yet another Liberal minority government.

[13] To unsettle claims to place, Cahuas (2024) engages with frameworks that emerge from ontological foundations outside of dominant western spheres, such as Black, Indigenous, queer, and feminist perspectives that provide alternative notions of belonging. For instance, Black and Indigenous ontologies challenge western anthropocentric notions of community by considering how sense of space is constructed through collaborative relationships with more-than-human beings (Cahuas, 2024).

legislating the exclusion of migrant farmworkers from almost every sphere of Canadian society and rendering them invisible through closed work permits that tuck them away to live and work in farms. My own research attempts to unsettle Latinx sense of place by highlighting how the homing practices of migrant farmworkers defy the racist and xenophobic bounds of the TFW Program.

While geographers have published research on how migrants and refugees relate to and create a sense of place in Canada, there has been little focus on the homing practices of migrant farmworkers. One study out of Leamington, Ontario, finds that migrant farmworkers feel a low level of social inclusion in Canadian society due to the closed work permits that exclude them from bringing their families with them and tie them to one employer (Basok, 2021). Another study explores how for migrant farmworkers, long-term family separation often leads to the development of new friendships with their colleagues (Perry, 2021). While these friendships can improve their quality of life, they can also inspire feelings of jealousy for their family members left behind (Perry, 2021). Sociologists Kerry Preibisch & Evelyn Encalada Grez (2013) are among the few researchers to study the homing practices of migrant farmworkers in Canada, focusing on the romantic and sexual lives of migrant women. Preibisch & Encalada Grez (2013) describe that through romantic and sexual relationships in Canada, migrant women assert pleasure and agency. However, employers often try to limit or control these relationships (Preibisch & Encalada Grez, 2013). Building on this work on the social lives of migrant farmworkers, I ask, what do social entanglements reveal about how migrant farmworkers understand and re-negotiate notions of home and belonging while working in Canada? In this thesis, I attempt to explore this question using qualitative research methods -- namely interviews and participant observation.

1.4. Methods

This thesis is based on multi-sited ethnographic research conducted in the Department of Chimaltenango, Guatemala and Metro Vancouver, Canada from July to November 2024.[14] Multi-sited ethnographic research entails conducting fieldwork in

[14] This work was only possible with the support of my co-supervisor Encalada Grez, who allowed me to accompany her to Guatemala and who introduced me to a network of migrants whom she has known for nearly twenty-years.

more than one site and is common in migration studies, enabling researchers to explore how migrants construct and maintain social lives across nation borders (Kearny, 2000; Besserer, 2004; Boccagni, 2016). One challenge of multi-sited ethnographic work, however, is that in navigating different social spaces, researchers encounter an array of ethical challenges. To address these challenges, I not only drew from institutional ethics -- I also applied notions of community ethics by working alongside advocacy organizations, whose members have decades of on-the ground experience.[15] This community ethics approach is also representative of Indigenous methodologies, where research is framed as a process to build and maintain reciprocal relationships with participants and community members (Kovach, 2021). In this project, a relational-forward project has entailed participant observation in the form of grassroots activism, as well as meaningful consultation prior to interviews in the form of house-visits, where I introduce myself and my project over food and tea. As part of stewarding good relationships with community members, throughout this thesis, I attempt to highlight this grassroots expertise to challenge traditional notions of research that position the academy as the only legitimate site of knowledge production. Indeed, I learned just as much from community organizers as I did from migrant farmworkers and university programming. Further, by centering advocacy organizations, I have worked to ensure that my research is in alignment with their values and useful not just for my own academic advancement, but for political means. In sum, this thesis is an account of multi-sited research grounded in a relationship-forward and community-centered approach.

Beyond the findings written in this work, a significant portion of groundwork involved building relations with community organizers in Vancouver, whom I was introduced to by my co-supervisor, Encalada Grez. After this initial connection was made, I attempted to establish respectful relationships by engaging in in-depth dialogue about myself and my project, and by volunteering at community events like protests and outings for migrant farmworkers. Yet, after conducting this work, not all members of advocacy organizations were eager about supporting my work. Those who were part of formal NGOs had their own confidentiality agreements to consider, and other grassroots organizers had

[15] Institutional ethics included receiving approval from the Research Ethics Board at Simon Fraser University. To protect the identities of all participants, I removed identifiable information such as names, *aldeas* of origin, and place of employment in Canada.

negative experiences of working alongside researchers. Still, others were willing to work alongside me if I was committed to protecting the anonymity of participants, ensuring that my research would not negatively impact their job prospects in Canada. My research was contingent on these lengthy yet rewarding processes of relationship-building.

In the end, I was introduced to prospective participants in Guatemala and Metro Vancouver by Encalada Grez and community organizers in Metro Vancouver. First, in Guatemala, I travelled alongside Encalada Grez who took me with her on various house-visits to reconnect with former migrant farmworkers she has known for decades. Through snowball sampling, these former migrant farmworkers connected me with other prospective participants in the area. Second, in Metro Vancouver, a community organizer took me on a home visit to a *finca* with Guatemalan migrant farmworkers, during which I introduced myself and handed out my phone number to prospective participants. Although I was introduced to participants through snowball sampling, it was my responsibility to establish trust and build rapport so that they would feel comfortable participating in audio-recorded interviews. To build good relationships, I began the research process by visiting the homes of prospective participants and answering questions about myself and my work prior to inquiring about verbal consent. Further, even throughout the interview process, I often had to divulge intimate details about my own migration experience for participants to feel comfortable talking about their own lives. My testimony about migrating from Mexico as a kid and leaving my father behind resonated with participants, many of whom had children in Guatemala. In sum, recruitment was only possible through community support and my own willingness to be vulnerable, sharing equally about my own family history that overlapped with the experiences of migrant farmworkers.

In total, I conducted nine Spanish interviews with seventeen participants. First, in the Department of Chimaltenango, I conducted three focus group interviews with seven participants, including former migrant farmworkers and their chosen friends or family members. In Chimaltenango, all participants were Kaqchikel Mayans over the age of fourty. Four where men had been previously employed as migrant farmworkers in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia. Three were women – two former migrant farmworkers who had worked on Ontario, and the wife of a former migrant farmworker. Second, in Metro Vancouver, I conducted two focus group interviews with six

participants, as well as four one-on-one interviews. All participants in Metro Vancouver were employed at the same farm. Participants in Metro Vancouver were all men between the ages of 24 to 48. Out of the ten interview participants in Metro Vancouver, four were non-Indigenous from the Departments of El Progreso and Zacapa, six were Kaqchikel Mayan from the Departments of Chimaltenango and Sacatepéquez, and one was K'iche' Mayan from the Department of El K'iche'.

Interview questions were first written in English to be read over by committee members. Once approved, I made careful efforts to translate the questions into Spanish, ensuring through careful word-choice that the general message and tone stayed the same. However, noting that there may be linguistic differences between Mexican and Guatemalan Spanish – especially among Indigenous workers who speak Spanish as a second language – I drafted two or three variations of the same question. This approach was particularly successful for clarifying more challenging interview questions, such as those where I asked participants to reflect on their Indigenous ancestry. I concluded all interviews with three questions. First, I asked interview participants if they had a message they would like to convey to Canadians who may not know anything about migrant farmworkers or Guatemala.[16] Then, I asked participants if they had anything they would like to add – either because we didn't cover it in the interview, or because it was important enough to emphasize. Lastly, I asked if they had any questions for me. Completing the interview with these three questions ensured that participants' voices were centered throughout the project and gave them room to gain clarification from me on any matter that might have emerged throughout the interviews. To ensure that the research followed ethical protocols, I provided participants with honoraria to compensate them for their time and knowledge. In Guatemala, honoraria were bags of grocery staples, and in Metro Vancouver they were $50 grocery store gift cards. Interviews provided valuable insights on the social lives of migrant farmworkers, and these were enriched with participant observation data describing lively experiences in Guatemala.

Following fieldwork, I typed up fieldnotes and transcribed interview transcripts to facilitate data analysis. Using Nvivo, I took an iterative approach at analysis, using the interview guides to create parent codes, then forming new child codes as sub-themes

[16] These messages are compiled in chapter 5 as a way of ending my thesis with the words of migrant farmworkers.

emerged. Table 1.1 provides a brief breakdown of some of these codes. By coding interviews and fieldnotes together, I made connections across field sites and migration journeys, producing one set of cohesive findings. Further, to unsettle linear notions of time that are irreconcilable with Indigenous ways-of-knowing, this thesis is not written in chronological order but rather integrates findings thematically.

Table 1.1. Example of Parent & Child Codes

Parent Code	Child Codes	Description
Mayanness	Traje, weaving & ceremonies Food (corn) Language ability, retention & loss Change & migration	How participants explained and understood what it means to be Mayan
Issues in Guatemala	Discrimination Corruption, danger & Illness Poverty	How participants articulated the issues they encountered in Guatemala
Issues in Canada	Discrimination & language barriers Physical & emotional discomfort Invisibility Unfair employment practices	How participants articulated the issues they encountered as migrant farmworkers in Canada
Context for migration in Canada	Demands & demographics Motivations & dreams First impressions Messages to Canadians	Background information on the experiences of migrant farmworkers in Canada

In sum, by travelling to Guatemala and across Metro Vancouver, I met with migrant farmworkers who were eager to talk about their experiences in Canada. With the support of local community organizers, my research was founded in community and political work. These connections made it possible for me to recruit workers and produce meaningful findings. In the next chapter, I attempt to provide a window into the context of Guatemala, highlighting a bloody colonial history and foregrounding the conditions that compel migrant farmworkers to leave their home to begin with.

Chapter 2.

What is 'Home'? Historical Context & Contemporary Life

To better understand the experiences of Guatemalan migrant farmworkers, it is imperative to situate where they come from – not only geographically, but also historically and socially. In this chapter, I provide some brief context. I begin by briefly describing ethnicity in Guatemala, grounding this discourse in colonialism, including the 1960-1996 civil war. In the aftermath of this war, two processes occurred simultaneously: the rise of a pan-Mayan identity, and the proliferation of neoliberal policies that enabled Canada's labour migration program to spread into Guatemala. I conclude this chapter by discussing contemporary living conditions in post-war Guatemala, highlighting the social and economic factors that drive waves of migration to both Canada and the United States. This background provides a valuable starting point for understanding the experiences of migrant farmworkers in Canada, including how they create a sense of place through daily practices and social exchanges.

First, participants came from different departments in Guatemala. I began my research with preliminary fieldwork in the Department of Chimaltenango in Guatemala, located in the highlands just west of Guatemala City. According to the last Guatemalan national census in 2018, the Department of Chimaltenango had 615,776 residents, 54% (332,519) of whom live in urban areas with the most populous city being the capital, Chimaltenango. Of Guatemala's twenty departments, the Department of Chimaltenango has the fourth largest Mayan population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2018). In fact, more than three-quarters (480,305) of its residents are Indigenous Maya, 96% of whom are Kaqchikel (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2018), a Maya people with their own distinct ancestral language, governance, and territory. Further, more than a third (190,890) of residents speak Kaqchikel as a first language. Following fieldwork in the Department of Chimaltenango, I conducted interviews with Guatemalan migrant farmworkers in Metro Vancouver. Interview participants were from five different departments. Almost all participants were from the Highlands region including from the Departments of Chimaltenango, Sacatepéquez, and Quiché. A few were from northeast Guatemala including the Departments of Zacapa and El Progreso. A map in Appendix A

highlights the Department of Chimaltenango, as well as some relevant regions that will be discussed in chapter four. While my fieldwork focuses purely on the Department of Chimaltenango, interview participants in Metro Vancouver originate from an array of departments in the highlands and eastern regions of Guatemala.

Figure 1. Photo taken in the Department of Chimaltenango, with Lake Atitlán peeking through the right

2.1. Ethnicity and the Context of Guatemala

One of the defining characteristics of Guatemala – which has made it an attractive site for ethnographers and tourists alike – is the vibrant Indigenous nations whose connection to those lands extends long before European colonization. Whereas these Indigenous nations have long histories of self-governance, they are regarded by the Guatemalan state as ethnic and linguistic minorities. According to the Guatemalan census, there are five recognized distinct cultural groups within the nation-state: Maya, Garifuna, Xinka, Afro-descendants, and *ladinos* (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Guatemala, 2018). Census findings indicate that 42% of the population is Mayan, a category that encompasses more than twenty groups with distinct languages, as well as governance structures rooted in ancestral knowledge and connections to land. Mayan peoples are not contained within the borders of Guatemala and instead expand into Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, and Belize (Castellanos, 2023). Garifunas are Afro-Indigenous peoples originally from the island of St. Vincent (Minority Rights Group International, 2017), and the Xinca are an Indigenous group based between the border of Guatemala and El Salvador (Fuentes, 2015). Together with Afro-descendants,

Garifunas and Xincas make up approximately 2% of the population of Guatemala, according to the latest census (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Guatemala, 2018). *Ladinos* are a cultural group encompassing Guatemalans of European descent who have historically yielded great structural power, as well as Indigenous and *mestizo* (mixed) people who have culturally assimilated into Hispanic norms. Reportedly, 56% of the Guatemalan population is *ladino* (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Guatemala, 2018). In sum, according to the national census, the vast majority of the Guatemalan population is Mayan and *ladino,* although there are enclaves of Garifuna, Xinca, and Afro-descendant communities.

Throughout this thesis, I use the term ethnicity to describe how migrant farmworkers understand and discuss their own identity. By using the term ethnicity, I draw on the work of sociologist Richard Jenkins (1997) who understands ethnicity as the output of cultural belonging, self-identification, as well as power-laden social categorization. Ethnicity as a product of comparison was evident in the context of fieldwork in Guatemala where, upon being asked what it means to be Mayan, one interview participant responded humorously that "We are not *ladinos"* (Ramon). In contrast, during focus group interviews with Mayans from different departments, they more often identified with their specific nations such as Kaqchikel or Quiché. In this example, Mayans distinguish each other through linguistic comparison but form a pan-Mayan group when compared to *ladinos.* Ethnicity is not only the product of self-identification; it is also the outcome of social categorization wherein one group ascribes another with an identity (Jenkins, 1997). For instance, Mayan anthropologist Victor Montejo (2005) argues that in their colonization efforts, the Spanish forged the ideological and discursive tool of *'el Indio'* (the Indian) to present Indigenous peoples as backwards and affirm colonial sovereignty to the lands originally governed by the Mayan. Montejo's (2005) analysis of '*el Indio'* exemplifies how processes of social categorization can be wielded by those with the power to define others and, in turn, maintain class differentiations and territorial boundaries (Jenkins, 1997). Analyses of ethnic identity must account for the role of power in identity formation.

Noting how identity is laden in historic and ongoing power dynamics, I sought to determine how interview participants saw their own ethnic background. As a white Mexican, I avoided leading with direct questions about Indigenous ancestry so that participants would not fear that I would be prejudiced against them. Instead, early in the

interviews, I asked participants what languages they spoke – interested to see if any spoke a Mayan language. Participants reported a mix of language abilities. Some spoke Spanish and were semi-fluent in a Mayan language: "Well, I only speak Spanish and a little bit of Kaqchikel" (Abram). However, Indigenous language fluency varied per *aldea* (village). In one group interview, two Mayan participants discussed these differences:

> Christian: "[L]ately I'm noticing that almost all children [in my *aldea* in the Department of Chimaltenango] speak Spanish … so [Kaqchikel] is practiced very little".
>
> Ramon: "In the *aldea* where I live, we don't always use Spanish. Just the dialect [K'iche']. The whole community – even in my family – we also use it [K'iche'] … When my kids leave, they learn a little bit of Spanish. But we hardly ever use it. It's not customary because … [using Spanish] is not acceptable.
>
> Regina: "It is not acceptable? What does that mean?"
>
> Ramon: "For example, if they speak Spanish, then they say we're losing our culture. So, we're better off using our dialect [K'iche'], and so on."

Christian is from the Department of Chimaltenango, and Ramon is from the Department of El Quiché – both in the eastern Mayan highlands. Although these areas are home to two distinct Indigenous nations (Kaqchikel and K'iche'), both Christian and Ramon express concerns that younger generations are losing Indigenous fluency. To counter this loss of language fluency, use of Spanish is framed as unacceptable in Ramon's *aldea* in El Quiché. There, K'iche' is used in everyday life, and children only learn Spanish upon leaving the *aldea.* In contrast, in Christian's *aldea* in the Department of Chimaltenango, Spanish is now used over Kaqchikel. This exchange captures why some participants may have different levels of Indigenous language-fluency. After participants clarified whether they or their family members could speak a Mayan language, I asked, in a more direct manner, if they considered themselves Mayan and/or Indigenous. Starting this process by asking about language and then narrowing in on ethnic identity let participants articulate their connection to Mayanness and Indigeneity more generally.

In Metro Vancouver, not all participants could speak an Indigenous language or even self-identified as Indigenous. The two focus groups I conducted (with three participants each) had both Mayan and non-Indigenous migrant farmworkers, fostering unexpected and stimulating conversations about ethnicity and belonging. For instance, after I asked a focus group what languages they could speak, one participant replied:

> "Only Spanish. In the eastern area, only Spanish … there is almost no cultural diversity, unlike in the west or south, where there are many dialects. There's a lot of Mam, Kaqchikel – there's a lot. And it's like they really embraced those cultures, whereas in our case, it's rare to see" (Moises).

I asked these participants who only spoke Spanish if they identified as *ladinos,* and they responded:

> Moises: "Yes, that's what they call it, but I don't really know what to call us. We're kind of a mix."
>
> Luis: "A mix. Yes, yes. The word '*mestizo'* is used."

In a later interview, another migrant farmworker from the eastern Department of Zacapa had a similar response:

> "I am *ladino-mestizo*. That's how cultures are. There are two types of *ladinos*: a *ladino* from the capital and one from the east. I am from the east" (Alejandro).

Interviews revealed that migrant farmworkers from the eastern departments of Guatemala did not see themselves as Indigenous or fully-*ladino*, rather, they drew from the language of *mestizaje* to explain their own ethnic identity. [17]

What does it mean when migrant farmworkers say they are *mestizo? Mestizos* are mixed race people with Indigenous and Spanish ancestry (Paredes, 2017). The term originated out of Spanish caste systems that placed Indigenous peoples at the bottom and descendants of the Spanish at the top (Paredes, 2017). As the product of ethnic caste systems, *mestizaje* is subject to racial hierarchies, and *mestizos* with 'whiter' features have greater structural power than those who are perceived as Black or Indigenous (Paredes, 2017). By drawing from the language of *mestizaje,* migrant farmworkers show that understanding of identity in Guatemala are sometimes more complicated than the typical five-ethnicity model used by the National Institute of

[17] Guatemalan anthropologist Christia Little-Siebold (2001) in the eastern Department of Chiquimula also found that participants did not use the terms Indigenous or *ladino,* and instead created their own terminology based on bloodline and skin colour. Interestingly, according to the Guatemalan census, these departments are home to large numbers of *ladino* people. This juxtaposition indicates that the Guatemalan census is sanitizing a range of identities – including that of *mestizos* – under the all-encompassing marker of *ladino.*

Statistics (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, INE), or the Indigenous/*ladino* binary often applied to Guatemala by social science researchers.

2.2. The 1960-1996 Guatemalan Civil War

As argued in the section above, power is one of the most important elements when it comes to defining ethnic groups. *Ladinos* have long held great structural power in Guatemala. Starting in the mid-1800s, the *ladino*-centric Guatemalan state facilitated the appropriation of land for coffee plantations called *latifundos*, often seizing Indigenous *aldeas* and exploiting Indigenous enslaved labour (Handy, 1998). *Latifundos* were so extensive that, according to the 1950 national census, 72% of all agricultural land in Guatemala was owned by two families (Handy, 1998). The *latifundo* system ran rampant for over a hundred years and was not challenged until the 1950s, when the first democratically elected President in Guatemala, Juan Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, introduced a new law called the Agrarian Reform Bill which intended to end the *latifundo* system and redistribute to land to Indigenous *aldeas* (Handy, 1998). The bill was passed in 1952 (Handy, 1998). The *latifundo* system affirmed the right of *ladino* people to extract and exploit Indigenous peoples and lands, capitalizing off centuries of colonialism and white supremacy.

Rather than rectifying generations of structural violence, the Agrarian Reform Bill ushered in a new era of violence in Guatemala. Indeed, controversy ensued when Árbenz's government began expropriating land owned by the United Fruit Company (now Chiquita Brands International) (Handy, 1998). Backed up by the United Fruit Company and the United States Government, in 1954 far-right military leader Carlos Castillo Armas staged a successful coup against Árbenz's democratically elected government – establishing a new period of brutal military dictatorship (Handy, 1998; Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999). Castillo Armas ushered in anti-communist legislation outlawing political activism and consolidating power to the military (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999). In 1960, the civil war officially began when the left-wing Guatemalan Labour Party attempted a failed coup against the right-wing government (Sullivan, 2012). Full-fledged armed confrontation began in 1962 under the leadership of President Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999). This period of tensions was not only the result of national conflict; rather, it was an outcome of the cold war during which US foreign policy promoted anti-communist policies

(Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999). In fact, the US supported right-wing political actors in Guatemala, even providing military assistance by reinforcing national intelligence and training the officer corps in counterinsurgency techniques (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999).[18] In sum, global geopolitical tensions destabilized Guatemala, ushering in decades of political repression and extermination.

After the armed confrontations of the early 1960s, the civil war was relatively quiet until the late-1970s, when the left-wing Guatemalan Army of the Poor (EGP) began working in the traditional territories of the Q'eqchi', K'iche', and Poqomchi' nations in the departments of Alta Verapaz and Quiché (Sullivan, 2012). The army responded by massacring Indigenous villages near the frontlines of the conflict (Sullivan, 2012). The bloodiest military operations occurred from 1978-1985 under President Fernando Romeo Lucas García. During this time, the army and private death squads hired by wealthy landowners utilized scorched earth tactics to destroy more than 400 Mayan villages in the departments of Quiché, Huehuetenango, Chimaltenango, Alta and Baja Verapaz (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999; University of Southern California Shoah Foundation, 2025).[19] In the 1990s, after this period of outright murders and disappearances ended, Mayan communities continued to live in a state of perpetual fear (Green, 1995). In a context where entire Mayan communities were slaughtered for the mere whispers of real or assumed ties to the rebel militia, silence became a survival tactic (Green, 1995). In 1996, the signing of the Guatemalan Peace Accords marked an end to the civil war; however, the long decades of violence left a shadow over the state – including among Mayan communities that were shattered by the murders, and displaced peoples who were now far from home.

[18] Anti-communist sentiments created the idea of the 'internal enemy' which fueled state violence (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999). However, post-war investigations have revealed that the Guatemalan state never believed that left-wing guerilla groups represented a real threat; instead, through the image of the internal enemy, the state magnified the threat of insurgency to justify the annihilation of all opposition (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999).

[19] An estimated 150,000 people were killed or disappeared and buried in unmarked graves (University of Southern California Shoah Foundation, 2025), and 500,000 to a million and a half people were internally and externally displaced (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999). About 150,000 people sought safety in Mexico, a third of whom lived in camps and were given refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999).

Context on the Guatemalan civil war is crucial for two main reasons. First, interview participants were deeply impacted by the civil war, most having survived the war themselves and others being first generation survivors. Many participants had lost loved ones in the war, and one Mayan community organizer I met in Guatemala had been forcibly recruited into the state military in his youth. Second, the lingering outcomes of the Guatemalan civil war impacts peoples' conceptions of home, both in their own *aldeas* and in Canada. For instance, one K'iche' migrant farmworker who survived the civil war and had lived in Metro Vancouver for nine years explained that one of the adjustments of living in Canada was being surrounded by *ladino* people:

> Ramon: "Here they are all *ladino*, and we have to get used to being here."
>
> Regina: "Here, the Canadians are all *ladinos*?"
>
> Ramon: "Yes."

Ramon was born in the department of El Quiché, one of the main sites of violence during the peak of the Guatemalan civil war. Although he comes from an Indigenous *aldea,* Ramon is surrounded by non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, including white Canadians who he sees as *ladino.* To understand how Ramon perceives life in Canada, it is not enough to look at contemporary living conditions; rather, his experiences must be situated within a historical backdrop, accounting for early life stories that have molded his understanding of self and identity. As explored in the next chapter, these earlier histories account not only for crises like the civil war, but for the economic and social transformations that have taken place in post-war Guatemala.

2.3. Post-War Guatemala: Neoliberal Capitalism & Mayan Resurgence

Post-war Guatemala has embraced two significant changes: the rise of neoliberal capitalism, and the proliferation of a pan-Mayan identity. Prior to the ratification of the 1996 Guatemalan Peace Accords, the Guatemalan state began negotiating trade agreements with the Global North that opened the nation-state up to foreign economic interests (Fischer, 1996). Like the *latifundos* of the mid-1800s, neoliberal policies have facilitated the appropriation of Indigenous lands, mostly for resource extraction (Fischer,

1996).[20] As part of this move towards privatization, the Guatemalan economy has been subsidized through labour migration (Smith, 2015), with remittance payments supporting local development (Popkin, 2003). While remittances sent to Guatemala are not taxable income, since the late 1990s the nation-state has nevertheless become reliant on labour migration to strengthen and support local economies (Popkin, 2003). In turn, the Canadian state has profited off the importation of this cheap labour to subsize its agricultural industry.

As these economic changes went underway, Mayan activists and intellectuals were gathering openly for the first time in decades. Now with the freedom to discuss their own nationhood, these thinkers popularized a pan-Mayan identity based on shared history and culture (Montejo, 2005). Some shared elements include, for example, the ability to speak a language based on proto-Maya; a belief in Mayan cosmologies, such as the sacred cardinal directions; and direct ancestry to the ancient Mayan civilization (Montejo, 2005). During new dialogues about Mayan identity, conversations were mostly male led, excluding Mayan women. Ironically, while Mayan women are kept separate from the political sphere, notions and representations of Indigeneity are highly gendered. For instance, a prominent visible marker of Mayan-identity is a unique attire called *traje típico* (traditional clothing) *(*Nelson, 1999).[21] In many parts of Guatemala, including the *aldeas* I visited, only women continue to wear *traje* in their day-to-day lives. On the other-hand, men typically wear t-shirts and jeans. Multiple anthropologists have noted that Mayan women – who are often rural, monolingual, and wear *traje* -- are associated with authentic representations of Indigenous identity (Nelson, 1996; De la Cadena, 1995, French, 2010). Male Mayan activists and intellectuals, who have become increasingly urban, refer to this idealized image of Mayan womanhood to affirm their own Indigenous identity and assert a connection to traditional customs (Nelson, 1996, De la Cadena, 1995; French, 2010). In her research in the Department of Chimaltenango, anthropologist Brigittine M. French (2010) shows, however, that in larger cities, many Mayan women are monolinguistic Spanish-speakers, challenging gendered depictions of

[20] As of 2024, there are 345 mining licenses in Guatemala, and 592 more under consideration (Lakhani, 2025). Many of these mining projects are Canadian owned, including the controversial Escobal silver mine in the Department of Santa Rosa. Indigenous Xincans have protested the Escobal mine, even garnering the support of First Nations in BC (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2025).

[21] Traje is made up of three central pieces: hand-woven blouses called *huipils*; long strands of fabric rolled into skirts called *cortes*; and *fajas*, woven sashes that display intricate designs.

contemporary Indigenous identity. In sum, whereas Mayan women have been excluded from activist and intellectual circles, their identity is associated with traditional customs and, in many ways, affirms men's claims to Indigeneity.

Figure 2. A loom with a colourful *faja* decorated with flowers

Many of the female former migrant farmworkers Encalada Grez and I visited were weavers and proudly crafted their own *traje.*

In sum, following the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords, two changes occurred simultaneously: the expansion of neoliberal policies within Guatemala, and the emergence of a pan-Mayan identity. In her project on the experiences of Mayan migrant farmworkers in Guatemala, Dr. Encalada Grez pays careful consideration into these overlapping factors. In my own project, these changes provide contextual information explaining why temporary migration has become embedded into Guatemala's economy, and what it means to affirm that many of these migrants are Mayan.

2.4. Contemporary Living Conditions

Although the signing of the 1996 Guatemalan Peace Accords ushered in rapid changes, interview participants were more concerned with everyday contemporary living

conditions that led them to migrate to Canada in the first place. Participants had mixed feelings about their home communities, expressing great love for their families while being frustrated about safety and economic woes. Regarding safety, many participants had been deeply impacted by acts of violence in their communities. For instance, Ana, my host in the Department of Chimaltenango, had experienced a devastating loss when her father – a baker who travelled the region selling bread – was mugged and killed. While Ana's husband has already worked five seasons in Quebec, she dreams of coming to Canada too so that she can provide a better life for her children. The week before I visited Guatemala, another injustice occurred when Ana's brother in-law, Adrián, was unlawfully detained by the police without a trial. While he was in jail, Adrián's family was extorted by prison guards in exchange for his safety. Adrián was eventually released, but the prison guards refused to return his personal identification, meaning that they still had access to his full name and address. As I conducted fieldwork with Adrián and his family, they continued to be contacted by extortionists who demanded more money, now as a preventive measure for them to avoid further harm. Familial concerns for safety were juxtaposed with love for one's community, producing complex narratives about what it means to live in Guatemala.

Numerous interview participants attested that corrupt political and judicial systems in Guatemala limited their life chances and thus thwarted their paths to success. Further, many people I met feared for their safety and the well-being of their loved ones. In the Department of Chimaltenango, anxieties about crime and corruption were not discussed in the context of anti-Indigenous racism – although all participants were Kaqchikel Mayan. Rather, the central contentions appeared to be between the criminals – including petty thieves and corrupt officials – who exploit and benefit from regular citizens. Adrián, upon telling me the story of his captivity, summarized the state of disruption in Guatemala by adding: "When you're being fair, you're treated worse than when you are a thief." In depictions of crime and corruption in Guatemala, participants depicted an upside-down country, in which 'being good' is a barrier for getting ahead.

The overall biggest motivation for leaving Guatemala, however, were low-wages and unemployment coupled with the high cost of living. According to the IOM (2023), 86% of Guatemalan migrants leave the nation-state to improve their economic standing. In the Department of Chimaltenango, many of the families I met were small-scale agriculturalists who rented land, unable to make any purchases without becoming deeply

indebted. These families had never owned land, as farming plots were first held communally by their villages prior to the rampant state-sanctioned expropriation of Indigenous land from 1871 to 1944 (Handy, 1998). Inequitable land access continues shaping the lives of Mayan agriculturalists, as many migrant farmworkers I met were forced to migrate to pay off these debts. Meanwhile, those who owned small plots of land were still unable to live off their harvests due to the high cost of living. The high cost of living is particularly visible in food prices, which skyrocketed in mid-2024, with the cost of basic fruits and vegetables like potatoes, tomatoes, and onions increasingly rapidly (Domínguez, 2024). Meanwhile, minimum wage has not increased to match inflation (Domínguez, 2024). One former migrant farmworker who now relies on small-scale agriculture explained: “One does not earn money here [in Guatemala]. Yes, one works *a lot*, but one does not earn money” (Josefa). Further, many people I spoke with throughout the Department of Chimaltenango also described they were *luchando* (fighting) or *battalando* (battling) to survive in Guatemala. Unable to live off small-scale agriculture, rural families in the Department of Chimaltenango have few employment prospects.

Figure 3. A *milpa* (small farming field) in the Department of Chimaltenango

In the highlands, one alternative to working in agriculture is seeking employment in the nearby *maquilas* (factories where raw materials are assembled into goods). As of January 2025, *maquila* workers in Guatemala working the standard workweek of fourty-eight hours a week are only entitled to a monthly minimum wage of Q. 3,097.21 ($550 CAD), almost Q. 500 ($90 CAD) less than all other wage workers (Ministerio de Trabajo

y Previsión Social de Guatemala, 2025; Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social de Guatemala, 2024). Meanwhile, migrant farmworkers in BC working forty-hours per week earn around $2,199.73 CAD per month (Q. 12,122.81).[22] In other words, migrant farmworkers in Canada earn almost four times as much per month as *maquila* workers. In sum, small-scale agriculture and *maquila* work has nowhere near the earning capacity of migrant farmwork.

The extent of economic necessity is evident in that, on their coveted days off, migrant farmworkers are busy dealing with investment opportunities and business transactions to improve their economic standing in Guatemala. This additional labour – performed across transnational boundaries– has not been well documented in literature about migrant farmworkers. Some migrant farmworkers even hire their relatives to oversee the construction of new businesses while they are abroad, and thus a portion of their wages go to reimbursing their family members for their labour. In Guatemala, some of the former migrant farmworkers I meet have been able to establish their own businesses, such as local shipping operations; and storefronts selling clothing, groceries, and hardware items. Participants saw these business ventures as a retirement plan because, as discussed in chapter 3, they are unable to access payments from the Canadian Pension Plan. By establishing their own business, migrant farmworkers ensure they have sustained income so that one day, they can stay in Guatemala without having to leave their families behind.

2.5. Discussion

In this chapter, I explore Guatemala from multiple avenues to better understand where migrant farmworkers come from. I begin with an explanation of place, briefly describing the departments from which interview participants originate. While I conducted fieldwork exclusively in the Department of Chimaltenango, interview participants in Metro Vancouver came from an array of departments in the western highlands and eastern Guatemala. I then provide a preliminary overview of ethnicity in

[22] In BC, migrant farmworkers are paid a minimum wage of $17.40 per month. This figure assumes they are working forty hours per week and accounts for tax (20.06% of gross income), Employment Insurance (1.63% of gross income), and Canadian Pension Plan (5.95% of gross income) deductions. As discussed in Chapter 3, migrant farmworkers are unable to access Employment Insurance and are almost entirely barred from Canadian Pension Plan payments.

Guatemala. While Encalada Grez's research provides a much more in-depth reading into Indigenous identity through the lens of hemispheric settler-colonialism, I accentuate how participants describe their ethnicity through self-identification, processes of comparison, and the language of *mestizaje.* Reckoning with Richard Jenkin's (1997) argument that ethnicity is also the outcome of power-laden categorization, I provide a brief outline of Guatemala's civil war. This background supports upcoming analyses of how migrant farmworkers create a sense of place in Canada.

Even though my research does not focus on the civil war, this internal conflict has undoubtedly impacted my work. Indeed, the Department of Chimaltenango was one of the most affected regions during the peak period of violence in the 1980s, and all interview participants were either survivors or first-generation survivors of the conflict. Further, when migrant farmworkers come to Canada, they bring with them the social dynamics pertinent to post-war Guatemala, such as the surge of a shared pan-Mayan identity that emerged after the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords. Simultaneously, neoliberal policies have facilitated foreign encroachment on Mayan lands and the development of labour migration programs like those in Canada (Fischer, 1996; Smith, 2015). In other words, the Agricultural Stream has expanded into Guatemala during a time of state transformation – from a military-regime to neoliberal capitalism, and from outright ethnic cleansing to Indigenous resurgence.

Shifting to contemporary times, I outline some of the reasons why migrant farmworkers feel compelled to migrate to Canada. While some participants were concerned about safety and corruption, the primary motivation for migration was economic necessity. Participants were small-scale agriculturalists who could not live from the product of their land. Outside agriculture, job prospects were limited to low-wage work such as that in *maquilas,* where the daily income is not enough to cover even the most basic necessities. These economic motivations drive participants to build businesses in their home communities even while working in Canada – an undoubtedly strenuous task. With this context in mind, I now turn to the following questions: What are the experiences of Guatemalan migrant farmworkers once they arrive in Canada? How do they organize themselves within the spatial bounds of the *finca*? And is it possible for them to traverse this boundary, or are they wholly contained within the border of the farm?

Chapter 3.

Social Organization Within and Across *Finca* Borders

Through the TFW Program, the Canadian government has created different classes of workers with uneven access to rights and services. For instance, while all migrant farmworkers pay into Employment Insurance (EI), they are excluded from accessing these benefits and can be fired at any time without any form of financial support (Encalada Grez, 2006). An ongoing class action lawsuit filed in 2023 against the Canadian Government alleges that tying workers to employers and barring them from accessing EI violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Koski Minski Law, 2025). Similarly, migrant farmworkers pay into the Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) but are not eligible to receive payment unless they work in Canada for ten consecutive years. Meanwhile, Canadian citizens can access CPP at the age of sixty regardless of how long they worked in the country. Requiring migrant farmworkers to work in Canada for ten consecutive years before being able to access CPP is a significant barrier as migrant farmworkers have no control over whether their employers renew their contracts in time. Some participants who have worked in Canada for more than ten years are ineligible for CPP because there was a momentary lapse in their contract that forced them to return to Guatemala, at which point the ten-year requirement is reset. Migrant farmworkers also do not receive overtime or statutory holiday pay. Interview participants asked, if Canada is so reliant on their labour, why don't they receive the same compensation as all other workers?

To emphasize Canada's inequitable compensation structure, I will calculate how much interview participants in Metro Vancouver are paid for their labour compared to Canadian citizens. First, migrant farmworkers have different work schedules depending on the farm they work at, but most have at least one day of rest per week and work eight-to-ten-hour shifts. Assuming it is a busy week, and migrant farmworkers work seventy-hours (seven ten-hour shifts) at the provincial minimum-wage of $17.85/hour including EI (1.66%) and CPP (5.95%) deductions, migrant farmworkers are paid $1,154.01/week. However, if these migrant farmworkers were entitled to overtime, their weekly net income would be $1,423.49 after EI and CPP deductions – an extra

$269.48.[23] Further, if they were not deducted EI and CPP, these workers would save an extra $95. In other words, according to the current employment structure and in these specific circumstances where migrant farmworkers work seventy-hours a week at minimum wage, they are paid a net income of $1,154.01/week but subsidize Canada's economy by $364.48/week by contributing to services they cannot access and being ineligible for overtime pay. Note that this preliminary calculation does not account for provincial or federal income taxes, which migrant farmworkers of course pay into.

Beyond arguing that the TFW Program enforces differential access to services and compensation, in this chapter I contend that it also creates unique spatial boundaries that constrict the daily lives of migrant farmworkers. I call these boundaries '*finca* borders', using the term *finca* rather than farm or *farma* (a term used more commonly by Mexican workers) to draw directly from the language used by Guatemalans. A Mayan Elder in the Department of Chimaltenango explained to me that Mayans have long migrated to *fincas* – referring to coffee plantations in Guatemala. Migrant farmworkers thus draw on language that situates their migration experiences within a broader shared and familial intergenerational history. What does the term *finca* invoke, however, within the context of Canada? First, researchers have documented that migrant farmworkers in Canada live in employer-provided housing, often on-site of the *finca.* These houses are often poorly kept trailers or deteriorating housing units, where employers attempt to cramp as many workers as possible (Encalada Grez, 2006). Living within the boundaries of their workplace means that there is no separation between home and work. As pictured in Figure 2., employers are thus able to survey migrant farmworkers when they are at work, sometimes with equipment like cameras and other recording devices, and other times through informants living in the shared housing units. The TFW Program thus ensures that migrant farmworkers are contained within these *fincas,* legislating a state of surveillance and poor living conditions.

[23] In BC, you are qualified for time-and-a-half payments for any work beyond eight hours per day or forty hours per week.

Figure 4. A *finca* border in Metro Vancouver

The lack of physical infrastructure demarcating the end of the *finca* shows how these sites are hidden in plain sight.

Figure 5. Modular housing unit in BC, where migrant farmworkers are recorded by employers to ensure that no visitors enter the units

Fincas are also sites of fervent antagonisms between workers. Migrant farmworkers are often in competition with one another because the TFW Program allows employers to fire them without reason or compensation (Preibisch & Encalada Grez, 2010). Indeed, in-fighting and competition was evident in the *finca* I visited in Metro Vancouver, where new migrant farmworkers attempt to out-perform their coworkers to

prove they are good workers. One migrant farmworker who had just finished his first two-year season explained:

> "I don't feel like I am here permanently. I work hard because … I want to keep coming, and that's what it's all about here. As you work, you earn the trust of your boss [so] that they keep bringing you" (Abram).

Another source of tension is the enforcement of arbitrary hierarchies by the employer. In the farm I visited in Metro Vancouver, one worker had been designated as the leader of the group because he had worked at the farm for longer and spoke some English. This worker was not paid more than his peers; yet he delegated tasks and was held responsible if anything went wrong. The work leader is also in charge of translating messages across his coworkers and boss. Ramon, who has worked in Canada for nine years and speaks Kaqchikel as a first language, explains that inter-worker translation is often problematic:

> "I mean, I want to learn, but I can barely manage Spanish, so how am I going to learn English? It's really difficult for me. Sometimes we really need it when we have to renew paperwork. Sometimes we have a coworker who speaks English, and he says he'll help us, but sometimes he doesn't – sometimes he leaves us behind … The biggest problem I see here is that sometimes he goes and complains to the bosses, and we don't even know how to defend ourselves."

Because these migrant farmworkers do not receive formal representation from any union or labour board, language barriers between them and their employer inspire feelings of helplessness. While the employer attempts to organize migrant farmworkers based on this hierarchy, in the following sections I highlight that migrant farmworkers have their own mode of organization that does not emphasize ability to speak English as a leadership characteristic. As a result of these conflicting modes of organization, some workers disagreed with and refused to recognize this leadership structure. Inter-worker conflict is kindled by their status as disposable workers as well employer-sanctioned hierarchies.

Another element that creates unique spatial conditions within the *fincas* is that migrant farmworkers are unable to bring their spouses or children with them to Canada. Interview participants in Metro Vancouver return to Guatemala for one month every two years, meaning they spent the vast majority of their time isolated and homesick. The TFW Program isolates migrant farmworkers by barricading them in despondent housing

without the company of their family members. There is great variation to the schedules of migrant farmworkers, meaning that their ability to escape the *finca* is scattered. Migrant farmworkers in greenhouses work year around, yet the peak agricultural season is in the summer when they often work seven days a week, for up to ten hours a day. In contrast, they may only work five days per week in fall, spring, and summer, when day-to-day operations include cleaning and prepping the greenhouses for harvest. On these coveted days off, migrant farmworkers can leave the *finca* and head into nearby cities or towns to shop for their weekly groceries. Few workers have access to employer-provided vehicles, meaning that most walk or bike as their main form of transportation. Leaving the *finca* is thus a coordinated and scheduled effort, mediated by the seasons and workers' own mobilities.

In sum, a spatial analysis of *fincas* reveals that they are sites of enclosure, where migrant farmworkers live under the thumb of their employer. While these divisions can change with political pressure,[24] they produce tangible material conditions that shape the lives of migrant farmworkers in Canada. Meanwhile, the *finca* border is invisible to almost all who pass it – save for farmworkers, employers, and those who know to look for it. To those for whom the *finca* is invisible, its green fields and picturesque plants may even represent tranquility or a romanticism of pastoral life. Providing an alternative representation, in this chapter, I attempt to make the *finca* border visible. I begin by providing a case-study of how migrant farmworkers in one *finca* organize themselves to counter the spatial-implications of the *finca* border. I then highlight the unexpected ways that the *finca* border is breached – both by community organizers and migrant farmworkers themselves. By highlighting the *finca* border, and then showing how it is resisted, I center the brilliance and creativity of migrant farmworkers as they navigate life under employer control.

3.1. *Finca* Social Organization: 'The Group System' & Mayan Cultural Logic

Although the employer in Metro Vancouver attempts to establish a hierarchical model of social organization that places the best English-speaker as a de facto leader,

[24] For instance, in June 2024, migrant caregivers were granted permanent residency upon arrival – a right that has been advocated for since 1979 (Migrant Rights Network, 2024).

migrant farmworkers in this *finca* have devised their own form of organization that draws from Mayan cultural logic. While much of the literature on migrant farmworkers show how they live in substandard conditions, this mode of organization, referred to as 'the group system', shows how even within the most oppressive spaces, migrant farmworkers can strategize to build more livable worlds. I begin this section by describing the group system. Then I introduce the concept of Mayan cultural logic, showcasing that the group system is a reproduction of collectivist values applied within a new context in Canada. I then highlight some of the outcomes of this mode of organizing, including the sharing of household duties and the forging of solidarity.

In practice, the group system is relatively straightforward; it involves migrant farmworkers splitting themselves into collectives of four so that each eight-person housing unit has two collectives. Because each housing unit has only one washroom and kitchen, the collectives facilitate co-habitation. Further, the collectives are structured informally, with each member deciding which collective to join. During my focus group interviews in Metro Vancouver, I learned the functions and benefits of the group system because participants attended these interviews in their collectives. The group system thus facilitated my own research in Metro Vancouver. In sum, the group system is a clearcut mode of social organization in which migrant farmworkers group up to complete daily tasks.

I argue that the group system is informed by Mayan cultural logic, a term proposed by anthropologist Edward F. Fischer (1999) to refer to the specific values and assumptions that underlie Mayan ways-of-knowing. Mayan cultural logic is a shared foundation that is internalized by Mayans and thus mediates their thoughts and behaviours (Fischer, 1999). Although all cultural logic changes over time, its internalization means that it is much more resistant to change than other everyday cultural practices (Fischer, 1999). Mayan cultural logic is the embodied practice of Mayan cosmology and worldviews. As Maya Achi sociologist Vivian M. Jiménez Estrada (2012) explains, Mayan ways-of-knowing are centered on collective responsibilities, rather than the individualistic model of self perpetuated in Euro-Canadian society. Mayan cosmology emphasizes that humans are just one part of a larger universe including spiritual forces as well as the natural environments and more-than-human creatures of Mother Earth. This cosmology calls for Mayans to consider how to develop relationships with these broader forces founded on tenants of balance and equilibrium (Cochoy Alva,

Yac Noj, Yaxón, Tzapinel Cush, Camey Huz, Domingo López, Yac Noj, & Tamup Canil, 2006). One example of the importance of balance and equilibrium is the K'iche' word *Jun Winaq* (One Being), which is used conceptually to describe being whole with the universe (Estrada, 2012). Becoming *Jun Winaq* means working towards equilibrium in both personal relationships and broader modes of social organization. Throughout the remaining section, I highlight how the group system reflects Mayan cultural logic, embodying the values of collectivism and harmony.

In Metro Vancouver, Mayan participants alluded that the group system is an output of shared values taught to them by their families in Guatemala. For instance, one participant explains that respect is pivotal to maintaining inter-group unity:

> "… another thing that comes into play are values, ethics, and morals … from our families … [W]hen we have to clean, we clean, and we know that it has a cost so we can't just come and dirty that place if our colleague has already cleaned it. So, we have a certain respect. If a colleague is cooking, out of respect we're not going to say, 'I don't like this food, or they put too much salt in it, or it's missing salt'" (Alejandro).

Alejandro explains that to maintain inter-group unity, group members must follow the values taught to them by their families, including respect for others. These values are not only embedded in family systems, but are also reflected in some *aldeas,* where neighbours engage in forms of shared labour:

> "For example, there are some [*aldeas]* where the family of a newlywed couple gets together and together they are going to build [a house] … when it's time to go to another house, those same people are going to help each other, and they are not charging money, only the owner of the house has to give food to those who accept it. In the case of farming … let's suppose everyone is going to plant in this field, then everyone helps the other until everyone gets a turn. But it is the *aldea* that creates this dynamic" (Christian).

Just like *aldeas* can create structures of social support, the group system is an intentional practice that requires effort and coordination. Following the values taught to them by their family members and instilled in some *aldeas,* migrant farmworkers who follow the group system see each other as family:

> "[S]ince we're united, we feel like we're among brothers, among family. And that also helps us a lot … We always support each other. That has kept us united, and that's the beautiful thing about it, not just our group – we've seen it in several other groups as well. It's like we become one family. Distance also unites us sometimes, even though it unites us with

> other people … We feel like we are united, like we are between brothers, between family" (Alejandro).

This sense of kinship is fostered by social activities conducted within collectives like, for example, going out for dinner, playing music together, competing in soccer games, and going out to nearby pools or lakes to swim.

Despite the long legacy in Canada of dividing up working workers along racial lines to foster a sense of competition and decrease the potential for solidarity,[25] in the group system Indigenous and non-Indigenous migrant farmworkers live and work together. In fact, one striking feature of the collectives is that, rather than segregating themselves across ethnic lines, Mayan and non-Indigenous migrants often choose to group up together.[26] Further, Mayan migrants do not necessarily group up with other Mayans from the same department or ethno-linguistic group; rather, there is a resounding diversity in the composition of the collectives. Describing the group system, one Mayan migrant farmworker explains, "We all have different thoughts. The bottom line is we're not from the same place" (Jonatán). By working with Encalada Grez, who has visited countless farms in the last twenty-years, I have also learned that the group system is unique to this farm in Metro Vancouver. Conversations with non-Indigenous migrant farmworkers, including Mexican workers across the Lower Mainland of BC and into the Okanagan region, reveal that competition stimulated by the employer is much more successful in eroding any form of bond or solidarity between workers. In sum, the group system is a unique element of this *finca,* facilitating collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers.

Inspired by Mayan cultural logic, the group system accomplishes two main goals. First, it divides household duties so that roommates do not fight for access to shared spaces, such as the kitchen. Each week, one group is responsible for cooking all the meals in the house, pooling their money to buy groceries. One group member is always in charge of making corn *tortillas,* a staple in many Latin American households and consumed with every meal. On special occasions, group members cook *punxin,* a boiled

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[25] For instance, in the Pacific Northwest, fish canneries were split among racial lines, with Asian, Indigenous, and Euro-Canadian workers pitted against one another to further competition (Muszynski, 1988; Frager, 1999).

[26] During my focus group interviews, I learned that one collective was composed of two Mayan and one non-Indigenous participants, while the other was made up of one Mayan and two non-Indigenous participants.

mixture of fruit with cinnamon and hibiscus; *chuchitos,* steamed corn husks with corn-dough and meat fillings; and *pan desabrido,* a crunchy bread. By cooking together, migrant farmworkers share recipes from their hometowns, teaching each other to make beloved traditional dishes. Some participants reported that when they return to Guatemala, they teach their own spouses and family members new recipes taught to them by workers from different departments. Many even add that they now help their wives and mothers cook in Guatemala – a marked change in traditional gender roles, as household duties are generally believed to be a women's role. Other kinds of chores are also shared, such as washing clothes and cleaning up the kitchen, thus lessening the prevalence of household conflict.

A second output of the group system is that it increases inter-group solidarity – a particularly challenging task considering that employers often intentionally pit workers against one another to increase productivity. One interview participant describes:

> "[W]e trust each other a lot. We're more united than anyone else. We're united, and if we cook a meal, we all eat the same food. Not like other people or other farms" (Christian).

The simple act of sitting together and sharing the same food is sufficient to strengthen unity and trust between group members. Daily practices of domestic solidarity – by means of sharing meals and household labour – are then translated into the worksite, where group members are more likely to stand up for one another:

> "Sometimes the boss comes out of nowhere to say something … That's when we come in as a group to defend ourselves. I mean, we put our differences aside" (Jonatán).

By forging solidarity and respect, the group system empowers migrant farmworkers to advocate for one another as a more united front.

In sum, in Metro Vancouver, I witnessed migrant farmworkers organize according to Mayan cultural logic, prioritizing interconnectedness over individualism. As the reproduction of family values and collectivist models of *aldea* social organization, the group model is not necessarily a complex system. Still, the simple act of working as a collective inspires migrant farmworkers to collaborate across ethnic lines, resulting in surprising modes of co-habitation. Lastly, beyond distributing household labour, the group system forges acts of shared solidarity that are then practiced in the job site. The

group system thus exemplifies that migrant farmworkers create livable worlds through daily practices that, while seemingly simple, embody intergenerational knowledge and require creativity, intentionality, and care.

3.2. Community Organizers as *Finca* Infiltrators

Even when migrant farmworkers can organize as a collective – as in the case of the group system -- their lives are still contained within the bounds of the *finca* border. In Metro Vancouver, however, this border is often infiltrated by a robust network of expert community organizers. Many of these organizations assist migrant farmworkers within their own city or regional limits, like Archway Community Services in the Fraser Valley and the South Vancouver Neighbourhood House. Others, like MOSAIC, are settlement agencies that are mostly intended to support permanent residents but offer some resources for migrant workers. There are four organizations, however, that work collaboratively to address province-wide needs: Watari, the Migrant Workers' Center, the BC Federation of Labour (BC Feds), and Migrant Journeys. Operating at a larger geographical scope, these organizations assist one another in crossing the *finca* border to engage with migrant farmworkers in unprecedented ways.

Whereas it is generally assumed that refugees remain permanently marginalized and impoverished, a number have become important leaders and executive directors of social justice organizations that carry out an impressive number of social programs. These efforts are largely due to the work of long-term Guatemalan organizers who began as student activists at a time when the military actively disappeared tens of thousands of 'enemies of the state' (Human Rights Watch, 1995). Facing the threat of assassination, many student activists sought refuge in other countries, including Canada. Some, who arrived in Metro Vancouver in the 1980s, quickly became involved in supporting the Latinx immigrant community in the Downtown Eastside, the most impoverished neighborhood in the city. Through this work, Guatemalan refugees transferred the knowledge and skills they gained in Guatemala to a new context in Canada.

Guatemalan refugees have played a significant role in migrant justice organizing in three ways. First, starting in the 1990s, Guatemalan refugees began playing a significant role in Watari, a counselling and support service organization based out of the

Downtown Eastside that supports Indigenous and at-risk community members.[27] Second, Guatemalan refugees have also held major leadership roles in the Migrant Workers Center, which provides free legal services for migrant farmworkers in BC, and the BC Feds, which represents affiliated unions and provides direct support to migrant farmworkers facing employment grievances.[28] Third, in 2023, members of Watari, the Migrant Workers' Center, and the BC Feds came together to establish a new grassroots organization called Migrant Journeys *(Jornadas Migrantes* in Spanish*)*, creating a new site of grassroots, migrant-led organizing. While Migrant Journeys has more Mexican members, Guatemalan refugees continue playing a monumental role in the organization. Further, the group is composed of immigrants who have been awarded permanent residence or citizenship, as well as a few migrants under temporary work permits, resulting in a leadership model representative of various migratory experiences. Migrant Journeys advocates for migrants across BC, including newcomers, undocumented migrants, and those that are a part of the TFW Program. Through their participation in the Migrant Workers Center, BC Feds, and Migrant Journeys, Guatemalan refugees provide invaluable knowledge and labour on various advocacy efforts.

One of the main mechanisms by which these four organizations cross *finca* borders is through the planning and coordination of dozens of Migrant Worker Health Fairs every year, taking place from the start of the agricultural season in the spring and carrying on across different regions until November. Health Fairs take place in parks, recreational centers, and churches. Each Health Fair is attended by hundreds of migrant

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[27] Under the leadership of Guatemalan refugees, Watari established two programs that were indispensable for crossing *finca* border. First, under the Migrant 2 Migrant Program, Watari staff provide resources and information to migrant farmworkers, often driving long-distances to farms across Metro Vancouver. Second, in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became provincially mandated for all migrant farmworkers to isolate in government-operated hotels for a period of two-weeks upon arriving in Canada. Compounded by anxieties over health and the uncertainty of the pandemic, this form of informal solitary confinement was acutely distressing for migrant farmworkers. In response, and with consent from the provincial government, Watari developed the Pandemic Walks Program, during which Spanish-speaking councilors took migrant farmworkers for daily mental health walks. By meeting and talking with every single migrant farmworker that entered the province, Watari created an unprecedented network of support that, through hard work, has been expanded upon in the last five years.

[28] While migrant farmworkers have historically been excluded from unionization efforts, many are now beginning to unionize under the United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW) (UFCW, 2025). The largest migrant farmworker unionization efforts took place in the summer of 2024, when 394 migrant farmworkers from Highline Mushrooms in Abbotsford, BC, successfully joined UFCW (Nay, 2024).

farmworkers as well as regional service organizations and settlement agencies. The Mexican and Guatemalan consulates also sometimes attend to meet with migrant farmworkers and provide information about their rights in Canada.[29] Tables are set up for migrant farmworkers to receive direct services in English and Spanish, and volunteers provide haircuts, massages, and acupuncture. Healthcare professionals and lawyers also often attend to provide free consultations. In sum, at the Health Fairs, migrant farmworkers can receive support on almost every topic pertinent to life in Canada.

The Health Fairs are not only intended for service provision – they are also celebratory occasions with food, music, and dance. Sometimes local Latinx businesses are hired to cater, and other times volunteers cook traditional stews and rice platters. On special occasions, a Mayan family from Guatemala prepares hundreds of meat-filled *tamales* (steamed corn dough, often with a meat filling). As they eat, migrant farmworkers are entertained by Latinx musicians, such as Vancouver-based singer Chela Tumbao who often dresses in mariachi outfits to sing Mexican classics. Chela Tumbao sweeps everyone up in game and dance, and at the end of the night she passes a microphone around for workers brave enough to sing songs of love and despair into the crowd. The festivities always conclude with a raffle, where migrant farmworkers win donated items such as bikes and gift cards. All in attendance leave sweaty, exhausted, and content. Direct support combined with food and music forges a sense of belonging and mutual community that is wholly absent from most *fincas.* By planning these events and working collaboratively to ensure workers' participation, community organizers infiltrate not only the physical boundaries of the *finca,* but the socio-spatial structures that, by containing migrant farmworkers, exclude them from broader participation in Canadian society.

[29] Mexican workers employed through the SAWP receive direct representation from the consulate, while the Agricultural Stream outsources this responsibly to private recruitment agencies that conduct business behind closed doors. The lack of bureaucracy and government oversight makes the Agricultural Stream particularly attractive to employers, resulting in an increase of Mexican workers employed through this program.

Figure 6. **A Health Fair in a church gymnasium, minutes before migrant farmworkers filled the room**

Figure 7. **A *carnita* (slow-cooked pulled pork) tamal made by a Mayan family in Vancouver and served at a Health Fair**

In Guatemala, I spoke with former migrant farmworkers who remembered the efforts of community organizers to cross *finca* borders. Andrés, who had worked in the Fraser Valley, recounted participating in programs orchestrated by Watari. Although Andrés felt support and solidarity from Watari, he recounts with sadness that he and his coworkers forgot to contact Watari when they were fired without due cause:

> "We never communicated with Watari because we forgot. And during that time, Watari told us, "If you have any problems or if you have any

> questions, talk to us, we'll see how we can help you.' They told that to us migrants."

Andrés and his colleagues were fired when several workers took off from the *finca* in the night to live as undocumented workers. Escaping the *finca* to find work without legal documentation is a gamble, as these workers are even more exposed to workplace abuses and exploitation, and may struggle to find employment and accommodation. Suspicious that all the workers had participated in this breach of the *finca* border, the employer fired all existing staff and recruited an entirely new group of workers. In other words, *finca*-crossings are not always sufficient to protect migrant farmworkers from facing injustices at the hands of employers.

3.3. Friendship Ties Across *Finca* Lines

While community organizers facilitate the infiltration of *finca* borders, migrant farmworkers also take steps to bypass these boundaries through the forging of friendships with people outside the farm. In general, migrant farmworkers have limited time for off-farm socialization, especially considering that most only have one or two days off from work. However, even under time constraints, migrant farmworkers find ways to develop meaningful friendships. One evening during a long drive from one *aldea* to another, our host Gustavo opened up about his five years working in Quebec. Weaving through the nearly pitch-black highway, he remembered having met a group of Colombian and Ecuadorian Canadians at a grocery store. Gustavo quickly befriended the group and was frequently invited for meals at their house. Gustavo was not the only former migrant farmworker who had met new friends in a grocery store. Days later, Encalada Grez and I ventured to another *aldea* further in the highlands, where Spanish was rarely spoken and we could peek Lake Atitlán from the mountains. In this *aldea,* we sat with former migrant farmworkers Josefa and Fabiana, eating bowls of fresh fruit and discussing their time in Canada. Josefa and Fabiana had worked together in Leamington, Ontario, and had also met new friends while shopping. These friends were a Salvadorean couple who would invite the two women over for dinner and would even drive them to the nearby city of Windsor to fish in the river. In sum, although migrant farmworkers spend the vast majority of their time working, there are pockets of time where they venture outside the *finca* and can even meet and develop friendships with people outside the farm.

Migrant farmworkers also develop friendships with non-Latinx Canadians outside of shared languages and cultures. For instance, former migrant farmworker Andrés was walking with a group of his coworkers in the Fraser Valley when they were approached by a "Canadian woman" who was curious about what they were doing and where they were from. One of Andrés' friends spoke English, and the group became acquainted with the woman. Andrés explains that the woman gifted him and his friends bicycles and would ride around with them to nearby towns and lakes. Through the gifting of bicycles, the "Canadian woman" assisted Andrés and his friends in crossing the *finca* border, providing them with new kinds of mobilities previously inaccessible to them. Further, by showing them around nearby landscapes, the "Canadian woman" – likely unintentionally – contested the confinement of migrant farmworkers within *finca* walls, exposing them to new worlds. Beyond inviting migrant farmworkers into entirely new spaces, these friendships facilitate the sharing of cultural knowledge. For instance, while working in Quebec, Gustavo befriended Quebecois workers and shared home-made tortillas with them.[30] Gustavo remembers that some of the workers were shocked to see him eating tortillas, and asked, "Why do you eat corn if it is only for animals?" Gustavo responded, "that [the tortillas] gives you strength." By sharing *tortillas* and talking about food with the Quebecois workers, Gustavo transmitted cultural knowledge foundational to Mayan livelihoods. Friendships between migrant farmworkers and Canadians facilitate the reciprocal exchanges of ideas.

Cross-*finca* friendships are complicated, as many are also labour relations. Even though migrant farmworkers are not legally allowed to conduct any work outside their employment contract, many seek additional informal employment to supplement their earnings. This informal employment can blur the boundary between friendships and income-generating ventures, complicating and commodifying personal relationships. For

[30] Whereas migrant farmworkers in Quebec reported befriending French-Canadians working alongside them in the *finca,* I have yet to see a similar dynamic in Metro Vancouver. After speaking with hundreds of migrant farmworkers at Health Fairs across the Lower Mainland of BC and into the Okanagan, I have learned that a large portion of *fincas* in the province employ both migrant farmworkers from Mexico and/or Guatemala, as well as workers from South Asia. According to Statistics Canada (2010), BC has the greatest diversity in farm operators than any other province in the country, with more than 10% of all farm owners being of a South Asian background. The prevalence of South Asian farmers is likely why many farms employ South Asian workers. However, while migrant farmworkers in BC work alongside South Asians, no interview participants reported forming a kinship tie with these workers. In fact, some interview participants even recounted having interpersonal issues with South Asian workers, as they felt that the South Asian workers were permitted to work at a slower pace than them.

instance, the Salvadorean couple who Josefa and Fabiana met in a grocery store would occasionally hire them to perform domestic duties in their house. Commodified friendships were also apparent in Metro Vancouver, where migrant farmworkers where sometimes hired by a local man named Fred to engage in manual labour:

> "Today, apart from the fact that we help them [and] they give us work, they become our friends. They give us ideas. They call their parents. They are good people" (Jonatán).

Although Jonatán's relationship with Fred involves the exchange of money, it is a familial friendship that involves intergenerational connections. Jonatán explains that Fred and his parents have encouraged him to ask his employer to sponsor his permanent residency application and Jonatán is now considering this possibility for the first time. As in the case of Jonatán, friendships that cross *finca* borders can inspire new ideas that impact migrants' migration trajectories. While friendships might overlap with business-relations, migrant farmworkers still find meaning and advice in these entanglements.

Friendships that cross the *finca* lines are maintained even when migrant farmworkers return to Guatemala. Former migrant farmworkers like Gustavo, Josefa, and Fabiana who had not returned to Canada in many years use social media platforms like Facebook to maintain friendships across time and space. Social media interactions are examples of transborder exchanges that cross nation-states and transcend from the physical to the digital world (Stephen, 2007). By developing and maintaining long-term friendships with Canadians off the *fincas,* migrant farmworkers elude the legislated temporality of the TFW Program, leaving an imprint in the social landscape of Canada that does not dissipate with their return home. Although cross-*finca* friendships defy the constraints of the TFW Program, migrant farmworkers developing these relationships must still navigate employer surveillance and control. For instance, Gustavo explains that his bosses didn't like it when he socialized with the Quebecois workers. Similarly, Andrés' employer became angry when he saw that he and his coworkers were socializing with Canadians:

> "Sometimes we'd sneak out, or sometimes [the employer would] close the gate so no one could come back in. And there were coworkers who, if you helped them, would open the gate from inside."

In sum, while migrant farmworkers develop friendships that defy their enforced temporality, employers often attempt to restrict these social bonds.

3.4. Discussion

In this chapter, I have shown how migrant farmworkers are bound by the logics of the TFW Program and contained within the *finca* walls – removed almost entirely from Canadian society. This containment is facilitated by closed work permits that grant employers structural power over nearly every facet of migrant farmworkers' lives. Further, although migrant farmworkers subsidize Canada's economy with their cheap labour and by paying into services like EI and CPP, policy restricts them from accessing many rights and services. One such right is the ability to live with their families – meaning that migrant farmworkers must endure long-term periods of excruciating family separation. The structures and institutions that prop up the state of Canada are thus divided along fabricated categories, demarcating who is allowed to belong and who must exist in the margins. Beyond being sites of enclosure, *fincas* host fervent competition, where employers intentionally create rifts among workers to restrict solidarity. Forced to compete and follow arbitrary hierarchies, migrant farmworkers are isolated even from one another. Perhaps the most chilling aspect of the *finca* border, however, is that it is entirely invisible to nearly all Canadians, as its boundaries are hidden in plain sight. Their exclusion from Canadian society and containment within the hidden boundaries of the *finca* make migrant farmworkers an especially vulnerable population.

Rather than assuming that the *finca* is a totalizing border, however, I explore how migrant farmworkers create a sense of place through exchanges within and outside its walls. In this chapter, I highlight three key findings. First, in one *finca* I visited in Metro Vancouver, Mayan and *mestizo* workers have constructed a home through what they call 'the group system'. In the group system, migrant farmworkers split into collectives of four, where they share household duties and financial responsibilities, taking turns feeding the entire eight-person household. Migrant farmworkers in this farm have not split themselves across ethnic or regional lines, but instead formed collectives based on shared values, illustrating modes of social organization that counter the competitive model of the TFW program. Importantly, I argue that the group system is informed by Mayan cultural logics that emphasize collectivism over individualism. Situated within the *finca* borders, the group system decreases the prevalence of household conflicts and builds solidarity between the workers. In sum, rather than accepting the volatile

conditions of the *finca,* some migrant farmworkers have worked together to forge new systems of organization that counter the exploitative measures of the TFW Program.

Second, I argue that community organizers are experts at infiltrating the *finca* border. I show that grassroots knowledge is informed by revolutionary practices from the Guatemalan student movement, highlighting the Health Fairs as a key site of *finca* border-crossings. Not only are the Health Fairs sites of education where migrant farmworkers can receive direct services – they are also joyful environments where migrant farmworkers are regarded as fully fledged individuals with bodies that move for pleasure, not for work. However, by highlighting the *finca* as a kind of border, I conclude that it can only be infiltrated through deliberate means. Andrés' unjust firing shows that, being such a totalizing landscape, the *finca* cannot be crossed if migrant farmworkers are not always thinking about their rights in Canada. Still, by moving across the *finca* walls, community organizers enable migrant farmworkers to construct a sense of home outside the gaze of their employers.

A third finding is that migrant farmworkers create livable worlds in Canada through friendships developed outside the *finca.* Friendships with Latinx Canadians are facilitated by like-languages and cultural values, while relationships with non-Latinx Canadians often result out of a shared curiosity and eagerness to connect. In these friendships, migrant farmworkers exchange forms of cultural knowledge and receive advice that impacts their own migration trajectories. Using social media, these friendships surpass migrants' own stay in Canada, following them back home where ties are maintained through Facebook and WhatsApp communication. Developing friendships across *finca* lines, however, comes with its own set of challenges, as employers take great lengths to restrict migrant farmworkers from socializing. Still, by developing social networks outside the *finca* walls, migrant farmworkers engage in homing processes that enable them to feel more at place in Canada.

Looking at ethnic and *finca* borders reveals unexpected outcomes about the social lives of migrant farmworkers; yet, what if we direct our attention to exchanges across nation-state borders? A broader analysis of transnational exchanges reveals not only how migrant farmworkers create livable worlds in Canada, but how their own communities are shifting because of migration. This focus on cross-state exchanges is more common within the disciplines of sociology (Boccagni, 2016), as well as in

anthropology (Rivera-Salgado, 1999; Kearny, 2000), where migration studies scholars highlight the social impacts of transnational migration. In the following chapter, I breakdown some key examples, illustrating how social exchanges reproduce certain perceptions of migration.

Chapter 4.

Transnational Exchanges & Social Networks

While migrant farmworkers create a sense of place in Canada through exchanges that cross *finca* borders, they also forge ties connecting sending and receiving communities called 'transnational social networks' (Massey et al., 1990). Transnational social networks are forged as migrants share stories about their new life with these friends and relatives in sending countries, sometimes inspiring these eager listeners to join their migratory routes (Massey et al., 1990). Sociologist Peggy Levitt (1998) describes the exchange of ideas and behaviours between migrants and their home communities as 'social remittances', drawing from the language of economic remittances.[31] Social remittances are exchanged through a long process that begins with the kinds of ideas that individuals take with them when they migrate (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). These ideas shape the activities migrants engage in while in host communities and thus impact the thoughts and behaviours they remit back to their home communities (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011).

Migrants are not only senders of social remittances – they are also receivers. By staying in touch with members of their home communities, migrants learn new ideas that they remit back to their host community (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011); thus, social remittances occur through a back-and-forth between sending and receiving communities. Exchanges sent across the migration journey also do not travel in a straight path. Instead, they are multidirectional, moving to and across unexpected sites where other migrants are based (Besserer, 2004). The cyclical nature of the TFW Program accelerates the exchange of social remittances, as migrant farmworkers employed under the Agricultural Stream return home every two years. During these return trips to Guatemala, migrant farmworkers bring more than just their physical bodies

[31] While I don't focus on this phenomenon, remittance payments are the most easily quantifiable exchange between migrants and their home communities. These payments make up a significant portion of Guatemala's economy, representing 19.1% of the total GDP in 2023 (World Bank, 2024). In Guatemala, more than 50% of households are entirely dependent on remittances to cover daily expenses (IOM, 2023).

and *recuerditos* (little souvenirs) – they also carry with them new thoughts and behaviours that they remit back to their communities.

The increase of Guatemalan migrant farmworkers in Canada is evidence of new but flourishing transnational social networks. Indeed, in 2003 when Guatemalan workers were first recruited into Canada, recruitment agencies visited *aldeas* with a clipboard, taking the names and contact information of those who were open to travelling abroad. Now that the pilot program has been absorbed into the Agricultural Stream, many employers prefer to hire the friends and family members of trusted workers – enabling a form of family reunification through labour migration. In Metro Vancouver, this dynamic was evident, as many workers were brothers, cousins, or brothers-in-law. On the flip side, the recruitment of migrant farmworkers through the recommendation of friends and family members has made it nearly impossible for those without the necessary connections to come to Canada. In sum, as the Agricultural Stream has grown, transnational social networks between Canada and Guatemala are strengthened, facilitating the mobility of entire families across countries.

Figure 8. A mural in the Department of Chimaltenango

The mural shows a woman dressed in *traje* wearing a backpack in front of the Statue of Liberty. Her hand is extended out, seemingly sending a hummingbird to two young children. The children are depicted in a different landscape – behind them are mountains and volcanoes like the ones in Guatemala.

Figure 9. A mural advertises an international courier company called 'Maya Express'

Maya Express sends food, medicine, clothing, shoes, documents, and more around the world. This business showcases some of the ways that exchanges between nation-states are facilitated.

In this chapter, I discuss transnational social exchanges remitted by Guatemalan migrant farmworkers to their home communities. I begin with an introduction into how migrant farmwork is modifying the physical landscape of rural *aldeas* in the Department of Chimaltenango. I then discuss the exchange of migration narratives – meaning the stories and insights that migrant farmworkers share with their friends and family members in Canada. I conclude by highlighting perceptions of migration in the Department of Chimaltenango. These examples showcase how migrant farmworkers strengthen transnational social networks, perhaps inspiring more community members to migrate.

4.1. Casas Canadienses

When migrant farmworkers come to Canada, many hope to use their remittance payments to construct a home in Guatemala. For instance, interview participant Abram – a thirty-year old Mayan man who had left his wife and children behind two years prior to work in Metro Vancouver – explained that migrating to Canada gave him the means to one day build a small house:

> "I feel happy because, at least in my case, I've always wanted or dreamed of having a house of my own. Aside from that, maybe not with so many luxuries, but a nice house … I came [to Canada] with goals, with dreams, and the truth is, I feel very happy to be here and to be the first in the family to leave [Guatemala]" (Abram).

Beyond propelling their own dreams, the construction of houses generates plentiful employment opportunities in migrants' *aldeas.* One migrant farmworker explains that when there is local employment in construction, less people must migrate to earn a living:

> "Most of those who come from where I live, the first thing they build is their house because sometimes they don't have a good place to live. When they arrive here, they have the means to do so, and they build a good house, and that's the first thing they do. That generates work or employs other people, like construction workers. That's good, because it prevents those people from also coming here [to Canada] and leaving their families" (Alexander).

As well as providing economic opportunities, remittance houses play an important social role, reflecting the goals and expectations that migrants have for themselves and their families (Boccagni, 2017). For instance, knowing that he one day wants to have children, twenty-four-year-old Moises dreams of building a house where he can raise a family: "In my case, my dream is to have my house, which I haven't built yet, but I'm in the process, and my dream is to have my house. And then, first, there [in the house] raise my children one day" (Moises). The construction and configuration of homes as an intentional effort to achieve goals and aspirations was also evident in the *aldeas* I visited, where two different architectural styles were evident. First, most *aldeas* were lined with small houses made from brick or concrete and consisting of one or two rooms – each a separate cubic structure with a door leading into the patio. Every few blocks, however, there were single-family houses like those found in the suburbs of Canada and the United States. These homes were not based around an open patio and

were instead built as a one structure with rooms leading into the next, often multiple stories tall. My guide, Jorge, a Mayan man who had once worked in Ontario, called them *Casas Canadienses* (Canadian homes) because they were both financed through remittance payments and inspired by Canadian architecture. *Casas Canadienses* show that social and economic remittances are not separate processes but are instead intertwined.

Figure 10. *Casas Canadienses* in the Department of Chimaltenango

Like many other residents who have worked in Canada, Jorge is in the process of building his own *Casa Canadiense.* The first floor of the house is almost complete, save for a few finishing touches. One morning over breakfast at his house, Jorge points to elements that were inspired by his time in Canada, such as the white walls. While Canadians tend to stick to neutral colour pallets, Guatemalan houses are often decorated with vibrant shades. For example, Jorge's parents' house is painted a bright lime green. Jorge adds that he even wanted to construct the house of plywood instead of concrete, as is common in Canada. His wife did not approve of the wooden house, arguing that concrete would be more durable; however, he dreams of one day building a second floor made from plywood. Jorge's brother, Gustavo, also worked in Canada and is in the process of building his own *Casa Canadiense.* One evening, Gustavo begins telling me about his house. He shares that one of his life dreams has been to build a house to his taste. He remembers noting the landscapes of the parks in Quebec where

he worked and thinking, “One day, I am going to make my house like this. I must do something different in my life and I wanted my kids to enjoy it because I couldn’t enjoy it.” Years later, Gustavo built a front yard with green grass, paved paths, flowers, pebbles, and bushes. One of these bushes is trimmed in the shape of a bear, and the other in the shape of a quetzal, Guatemala’s national bird. He jokes that the bushes symbolize his time in Canada and his life in Guatemala. Gustavo’s front yard is unlike any in the *aldea,* as most other houses use their limited space to grow *milpas* (small farming fields) or raise chickens. Gustavo’s insistence on building a house to his own taste based on the parks he saw in Quebec exemplifies how social remittances shape the landscape of migrant-sending communities. Moreover, this example shows that migrants’ homes are the output of long-term dreams and desires that are shaped in part by what is learned through the migration journey.

During my stay in Gustavo’s *Casa Canadiense*, I learned that these houses are not always exact replicas of suburban homes in Canada and the United States. Each morning, Encalada Grez and I would sit in the kitchen around a big wooden table and catch up with Ana, Gustavo’s wife, as she served fresh-made *tortillas* and *café de olla.* The kitchen connected to another room that we did not enter until later into our trip, when the cold air of the highlands swept family members deep into the house. This second room was another kitchen, housing not an electric stove as was in the other room, but an *estufa de leña* (wood-burning stove) made from clay and ceramic tiles. By the end of our trip, we would sometimes eat around the *estufa de leña,* talking and warming up by the fire. It was then that I realized that Ana cooked much of the food on this traditional stove, even when it was consumed in the Canadian kitchen. While it is true that migrants learn new aspirations while abroad that impact the material houses they construct, these do not always replace original notions of home; rather, they compliment one another in new and surprising ways.

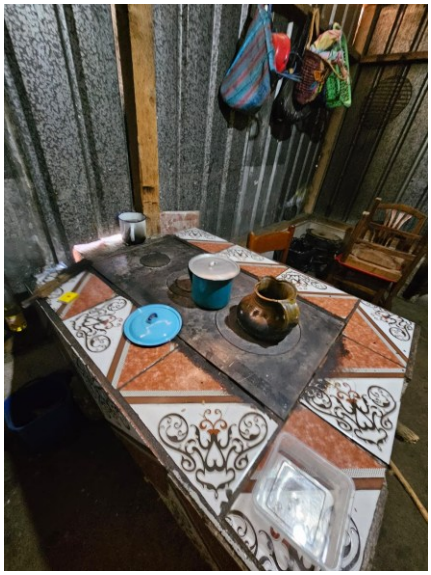

Figure 11. Ana's *estufa de leña*

4.2. Migration Narratives

Social remittances are apparent not only in the physical construction of homes in Guatemala, but also in the messages exchanged by migrant farmworkers to their friends and family members back home. These messages are remitted when migrant farmworkers share stories about Canada, recounting everyday happenings, like what the traffic in Canada is like, and personal anecdotes about the kinds of activities they engage in with their coworkers. One former migrant farmworker, Josefa, remembers that her family was curious about her time working in Leamington, Ontario:

> "They [our families] asked us, 'wow, how great, because you traveled by plane, you tried a plane. We'll never get a chance to try' [laughs]. And I told them that I went to see Niagara Falls and what they were like. They were really excited. And I also felt happy because I did get to see other places" (Josefa).

Sharing stories about their adventures in Canada can inspire a sense of pride in migrant farmworkers, who often gain experiences that would otherwise be completely unimaginable. These stories are transmitted to friends and family members in Guatemala who come to perceive work in Canada as an exciting opportunity.

Figure 12. In the Department of Chimaltenango, another former migrant farmworker who had also worked in the Niagara region hung postcards of the area in her living room

Whereas before 2010, migrant farmworkers used to rely on long-distance phone calls to speak with their friends and family members, social media has facilitated the transmission of social remittances. Now, all migrant farmworkers I meet have their own cellphones and use social media applications like Facebook and WhatsApp to maintain frequent contact with their friends and family, often communicating with them everyday. Participants explained that talking with their family members made them feel more at home in Canada and helped them kill time on their days off, when they had nowhere outside the *finca* to go. Migrant farmworkers also use additional social media platforms, including video sites, to remit certain depictions of life in Canada. For instance, in Metro Vancouver, I met Erick, a thirty-two-year year-old Mayan migrant farmworker who has worked in Canada for six years. When I met him, Erick was wearing a t-shirt with the YouTube logo and an account name, and his friends introduced him as the 'Youtuber' of the group. Later, during a focus group interview, I asked Erick what kinds of videos he made, and he responded: "I haven't done much of anything right now. When I started, yes, I made some videos, recorded everything here and we [the workers] were on it." With Erick's consent, I watched some of the videos he has made publicly available on his YouTube channel. Over the past six years, he has published dozens of twenty minute-videos about his life in Canada. A few of the videos follow his migration journey from the plane ride in Guatemala to the drive across Metro Vancouver. Most are of him

and his coworkers using high-tech equipment in the greenhouse, or even just at home cooking, making jokes, and playing music. The videos serve as a personal blog of Erick's life in Canada, showing the journey he takes to work in a lavish greenhouse, surrounded by peers and friends. By posting the videos and publicizing his YouTube channel with a t-shirt, Erick is remitting curated glimpses of his life in Canada. Social media has thus facilitated everyday communication across Canada and Guatemala, even enabling migrant farmworkers to engage with mediums such as film.

Like the videos that Erick posts on YouTube, migration narratives tend to be curated – meaning that only certain elements of life in Canada are shared with friends or family members. In fact, the vast majority of interview participants admit that they don't tell their friends and family members about the hardships they suffer in Canada. For instance, migrant farmworkers are often ashamed to discuss workplace dynamics:

> "I almost tell them [my family] everything … believe me, sometimes they say it [working in Canada] is easy, I tell them no, because sometimes it's hard to mention it, but I tell them here I also receive scolding because that's how it is. True, in every job, you're going to get called out, you're going to be hurt … They are things that sometimes I wouldn't want to tell them because they make one look bad" (Abram).

For the most part, interview participants admit that they would rather keep painful aspects of their life a secret than worry their family members:

> Alejandro: "Yes, sometimes we don't tell [our families] everything, sometimes we have tough days either because we didn't understand some instruction about our work, we make a mistake or something like that. We sometimes feel depressed or stressed."
>
> Erick: "You get sick."
>
> Alejandro: "Well, we can't tell them, 'sometimes, I'm tired or ... a little depressed or stressed'. Sometimes we don't share that so as not to spread it to the other person. It's better to talk about other things and talking like that helps you de-stress a little, too."
>
> Ramon: "What we need to do is encourage the family so they don't feel sad."

Geographers Linamar Campos-Flores & Patricia M. Martin (2024) point that migrant farmworkers' abilities to articulate their emotions are limited by prevailing notions of hegemonic masculinity that posit men as the stoic and thick-skinned. Indeed, the male

migrant farmworkers I interviewed believed that sickness, depression, and anxiety are personal grievances that should not be shared with family members, lest they fall ill with these ailments, as well. Some migrant farmworkers go to even greater lengths to keep their family members from worrying about them. For instance, Jonatán refused to tell his family about a medical operation he had in Metro Vancouver:

> "Yes, we suffer here, yes, we go through hardships here … I got sick here, I had a hernia operation, they [my family] never knew anything until I arrived at the airport ten days late because I couldn't walk … they were surprised and they said to me, 'why did you never say anything?' Because I do not want to worry them … I do not share it with them [my family] because I feel that it is something that does not belong to them" (Jonatán).

Jonatán concealed his medical operation from his family members, hoping to keep them from worrying. It was not until he returned home, and his family saw him unwell at the airport, that they realized Jonatán's health had declined in Canada. Migration narratives are thus not full representations of life in Canada; rather, they are sanitized stories intended to avail the worries of family members in Guatemala.

Some migrant farmworkers also try to ensure that their family members do not hear about activities and behaviors that go against traditional religious values. For instance, in Metro Vancouver, twenty-four-year-old Marco works with some of his cousins, who sometimes drink alcohol to unwind. Drinking goes against the Catholic teachings that Marco and his family follow, so when Marco talks to his family, he curates a version of life in Canada in which his cousins follow all religious teachings. At the time of the interview, Marco had just finished his first two-year season in Canada. When I asked Marco how many more seasons he would like to work in Canada, he replied that he would only like to work for two more seasons – meaning four more years. Referencing his cousins' drinking, Marco explained that he does not want to stay in Canada for too long, fearing that the longer he stays in the country, the more he will *ensuciarse* (get dirty) and pick up vices that go against his family values:

> "I don't want to come here to get dirty because … sometimes there are problems in the family. Out of desperation, since you've been here longer, at least I've seen workers like that, they make other decisions to go out or entertain themselves elsewhere or as I said, drink, have their beers and everything. These are things that I don't, at least I wouldn't want to get to that point" (Marco).

The term *ensuciar* (to get dirty) is not generally used to denote the corruption of morals and instead refers to physical messes. The act of becoming dirty is thus a process that is bound by time; the longer a worker is in Canada, the dirtier he gets. Coupled with Marco's concerns about becoming dirty are intentional efforts to restrict the information that gets back to Guatemala, saving his cousins' reputation while avoiding awkward confrontation.

According to Marco, becoming dirty is not only about drinking alcohol, but about inter-marital affairs. Although he is currently single, Marco hopes to one day marry a woman in Guatemala. He fears, however, that if he stays in Canada, he will one day be tempted to engage in sexual or romantic relationships outside this relationship:

> "I don't want to get to that extreme, for example having a woman someday and doing that to her, going with another woman, or spending time with another woman. That's what I want the least, so more than anything it's my reason why not [to come to Canada] anymore. I just want to do it [come to Canada] for a little while. I want to take advantage of the opportunity."

Being in Canada means navigating the slippery slope between earning hard-earned dollars and maintaining moral composure. In Guatemala, I heard similar anecdotes about Canada as a country that strays from religious values. Throughout my travels, several people approached me to verify if it is true that Canadians are non-religious. Further, one migrant farmworker shared that the biggest difference he noted between Canada and Guatemala is that the Catholic mass "was just elderly people, no young people, no children, no one" (Mateo). Many people I spoke with see Canada as a spiritually devoid place where migrant farmworkers can become lost and stray from religious teachings.

4.3. Perceptions of Migration

By travelling to the Department of Chimaltenango, I witnessed how *Casas Canadienses* and migration narratives inspired a desire to migrate in almost everyone I met. Participants agreed with my assessment, noting that up to 100% of adults in their *aldeas* who work in agriculture want to work in Canada. In one instance, Encalada Grez and I were accompanying an Elder named Angelica to a corner shop to purchase ingredients for dinner, when the shopkeeper asked if we were *patronas* (bosses),

implying we worked at a farm in Canada. The shopkeeper, a middle-aged woman whose young child followed her around behind the counter, then asked if we could find a way to help her come to Canada as a migrant farmworker. When Angelica explained we were friends visiting from abroad, the shopkeeper asked if we were *nueras* (daughter-in-laws) – a plausible option since one of Angelica's sons is an undocumented worker in New York, and the other is a migrant farmworker in Quebec. Angelica laughed, waving her hands in the air and affirming that Encalada Grez and I were just friends. This uncomfortable moment with the shopkeeper reflected not only how Encalada Grez and I were perceived in the field – as foreigners with potential ties to farms, or the romantic partners of migrants working north; it also showed the prevalence and intensity of people's desire to migrate, even among mothers and small business owners.

One reason why migration is so attractive is that, among religious community members, it is seen as an opportunity from God that must not be passed up. One day over breakfast at Angelica's house, her husband Orlando opened up about his son's migration to New York. Vicente was underage when he crossed the Mexican desert to seek opportunities in the United States. Now, he works as a cook in a restaurant that sells East Asian cuisine. Orland remembered that Vincente used a landline from the *albergue* (hostel) he was staying at to call him before crossing into the United States. In the call, Vincente told his dad:

> "Well, Dad, I'm fine. Just pray for me. Tomorrow we'll cross the desert, and we're almost at the U.S. border".

Orlando prayed for Vincente, and days later he received the call he had been waiting for – his youngest son, only seventeen, had made it safely across the border. Reflecting on his child's journey across two state borders – first into Mexico and then into the United States – Orlando says: "*hay que sacar alas para cruzar* ("you have to grow wings to cross") … God gives us the opportunity to travel; we must take advantage of it." Using religious language and symbolism, Orlando frames migration as an opportunity. While the journey might be perilous, the ability to seek economic opportunities in the north is a privilege or a blessing that must be appreciated in full.

Migrant farmworkers must be adults to qualify for the TFW Program; yet many of the young children I met expressed a desire to migrate, and a surprising number of participants shared that their siblings or children had crossed into the United States

undocumented while underage. Some former migrant farmworkers – who had been fired without due cause or under unfair conditions – shared in their interviews that they want their children to come to Canada like they did. For instance, Andrés, who had previously worked in the Fraser Valley, explained: “I would like [my children] to go there [to Canada] and work in the future … Yes, when they’re older.” As I interviewed Andrés in his small house – composed of one room shared by the family -- his twelve children looked at me with quiet curiosity. Would any of them one day work in Canada?

Figure 13. During Catholic mass, I noticed that the young girl I was sitting beside was playing with a keychain of a Canadian flag

She later explained it was a gift from her uncle who works in Quebec.

Figure 14. A toddler in the *aldea* wearing a pink fleece embroidered with the word 'Canada' and a maple leaf

Even though it seemed like individuals of all ages were intent on migrating, most people I met also understood that work in Canada was not pleasant. One evening after Catholic mass, Encalada Grez and I were invited to a nearby house for tea. Our hosts listened as we introduced ourselves and our research. Then, they shared a story of their relative who had gone to Canada as a migrant farmworker. In Canada, their relative worked on her hands and knees, picking produce. Hours into her shift, her feet would go numb. Eventually, the pain became so overwhelming that she decided to go back to Guatemala rather than brace the agony of her working conditions. Evidently, while many migrant farmworkers attempt to remit curated versions of Canada that obfuscate their negative experiences while abroad, those who can no longer tolerate life in Canada share these experiences with their relatives – showcasing that suffering and migration go together.

Noting migration is an uncomfortable or even dangerous process, not everyone Encalada Grez and I met wished to migrate. Alexander, a twenty-nine-year-old migrant farmworker in Metro Vancouver from the Department of El Progreso, explains: "There are … many people who definitely don't want to [migrate], either because *no se quieren arriesgar* (they don't want to take the risk) or because they don't want to leave their family." The term *arriesgar* implies the risk of danger or hazards, meaning that migration

is seen as something that could potentially jeopardize one's health and well-being. Even though migration is seen as a risk, I only met two people who openly expressed a disdain for migrating. The first woman was Mayra, an accountant who had studied to be a lawyer in the capital and now works for a migrant advocacy organization called the Association of Guatemalans United for our Rights (AGUND). Over lunch at a cafeteria in the Department of Sacatepéquez, Mayra explains that her brother tried to enter the United States undocumented while underage but was deported in the process. Unlike her brother, Mayra does not feel compelled to leave Guatemala. Further, as a single professional without children, her economic needs are less dire. While it initially seemed like almost everyone was interested in migrating to Canada or the United States, migrant farmworkers point out that not everyone is willing to take the risk; and, as denoted in the case of single professional women, not everyone has the same financial motivation.

Another woman who shared an aversion to migration was Julia, a middle-aged mother of six whose husband Mateo worked in Quebec for eleven years. Four years into his work in Canada, Mato asked Julia if she would want to migrate with him. Julia replied,

> "You go [to Canada], because I'm not going. No. I don't want to go there."

Mateo did not accept Julia's answer at face value, and would nag her, asking why she was not interested in life in Canada. Eventually, after incessant nagging, Julia finally replied, "Because they don't eat tortillas there [in Canada], and I can't live without my tortilla!" Julia explained to me:

> "He gets used to it [not eating tortillas], because when he comes back, he doesn't even need the tortillas. And I tell him, 'No one takes me away from my tortilla … I don't want to leave.' 'But it's nice there', he says. 'Yes, but I'm not leaving, I tell him.'"

This humorous exchange provides yet another perspective on migration: not everyone is willing to sacrifice a connection to culture and 'home' in exchange for the prospect of economic stability.

4.4. Discussion

Whereas social science research has generally focused on the economic impacts of migration, in this chapter I focus on social exchanges across state lines. As migration scholars have noted, the persistent movement of people across borders creates transnational social networks that facilitate exchanges of resources and information from one site to the next (Escala Rabadán & Rivera-Salgado, 2018; Massey et al., 1990; Velasco Ortiz, 2005). Transnational social networks are infrastructure that make migration more accessible for members of the same community. To explore transnational social networks more closely, I have provided two examples of social remittances. First, I discuss *Casas Canadienses,* the houses migrant farmworkers build in Guatemala with the joint use of social and economic remittances – showing that these exchanges are not wholly separate processes. Constructing a *Casa Canadiense* is often the first goal that migrant farmworkers have while in Canada. Through their construction, migrant farmworkers are physically reconstructing space in a way that reflects their long-term aspirations. Notably, *Casas Canadienses* are not a reproduction of Canadian landscapes in a Guatemalan context; instead, migrant farmworkers take aspects of both architectures to create new models that best fit their needs, desires, and daily lives. The material nature of what constitutes home is thus renegotiated depending on what is learned abroad, and what elements are kept, replaced, or abandoned.

Second, I highlight some migration narratives, noting how these often depict a curated image of life in Canada. Migration narratives start in Canada and are remitted through daily acts of transnational communication using social media, such as WhatsApp or Youtube. Through this communication, migrant farmworkers share daily stories about life in Canada, often experiencing a sense of pride when stories are received with intrigue and surprise by their friends and family members in Guatemala. However, migrant farmworkers often fail to divulge painful or embarrassing stories to their family members, resulting in migration narratives that do not account for the full breadth of emotions experienced in Canada. *Casas Canadienses* and migration narratives are two forms of social remittances that leave a lasting imprint in Guatemala, shaping the physical landscape and molding perceptions of migration.

Through fieldwork in the Department of Chimaltenango, I learned firsthand that migration is in high demand. As an outsider, I was sometimes perceived as a recruiter

who could help those in need work in Canada – an uncomfortable position but an important reminder of my own positionality. Notably, for many people I met in the *aldea* – particularly those of more religious values – migration is understood not as an option but as an opportunity presented by God. In these instances, the people I met were willing to make perilous journeys and sacrifice their own livelihoods to take advantage of this holy opportunity. A desire to migrate was not age-specific, as both children, adults, and Elders shared a willingness to travel north. Recognizing that migration is indeed a sacrifice, a few people I met asserted a desire to stay in Guatemala, partially because of cultural and familiar comforts, and at times due to a lack of economic necessity.

Chapter 5.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have highlighted how migrant farmworkers build a sense of home in Canada through social exchanges, all the while being unable to settle permanently in the country. First, I show how in one farm in Metro Vancouver, migrant farmworkers have drawn from Mayan cultural logics to create a collectivist group system that lessens the burden of domestic labour and forges inter-worker solidarity. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous migrant farmworkers operate under the group system, showcasing a surprising form of inter-ethnic solidarity. This exchange would be unprecedented in Guatemala where, even after the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords, the state is still imagined to only serve *ladino*-interests. While migrant farmworkers use Mayan cultural logic to organize themselves in strategic ways, community organizers coordinate calculated efforts to infiltrate *finca* walls. However, infiltration efforts must be deliberate and well-executed, as employers hold the decision-making power to determine whether migrant farmworkers stay in Canada or not. In the Department of Chimaltenango and Metro Vancouver, I also spoke with current and former migrant farmworkers who led the crossing of the *finca* border by forging unexpected friendships with Canadians. Using digital technologies, these friendships are maintained even when migrants return to their home communities – showing that migrants leave a permanent imprint in the social landscape of Canada that defies their legislated and enforced temporality. These friendships facilitate the sharing of knowledge, with migrant farmworkers teaching Canadians about their culture, and Canadians providing advice that can impact migrants' migration trajectories. In sum, even while contained within *finca* walls, migrant farmworkers come up with strategic means to re-organize themselves, and even ways to break out from their enclosure.

Ultimately, I posit that there is nothing temporary about migration – even short-term or cyclical movement across borders. Indeed, as migrants send economic remittances back to Guatemala, they also circulate social remittances by way of the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours they exchange from one place to the other. The example of *Casas Canadienses* shows how social and economic remittances are intertwined, with migrants' aspirations physically reconstructing the landscapes of their

home communities. Social remittances are part of the transnational social networks that are constructed when migrants move from one place to another. As in the case of the Agricultural Stream, transnational social networks facilitate the movement of migrants from one place to another, building stronger communities in the diaspora. Through the concept of migration narratives, I show how transnational social networks are constructed through curated images of life in Canada that conceal many of the hardships that migrants undergo in Canada. Social remittances and economic necessities inspire a general interest in migrating to Canada, including among underage children and religious community members. However, not everyone is equally keen on migrating – showcasing how connection to place can trump the prospect of economic improvement.

With these findings, I argue that treating migrants as just workers disregards their vibrant social lives in Canada. Instead, by highlighting migrants' rich social lives, I show how individuals exercise agency in ways that defy all expectations – curtailing even the most extensive and panoptic structures of domination and control. Ultimately, although this was never the intention of the Canadian government, migrant farmworkers are active members of our communities. In fact, beyond settler colonial narratives based on white supremacy, there is no legitimate justification for their exclusion and marginalization.

5.1. Significance & Contribution

My research provides two main contributions. First, researching the experiences of Guatemalan workers allowed me to learn about life under the Agricultural Stream – an increasingly important task as Guatemalan migrant farmworkers are quickly replacing Mexican and Jamaican workers hired through the SAWP. Further, by focusing on Guatemala, I highlighted the experiences of Mayan workers. Unaware of the ethnic dynamics of eastern Guatemala, where many identify as *mestizo* or *ladino-mestizo,* I had incorrectly assumed that all Guatemalan migrant farmworkers would be Indigenous. However, through interviews in Metro Vancouver, I quickly learned that the *fincas* are a lot more diverse than expected. This unforeseen finding enabled me to study how Indigenous and non-Indigenous migrant farmworkers organize themselves according to Mayan cultural logic. Focusing on Guatemalan workers thus revealed rich findings on the experiences of workers in the Agricultural Stream and the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers. In fact, whereas the Federal Government has taken a

highly national approach to Indigeneity, my research provides crucial insights in the rich cultures of Indigenous migrants from Latin America.

Second, I highlight how the discursive and material outputs of migration create transnational social networks that contradict the legislated temporality of the TFW Program. Indeed, by showing how migrant farmworkers leave an imprint in Canada's social landscape, I argue that there is nothing temporary about migrant farmworkers – even if migrant farmworkers themselves are essentially barred from becoming permanent residents in Canada. Noting that migrant farmworkers are a part of our communities facilitates advocating for their rights not to *belong* in Canada – because they have ensured their own belonging – but to be respected as community members who should have access to the same rights and services as Canadians.

5.2. Recommendations

Whereas in sociology, researchers frequently make recommendations aimed at policymakers, I turn instead to community organizers without whom this project would never have been possible. My decision to exclude policymakers from recommendations is because, since the TFW Program's inauguration in the 1970s, vast numbers of researchers have produced rich and meaningful findings on the exclusionary and racist nature of migrant labour in Canada, including how closed work visas actively bar racialized workers from the Global South from becoming a part of the white nation-state. Any policy recommendations I might have would follow in this line of thinking, calling for permanent residency upon arrival to all migrant farmworkers. While sometimes framed as an impossibility, the successful struggle of migrant caregivers in Canada – who achieved permanent residency upon arrival in 2024 – shows that ambitious migrant victories are possible. Thus, instead of directing my recommendations to policy makers, I have always intended for this thesis to contribute to grassroots advocacy efforts.

Figure 15. A banner calling for 'status for all' at a Health Fair

Status for all includes permanent residency upon arrival for migrant workers and the regularization of undocumented workers.

Figure 16. A protest advocating for the rights of migrant workers, held in Vancouver

I thus conclude with three recommendations to community organizers whose work involves advocating for migrant justice in Canada:

1. **Community organizers should be familiar with migrants' home communities and consider how these sites are changing because of migration.**

In Canada, migrant farmworkers are predominantly recruited from Mexico, Guatemala, and Jamaica. While it would be unreasonable to expect community organizers to be experts on the histories as well as the social and political landscapes of these countries, I recommend that, whenever possible, efforts be made for community-wide education on these subjects. The case of Guatemala reveals the significance of these observations, as the recruitment of migrant farmworkers is situated within neoliberal policies adopted after the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords. Reckoning with Guatemala's violent history is essential for understanding ethnic divisions within the country that are brought over to Canada by migrant farmworkers. Community organizers should develop specific strategies for empowering Indigenous migrant farmworkers who carry with them either direct or intergenerational trauma from the genocidal civil war. Further, if community organizers hope to nourish solidarity between migrant farmworkers to counter the competition pervasive in the TFW Program, they must be aware of ethnic borders that exist between workers and know that crossing them is possible. This is especially important for capacity-building initiatives encouraging migrant farmworkers to advocate for their immigration and employment rights while in the *finca.* In sum, the historic and contemporary conditions of sending communities impact the lives and experiences of migrant farmworkers while they are in Canada.

Community organizers should also be aware of how entire communities are changing because of migration, as their advocacy efforts play a role in these changes. In fact, community organizing does not start and end in one country; rather, the actions and ideas transmitted to workers are remitted to their home communities. Recognizing migration narratives makes it easier to know what migrant farmworkers are thinking when they arrive in Canada. Familiarity with migrants' home communities thus does not only include knowing its histories and socio-political stratification but noting how these communities are changing post-migration.

2. Community organizers should think of the *finca* as a border to emphasize the intentionality needed to break in.

Highlighting how the *finca* serves as a barrier highlights the mechanisms by which migrant farmworkers are kept separate from the vast majority of Canadian society. With this focus, advocates are in a better position to note how migrant farmworkers

organize among one another in the *fincas,* and how community organizers can establish a presence within the farms while existing outside its boundaries. This first point on social organization is important for fostering inter-worker solidarity, noting how competition and other barriers such as gendered or ethnic boundaries dissolve worker solidarity and strengthen employers' power. The second draws on Andrés' experience of being fired without cause by his employer but forgetting to reach out to migrant advocacy organizations who might have been able to support him and his coworkers through this transgression. How can advocacy organizations have a presence within the *fincas* while boarded out? These thoughtful reflections can inspire intentional breaching of the *finca* borders, strengthening the ability of migrant farmworkers to advocate for their rights and call in support when needed.

3. **Community organizers should draw from – and strengthen – my argument that whether the Canadian Government recognizes it or not, migrant farmworkers are already part of our communities.**

Whereas the TFW Program excludes migrant farmworkers from rights and services and conceals them in *fincas,* migrant farmworkers engage in multiple strategies to circumvent these boundaries. Advocacy efforts should focus on strengthening relational ties, as Canadians are more likely to become politically motivated if they have a personal friendship or acquaintance they can refer to. Cross-*finca* relationship-building can be a tool to counter reactionary xenophobia, wherein migrants are blamed for overlapping crises. This strategy halts right-wing narratives from positioning migrant farmworkers as outsiders to justify their exclusion from basic labour and immigration rights in Canada.

5.3. Next Steps & Future Research

As is expected in community-engaged research, I am planning modes of knowledge mobilization to ensure that the findings are returned to research participants and community partners. I have already prepared a Spanish/English informative flier and handed this out to migrant farmworkers and service providers at Health Fairs. Second, I am sharing my findings with community organizers at a Migrant Worker Summit that I am planning with Evelyn Encalada Grez for the fall of 2025. At the Summit, I will receive feedback from community members that will inform other research outputs I am co-

authoring with Encalada Grez, including a policy brief aimed at a provincial audience, as well as scholarly publications. These knowledge mobilization efforts will ensure that my findings are returned to the communities that facilitated and/or participated in this research.

Once knowledge mobilization is completed, what should future research focus on? I have three main contributions. First, future research could account for the experiences of migrants who do not fall under the TFW Program but instead operate entirely outside its logics as undocumented workers. According to community organizers in Metro Vancouver, in the Okanagan region of BC, up to 40% of migrant farmworkers are undocumented, earning eight to eleven dollars per hour compared to the $17.40 provincially mandated minimum wage. While my research focused purely on workers employed through the Agricultural Stream, I have met undocumented migrant farmworkers who were once part of the TFW Program but left the *finca* borders to seek more flexible employment. How do migrant farmworkers create livable worlds while navigating the fear and precarity of living without legal documentation? Extending a focus to undocumented workers would provide an even richer account of how migrants with precarious legal status draw on their social lives to navigate exclusionary landscapes, building communities in unexpected places and ways.

Second, future research should explore how migrant farmworkers are connected not only to Canada and Guatemala, but to the United States. Almost everyone I met had either migrated to the United States themselves before coming to Canada or had direct family members currently there. To better understand the transnational dimensions of migrants' lives and home-making practices, I would expand this project to include undocumented migrants in the United States. Third, while this thesis highlights the experiences of Guatemalan workers, it does not provide an in-depth analysis into the role of gender. The role of gender is a significant factor to explore because, in Guatemala, men are more likely to migrate than women (IOM, 2023).[32] Similarly, in Canada, only 5% of all migrant farmworkers are women (Government of Canada, 2024a); however, this does not mean that women do not wish to migrate. In fact, while research shows that many women choose to migrate to improve their family's quality of

[32] In fact, migrant-sending communities in Guatemala have on average seventy-four men for every one-hundred women (IOM, 2023).

life (Boccagni, 2012), Canadian agricultural employers almost always prefer to hire male workers due to prevailing beliefs that women are weak and thus not efficient manual labourers (Preibisch & Encalada Grez, 2013). In some cases, employers even avoid hiring female workers to limit sexual relationships and pregnancy on the farm (Preibisch & Encalada Grez, 2010), resulting in transnational mobility being split across gendered lines. Future research should consider the role of gender more carefully, noting if home-making practices among migrant farmworkers differ among gendered lines, and accounting for how identities intersect – especially in the case of Indigenous women migrants.

5.4. Messages from Migrant Farmworkers

To center migrant farmworkers at the heart of this project, I concluded all interviews by asking participants what message they would send to Canadians who may know nothing about Guatemala or migrant farmwork. Not all participants felt they had anything meaningful to contribute, while others appreciated the opportunity to conclude their interview with their own message, highlighting topics they felt needed to be re-asserted. In the spirit of community-engaged research, it feels appropriate to end my thesis with their voices. Indeed, this project would not be possible without the invaluable contributions and participation of migrant farmworkers. In Guatemala, former migrant farmworkers welcomed me – a stranger – into their homes, feeding me and introducing me to their families with kindness and generosity, willing to share personal testimonies over tea. In Metro Vancouver, migrant farmworkers took phone calls or drove straight to see me after long workdays, sacrificing time that could be spent resting, cleaning, or connecting with their family members. Without these contributions, there is no way I could have completed this project.

When asked what message they would like to pass onto Canadians, most migrant farmworkers thought of their work. Participants highlighted their essential labour, asking Canadians to recognize their contributions:

> "Well, first, I would ask you [Canadians] a favor: don't close the doors on us, because there are many of us, we love the country, we love our work, we want our jobs, and don't close the opportunities on us. There's something I'm always afraid of: when there's a change in government. Believe me, I always see that. The colleagues who surround me sometimes don't see that, but I do. Why? Because I don't want Canada

> to close the doors on me like Guatemala does. I know that not all of us are perfect and not all of us come with that intention. More than one or two will fail, but most of us have that dream of being here, of working, of getting our family ahead. First, thank you. It's a country of opportunities. Keep giving us opportunities. An example is the Canadian people. I'm working with them now. They've liked our work. We want more people to see that, for others to share it, for them to explore us more, who we are, especially at work. That they open the doors for us. … For example, what happened right now with [Prime] Minister Trudeau who changed the entire immigration law. One has dreams, one has goals but when those changes happen or they reduce all of that [incoming immigration], then they are also closing us off and the only thing we want is to work. There are many people who don't have work for the same reason that [the immigration changes] is happening. We see many migrants, but they shouldn't close the doors on us. Let the Canadians explore us and see us. The only thing I tell them [Canadians] is not to close the doors on us. Not all of us. It is true that we fail but for example I am willing to give my all because we have that strong workforce, especially in agriculture and construction. We are a strong workforce, and we do not give up. We do not see adversity. We work in the rain, in greenhouses when the heat is at its maximum, in construction -- we do not give up. I also do extra work; sometimes I go out to earn some extra bread. I have done heavy labor, I have worked lifting whatever it is, I have worked in demolition, I know demolition work. We are people who guarantee our work, that is what I tell them (Jonatán)."

Jonatán, who has been quoted throughout this thesis, asks Canadians to not close the door on migrants following the upcoming Federal election. By emphasizing their contributions, migrant farmworkers affirm their right to stay and work in Canada.

Jonatán was not the only worker who used this opportunity to speak about migrants' rights in Canada. Similar themes came up during a focus group interview in Metro Vancouver:

> Moises: "I think some [Canadians] don't really care about the effort we make. I know that most farmers aren't Canadian -- they're migrants from Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, and I don't know what other countries. However, it would be essential for them [Canadians] to share those rights they have with us, because we come here to perform an important function for them. Otherwise, one day we'll all leave here, and they'll have to sort it out for themselves [laughs]; to do the work we come here to do for them, with great effort. We don't waste time, we give all our capacity, and even more, just to satisfy them … I don't know if it's right or not but keeping the boss happy is only possible by doing a good job, and giving him our best, because they [the bosses] put great pressure on us."
>
> Christian: "And well, they don't even thank us [all laugh]."

Moises: "We're basically the ones who do all the work. For example, our *finca* produces so much everyday and all of that is consumed by the people. And it's not only that [*finca],* but also several *fincas* that are worked by people of other countries. And just like my colleague says, it's true that they should give us the opportunity to have the same rights, or just like we said, to give us the opportunity to bring our families here, to enjoy the benefits as well."

Luis: "Yes, as my colleagues say, for me it means they [migrants] should have the same rights as those here … [I]t should be almost the same rights so as not to discriminate against immigrants."

Moises, Christian, and Luis highlight that migrants perform essential labour, feeding Canada while being unable to access the same rights as the rest of Canadians. Migrant farmworkers highlight a profound contradiction: if their essential labour nourishes our bodies by producing the food consumed by Canadians, why can't they have the same rights as everybody else?

Some interview participants used this time to call out inequitable access to rights and resources. For example, during another focus group interview in Guatemala, former migrant farmworkers Josefa and Fabiana also speak out against discriminatory policy:

Josefa: "Canadians should think more about women. There should be more opportunities [in Canada] for women [who want to work as migrant farmworkers]. Because yes, many women want to raise their children. And for me, well, there are many single mothers here who don't have a father to look after them [the children], only the mother. So, there should be more opportunities for women and single mothers so they can raise their children. For me, that's it."

Fabiana: "Well, at first, they said that you should stop traveling until you're 60 and they would help you with something after 10 years. But no, it wasn't like that. It wasn't like that."

Regina: "Who told you that?"

Fabiana: "In the office, on the first floor."

Josefa: "They did tell us at the office. That when you're going to stop traveling and when you turn 60, you can no longer travel to Canada."

First, Josefa explains that women have few opportunities to go abroad. As a single mother, not being able to migrate to Canada has severely decreased her economic

freedom. Fabiana then complains that CPP has not been made available to her even though the employer promised that workers older than sixty who have worked in Canada for more than ten years would receive payments. Hoping for changes to the exclusionary measures of the TFW Program, migrant farmworkers want Canadians to be aware of the structural violence perpetuated against them.

Migrant farmworkers took different approaches at advocating for their rights. For instance, in another focus group interview, participants did not highlight their contributions; rather, they thanked Canadians for the opportunity to work in Canada, appealing to their generosity:

> Alejandro: "I would tell them to also have faith in us, that we can contribute a lot to Canada, but we also need Canada to open its doors to us so we can have those opportunities to get ahead, and from that, they will also rise economically because that's what we're coming for: to support them and receive their support so that we in Guatemala can also carry out our projects and achieve better progress, both for our families and for ourselves."
>
> Ramon: "For me, without the Canadian people, we can't do anything, even though we want to come. What I also want to say is thank them."
>
> Erick: "What I would say is thank you to the Canadians who have given us this opportunity to come and work here, and … what we're working on here is what they consume daily, and that's a benefit for us, too, to help our families, and thank them for that, too."

Alejandro, Ramon, and Erick frame migrant farmwork as a mutually beneficial process that produces food for Canadians while enabling migrants to meet their economic goals. However, their answer points to anxieties about potential immigration reforms that might limit the number of migrants allowed into Canada. Although both migrants and Canadians benefit from migrant farmwork, Canadians have the power to determine whether migrants are allowed into the country to perform their duties.

Rather than directing their comments to all Canadians, some participants answered the question with a message towards their employer. In doing so, they spoke against issues they encounter while working in Canada:

> "Perhaps they [the employer] can let us go [to Guatemala] for two months, two and a half months, when one finishes [the two-year

> season] … [W]e have already finished the two years, maybe the family was excited that we were going to return, but … then one has to wait up to half a year more to be able to see if one can go back, well imagine, that affects them a lot. The little things that one needs as a human are small but I would say, having time every year to travel to visit the family or every time one's contract ends, they should let you go without 'buts', right? Because there are times when they do put up obstacles because there is no staff, there is a lot of work and if you leave, you are gone for a short time and things like that" (Abram).

In Metro Vancouver, the employer does not allow migrant farmworkers to take any vacation during their two-year contract, meaning that they can only return to Guatemala once the contract is complete. The issue, however, is that even once the contract has ended, the employer still does not allow the workers to return to Guatemala. Instead, he staggers workers' return home, meaning that workers must spend half a year working without a contract, in a way being held against their will. Holding workers against their will after their two-year contract has been completed is an illegal violation – yet Abram and his coworkers fear that if they stand up for their rights, they will be fired and consequently reported. Under the policies of the TFW Program, their fears are justified, as employers are granted the power to fire workers at any time without reasonable cause. Although Abram knew that the employer would not read this thesis, he emphasized the importance of returning to Guatemala, asking for more frequent trips back, and for a longer duration of time.

5.5. Closing Statement

I want to end first by thanking those who have taken the time to read this thesis – especially my committee members who have read multiple iterations of the same project. There is so much more that I wish that I could write about, especially regarding the rich visuals, sounds, and experiences from Guatemala. However, I recognize that after two years on this project, it is time for me to let go and continue ahead into new challenges. For now, I am unsure where life will take me, and if I will continue with my research or commit myself to more conventional wage labour. However, one thing is clear – I am not leaving migrant farmworkers, including my participants, behind. I have spent the last two years cultivating relationships with community organizers and migrant farmworkers, and I have no intention of abandoning this work. I am looking forward to attending more Health Fairs and even taking a greater initiative in the planning of these events as a newly minted organizer. Further, no matter where life takes me, I know to

seek migrant farmworkers out – whether at grocery stores or on the streets – because they are a part of my community, whether they know it or not. It is strange, but now when I go to the grocery store, I check to see where local produce comes from. After participating in multiple rounds of Health Fairs, I know migrant farmworkers from many of the nearby farms, and I can conjure their voices and faces. I hope to one day spread this feeling, so more people know that each tomato, cucumber, bell pepper, cherry, flower, and mushroom, was grown with care.

Gracias y adios.

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Appendix A.

Maps

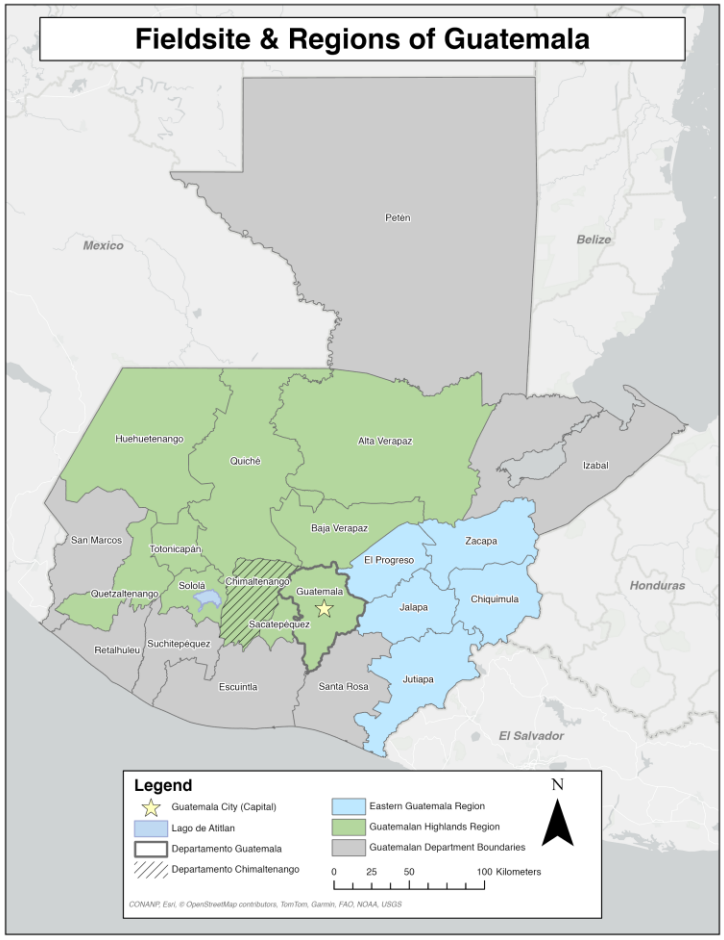

Figure A.1. A map highlighting my fieldsite in the Department of Chimaltenango, as well as highlighting some key regions in Guatemala[33]

I conducted fieldwork in the Department of Chimaltenango, which is highlighted in shading. Departments in blue are part of eastern Guatemala, where interview participants who identified as *mestizo* emerged from. In contrast, the green region encompasses the highlands, where there are large numbers of Mayans.

[33] All maps were generously made by Noah Denommee-Robert.

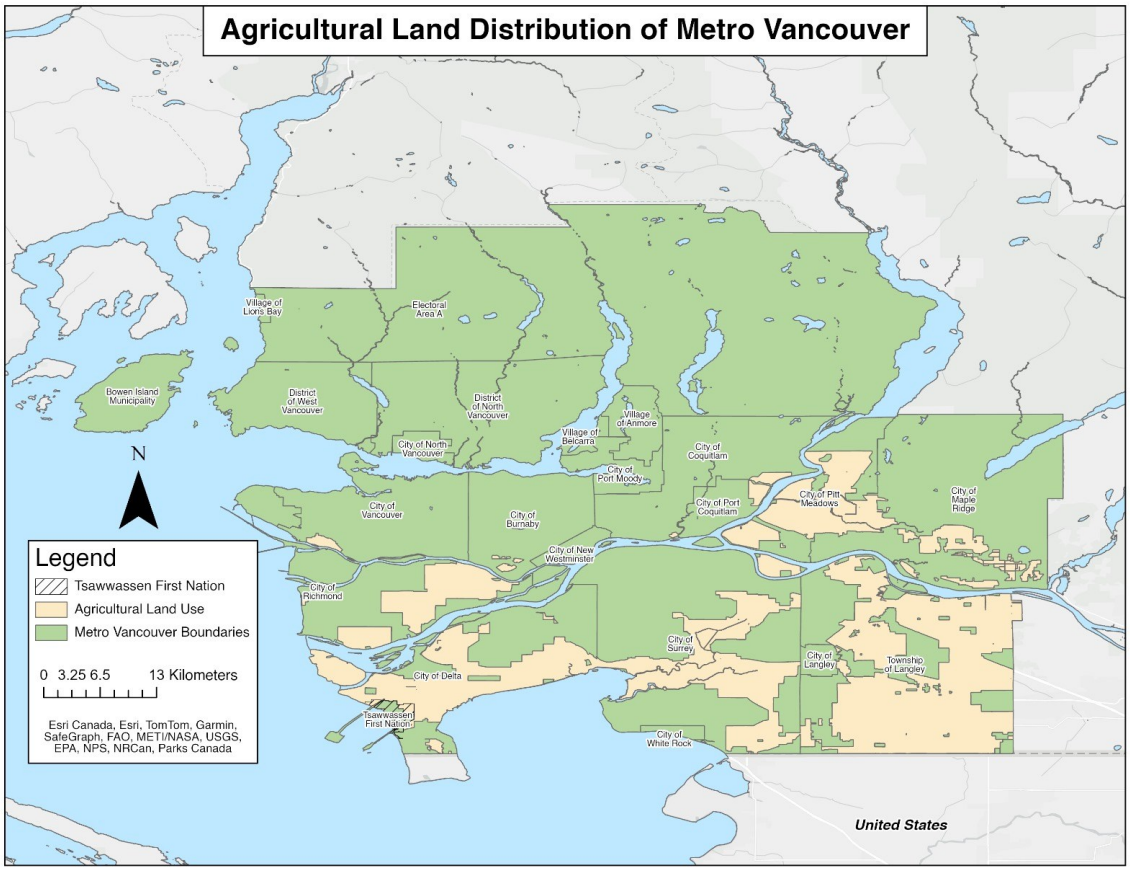

Figure A.2. A map of Metro Vancouver and its agricultural land distribution

This is a map of Metro Vancouver, denoting the cities and municipalities that make up the metropolitan area. In the bottom left corner is the Tsawwassen First Nation – the only treaty area in the city. The yellow zones are regions marked for agricultural land use, where migrant farmworkers may work in greenhouses or fields.

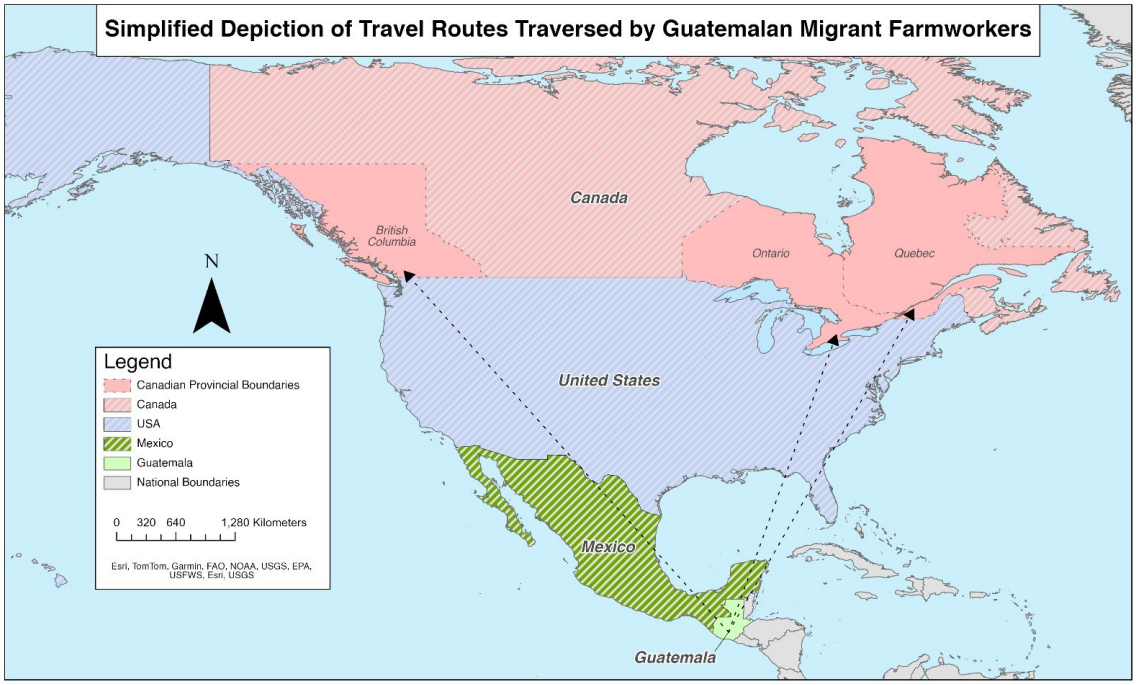

Figure A.3. A map showing simplified iterations of travel routes traversed by Guatemalan migrant farmworkers

Throughout my research, I met current and former migrant farmworkers who worked in the provinces of British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec. This map provides a simplified depiction of their travel routes.

Appendix B.

Interview Questions (English) – for Migrant Farmworkers in Metro Vancouver

Background and Demographics

1. How old are you?
2. Tell me about your life in Guatemala
    a. What department are you from?
        i. Did you grow up in a city or a town?
        ii. What was it like to grow up there?
    b. What kind of work did you do in Guatemala before moving to Canada?
        i. What was that like?
3. Tell me about your family in Guatemala
    a. Are you married
        i. How long have you been married for?
    b. Do you have any kids?
        i. How many and what are their ages?
    c. What kind of work do your parents do/did?
    d. Are you close with your extended family?
        i. Do you live near them in Guatemala?
4. Are you part of a church in Guatemala?
    a. Do you have any church related responsibilities?
    b. How else would you describe the role that religion plays in your life?
    c. What do you know about traditional Mayan spirituality?
        i. Does anyone in your family practice it?
        ii. If not, why not?
5. What languages do you speak?
    a. Who taught you [Indigenous language]?
    b. Do your kids speak [Indigenous language]?
6. Would you say you come from a Mayan community/family?
    a. If you were to describe what it means to be Maya to someone who knows nothing about the culture, what would you say?

        i. What are some things that are unique to Mayan culture that you don't see in other parts of the world?
        ii. It could be food, music, values, traditions, and more.
    b. What do you know about the Indigenous peoples of [name of City]? Of Canada?
        i. Have you ever met an Indigenous person from here?
        ii. Are you curious about them?
            1. What kind of things do you think you might have in common?
            2. What kind of things do you think might be different.

Migration to Canada

7. Had any of your family members migrated, either to Canada or the United States, before you?
    a. If so, who migrated? To where? For how long? Are they still there?
        i. What did this/these family member(s) tell you about their migration experience?
    b. If not, what is it like to be the first to venture north?
        i. What kinds of things do you tell your family about your time in Canada?
8. Why did you decide to come to Canada?
    a. How were you able to migrate here? What did you have to do?
        i. Did you have to pay a private recruitment agency to travel here?
    b. Why did you choose Canada over the United States?
9. How long have you been working in Canada?
    a. Have you been on this farm the whole time?
    b. How long is your contract?
    c. How often do you return to Guatemala?
10. What did you first think or feel when you arrived in Canada?
    a. Did you notice any big differences between Canada and Guatemala? If so, what?
11. Can you tell me what it is like to work on this farm?
    a. What is the work schedule?
    b. What do you grow?

c. How would you describe what it is like to work on a farm to someone who has never had that experience?

12. Are the workers on the farm from other countries, or are they all from Guatemala?
    a. If so, what countries?
    b. Are any of the Guatemalan workers from the same department as you in Guatemala?
    c. Did you know any of them before coming to Canada?

Place-Making Practices

13. Tell me about your relationship with other workers on your farm.
    a. Do you get along?
    b. Do you spend time together after work?
        i. If so, what kinds of activities do you do?
        ii. For example, do you go grocery shopping together?
        iii. Do you ever do any fun activities, like playing soccer?
        iv. What about attending parties or dances?
14. Can you tell me what a regular day in your life is like? What kinds of activities do you usually do on a standard day?
    a. A regular day weekday?
    b. A regular Saturday/Sunday?
15. Does anything make you feel at home in Canada?
    a. If so, what?
    b. Are there places you go to in the community that feel like home or where you feel like you are welcomed/belong?
16. Do you cook for yourself in Canada?
    a. What kinds of things do you like to cook? Can you give me some examples?
    b. Did you cook before coming to Canada?
    c. When you go back to Guatemala, do you now help your mom/wife with the cooking?
        i. What does she think about this?
    d. Is there anything else you learned to do in Canada that you bring back to Guatemala?
17. How do you practice your religion while in Canada?

a. Do you keep an altar?

18. Do you speak your Indigenous language with any of the workers on the farm?
    a. If not, why not?
    b. If yes, how often? When?
19. Tell me about [name of community organizer]. What kinds of things do they do?
    a. Other than [name of community organizer], have you met any Canadian citizens outside the farm?
    b. If so, tell me about the person/people you have met and what you have done together.

Transnationalism

20. How often do you talk with friends and family while working in Canada?
    a. Do you usually call on the phone, send texts on WhatsApp, or use another mode of communication?
    b. What is it like to stay in touch with them this way?
21. After the season ends, what is it like to return to your friends and family after being away?
    a. Do you bring them things from Canada? Like what?
    b. Do they have questions about your time in Canada?
    c. What sorts of things do you tell them? For example, my little sister in Mexico always asks about the snow, so I tell her a lot of stories about living in a cold place.
    d. Is there anything you choose not to tell me, maybe because it is painful?
22. What percentage of people in your community migrate to Canada and the United States?
    a. What about only to Canada?
    b. How do you think your family and community is changing as a result of this migration? For example, what new opportunities or challenges do you see?

Conclusion

23. What are your dreams for the future?
    a. Growing up, what were your dreams?
24. If you could pass on one message to Canadians who don't know anything about Guatemala or migrant farmwork, what would you say?
    a. What do you wish Canadians knew about your experience in Canada?

25. Is there anything else you would like to add?
26. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C.

Interview Questions (Spanish) – for Migrant Farmworkers in Metro Vancouver

Demografía

1. ¿Cuántos años tienes?
2. Cuéntame sobre tu vida en Guatemala.
    a. ¿De qué departamento eres?
        i. ¿Creciste en una ciudad o un pueblo?
        ii. ¿Cómo fue crecer allí?
    b. ¿Qué tipo de trabajo realizabas en Guatemala antes de mudarte a Canadá?
        i. ¿Cómo era?
3. Cuéntame sobre tu familia en Guatemala.
    a. ¿Estás casado?
        i. ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas casado?
    b. ¿Tienes hijos?
        i. ¿Cuántos son y cuáles son sus edades?
    c. ¿Qué tipo de trabajo hacen/hicieron tus padres?
    d. ¿Tienes una relación cercana con tu familia extendida?
    e. ¿Vives cerca de ellos en Guatemala?
4. ¿Formas parte de alguna iglesia en Guatemala?
    a. ¿Tienes alguna responsabilidad relacionada con la iglesia?
    b. ¿De qué otra manera describirías el papel que juega la religión en tu vida?
    c. ¿Qué sabes sobre la espiritualidad tradicional maya?
    d. ¿Alguien en tu familia la practica?
        i. ¿Por qué no?
5. ¿Qué idiomas hablas?
    a. ¿Quién te enseñó [idioma indígena]?
    b. ¿Tus hijos hablan [idioma indígena]?
6. ¿Dirías que vienes de una comunidad o familia maya?

    a. Si tuvieras que describir lo que significa ser maya a alguien que no conoce la cultura, ¿qué le dirías?
        i. ¿Hay algunos aspectos de la cultura maya que no se ven en otras partes del mundo?
        ii. Podría ser la comida, la música, los valores, las tradiciones, la historia y más.
7. ¿Qué sabes sobre los pueblos indígenas de [nombre de la ciudad]? ¿De Canadá?
    a. ¿Has conocido alguna vez a un indígena de aquí?
    b. ¿Te dan curiosidad?
        i. ¿Qué cosas crees que podrían tener en común?
        ii. ¿Qué cosas crees que podrían ser diferentes?

Migración a Canadá

8. ¿Algún miembro de tu familia había emigrado, ya sea a Canadá o a Estados Unidos, antes que tú?
    a. ¿Quién? ¿Adónde? ¿Por cuánto tiempo? ¿Siguen allí?
        i. ¿Qué te contó este/estos familiar(es) sobre su experiencia migratoria?
    b. ¿Cómo se siente ser el primero en venir al norte?
        i. ¿Qué le cuentas a tu familia sobre tu tiempo en Canadá?
9. ¿Por qué decidiste venir a Canadá?
    a. ¿Cómo pudiste emigrar aquí? ¿Qué tuviste que hacer?
        i. ¿Tuviste que pagar a una agencia de reclutamiento privada para viajar aquí?
    b. ¿Por qué elegiste Canadá en lugar de Estados Unidos?
10. ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas trabajando en Canadá?
    a. ¿Has estado en esta finca todo ese tiempo?
    b. ¿Cuánto tiempo duran tus contratos?
    c. ¿Cada cuanto regresas a Guatemala?
11. ¿Qué fue lo primero que pensaste o sintiste al llegar a Canadá?
    a. ¿Notaste alguna diferencia grande entre Canadá y Guatemala?¿Cuál?
12. ¿Puedes contarme cómo es trabajar en esta finca?
    a. ¿Cuál es tu horario de trabajo?

b. ¿Qué cultivan?
c. ¿Cómo describirían la experiencia de trabajar en una finca a alguien que nunca la ha tenido?

13. ¿Los trabajadores de la finca son de otros países o son todos de Guatemala?
    a. ¿De qué países?
    b. ¿Alguno de los trabajadores guatemaltecos es del mismo departamento que tú en Guatemala?
    c. ¿Conocías a alguno de ellos antes de venir a Canadá?

Place-Making

14. Cuéntame sobre tu relación con los demás trabajadores de tu granja.
    a. ¿Se llevan bien?
    b. ¿Pasan tiempo juntos después del trabajo?
        i. ¿Qué tipo de actividades realizan? Por ejemplo, ¿van juntos al supermercado? ¿Alguna vez hacen alguna actividad divertida, como jugar al fútbol? ¿Y qué tal ir a fiestas o bailes?
15. ¿Puedes contarme cómo es un día normal en tu vida? ¿Qué tipo de actividades sueles hacer en un día normal?
    a. ¿Un día normal entre semana?
    b. ¿Un domingo normal?
16. ¿Hay algo que te hace sentir en casa en Canadá?
    a. ¿Hay lugares en la comunidad – fuera de la *finca* -- que te hagan sentir como en casa?
17. ¿Cocinas en Canadá?
    a. ¿Qué te gusta cocinar? ¿Podrías darme algunos ejemplos?
    b. ¿Cocinabas antes de venir a Canadá?
    c. Cuando regresas a Guatemala, ¿ayudas a tu mamá/esposa a cocinar?
    d. ¿Qué opina ella de esto?
    e. ¿Hay algo más que aprendiste en Canadá que traes de regreso a Guatemala?
18. ¿Cómo practicas tu religión en Canadá?
    a. ¿Mantienes un altar?
19. ¿Hablas en [idioma indígena] con alguno de los trabajadores de la finca?
    a. ¿Por qué no? O ¿Con qué frecuencia y cuándo?

20. Cuéntame sobre [nombre del organizador comunitario]. ¿Qué tipo de actividades realiza?
    a. Además de [nombre del organizador comunitario], ¿has conocido a algún canadiense fuera de la granja?
    b. Cuéntame sobre la(s) persona(s) que has conocido y qué han hecho juntos.

Transnacionalismo

21. ¿Cada cuanto hablas con tus amigos y familiares en Guatemala?
    a. ¿Sueles llamar por teléfono, enviar mensajes de texto por WhatsApp o usar alguna otra forma de comunicación?
    b. ¿Cómo se siente mantenerte en contacto con ellos de esta manera?
22. Después de que termina la temporada, ¿puedes regresar a Guatemala antes de empezar la proxima temporada?
    a. ¿Cómo es volver con tus amigos y familiares después de estar fuera del país?
    b. ¿Les traes cosas de Canadá?
    c. ¿Tienen muchas preguntas sobre tu tiempo en Canadá?
    d. ¿Qué les cuentas? Por ejemplo, mi hermana pequeña en México siempre me pregunta sobre la nieve, así que le cuento muchas historias sobre vivir en un lugar frío.
    e. ¿Hay algo que prefieres no contarles, quizás porque es doloroso?
23. ¿Cuál es el porcentaje de personas de tu comunidad que migran a Canadá y Estados Unidos?
    a. ¿Y solo a Canadá?
    b. ¿Cómo crees que tu familia y tu comunidad están cambiando como resultado de esta migración? Por ejemplo, ¿qué nuevas oportunidades o desafíos ves?

Conclusión

24. ¿Cuáles son tus sueños para el futuro?
25. Si pudieras transmitir un mensaje a los canadienses que no saben nada sobre Guatemala ni sobre los trabajadores agrícola migrantes, ¿qué les dirías?

a. ¿Qué te gustaría que los canadienses supieran sobre tu experiencia en Canadá?

26. ¿Hay algo más que te gustaría agregar?
27. ¿Tienes alguna pregunta para mí?

Appendix D.

Interview Questions (English) – for Former Migrant Farmworkers & Their Chosen Friends/Family Members in the Department of Chimaltenango

Background & Demographics

Ask to all participants

1. Can you each tell me a little about yourselves?
    a. How old are you?
    b. What do you do?
2. What languages do you speak?
3. Would you say you come from a Mayan community/family?
4. Has anyone here migrated to another country?
    a. Where?
    b. How long ago?
    c. For how long? How many seasons?
    d. What did you do there?
5. How many people in your community do you think have migrated to another country? What percentage of your community would you estimate?
    a. Any people you know?
    b. For example, friends? Nuclear family? Extended family? Neighbours?

Migrant Work Experiences

Ask to former migrant workers

6. Can you describe your experience working in Canada?
    a. What were your first impressions?
    b. What was your average work day like?
    c. What was your average leisure day like?
7. What was it like to return to Guatemala after working abroad?
8. What kinds of things did you share with your friends/family about your time abroad?
    a. How did they react?

9. As a Guatemalan, how do you think other people perceived you while you were working in Canada?
    a. For example, other workers? Employers? Canadians?

To ask friends/family members of former migrant workers

10. How did you feel when your friend/family member decided to work in Canada?
11. What was it like for them to be away for so long?
12. How did you talk and stay connected while they were abroad?
    a. Did you use social media? If so, how did you use it? How often?
13. What was it like when they came back?
    a. What did they tell you about their time abroad?

To ask all participants

14. How has your community been impacted by migration?
    a. Has there been in change in how you see and understand yourself?
    b. Has there been a change in how you see and understand your community?

Conclusion

To ask all participants

15. Is there anything else you would like to add?
16. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix E.

Interview Questions (Spanish) – for Former Migrant Farmworkers & Their Chosen Friends/Family Members in the Department of Chimaltenango

Demografía

Para todos

1. ¿Podrían contarme un poco sobre ustedes?
    a. ¿Cuántos años tienen? ¿A qué se dedican?
    b. ¿Qué idiomas hablan?
2. ¿Dirían que vienen de una comunidad/familia maya?
3. ¿Alguien de aquí a migrado a otro país?
    a. ¿A dónde?
    b. ¿Hace cuánto tiempo?
    c. ¿Por cuánto tiempo/cuántas temporadas?
    d. ¿Qué hacían allí?
4. ¿Cuántas personas de su comunidad creen que han migrado a otro país? ¿Qué porcentaje estiman que hay en su comunidad?

Experiencias Laborales de Migrantes

Para trabajadores migrantes

5. ¿Pueden describir su experiencia trabajando en Canadá?
    a. ¿Cuáles fueron sus primeras impresiones?
    b. ¿Qué hacía en un día cualquiera de trabajo?
    c. ¿Qué hacía en un día cualquiera de descanso?
6. ¿Cómo fue regresar a Guatemala después de trabajar en el extranjero?
7. ¿Qué les contaste a tus amigos y familiares sobre tu tiempo en el extranjero?
    a. ¿Cómo reaccionaban?
8. Como guatemalteco, ¿cómo cree que lo percibieron otras personas mientras trabajaba en Canadá?
    a. Por ejemplo, ¿otros trabajadores? ¿Empleadores? ¿Canadienses?

Para los amigos/familiares de trabajadores migrantes

¿Cómo se sintió cuando su amigo/familiar decidió trabajar en Canadá?

9. ¿Cómo fue estar separados por tanto tiempo?
10. ¿Cómo se comunicaron en contacto mientras su amigo/familiar estaba en el extranjero?
    a. ¿Usaron redes sociales? ¿Cómo las usaron? ¿Con qué frecuencia?
11. ¿Cómo se sintió cuando regreso su amigo/familiar?
    a. ¿Qué le conto sobre su tiempo en el extranjero?

Para todos

12. ¿Cómo ha impactado la migración a su comunidad?
    a. ¿Ha habido cambios en cómo se perciben a sí mismos?
    b. ¿Ha habido cambios en cómo ven y entienden a su comunidad?

Conclusión

Para todos

13. ¿Hay algo más que le gustaría agregar?
14. ¿Tienes alguna pregunta para mí?

Appendix F.

Comparison of the SAWP & Agricultural Stream

Table F1. Comparison of rules and regulations of the SAWP and Agricultural Stream[34]

	Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP)	**Agricultural Stream**
Participating Countries	Only Barbados, Eastern Caribbean, Jamaica, Mexico, and Trinidad & Tobago	Any country.
Employment Contracts	Contracts are standardized. The sending-country, the employer, the migrant farmworker, and the Canadian Government are parties in the agreement.	Contracts are not standardized and very per farm. Each employer is responsible for creating their own contract between themselves and the migrant worker.
Recruitment	Sending-countries recruit migrant workers and station a representative in Canada.	Employer is responsible for the recruitment, often by hiring private recruitment agencies.
Wages	Employers must pay the provincial minimum-wage.	Employers must pay the prevailing rate for Canadians performing the same job; for migrant farmworkers, this

[34] Format and information derived from F.A.R.M.S (2025).

		often means the provincial minimum-wage.
Period of Employment	A maximum of 8 months between January 1st and December 15, with a guarantee of at least 240 hours of work.	A maximum of two years.
Housing Requirements	Employer must provide housing at no cost, except for in BC where migrant workers can pay up to $5.85 per day, or $902.17 per year -- whichever comes first.	Employers are allowed to charge up to $1,560 per year for in-farm housing, or up to 30% of the workers' gross monthly earnings for off-farm housing.
Reimbursements	Caribbean and Mexico reimburse up to 50% of the airfare each year.	There is no provision to reimburse airfare travel.
Medical Coverage	Migrant workers have provincial coverage from their first day in Canada.	Migrant workers must wait three months before being eligible for provincial coverage, during which time the employer is required to purchase comparable coverage.
Contract Compliance	A government representative from the sending-country monitors contract compliance.	There is no monitoring of contract compliance. If issues arise, they must be addressed by employers and migrant workers.