Transnational Circuits of Precarity: A Qualitative Examination of Temporary Worker Wellbeing in Manitoba

by

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CBA- collective bargaining agreement

CBPR- community-based participatory research

CCIS- Calgary Catholic Immigration Society

CERB- Canadian Emergency Response Benefit

CIC- Citizenship and Immigration Canada

COVID-19- coronavirus disease-2019

ESDC- Employment and Social Development Canada

IGPH- Institute for Global Public Health

IRCC- Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada

OFW- overseas Filipino workers

PNP- provincial nominee program

PPE- personal protective equipment

PR- permanent residence

MANSO- Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations

Migrante MB- Migrante Manitoba

MPNP- Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program

RSMS- regional sponsored migration scheme

SPO- service provider organization

TFW- temporary foreign worker

TFWP- Temporary Foreign Worker Program

TCP- transnational circuits of precarity

VPN- Virtual Private Network

WCB- Workers Compensation Board

WRAPA- Worker Recruitment and Protection Act

ABSTRACT

Background

In western Canada, Manitoba is a critical hub for a large population of migrant workers. Usually with limited English or French language ability and possessing limited rights and protections under the current TFWP, Temporary foreign workers (TFWs) are often tied to a single employer, leaving them vulnerable to employer abuse and the under-reporting of workplace injuries and illnesses due to the threat of deportation. Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, when my dissertation research began, the many cases seen among TFWs in Manitoba raises additional important public health questions on the health and wellbeing of migrant workers in Manitoba that I discuss in this dissertation.

Methodology

In close collaboration with Migrante Manitoba (MB), I conducted a qualitative study to explore the precarious lives of migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. I virtually interviewed 20 migrant workers who entered Canada through the TFWP, employed either as seasonal agricultural workers (n=7) or TFWs (n=13). Thirteen TFWs came from Philippines and seven farmworkers from Mexico (n=6) and Jamaica (n=1).

Theoretical contribution

I developed the notion of transnational circuits of precarity to understand the multiple temporal-spatial layers of precarity that migrant workers encounter along their journeys to Manitoba. This multivalent concept is comprised of the following interconnected pieces: 1) a broader political economic "force-field" that compels the movement of human labour resources from the global

South to the global North; 2) the rigid and regulated pathway put in place to ensure workers arrival at their work destinations; 3) the process of making "model minorities" through training programs that ensure the "smooth" transition of workers in their host country; and 4) the affective economy that is fueled by workers' hopes, dreams, and desires. All together, these seemingly disparate processes articulate to produce complex temporal and spatial realities that shape the precarious trajectories of migrant workers. Such a paradigm shift away from the narrow temporal and spatial limits of a focus on "occupational health hazards" will be critical if workers are to realize any meaningful and substantive changes to their overall physical and mental well-being.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Within the context of globalization, workers—particularly from the global South—are encouraged to be mobile and flexible in their labour market participation (Lewis et al., 2015). Over the past few decades, the share of migrants moving from developing countries in the global South to participate in low-wage work in the global North has grown dramatically. Through cross-national trade agreements, the Canadian government supplies a steady stream of transnational workers to Canadian employers who demonstrate labour shortages through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TWFP) (CIC, 2009).

Initially established on January 1, 1973, Canada's first general TFWP was the Non-Immigrant Employment Authorization Program (NIEAP), which has become an integral part of Canada's low-wage immigration stream (Fudge and MacPhail, 2009). This program incorporated the 1966 Commonwealth Caribbean Agreement—an agreement between Canada and several Caribbean countries to form the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (Fudge and MacPhail, 2009; McLaughlin, 2010). In 1973, NIEAP was extended to include Mexico, a vital supplier of agricultural labour across Canada. This program stipulated temporary foreign workers' (TFWs) length of employment, occupation, and residence. Once their work permits expired, TFWs were forced to leave and reapply for another work permit from abroad (Fudge and MacPhail, 2009). NIEAP then signaled a shift in Canadian policy not only in favor of TFWs over permanent settlement but also a reliance by employers on unfree labour.

Later in the1990s, NIEAP had split into two streams targeting high-skilled workers and low-skilled workers (Fudge and MacPhail, 2009). In 1994, through a series of bilateral and multi-lateral agreement, the hiring of high skilled worker came into prominence with the intention of increasing Canada's competitiveness in the global economy. These agreements (e.g.

NAFTA and the Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement) allowed high-skilled workers to smoothly enter Canada without the same restrictions as low-skilled workers (Fudge and MacPhail, 2009). This included easing the processing requirements and exempting employers from the labour market opinion. Now known as the LMIA, LMO is an employment authorization issued by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) to recruit foreign nationals to work temporarily (Fudge and MacPhail, 2009). HRSDC serves the function of ensuring employers have made the necessary efforts to recruit citizens and permanent residents. This presumably acts as a safeguard against foreign workers taking jobs as seen as belonging to Canadians.

However, with the demand to include low-skilled workers to fill jobs in the oil and gas construction, and agricultural sectors, the Liberal government created the "the Low-skilled Pilot Project" in 2002 (Fudge and MacPhail, 2009; McLaughlin, 2010). By encompassing a broader range of labour sectors, employers had the ability to hire workers from a diverse selection of countries. Between 2002 and 2007, the number of TFWs increased from 97,500 to 302,000 across all sectors.

In western Canada, Manitoba is a critical hub for a large population of migrant workers (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2015). In Manitoba, aggressive recruitment campaigns by the hog-processing industry (targeting would-be migrants from Latin America, Africa and Asia) have driven population growth in smaller urban centres and towns. For instance, Neepawa, as the third largest city in Manitoba, after Winnipeg, is a prime example of a community that employs a large number of Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) in the meat packing sector through the company known as HyLife. Usually with limited English or French language ability and possessing limited rights and protections under the current TFWP (Gibson et al., 2017), TFWs

are often tied to a single employer, leaving them vulnerable to employer abuse and the under-reporting of workplace injuries and illnesses due to the threat of deportation (Hennebry, 2010).

In Manitoba, employers have been actively involved in the expansion of the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), which is an economic immigration program that allows for employers to nominate individuals who desire to work within the province (Baxter, 2010). In addition to enhancing geographic and demographic diversification, the PNP has been implemented to address community concerns regarding their aging population and labour demand for a fast-track skilled workforce (Clement, 2003; Silvius & Annis, 2007). This impetus for new arrivals is in large part related to Manitoba's history of organized labour that has motivated the provincial government to be more proactive to the needs of TFWs. Moreover, these developments for permanent economic migration have been further sustained by the rise of the pro-labour New Democratic government to support worker's rights and work with the federal government to provide settlement services for nominees and new immigrants. Through the use of PNP, Manitoba has seen a rise of immigration from 4635 to 15,809 between 2000 in 2010 (CIC 2011b). Between 2007 and 2016, the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP) landings accounted for about 70% of all immigrants to Manitoba, and more than 90% of all economic immigrants to the province. In 2009, PNP applicants accounted for 75.1% of all immigrants to Manitoba (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2015).

Within the context of the COVID-19 (coronavirus disease-2019) pandemic, when my dissertation research began, the many cases seen among TFWs in Manitoba (Government of Manitoba, 2020) raises additional important public health questions on the health and wellbeing of migrant workers in Manitoba that I discuss in this dissertation. As 'non-citizens' of Canada, migrant workers often work under conditions that would be deemed unacceptable to Canadian

workers (Sharma, 2012). For this reason, the World Health Organization (2013; 2019) has emphasized the need to draw linkages between migration, health, and human rights. This is especially relevant within the context of the Canadian prairies where we know little about the health problems facing transnational migrants.

Pursuing a critical qualitative examination of the uneven effects of vulnerability on TFWs, my dissertation research describes how precarity itself manifests and operates across a transnational circuit, from origin country to destination in Manitoba. Analytically, the concept of precarity provides a useful framework to not only reveal the contradictory nature of migrant labour—one which is essential yet expendable—but also interrogate existing conditions of capitalism and systemic inequities that render migrant workers structurally vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and poor health outcomes.

In Canada, TFWs have historically been viewed by employers and the government as a response to the country's purported labour shortages (Goldring et al, 2009; Mclaughlin & Hennebry, 2013; Walia, 2010). According to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), formerly known as the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) (2011a), a number of factors have contributed to these labour shortages: from demographic issues of low fertility rates and an aging workforce to a rising educated class unwilling to work in the low-wage sector. Canadian industry representatives contend that these shortages reflect a deeper problem with regards to the federal migration program's inability to meet the country's market demands (CIC, 2011a). As such, TFWs are viewed as only providing a short-term solution to a broader and ongoing economic crisis. From 2007 the number of TFWs entering Canada from the global south in 'low-skilled' positions exceeded the population of permanent residents (Read et al., 2013). Over the years, the number of temporary foreign workers (TFWs) has increased significantly,

reaching over 770,000 workers in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022). As noted by other Canadian migration scholars (Hennebry, 2010; Mclaughlin & Hennebry, 2013), the dramatic rise of overseas migrants in low-wage temporary work position highlights a precarious, flexible workforce occupying positions that would otherwise be deemed dangerous or unsafe to Canadians.

Within the context of a global political economy, Trumper and Wong (2010) contend that Canada's TFWP, in the absence of state jurisdiction, provides employers the license to hire migrants on the basis of gender, cultural and geographical preferences. Although Manitoba is viewed as one of the leading examples of enforcing mechanisms to protect migrant workers, TFWs are still very much vulnerable due to the lack of coordinated federal provincial oversight and a complaint-based system that relies on the workers to file for grievances. In response to the vulnerability of migrant workers, the Manitoba government passed a groundbreaking reform in April 2009. Known as the Worker Recruitment and Protection Act (WRAPA), the reform expands Employment Standards branch coverage and protection of workers by enforcing measures with respect to employer misconduct or abuse (Read et al., 2013). In particular, WRAPA involves two primary reforms. First, the Act requires that employers be licensed and register with the province before they can recruit a foreign worker. This registration process is aimed at ensuring that employers have a good history of compliance with labour laws and employment standards prior to their hiring workers as well as prohibiting agencies from recovering from foreign workers cost relating to recruiting them (Allan, 2010). Secondly, the registration process provides Employment Standards with an updated record of employers who have employed TFWs. For agencies that fail to comply with labour laws, the province has the authority to revoke a license, to investigate, and to recoup money on behalf of workers from

employers and recruiters. Although the Act ensures that employers remain compliant with Employer standards, the absence of an information sharing agreement with the federal government leaves worker's rights as an individual matter. For example, despite the Employment Standards branch effort to meet with advocacy groups and make proactive site visits and audits of employers that hire migrant workers, enforcement of the Act is primarily complaint-based. Under the TFWP, migrant workers constitute an unfree labour force with no guaranteed pathway to permanent residency despite their economic contributions to the nation-state (Basok, 2004; Sharma, 2000; Sharma, 2001; Strauss & McGrath, 2017). Although some participants in the TWFP may be able to apply for permanent residency if nominated by provinces, they must be provided with job offers from employers through the PNP. However, this merely serves to heighten worker precarity, as the workers are generally tied to one job, with one employer at one location and may accept unsafe working conditions to obtain secure employment. Moreover, under the threat of losing their job and being deported, TFWs are less likely to report workplace abuse and injuries and dangerous working conditions (Gibb, 2006).

In such a system of managed migration, migrant workers in Canada are caught in a "vicious cycle of precariousness" (Tucker, 2006, p. 157 cited in McLaughlin & Hennebry, 2013, p. 5). Within the context of the global political economy, McLaughlin and Hennebry (2013) contend that the cyclical nature of precarity reinforces the marginalization of migrant workers by increasing their risks to health problems and abuse, which, in turn, further jeopardizes their employment or immigration status. With limited options and agency and the pressure to support family members back home, migrants' struggles are often exacerbated by social exclusion, inadequate access to Canadian settlement services, and insufficient recourse to human rights and legal protections (Depatie-Pelletier, 2008; Nakache & Kinoshita, 2010).

With respect to the unprecedented rise of COVID-19 in Canada, migrant workers are one of the many vulnerable communities being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 (Haley et al., 2020). Under the TWFP, the seasonal agricultural worker program (SAWP) employs over 50,000 seasonal agricultural workers a year usually from Mexico and Commonwealth Caribbean countries to come to Canada to work in orchards, greenhouses, or farms. These workers who stay up to eight months a time arrive without family members and without a guaranteed pathway to permanent residency (McLaughlin & Hennebry, 2013). In order to secure Canada's food system and agricultural industry, migrant workers were permitted continued entry due to the essential role they play in supporting Canadian farm production and food supply (Haley et al., 2020).

Despite their necessity to the economy, migrant workers continue to suffer deep inequities that make them vulnerable to increased COVID-19 exposure. This ranges from overcrowded and unsanitary working conditions to lack of access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and health care services (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020). As noted by Haley and colleagues (2020), "Many live in tight quarters (e.g., trailers or bunkhouses) that are poorly ventilated, allowing for easy transmission of the virus, a pattern that has already emerged in prisons, meatpacking plants, long-term care homes, and homes for the disabled" (p.36). Moreover, migrant workers who have lost employment due to the pandemic were ineligible for emergency income supports such as the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), putting them in more precarious and dire positions (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020).

At the start of the global pandemic, the Canadian government's international travel bans drastically decreased the number of TFWs. From March 2019 to March 2020, the number of the TFWs decreased by 47% (Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council [CAHRC], 2020).

However, in response to initial disruption to the Canadian food system, this number would later rebound in the last quarter of 2020 and increase further in 2021, For instance, between March 2020 and September 2021, non-Canadian citizens and PRs were banned from entering the country with exceptions for workers deemed essential (Helps et al., 2021). This recasting of workers as economically essential shielded them from some of the stoppages of the immigration system.

Such changes became more possible by way of the July 2020 United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)—formerly known as NAFTA—an effort by the Trump's administration to invest in the US economy (Blecker, 2021). Although this offered mechanisms through which to address unfair competition and expand legal migration pathways (Cheu, 2024), this declaration primarily focused on the abuses of workers occurring in Mexico, failing to address the violations of labor standards in the US or Canada particularly within the agricultural industries (Gordon, 2023). Within context of COVID-19 pandemic, migrant workers particularly from the Global South came to be deemed 'essential' to the Global North's economy. Workers in these cases were cheaper and more expendable than workers who were 'free' citizens, underwriting the cost of U.S and Canadian exports.

Despite the 'welcoming' of migrant workers into Canada and US, Trump's anti-immigration policies and rhetoric has only emboldened the racism and xenophobia of migrant workers across North America. Under Trump, COVID-19 has played an important role in inciting violence and discrimination against racialized communities. During this time, these racially motivated acts of violence in Canada was most prominent against those of East Asian backgrounds (Helps, Silvius, & Gibson, 2021). Against this backdrop, migrant bodies also came to be seen as expendable. Many were forced to work without proper physical distancing or PPE

in place, further increasing the risk and cases of COVID-19. As evident in President Trump's March 2020 updated issue of "Coronavirus Guidance for America" essential agricultural workforce has "a special responsibility to maintain [its] normal work schedule" (Handel et al., 2020: p. 1760). However, this 'normal' only served to perpetuate workers' precarious and exploitative working conditions.

In terms of the spread of COVID-19, the rising rate of workers entering Canada came with new challenges. (Helps et al., 2021). Since 2020, there were close to 1,000 cases of COVID-19 among seasonal agricultural labourers in the Southwestern Ontario farms and greenhouses of Leamington and Windsor-Essex County resulting in 3 deaths (Jeffords, 2020; Gatehouse, 2020). Meanwhile, Alberta saw one of the largest outbreaks in North American history at Cargill, a slaughterhouse plant employing mostly TFWs, with 3 deaths and more than 1500 cases (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020). In the case of Cargill, workers reported feeling pressured to continue working by employers even after testing positive as long as they did not show symptoms.

In Brandon, Manitoba, Maple Leaf Factory (MLF) workers, who composed over 70% of recent migrants (Economic Development Brandon, 2016; Hamilton & Huynh, 2019) were particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 with over 90 confirmed cases of COVID-19 due to a lack of sanitary stations and overcrowded communal spaces that made physical distancing highly difficult (Einarson, 2020). This made up approximately a third of the cases in the city. Despite the request of employees and the United Food and Commercial Workers union for a temporary shutdown, MLF management and provincial government and public health officials had insisted the workplace safe and stay fully operational (Krugel, 2020). In one of his daily pressers, Dr. Brent Roussin, Manitoba's chief provincial public health officer, maintained that a factory

shutdown was not necessary, stating that there was no evidence to suggest "workplace transmission" among the COVID-19 positive employees (CPAC, 2020a)—a sentiment that had been echoed by MLF management. Similarly, in another presser, Dr. Roussin and health minister Cameron Friesen also questioned the significance of declaring MLF as a public health concern with "no exposure to the public" despite the cluster of cases linked to this workplace (CPAC, 2020b). Instead, the Chief has attributed cases of COVID-19 to 'community spread' and 'communal living' communities. Such rhetoric not only failed to capture the complex workplace conditions responsible for the spread of COVID-19 but inadvertently reinforces the stigma of already marginalized ethnic communities. This also brought to bear the politicization of public health with respect to its complicity with management and the Conservative government. As such, understanding how public health discourses had become coopted and politicized in response to COVID-19 provides a useful lens through which to understand the systemic marginalization and precarity experienced among various groups of migrant workers in Manitoba.

Theoretical Framework

Precarity

Conceptualized in 1963 with roots in French economics, précarité also known as poverty-related conditions was used by Bourdieu to distinguish between casual workers and permanent workers (Bourdieu, 2022). The term precarity is later rearticulated in the early 2000s to encompass the idea of precaritisation—a process of increasing insecure employment prospects and uncertain futures (Lazar & Sanchez, 2019). In response to the rollback of the welfare state and increased contractualization of labour, the precariat has been a term taken up among European activists

during the EuroMayDay protests between 2001 and 2006 to speak out against austerity and economic insecurity (Lazar & Sanchez, 2019; Paret & Gleeson, 2016). Drawing on Neilson and Rossiter's work, Lazar and Sanchez (2019) criticize this notion precariat for its Eurocentric Fordist model of labour that focuses on a highly educated young class denied of a future of guaranteed employment, upward mobility, and income security that was once afforded to their parents. Similarly, other scholars (Das & Randeria, 2015; Munck, 2013; Paret & Gleeson, 2016) have noted how the precariat concept fails to account the diverse and complex ways precarity takes shape across different political and cultural regimes and how workers in the global South have always been precarious. Despite its initial shortcomings, the notion of precarity and precarious work has expanded to offer valuable insights in understanding the larger transnational contexts of the global North/South relations (Lazar & Sanchez, 2019).

Within the global South, however, ethnographic research has played a vital role in highlighting how such objects of desire have yet to be widespread enough to be realized in most people. This is because precarity of employment in the global South has a long history and is often the norm (Han, 2018; Lazar & Sanchez, 2019; Munck, 2013). Instead of viewing the urban poor as a political group lacking in work-based identity, global South scholars have detailed the complex social and material conditions that can enable or inhibit collective mobilization. For example, Zlolniski (2018) examines the precarious lives of Indigenous farmworkers in northern Mexico employed to grow fresh fruits and vegetables for US markets. Instead of an eroding class, he describes the precariat as a new class of farmworkers fostered by neoliberal agrarian policies. Such reforms, he argues render labourers in Mexico structurally vulnerable to government-sanctioned unions and detrimental state policies that leave them with limited rights and benefits. In response, the farmworkers develop multilayer individual and collective

strategies, which ranged from engaging in non-market labour activities, which entailed participating in local food production (e.g. raising animals or cultivating plants, vegetables and herbs in the backyard) for self-provisioning, selling, or bartering with kin, neighbors, and friends, to forming independent unions to push for better working conditions, labour benefits, and higher wages (Zlolniski, 2018).

Moreover, Das and Randeria (2015) show that through liberal forms of citizenship the urban poor emerges as political actors based on the claims they can make on the state. They argue that the socialities that constitute the lives of the poor are influenced by forces of precarity beyond material lack. For instance, Bourdieu's work among those in the margins of French society show how symbolic struggle for recognition and dispossession are intricately linked in which the refusal of social symbolic value is intimately connected to material adversity (Das & Randeria, 2015). In other words, poverty, according to Das and Randeria, is a social relationship with the state that is not only engendered by material scarcity but also by the desire for recognition.

As illustrated above, a nuanced understanding of precarity would help unsettle the global North/South divide and, in the process, discourage reductionist attempts of development discourses that link poverty with the global South. With the global casualization of labour, precarity shifts from its Eurocentric notion of formal employment and work-place identity to a transnational process marked by uncertainty and impermanence (Han, 2018; Lazar & Sanchez, 2019). By highlighting the processes of dispossession and institutionalized violence, precarity reminds us how the deregulation of the global labour supply chain has allowed capital to move where labour is cheapest and most flexible while incentivizing governments to implement work measures that leave workers vulnerable and exploited (Lazar & Sanchez, 2019).

Precarity and Structural Violence

Within the context of health, Paul Farmer (1996) contends that the social roots of diseases—particularly political and economic inequalities that affect various levels of risk and protection—are examples of structural violence. "Their sickness is a result of structural violence: neither culture nor pure individual will is at fault; rather, historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces conspire to constrain individual agency. Structural violence is visited upon all those whose social status denies them access to the fruits of scientific and social progress (p. 79)."

Structural violence then accounts for the social relations and arrangements—economic, political, legal, religious, or cultural—that perpetuate the risk for various forms of suffering towards subordinated groups (Benson, 2008; Farmer, 1996; Mills; Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2016). This suffering is linked to historically rooted social, economic and political inequities and the uneven distribution of harm that not only subordinates but constricts the agency of the individual (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2016). As Farmer (2004, p. 315) succinctly puts it: "Structural violence is structured and stricturing. It constricts the agency of its victims [and] determines the way in which resources—food, medicine, even affection—are allocated and experienced."

Similarly, precarity provides a useful lens through which to examine the uneven effects of structural violence and its effects on human suffering (Mills, 2016). Unlike structural violence, precarity highlights the nuanced relationships between different forms of violence and suffering and the ways in which such forms can be embodied. Here, Pierre Bourdieu and Veena Das' theoretical concept of social suffering is worth detailing. With the growth of neoliberal reforms in France, Bourdieu notes how social suffering is not only the result of unequal

distribution of material goods and services but also people's lived experience of domination and repression and the pain that arises from this (Frost & Hogget, 2008). The term provides a nuanced understanding of the everyday suffering of individuals denied the means to live a dignified life and to adapt to the shifting conditions of capitalist society (Bourdieu, 1999). Similarly, Das speaks to the human consequences of social suffering derived from war, extreme poverty, death, torture and disease in South Asia (Das, 1997; Kleinman et al., 1997). According to Das, these 'assemblages' of human problems reveal the implications of political, economic, and institutional power on people and how this influences their responses to injuries. Both scholars provide a critical lens through which to not only understand the lived experiences of social and structural oppression but also the forms of agency possible.

Precarity and Migrant Health

Within the context of the Global North, precarity is particularly important to note when trying to understand the sending and returning contexts of migration to countries like the US and Canada. According to Paret and Gleeson (2016), a historic and geographic perspective of migrant vulnerabilities helps to shift migration from being a voluntary rational choice to being informed by economic insecurity, social networks, and cultural expectation. Critical migration scholars, for instance, have noted how migration must be reframed as a 'constrained choice' that considers the disadvantages and advantages for migrants (Massey, 1999; Paret & Gleeson, 2016). This is particularly apparent among female migrants who often endure serious socioeconomic inequalities unique to their gender. For example, in Sangaramoorthy's ethnography (2023), Mexican migrant women in commercial crab processing in rural Maryland Eastern Shore on H-2B work visa earned less, had fewer rights, benefits and legal protections, and suffered numerous invisible injuries compared to their male counterparts (Sangaramoorthy, 2023). Similarly,

Richter and colleagues (2020) ethnography on the healthcare access experiences of African economic migrant women in Canada revealed how their lack of information and social support influenced their ability to engage in health care. For example, women faced the unique stressors of supporting for family members overseas while adjusting to and caring for their families in their new environment. With respect to the transnational caregiving during COVID-19, Rottenberg, Sethi, and Williams (2023) work illustrates that despite the feminization of care work, both immigrant men and women in London, Ontario faced multiple challenges, including: managing the guilt between needing to financially supporting their families overseas and finding steady employment; and easing the stress of family members overseas of the pandemic while also worrying about their risk of exposure and infection.

Within Canada, the exploitation of migrant workers is often concealed and reproduced through the notion that citizens can expect rights that non-citizens are not granted (Sharma, 2000). Despite working and paying taxes in Canada, TFWs are largely denied social programs and services that citizens and most permanent residents have access to, such as unemployment insurance, social assistance, workers' compensation, and health care insurance (Sharma, 2002). At the same time, these workers are placed in highly vulnerable positions that make speaking out against employers difficult due to the very real fear of deportation. As such, citizenship or a lack thereof helps to legitimate the domination of and make differentially vulnerable those who are socially, as well as legally classified as non-citizens (Sharma, 2000). According to Sharma, nationalist discourses of "Canadian-ness" often rely on racist ideologies that organizes differences between citizens and non-citizens. It is this social organization of "difference" in Canada and the claim to the idea that only citizens are afforded rights, Sharma argues, that has encouraged a cheap and flexible workforce of non-citizen Others. Here, the Other not only exist

outside the borders of the state but also includes its original Indigenous inhabitants. As a white settler colony, Canada relies on racist, sexist and nationalist constructions of belonging that affords Canadians differential rights and entitlements over those constructed as the Other (Sharma, 2000). By classifying people as 'migrant' or 'foreign workers', rather than 'citizens' or 'permanent residents', the Canadian government then is in a position to force people to work within unfree employment relations as a condition of their entry and residence in Canada (Sharma, 2000).

However, precarity can provide an important analytic entry point for understanding the agentic character of the so called vulnerable and its potential to unite disparate marginalized groups (Das & Randeria, 2015; Paret & Gleeson, 2016). Precarity, then, helps to shift the precariat from a homogenous passive group to a complex social entity with the potential for self-activity and collective change making. As noted by Butler (2009, p.ii), precarity allows for a deep understanding of the political, ideological processes by which certain groups are more vulnerable to inequitable social and economic conditions and "differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death".

The project

In this dissertation, I examine the multiplicity of forces that play a critical role in creating forms of precarity in the lives of migrant workers. Specifically, this story begins during COVID-19. In 2020, we begin to see the exacerbation of inequities encountered by TFWs in Canada and beyond. During COVID-19, workers encountered uncertainties and suspensions around regular work activities, which dealt devasting blows to workers' financial planning and commitment to

their families. In other words, the pandemic compounded and featured in the forms of precarity I portray in this dissertation.

To understand the complex lived realities of migrant workers, in a more general sense, I analyzed a constellation of structural forces through the lens of precarity, revealing the ways migrant workers are differentially exposed to social and economic inequities. By detailing how these contradictions play out in workers' lives, I illuminate them as being more than an available commodity to service and prop up the Canadian settler economy. Rather, I reveal the rich affordances of their individual and collective histories and relations as making up *a complex social tapestry that, indeed, forms Canadian life*. Through their stories, we gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the stakes behind why these workers continue to place themselves in what might appear as obvious situations of precarity.

Transnational Circuits of Precarity

Based on my findings, I develop the notion of TCP to understand the multiple temporal-spatial layers of precarity that migrant workers encounter along their journeys to Manitoba.
This multivalent concept is comprised of the following interconnected pieces: 1) a broader political economic "force-field" that compels the movement of human labour resources from the global South to the global North; 2) the rigid and regulated pathway put in place to ensure workers arrival at their work destinations; 3) the process of making "model minorities"[1] through

[1] I borrow this notion from critiques of the term "model minority" initially employed by the sociologist William Petersen in the article titled, "Successful story: Japanese American style", an article which appeared in *The New York Times Magazine* in 1966. According to critical theorists the "model minority myth", most often applied to Asian people, is often employed to drive a wedge between racialized groups. In sum, although seemingly complimentary it is nonetheless racializing in its acceptance and reinforcement of the labour exploitations of Asian people in the US. See for example: Au, W., 2022. Asian American racialization, racial capitalism, and the

training programs that ensure the "smooth" transition (i.e., assimilation) of workers in their host country 4) the affective economy (appealing to notions of class mobility) that is fueled by workers' hopes, dreams, and desires. All together, these seemingly disparate processes articulate to produce complex temporal and spatial realities that shape the precarious trajectories of migrant workers.

Through my qualitative examination of transnational circuits of precarity—which begins "at home" and connects along the pathway to arrival—I identify key themes that emerged from their stories: 1) causes of migration, 2) challenges upon arrival, 3) becoming the model minority, 4) health care barriers, 5) workplace injuries, abuses and exploitation, and 5) hopes and dreams for a better future. My depiction of the spectrum of vulnerabilities that workers face along this trajectory is placed alongside a view of their ability to actively and creatively negotiate ways of flourishing, which is also integrally a part of their precariousness. In other words, precarity is revealed as double-edged in its relationship to futurity—producing immanent possibilities of success and ruin that continually act on the present through optimism, hope, dread, and anxiety. This conflictual field of affect manifests in the work lives of my interlocutors as a continual state of regulation and dysregulation, self-disciplining and being disciplined, being assertive and capitulating. These vacillations tie their existence to perpetual risk and anticipation. This dissertation unpacks this tightrope walking and its implications for well-being in ways that go beyond disease and injury mitigation.

Given migrant workers' vulnerable social and health status in Manitoba, my study explored the overarching research questions: How do TFWs' precarious conditions across the

threat of the model minority. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, *44*(3), pp.185-209.

continuum of their work-migration journey shape their lived experiences with respect to the present and aspiration towards the future? More specifically I ask: How do the precarious conditions back home impact the migration experiences of TFWs? What are the different challenges encountered along this journey? How has the model minority archetype used and constructed to shape the work experiences of migrant workers? What are the key challenges migrant workers encounter as newcomers to Canada? How does TFWs' precarious status affect their access to health care and workplace health and safety? How do TFWs' hope for a better future articulate with the forms of precariousness they face?

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY—APPROACHING PRECARITY

Methodological framework

Although my original intention was to conduct ethnographic research, my dissertation project had to make a strong pivot because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, I was not able to engage in the immersive fieldwork or intensive participant observation normally expected of ethnographic research. However, given the methodological limitations posed by COVID-19, this research eventually evolved into a community-based qualitative research project. Based on nine years of activist engagement with Migrante Manitoba (MB), I was able gain approval from the organization to collaborate on my doctoral research project. As a volunteer, I helped facilitate and organize workshops and events related to migrant issues (e.g., health and safety workshops), and provided relief support (e.g. delivering PPE and food hampers) to TFWs during COVID-19.

In relation to community-based participatory research (CBPR), Stanton (2014) describes it more as an epistemological orientation than a set methodology. In particular, CBPR shares the commitment to democratic praxis with people and communities most affected by the issue of inquiry (Janes, 2016). In particular, scholars (Iglesias-Rios et al., 2022; Stanton et al., 2014; Strand et al., 2003) detail fundamental characteristics that guide CBPR: 1) research should be participatory, collaborative, and value the unique strengths and perspectives of members in the community; 2) scholars should achieve balance between research and action; 3) research enhances community capacity; and 4) results should be relevant, useful, and shared to all partners through regular and transparent action. This holds the potential to democratize and decolonize knowledge production by engaging community members in the research process as well as requiring reflections on the researcher and their practices (Janes, 2016).

For the needs assessment, there was an advisory board that guided development of the instrument as well as its objectives. The following key stakeholders were involved in my research: 1) one representative from Migrante Manitoba 2) one representative from Migrante Canada 3) one representative from Occupational Health Centre (OHC)[2] in Manitoba 4) and the Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations, an umbrella settlement organization in Manitoba. As the parent organization of Migrante Manitoba, Migrante Canada was vital in providing feedback from other Migrante chapters across Canada. In addition, OHC and MANSO representatives provided important feedback on interview guides, the data collection process, and the findings of my report. Thus, a constellation of organizations framed and defined the needs assessment. However, in later stages of my project, certain members left while others were more involved in the research process, which speaks to the evolving connections and attachments within CBPR.

As the primary research partner, Migrante MB was engaged in every aspect of the research process, from the development of the interview guide and connecting me to migrant workers to determining the appropriate data collection methods and knowledge dissemination strategies. However, given the many projects and caseloads Migrante Manitoba had taken during the pandemic, their capacity was also limited. To accommodate their busy schedules, for instance, I would actively follow-up with a research representative from Migrante Manitoba after every interview. Key insights were shared and used to inform their advocacy work and casework. Here, my research was more than just theoretical but became an ongoing collaborative process

[2] Established in 1983, OHC is a non-profit, charitable community health centre based in Manitoba funded by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, unions, and other donors. The OHC supports workers, employers, and health and safety committees toward improving health and safety conditions and eliminating hazardous work conditions (MFL OHC, 2020).

that had practical applications for Migrante Manitoba's organizing efforts. As a result, my research findings reflect not only the realities of migrant workers but also the everyday groundwork of Migrante Manitoba.

In terms of CBPR-related knowledge products, a report with key findings from my interviews was published and shared with Migrante MB to support their advocacy work with migrant workers (Huynh, 2021). In addition, through my research collaboration with Migrante MB, I was able to co-develop legacy tools (such as a directory or resources and services for migrant workers) that have been used and shared in the organization's case work and outreach activities with Migrante MB and its members.

Furthermore, with respect to precarity, CPBR was vital to understanding how the marginalization and oppression of migrant workers was upheld by precarious employment and workplace exploitation. Such a collective approach building on the strengths and expertise of Migrante MB allowed me to prioritize community-identified issues and concerns while building equitable decision-making practices.

Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic played a complex and nuanced role in shaping the ebbs and flows of my research. For many of my interlocutors, COVID-19 came with its own trail of challenges, making even the simplest interview difficult. Cancellations and postponements became a regular occurrence. For some, interviews were treated as a therapeutic break from the struggles of their lives; but for others, the stress of everyday life proved too much for people to become fully invested in my research. However, instead of being brushed off as "limitations", I regard my encounters with these dynamics as important indicators of the complex and fraught lives these

workers had to endure. As such, my research came to explore the broader multiplicities of forces that converged in the pandemic to affect the precarious lives of migrant workers.

Another important methodological limitation was the lack of openness among my interviews with Mexican farmworkers. This was in large part because Migrante MB had a larger and deeper reach with Filipino TFWs. Although my Mexican farmworker interlocutors came by way of Migrante MB's "solidarity contact", as they called him—an organizer who has been a farmworker organizer for more than 15 years—many were reluctant to openly discuss the workplace grievances they faced. This can be attributed to several reasons, including: 1) the seasonal makeup of farmwork making it difficult to establish long-term rapport and trust with these farm workers; 2) the fear of deportation for speaking negatively of their employers; 3) my inability to do fieldwork or speak the workers' native language; 4) and my perceived ethnic-cultural difference that may have marked me apart from them. With respect to the second reason, a couple of workers discussed the concern that co-workers would find out and report to their employers. A few workers would use the idiom 'orejas' an idiom to mean "those who listen will betray you". For these reasons, most of my findings focused on the experiences of Filipino TFWs who were more willing to share their experiences with me.

Positionality

My relationship with my research partner, Migrante MB, was critical to my examination of migrant workers lived realities in Manitoba. Through them, I was granted entrée into an array of social and political terrains that became vital to my understanding of the everyday lives of migrant workers. Importantly, my long-term activist engagement with the organization enabled me to immerse myself within migrant worker communities throughout Manitoba. Although my dissertation research commenced in 2020, I have served as an active volunteer with Migrante

MB since 2015. This volunteer work forms a crucial analytic backdrop in this dissertation. This field immersion allowed me to cultivate intimate relations of rapport with Migrante MB staff, settlement services providers, and other important people, environments, partnerships, and policies that are instrumental in shaping the conditions of migrant worker wellbeing.

In the following section, I would like to bring to bear my positionality. As a child of two Vietnamese refugee parents so much of this background informed how I related to and interpreted the stories migrant workers told me. Analytically, at times, I had to remind myself of this analytic inclination, so as to be vigilant that I was not making sense of their lived realities through my personal experiences as a first generation Canadian of immigrant parents. At the same time, exchanging similar experiences fostered what appeared to me as open and candid conversations in which participants seemed to be at ease. For instance, some workers expressed that they felt "seen" and understood after being interviewed by me.

That being said, the process through which my positionality was at play was not always as seamless. As a male-presenting researcher, most of my male interlocutors appeared to be more open and inclined to engage with me. I found this particularly true with the Filipino male migrant workers who in some cases had mistaken me as part of their ethnic group. Despite the perceived affordances of my gender presentation, however, my position as a researcher influenced how respondents would address me. For example, they would often refer to me with the honorific "sir"—a sign of respect for authority—despite my protest and many of them surpassing me in age.

With respect to the Mexican farmworkers, they had often viewed me with some level of suspicion despite my perceived male status. As noted earlier, my perceived ethnocultural difference and inability to speak Spanish may have been a barrier for them to feel comfortable

enough to confide in me. Although a female Spanish-speaking interpreter was present to assist me, this may have had the unintended effect of reducing workers' openness in which being seen as vulnerable or weak by these men may have been an affront to their machismo sensibilities. Similarly, my interviews with my three female interlocutors may have had influenced the depth and type of conversations that was afforded to me. Despite a female interpreter present in case of translation support, my presence may have had limited the types of gender-specific issues in the workplace they would have comfortably shared with me.

Through my positionality, the knowledge produced was a co-constructed and negotiated process between myself as the researcher and the research process. Moreover, within the disciplinary practice of anthropology, these tensions that I bring to bear instead of being written off as merely bias, were necessarily embedded within the research itself. This not only was an enriching and informative part of my research project but integral in revealing how the meanings we come to produce are reflexively situated (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015).

Research partner

Responding to the rights and welfare of temporary workers in Manitoba is the community-based organization known as Migrante MB, which became an integral partner in and primary beneficiary of my research. Migrante MB is one of the many chapters of Migrante International—a global alliance of over 200 member organizations in 23 countries founded in 1996 (Migrante Canada, 2020). Migrante MB formed in 2010, alongside the founding of Migrante Canada and its 13 other affiliated organizations across the country. As the parent organization, Migrante International formed in response to the unjust hanging of Flor Contemplacion, a Filipina maid who was accused of murdering another Filipina domestic worker and a three-year-old boy she was babysitting in Singapore (Migrante International, 2020;

Pinoyabrod, 2024). This ignited nationwide and overseas outrage within the Filipino community over the denial of President Ramos' administration in providing any assistance to protect Flor, an event which drew global attention to the plight of overseas Filipino workers (OFWS).

Accordingly, Migrante MB and the many other chapters pursue the following objectives in their work (Migrante Canada, 2020):

> Promote migrants' rights and dignity against all forms of discrimination, exploitation and abuse in the work place and in the community and resist all anti-migrant policies 2) to assert the right to organize 3) Strengthen unity among the Filipino diaspora and rally their families and advocates towards the upholding of migrants' rights for jobs, fair wages and due recognition 4) Push for the building of a self-reliant economy to stop forced migration, promote social equity and justice and unite with other sectors of society for the advancement of national development and democracy 5) Build solidarity with migrant organizations of other nationalities and peoples who are against the plunder of economies, destruction of the environment and wars of aggression that cause widespread poverty and injustice.

Together, these objectives formed the basis through which Migrante MB advocates for the rights and welfare of migrant workers by systemically confronting governments in home and labour receiving countries. Although Migrante MB work includes addressing the immediate needs of migrant workers (e.g. case supports, health and safety rights workshops, and providing referrals), their work aims to address the root causes of forced migration in the Philippines via labour export policies that facilitate the export of Filipinos to 'ease' massive unemployment in the Philippines or US militarization, which has displaced many Indigenous communities in the

Philippines. As such, Migrante MB's organizing work aims to empower workers by actively engaging in both the personal and political struggles of migrant workers.

In particular, the relations and bonds they forged were built upon genuine engagement in the everyday struggles, joys, and events of migrant workers. Their work to understand the various social and economic characteristics of Filipino workers—including TFWs, permanent residents and citizens alike—through a dialectical transnational anti-capitalist lens was critical in their organizing work and formed the basis for my own theoretical analysis.

Throughout my years of organizing with Migrante MB, what captivated me most was the sense of camaraderie and community the organization had fostered among workers and members alike. If someone, for example, needed food or confronted workplace abuse, members were quick to leverage whatever resources and supports they had to come to workers' aid. Members were not shy to pitch in what they could to help. To fully grasp and understand complex struggles of workers, Migrante MB organizers often impressed upon me the importance of immersing myself in the everyday lives of workers whether through sharing a meal, helping out in work/life matters, or simply hanging out.

Although providing mutual aid was one way of meeting worker material needs, Migrante MB's politics was fundamentally rooted in strengthening relations and collectivizing the individual experiences of migrant workers toward a common struggle—borne of collective action toward social and political change. Such a worker-led movement aimed to go beyond the one-sided charity model by, instead, aiming to address and combat the neoliberal captialist structures responsible for workers' migration. By engaging in the particularities of workers struggles within the context of Manitoba, Migrante MB has been able to engage and mobilize the

Filipino worker diaspora on systemic level issues. In the following vignette, I revisit a meeting that encapsulates the organizing principles and practices of Migrante MB.

March 22, 2022

Today's meeting was particularly important. Held at the apartment of a Migrante MB member, Rosie, in downtown Winnipeg, the air was buzzing with excitement and fervor. With the easing of social distancing and mask-wearing restrictions, we were overjoyed to reconnect after months of the COVID-19 lockdown. In attendance were seven Migrante members, including myself. Four had been part of Migrante MB since its inception in 2010. Two of the women, Rosie and Danielle, aged 46 and 53, had respectively organized with unions and students back in the Philippines while Brady, aged 42, has organized students and workers alike across Manitoba and Ontario. As the oldest member, Donnie, aged 55, was an active student organizer in the Philippines fighting against the fascist dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos regime. Other members included me and more recent members, school teacher Abi and PhD student Lori, aged 42 and 30, who joined in 2019.

As with every meeting, each person would usually bring food—potluck style to share with the group. The smells of freshly cooked Filippino food wafted through the air. Dishes included pancit, sopa, chicken adobo, and Jollibee chicken. Even though many of our members were struggling workers themselves, every meal was prepared with great consideration, time, and effort. Emblematic of the Filipino culture, food was integral part of our bonding experience, not just as organizers but as people connected by the simple pleasures and necessities of life.

Laughter filled the air as people inquired about each other's food, like learning how Abi's pancit dish used a particular brand of noodles called "Lucky Me: Pancit Canton" or how

Brady would use a pressure cooker to cook his sopas to obtain a rich and delicate flavour profile. Such simple moments of interaction were a symbolic way for people to learn about each other but also honour and acknowledge the labour put into our meals. With our bodies satiated, we turn to filling our mind with the latest news affecting OFWs as well as those back home. One by one we went around to check in with each other. Danielle described the struggles of being on peritoneal dialysis and waiting for her kidney transplant. Rosie shared her need to find more stable employment apart from her part-time work as a child care assistant at YMCA. For Donnie, he discussed the challenges of working the nightshift and the impact this had on his health. As with other check-ins, these were integral moments to understand how our struggles and experiences were part of a larger capitalist structure—that our struggles alone did not distinguish us but in fact united us.

Afterwards, we proceeded to discuss Migrante Canada's national campaign work to address issues affecting the lives of Filipino workers across Canada and at home.[3] *With chart paper and marker on hand, we discussed the most pressing current political issue in the Philippines: the presidential election. The air chilled as members expressed the possibility of another Marcos regime. What would the presidential election of Bong Bong Marcos (BBM), son of former dictator President Ferdinand Marcos, and his vice-president running mate Sara Duterte, daughter of current President Rodrigo Durture mean for Filipino citizens and OFWs? Highlighting this controversy, Rosie explained that BBM is nothing more than Duterte's puppet*

[3] As the parent organization, Migrante Canada holds a congress every year in a different province to discuss the variety of issues and challenges different Migrante chapters in Canada have experienced. Migrante Canada Congress is the highest policy making body of the organization with one delegate representing the local provincial chapter of Migrante. The lessons from each chapter are later synthesized into different campaigns that reflect the unique, complex, and overarching struggles migrant workers face across Canada and at home.

and if elected he would continue on the policies of his predecessor. Donnie conjectured that another Marcos regime would mean a continuation of his father's policies stained by human rights abuses and corruption. Similarly, Brady brought up the ongoing extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and forced disappearances of activists and dissidents of past and current regimes of Marcos and Duterte respectively. For Abi, she highlighted the corrupt act of vote-buying in BBM's presidential campaign in which his party was known to distribute cash to curry potential voters at rallies. As the conversation progressed, we discussed the implication his Presidency would have on OFWS. As Ronnie highlighted, BBM's platform to further prop Duterte's Department of Migrante Worker would mean increasing the global demand for migrant workers especially after the pandemic making working abroad the only viable option to supporting themselves and families.

With the meeting nearing the end, we discussed concrete actions to discuss the plight of OFWs in relation to their country's presidential election. For Danielle, engaging OFWs in the Filipino electoral politics in Manitoba was part of larger national call by Migrante Canada to address the systemic abuses and mass migration of Filipino workers. As an act of solidarity and building relations with the Filipino diaspora, Abi planned on attending an event to support the progressive presidential candidate Leni Robredo's campaign. In contrast to her opponent, Leni Robredo ran on the platform of stimulating the local economic development of the Philippines investing in local jobs and small business. To end, Brady discussed working with TFWs on Migrante MB's various projects as an important entree to politically engage them on issues affecting their migration and workplace health and safety.

As highlighted in the above vignette, these meetings were essential in tying Migrante MB's political work to the needs and plight of Filipino workers. It was a way for members to

collaborate, synthesize, and concretize their ideas into specific political actions. Instead of espousing a band-aid solution of Duterte's Labour Export Policy (LEP)[4]—that did not address joblessness and poverty in the Philippines—Migrante MB's work strived to provide a concrete analysis on the forced migration of OFWs. Such seemingly mundane meetings were, in actuality, a forum to not only put theory into practice but further refine theory through practice.

Such organizing principles can be similarly viewed through Marxian notions of dialectical materialism. According to Chatterjee and Ahmed (2019, p. 384): "Dialectical materialism … reveals the materialization of exploitation and hence provides possibilities for reproduction of just material realities—theory and politics are inextricably linked towards a transformative politics." They argue that dialectical materialism, instead of testing or proving that capitalism exists, aims to *reveal* the systemic basis of inequalities pushing for political praxis beyond the one-sided charity model. As they contend, social existence relies on shaping material reality through labouring and understanding the act of labour to inform one's consciousness. For Migrante MB, the exploitation worker's experience was not a subjective abstraction but rooted in a material basis of reality derived from capitalist and unequal relations of production compelling large swathes of migrant workers to migrate. This ontological and

[4] Originally, the Ferdianand Marcos' LEP was meant to be a temporary solution for the country's struggling economy but has been main strategy for the country's economic survival. In particular, LEP has been a response to the continued demand of the global labour market and stagnant Filipino economy leading the institutionalization of international migration (Balba & Kingan, 2022).

political commitment to critiquing capitalism or the many ways capitalism exists was one of the main characteristics that distinguished Migrante MB from other NGOs and faith-based groups.[5]

Research Context

What began as my journey to understand the struggles of migrant workers in Manitoba took a dramatic turn during the pandemic. With strict COVID-19 health and safety measures implemented and the health and safety of my interlocutors at stake, my research was greatly affected in terms of what I was capable of doing. I was limited not only in my abilities to frequent or congregate in settings where workers would meet or work but also engage in the everyday activities of workers. As a result, my ability to gather contacts was greatly affected during this period. At the same time, however, this period was integral in revealing and magnifying the vulnerabilities of workers. Through my activist engagements with Migrante MB, we came to discover the unique hardships migrant workers had to endure including social isolation, exploitative working environment, and lack of access to health care services.

Given these challenges, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), under the Trudeau Government, funded five main organizations serving migrant workers in 2021 across Canada to provide support workers: 1) the Community Airport Newcomers Network; 2) Kairos for workers in British Columbia; 3) Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) for Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba; 4) Kairos for workers in Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Northwest Territories; and 5) Immigrant Quebec for workers in Quebec (ESDC, n.d.). Under the purview of these organizations, they were tasked with providing

[5] Critics have drawn attention the adverse consequences of NGOs and other faith-based groups including its commercialization, depoliticization of the poor, transfer of social responsibility from the government, and lack of accountability (see, e.g., Adams, 2013; Haque, 2020).

direct support for migrant workers—such as providing advice, interpretation, workshops, and referrals) as well as adjudicate and allocate the funding to migrants serving organizations within their respective provinces to carry out the work with TFWs. The latter is of particular note as it granted these organizations authority over what they deemed as "appropriate" work with migrant workers among their funded migrant serving organizations.

In January 2021, CCIS led a two-million-dollar funded tri-provincial project in support of TFWs affected by COVID-19 (Pivotal Research, 2022). Known as the TFW Prairie Project, this initiative was delivered in collaboration with 13 partnering organizations within the Prairies—including three provincial umbrella organizations—to provide a comprehensive and coordinated approach to meet the unique needs of TFWs across the Prairies. This included TFWs employed in agricultural and other related industries. In particular, CCIS was responsible for the adjudication and allocation of funds for organizations serving migrant workers within the Prairie provinces. Although this project was initially funded for six months, it would later be extended to over a year.

As one of the four largest immigrant serving organizations in Canada, CCIS has historically partnered with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary as well as the Canadian government to respectively support private-sponsored refugees, and federally sponsored refugees and immigrants who arrive in Southern Alberta (CCIS, n.d.). Since its inception in 1981, CCIS has provided non-denominational settlement and integration services for newcomers. This includes but is not limited to supports in housing, healthcare, service access, employment, and interpretation.

Within the context of Manitoba, Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO) was one of the umbrella settlement organizations funded by CCIS.

Despite not providing direct services to newcomers, MANSO's work has included bringing together and representing settlement and newcomer service providers in Manitoba. According to their website (MANSO, n.d.), "MANSO acts as a voice for the Manitoba settlement and integration sector, as well as supporting our members through communication, networking and professional development activities [and] facilitate[s] newcomer integration by providing leadership, support and a unified voice for settlement and integration organizations." During this project, MANSO's main role was to provide coordination and outreach support to SPOs and organizations serving migrant workers. To do this, they reached out to Occupational Health Centre (OHC) of Manitoba, a non-profit worker-centered community that provides services and programs to support the health and safety of workers, and grassroots organization, Migrante Manitoba. Together, these three organizations formed a partnership through which they would collaborate on activities that would align with MANSO's funding agreement with their funder CCIS. Although Migrante was not one of the organizations directly funded by CCIS initially, they were eventually contracted by MANSO via CCIS in planning, designing, and organizing activities that would go towards supporting migrant workers during COVID-19.

With respect to Migrante MB's partnership with MANSO, their involvement with the TFW Prairie Project helped to build and expand on their existing efforts in supporting migrant worker during COVID-19. In 2020, Bayan Canada, an alliance of anti-imperialist Filipino groups in Canada organizing for National Democracy in the Philippines, launched the Kapit-Bisig Canada to respond to the acute needs of migrant workers during the pandemic. This Canadian mutual aid network included Migrante Canada and its chapters, Toronto Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines, Anakbayan Canada (a Filipino youth and student organization for National democracy in the Philippines), Gabriela Ontario, and Gabriela BC (a self-

proclaimed anti-imperialist Filipino women's movement). Known as linking arms in Tagalog, Kapit Bisig project provided migrant workers with vital resources such as emergency grocery hampers, PPE, essential items (e.g. diapers, over-the-counter medication, etc.), and relief initiatives, such as helping people apply for CERB. However, more than just a charity, Kapit-Bisig's principles have been rooted in collective values and action to address the systemic challenges faced by migrant workers. Namely, through their service delivery work, the network has been able to engage workers on the social, political and economic matters that impact their lives and futures both in Canada and the Philippines. Although initially funded by in-kind donations within their community, this work would soon be expanded with the funding support from ESDC. Within the context of Manitoba, Migrante MB spearheaded the Kapit Bisig project for migrant workers in Manitoba providing emergency grocery hampers, PPE, financial aid, case support, referrals, and rights workshops (i.e. workers' health and safety rights, workers compensation, COVID-19 prevention in the workplace and vaccination) to over 800 migrant workers, including over 200 seasonal agricultural workers. More broadly, as part of Migrante Manitoba's funding agreement with CCIS, they were required to collect the information of workers they came into contact with via a needs assessment.

Moreover, an integral part in Migrante MB's partnership with MANSO involved the development of a contract hiring for a Migrant Worker COVID-19 response organizer to help coordinate and facilitate the activities planned by the MANSO, OHC and Migrante. Given my academic interest and activist relationship to Migrante MB, I was onboarded to work as MANSO's COVID-19 response organizer in 2021 between March and June. It was through this project that my entrée into the migrant worker community was consolidated. As the migrant COVID-19 response organizer, I was tasked to coordinate meetings and activities with MANSO,

OHC and Migrante Manitoba, developing resources for migrant workers and settlement service providers, collecting information on the workplaces and geographical location of migrant workers, attend meetings with our funder CCIS, and conduct a needs assessment with migrant workers. In particular, with the approval of MANSO, OHC and Migrante MB, I was able to embed my doctoral research within the project's needs assessment, which became a vital entry point through which to examine the lives of migrant workers with respect to their migration experience, workplace health and safety, and COVID-19 knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. *In short, my dissertation research was conducted within the context of a needs assessment project.* Given Migrante MB's extensive network with the migrant worker community, we were able to conduct a province-wide needs assessments province, in Portage La Prairie, the Pas, Winnipeg, La Broquerie, Carmen, Steinbach, and Neepawa. In particular, Neepawa was a site where Migrante had a strong membership base and received most of their contacts and where the majority of my interlocutors were based.

Here, my positionality played an integral role in understanding the larger landscape in which migrant workers in Manitoba had to confront. As the COVID-19 response organizer, I was intimately embedded within and often caught up in the tensions between institutional and grassroots structures, both of which aimed to serve migrant workers. With Migrante's focus on grass roots organizing work advocating for migrant workers and MANSO's responsibility to their funders and partner relations, I often found myself feeling conflicted over being requested to meet deliverable by MANSO and CCIS and doing what was feasible on the ground with grassroots organizers like Migrante and OHC. In particular, the needs assessment was quite a lengthy and laborious project that required timing, preparations, and sensitivity in approaching workers who were going through quite the ordeal during COVID-19. Such efforts, however, did

not always align with the strict temporality of the deliverables set out by our contractor, MANSO, and the funder CCIS, both of which tended to emphasize the number of TFW contacts collected.

One such example came from bi-monthly virtual meetings I attended with our main funder CCIS and other settlement organizations in the Prairies. One by one, representatives from each settlement services went around to discuss some of the progress, challenges, and supports needed for outreach to migrant workers. This ranged from inquiries regarding what types of activities were appropriate to support workers to challenges of outreaching to migrant workers. Moreover, during these meetings, we were often reminded by our funders that our funding was contingent upon the number of TFWs we reached and the information we collected from them. This information, which included age, gender, place of residence, employment, and needs, formed the basis of a database where CCIS would input the Prairie provinces data to be then submitted to ESDC. From the perspective of ESDC and CCIS, this offered key insights into the overall population, geography, and issues of TFWS, which were critical sources of data leveraged by stakeholders to respond to COVID-19 among TFWs.

On the ground, however, such simple gathering of data however proved to be more complex. Here, I provide two key examples. During my four-month contract, MANSO via CCIS often impressed upon me to extend our services beyond the areas directly covered by service provider organizations (SPOs). In other words, we were advised to not ‘duplicate’ the services that already existed. However, this proved to be difficult as it was predicated upon two assumptions: 1) workers were aware of the services available to them, and 2) workers felt safe enough to avail themselves of said services. Such assumptions came to be refuted by Migrante. As my engagement with them informed me, Filipino TFWs often expressed preference and

comfort in receiving support from Migrante. Given Migrante MB's reputation to serving migrant worker communities, especially those from the Philippines, TFWs even within the settlement services catchment area opted to seek support from Migrante Manitoba. Similarly, given the sensitive and complex cases of migrant workers, SPOs often turned to Migrante for support offloading their cases onto the organization. However, this had the unintended effect of increasing Migrante MB's already heavy workload.

A second example of the contentious relationships between funder and grassroots funded organization is what was deemed appropriate and acceptable data. As part of Migrante MB's deliverables to their funders, the collection and submission of workers' data to ESDC was critical to the funding Migrante received. In subsequent months of the project's rollout, Migrante MB would be asked by ESDC to provide more identifying information (such as workers' contact information and home address) of the workers they came to contact within their outreach. This came with great resistance from Migrante MB who argued for the importance of maintaining the anonymity of TFW's information, which often came at a great cost to workers. For Migrante MB, it was vital that they did not compromise the safety of workers who had put a great deal of trust in sharing their personal information with the organization at the risk of being found and terminated by their employers. Although Migrante MB was eventually able to advocate for the confidentiality of its workers in terms of what information was appropriate to send their funders, this incident underlined the insidious nature of funding organizations to ignore and neglect the complicated realities of marginalized communities in favor of output and numbers. Here, the work of Migrante Manitoba was critical in advocating for the rights and welfare of migrant workers while mitigating the negative consequences of funder-driven activities.

Despite Migrante efforts to stay true their organizing principles, this was not met without criticisms. In a scathing 2021 CBC article, Migrante MB organizer Diwa Marcelino was interviewed regarding the health and safety conditions of migrant workers during the pandemic (Bergen, 2021). In it, he spoke about the lack of provincial and federal oversight in instating regulation in protecting TFWs from COVID-19 in their workplaces, ranging from lack of social distancing in meat processing facilities to the lack of vaccinations available to migrant workers particularly on the farms. He further questions the legitimacy of TFWP itself, stating: "There are programs in place that the Canadian government has made in response to COVID-19, but the fact remains that most workers are in a precarious situation because of the temporary foreign worker program itself" (Bergen, 2021, para. 6). Although the article was published in 2021 during Migrante's funding period with CCIS, this had caught the attention of CCIS a year later. In an email response back, CCIS reprimanded Migrante MB for their criticisms of the Canadian government and instead shifted accountability from the state to Migrante MB grassroot organizing work for workers' systemic problems. She writes, "As one of the organizations that provide support for TFWs during COVID-19 through ESDC funding, what has been Migrante's role to lessen the challenges TFWs face?" Despite these bureaucratic obstacles, Migrante MB and other migrant serving organizations would find their funding from EDSC come to end in 2022.

Recruitment and data collection

Through my work with Migrante and the TFW Prairie Project, I was able to virtually interview 20 migrant workers who entered Canada through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, employed either as SAWP workers and TFWs. I also relied on Migrante's solidarity contact to help me contextualize the workplace milieu of the farmworkers in Canada. Given the sensitive

nature of the pandemic, it was of the utmost importance that I followed health and safety protocols as define by my institution to ensure the safety of interlocutors and myself. To achieve this, I conducted in-depth interviews virtually, by Zoom video conferencing technology. Although I was not afforded the level of richness and depth that is expected to come through participant observation, my interviews were, nevertheless, important in providing a vivid window into the harrowing realities workers endured as so-called temporary workers to Canada.

Participant background

I use the term migrant workers to encompass different streams of foreign workers. This includes, temporary foreign workers and seasonal agricultural workers. According to Strauss and McGrath (2017), migrant workers are those who enter Canada without the automatic right to PR. In particular, temporary foreign workers fall under four streams: high-wage stream, low-wage stream, primary agricultural stream (includes SAWP), and the support for permanent residency stream. Here it is worth noting the differences between workers under the SAWP and TWFP in order to explain the varying vulnerabilities each group experienced. Agricultural workers arrived in Canada to work on farms seasonally, usually without any pathways to permanent residency. By contrast, temporary workers arrived in Canada *with the possibility of a pathway* to permanent residency. It is within this very realm of possibility that inhibited them from doing anything to be perceived as disruptive to their employers, including claiming sickness or injury leave.

With respect to my interlocutors, there were a total 20, three of whom identified as female and the 17 identified as male. In addition, TFW's work background can be delineated in the following manner: 13 TFWs from the Philippines in hospitality (n=2), farming (n=1), and meat packing (n=10); seven farmworkers from Mexico (n=6) and Jamaica (n=1). Workers were based in the following locations: meat processing workers in Neepawa; farmworkers in La

Broquerie and Portage la Prairie; and hospitality workers in the Pas and Portage la Prairie. In particular, farmworkers all identified as men, which is indicative of the larger gender composition of farmworkers in Manitoba. In terms of education, workers had the following formal education levels: middle school (n=5), high school (n=5), college (n=2) and university (n=8). All the Mexican farmworkers had up to a middle school education except for one who completed high school. Lastly, all the workers were on work permits except for one worker who was undocumented. The table below provides a more detailed background of my interlocutors.

Pseudonyms	**Country of Origin**	**Age**	**Men**	**Women**	**Employment Status**	**Type of Work**
Edwin	Philippines	47	✓		Full-time	Meat processing worker
Ricci	Philippines	42	✓		Full-time	Meat processing worker
Gabriel	Philippines	47	✓		Full-time	Meat processing worker
Aldo	Philippines	33	✓		Full-time	Meat processing worker
Jacob	Philippines	30	✓		Full-time	Meat processing worker
James	Philippines	39	✓		Full-time	Meat processing worker
Nathan	Philippines	33	✓		Full-time	Meat processing worker
Samuel	Philippines	46	✓		Full-time	Meat processing worker
Ethan	Philippines	33	✓		Full-time	Meat processing worker

Sonny	Philippines	41	✓		Full-time	Meat processing worker
Kristine	Philippines	41		✓	Full-time	Meat processing worker
Sherald	Philippines	43		✓	Full-time	Meat processing worker
Rachel	Philippines	44		✓	Full-time	Hospitality worker
Isaac	Jamaica	35	✓		Undocumented	Former agricultural labourer
Luis	Mexico	27	✓		Seasonal full-time	Agricultural labourer
Diego	Mexico	53	✓		Seasonal full-time	Agricultural labourer
Santiago	Mexico	56	✓		Seasonal full-time	Agricultural labourer
Ricardo	Mexico	52	✓		Seasonal full-time	Agricultural labourer
Alberto	Mexico	33	✓		Seasonal full-time	Agricultural labourer
Denis	Mexico	34	✓		Seasonal full-time	Agricultural labourer

Qualitative Data Analysis and Quality Assurance

Recordings spoken in languages other than English were transcribed by an interpreter. In particular, all interviews done by the Mexican farmworkers were conducted in Spanish with the support of Spanish-speaking interpreter. Non-English transcripts were written and translated into English by a different interpreter (our 'solidarity contact') who ensured the accuracy of the translation. Interviews conducted in English was transcribed by the transcription company Transcript Heroes. English audio interviews were checked against the transcripts. To ensure

confidentiality of my interlocutors, transcriptionists and interpreters signed a confidentiality agreement consent form.

The study followed accepted procedures for thematic qualitative data analysis (Liamputtong, 2009). With respect to data analysis, all of the transcripts were analyzed and reviewed by me. I identified initial code categories and developed the coding scheme. In addition, NVivo was used to store, manage and organize the analysis of the interview transcripts. As subsequent interviews were reviewed, inductive thematic analysis helped identify and code for emergent themes (Liamputtong, 2010). This included familiarizing myself with the interview transcripts, systematically coding via NVivo for interesting data, then grouping them into core concepts or themes. Overall, this continual iterative process of checking themes with my interview data and codes helped to ensure comprehensiveness and applicability of my research. The key themes that emerged including the following: 1) reasons for migration 2) barriers upon arrival 3) becoming the model minority 4) work place structure 5) workplace injuries 6) healthcare barriers 7) social politics of the workplace 8) race and the workplace 9) and hopes and dreams. The notion of "transnational circuits of precarity emerged through my analytic discussions and volunteering with Migrante members and served as the theoretical lens through which I came to view the key findings. As themes were identified and interpretations were developed, they were crosschecked with my research team to contextualize and validate the findings. This was used to develop a technical report and my dissertation; of which were heavily influenced by my interactions with Migrante. In terms of quote selection, quotes were selected based on the ones that best illustrated the recurring themes that emerged across the interviews. In total 17 of the 20 interviews were selected and quoted for my dissertation.

Data Management and Protection

Electronic files of collected data were transferred from one location to another in a fully encrypted manner using a Virtual Private Network (VPN). All electronic data was housed at the Institute for Global Public Health (IGPH) at the University of Manitoba. All participants were assigned a unique identification number following completion of the consent process. A complete list of direct identifiers (names, contact information) was stored separately in a master database at the IGPH. Only the lead researcher and authorized research staff had the code to link response records to direct identifiers.

All study data, whether electronic (e.g., participant contact information or collected data) or paper (e.g., address labels, study introduction letters, signed consent forms or passwords), were kept in secure locations that were accessible to authorized personnel only. All computers with access to the VPN employed passwords at both the device and network levels. All laptop hard drives had password-protected and encrypted to ensure the security of participant data in the event a computer is lost or stolen.

All study data were kept in a secure location at IGPH. All computers with access to study information employed passwords at both the device level and the network level. When not in use, signed consent forms, transportable storage media, and data back-ups are stored in locked cabinets. Having all data located at IGPH during data collection ensures maximal data security, efficient management, and quality control.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the University of Manitoba Ethics Review Board [H2020:496 (HS24425)]. I was involved in selecting the participants for the study, explaining its objectives and protecting the interests, confidentiality and safety of the participants, prior and after the

individual interviews conducted under the study. For the interviews, consent forms were administered in English or the preferred language of the participants (i.e. Spanish or Tagalog). Given the questionable and potentially disruptive nature of written consent in this context, participants were given the option of consenting verbally. Anonymity was maintained by using no identifying information and a study ID to distinguish individual participants in the study. My interlocutors also consented with me to assigning them with pseudonyms. All electronic and written documents were safely secured and stored. As part of the consent procedure, participants were assured of anonymity and of the voluntary nature of their participation. In the case that questions caused emotional and personal distress, participants were given the following options: withdrawing at any time; passing up on questions they may not feel comfortable answering; or being referred to appropriate counselling services. They were informed that their decision to participate did not affect their access to health clinics and other services provided by Migrante MB.

CHAPTER 3: MOVING TOWARDS A BETTER LIFE?

To demonstrate the complexities that were articulated around the double-edge nature of precarity, I draw a series of portraits to illuminate the stakes for people in leaving their home countries and the conflicts (i.e. emotional, financial, and familial) that take shape in their lived realities. I draw on select portraits of these specific characters to highlight the spectrum of experiences shared among many of my interlocutors. More specifically, this chapter highlights the myriad precarious pathways migrant workers had to navigate throughout their migration journey. As noted by Hennebry (2014), transnationalism within the context of migrant workers involved sustained movements and participation in the sending and receiving countries. As my interlocutors illuminate, these migration practices not only exacerbated their precarity but came with it visions for a better life for their families.

COVID-19 and the double-edged reality of precarity

For 42-year-old Ricci—who arrived in Manitoba, August 2021 from Mindanao, Philippines—the notion of moving was not unfamiliar to him. At a young age, he and his siblings and parents left their home in Luzon to move to Mindanao in the hopes of a better life. Having completed his undergraduate degree in political science in the Mindanao State University, he viewed education as a crucial factor of success and economic mobility. However, with COVID-19, his wife and children were left with little financial prospects and security.

> So I moved here because – I don't know how I would say that – economic reasons. [Laughs] So when COVID took a hit on the world, so everyone was not spared, so including my family's. The job that I have – the source of income that I have in the Philippines was greatly affected – so I was left with no choice but to look for a better source of income. So Canada presented itself and its opportunities. And I took it, so I

> applied. I was eventually hired, so I moved here to Canada to work as an industrial meat cutter.

Once COVID-19 struck, Ricci had to uproot his life in the Philippines back home to support his family. Schools and businesses were shut down leaving many workers without employment. As a college instructor, Ricci had to cancel his slaughtering operations course due to the pandemic lockdown:

> I really didn't want to stop [working]. So the school that was offering the course, they weren't getting any students anymore because of COVID, so eventually they had to stop. The school, they had to put it on hold … because no students are coming in. Everybody's scared of the virus. So everything was really affected. So total shut down for a year and a half.

Given that this teaching position was his primary source of income, this loss had a devastating economic impact on his family. As with the rest of the world, the Philippines faced major economic upheavals resulting in the shutdown of many schools and businesses (Santos et al., 2022). With the lack of job opportunities, many had to resort to migrating overseas in order to support themselves and families. The move to Canada for Ricci was not an easy decision, but, he expressed, a necessary one.

> So I'd say that it's a life changing decision going here to Canada. It's the first time that I went away from my family for a long time. So we have not been separated whatsoever, so. We've been together for so long that to be separated like this – because of the circumstances that we have – we have a choice but we chose the better option to be here [in Canada] than to stay in the Philippines, for the kids.

As with many of my interlocutors, they perceived that migrating overseas afforded them and their families a better livelihood than if they were to stay in their home country. However, such overseas work also came with a financial burden. In addition to sending remittances back home to his wife and children, Ricci had the extra responsibility for supplying his elderly ailing parents with medication:

> My mother is a cancer survivor. She had her mastectomy six years ago and she's still alive and kicking up to date, so. But, she requires medicine maintenance and so does my father. My father—he has high blood pressure so he needs medicines. And my mother outside from being a cancer survivor, is also a diabetic, so medicines for those too. Things like those. Luckily my wife and kids are healthy, so I hope it stays that way for a long time….
>
> I hate spending on medicines, to tell you frankly. I really hate spending money on medicines. I'd rather spend it on food and travel. Medicines and hospitals – that's the worst places that you could spend your money on [laughs].

For Ricci, to manage these extenuating life circumstances, like his parents' declining health, he regularly sent remittances back home. Given the lack of available good quality public health care in the Philippines (Son, 2009), most of his earnings became absorbed in caring for and supporting his family members.

Moreover, as a TFW, Ricci had to continue paying for Canadian healthcare coverage and the additional charges back home despite living in Canada as he was still considered a resident of the Philippines. He exclaims:

> So for healthcare we almost pay double than those paying in the Philippines, just because we're migrant workers. And I'm telling them, "Shouldn't it be free for us migrant workers?" So we're bringing in the dollars for the [Filipino] economy but my government doesn't do that one…. So my case is that it should have been free for the migrant workers, if not less than what we are paying now, because we're not – we can't use it because we're here in Canada—so why not transfer it to our partner. So for me now, in my case, I've been paying my health insurance in the Philippines, monthly, so.

For Ricci, these additional expenses incurred added to his financial struggles. He calls for the Filipino government to support his fellow migrant workers by removing the cost of their health insurance and transferring coverage over to their spouse and children. This was particularly the case given that many workers' wives and children's health coverage was under the husbands' names, which meant that they had to continue paying for their entire family's healthcare—or risk losing it all together.

Moreover, Ricci's financial precarity was systemically linked to the Filipino government's corrupt regime. Contextualizing his struggles within the political and historic milieu of the Philippines, Ricci notes:

> You don't have to feel [the government] is corrupt. It is corrupt. I'm confirming that one…. It is a sad fact. I am a Filipino and I'm from the Philippines, but I love the Philippines – but not the government running it….
>
> I don't know about the new government now because we have just had our elections but the previous governments that I did experience was a huge burden to the people. They are doing more bad, than good to the people. They're putting their interest

> above the welfare of the people…. And you can see it. The poverty level is very high in the Philippines.

Coming from the global South, most of these workers attributed their poor economic state to the government's disregard of its people forcing them to migrate to support their families. Instead of a good, many of my interlocutors viewed their home government as a burden and detriment to its people. Describing the economic precarity of his country, Ricci states:

> Poverty level is very high in the Philippines. So you could just go to the city – the nearest city that you're in. You look around – you could see the disparity between the rich and poor. It's very sad. Some people are not eating anything and some people are wasting food. Things like those.

In a change of tone, he expressed a sorrow in the injustice those in less fortunate circumstances faced "It breaks our hearts. After all, we're all humans. We all live on the same earth, the same planet, but we have to experience different experiences in life – some not so good, some good, some extraordinary – but you still feel for those less fortunate ones."

Despite the issues wrought by their government, many of the workers described their country with a deep fondness and nostalgia with sentiments like "home is where the heart is" and if they had a choice they would prefer to stay back with their families. However, given their material lack and state of poverty, many had no choice but to leave their countries if they were to support themselves or families.

> I think this would be the common denominator of most, if not all, the migrant workers. They went out because of their family. Well, what people in their right mind would go out of their country, if there whole life is there, right? If the government is providing – yes

> providing for the basic needs of the people – we wouldn't need to leave. I mean we weren't brought up to be so lavish. We're content with simple things. But when those simple things are not being met, we tend to do things that we usually don't do, like migrate, [laughs] I guess now here. *(Ricci)*

Again, Ricci describes how worker's migration process was often propelled by the need to support their family members. That is, if not for their current material lack, they would more likely than not stayed back home. He reminds us that he and his Filipino compatriots did not require a lavish lifestyle to survive but a government willing to provide for its people's basic necessities.

Precarious employment in home country

Born in Visayas, Philippines, Edwin, age 47, moved to Canada to provide a better life for his family. As a TFW, Edwin has lived in Manitoba for the past three years since his arrival in March 2018. He has a daughter and son who are the ages of 18 and 13, respectively. After graduating with a bachelor's in business administration, he worked as a salesman at Coca-Cola, where he was able to climb the corporate ladder to achieve supervisor rank and early retirement only after six years in the company:

> It's funny. I'm probably the youngest person in our company who retired young because I only worked for six years and then there were some changes in the company…. They were actually offering an early retirement, so I was thinking … since I was a business graduate, one of the goal is to have my own business. So, I did grab the offer of early retirement, and then I had my business, but then it only lasted for, like, three years because of the economy was bad….

> It was a food business. It only lasted for three years because I had it in my wife's place. There used to be, like, a plant, a sugar cane plant, but then it closed. It went bankrupt. So, what happened was there were a lot of people there who were jobless.

After three years of business, Edwin's sugarcane plant eventually went bankrupt and had to be shut down. Unsurprised, Edwin pinned this down to simple economics:

> Workers cannot buy what they cannot afford…. There's no job, so there's no money. The buying power of the consumers are less because lack of job employment. So, it was a tough decision because I invested so much, but I have to decide to just close the business and then I have to work again. Back to square one….
>
> So, I was a salesman then, then because of you know hard times in the Philippines you know my kids were growing up and growing up is you know, more expenses. So, I had to find a way to you know give them a better future, better life.

This eventually led him to find work at a call center as a customer service representative for six years, until 2013. It was here where he would discover from a co-worker a butchering position offered in Canada and Australia. However, before he was able to acquire this position, he had to first receive at least two years of training as a butcher in the Philippines.

> It's a good thing that our government there, local government, is actually offering, like, training for butchering, yes. So I grab the opportunity, and then I have to work in our local slaughterhouse just to get a certificate because we have to have, like, two year or three year experience before we could apply. So, I got accepted in 2017. 2018 March, that's when I came here.

Through the government, Edwin was able to achieve the necessary training to receive his certification. His training, however, quickly fell through upon his arrival at HyLife:

> When I get here, I was assigned to a packaging or a box making that was my first job when it got here and then I have to move to shipping department…. Here, my job is to stack boxes and then we have like a rotation job, sometimes I do strapping, strapping the boxes with strapper and I do also pallet jack.

Although the position was not initially what he envisioned for himself, overtime he would find himself obtaining seniority in the shipping department at HyLife with higher pay:

> [I]t's the salary in shipping is a lot better than in box making. So and then our general rule here in HyLife is seniority. So when I became one of the seniors already, so I have a choice of you know, they call it like, a job bidding. I have to jump in there. I got lucky. I landed shipping department because the pay is much higher compared to the previous one.

Despite his narrative of a seemingly smooth transition to Canada, Edwin's view of the migration was rather politically fraught. Like his colleague Ricci, Edwin describes the systemic role of colonization on the people of the Philippines and how this triggered many towards their path of migration.

> Sad to say we are still struggling, we're still you know experiencing the years that we were colonized by Spain because our country is still suffering. Government isn't functioning well because of corruption so that's why many of us wanted to go out from our country to work abroad just to look for a greener pastures as they say.

Precarious employment overseas

Originally from Manilla, Philippines, Aldo, age 33, had been working outside the Philippines for almost a decade. To support his wife, parents and in-laws, he moved to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for two and half years where he worked as a barista. Afterwards, he moved to Macau for a higher paid position where he sold imported meats for seven years until finally deciding to move to Canada on February 7, 2020, where he was offered a position at HyLife. While in Macau, Aldo was on track to receiving his provincial nomination in Canada, a process to allow economic immigrants to apply for permanent residency.

> When I was still working in Macau, the company was already processing my papers here in Canada. They sent me my nominee forms. They started sending me approval to come here in Canada. So, they said it will take around a year and eight months to process for my permanent residence.

For Aldo, his work at HyLife provided him an earning potential he would not have realized back in the Philippines let alone Macau or Saudi Arabia.

> Actually, it's like an accident. So I was working in Macau. My salary there was quite good. But still, when the recruitment agency in the Philippines was sending a message that I could be a permanent resident here in Canada, I thought of the bigger picture—bigger opportunities and better salary. Of course, you have to check if the earning was good or not. And the company is good for you also.
>
> Since Canada is better than Macau, I moved to Canada. Because in Macau, you know, your family can visit you, but you cannot bring them to live and become a permanent resident. Not like here in Canada … I can bring my family here. And since I

> was working abroad for almost 10 years, I have been alone. So, I was not so happy being alone. So hopefully next year, my wife will be here, and we'll be together.

For Aldo, it was vital he weighed the cons and benefits of where he would migrate to next as he grew weary of being away for a long period from his family. Such major life-changing decisions, however, often came with his family's well-being at the forefront. As Aldo notes "When you're making a life changing decision, you're not only thinking of yourself but also you're family. You're not only working for yourself. You are also working for your family."

As with many of my interlocutors, they viewed Canada as providing them with better economic prospects and livelihoods as well as the opportunity to be reunited with their families. However, as shown by Aldo, the journey leading to Canada was rather complex. This was evident in his harrowing journey working in Saudi Arabia, where he came to experience exploitation and abuse in a new country for the first time. As a barista there, he worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week with no vacation time. And although he would later find respite in the better working conditions in Macau, he had no pathways through which he could be reunited with his family, leading him to a deeper state of isolation. For Aldo then, his move to Canada was the solution he believed would grant him the relief from his turbulent migrant journey.

> I was just like a very spoiled brat…. And I was really not good that time. The outbreak had brought me back to life. I was fighting with my parents going outside and ignoring everybody else to go party. After that, they didn't want to help with my finance or with my food. I go study abroad and Saudi Arabia was the one teach me a lot. Because I earn around … 9000 pesos? How much is Canada? Yeah, I earn 250 a month, Canadian dollar. That's only a little. And I was working 12 hours a day with no day off…

> My employer there was very bad. There are different contracts that they gave us. So in the Philippines, they were giving me like, like $500 a month. But when they arrive in in Saudi Arabia, they give you another contract that you have to pay $250 a month, plus 12 hours a day. And no day off.

For Aldo, he quickly realized the exploitative nature of his workplace upon arrival in Saudia Arabia where he was unexpectedly provided with a new contract. Once there, he was required to give up half his earnings and work long hours without any day off. For this reason, he felt his workplace challenges in Canada did not warrant complaint viewing his previous work experience worse than what he had endured in Canada. As with many workers, this compartmentalization of suffering was a way of making the intolerable tolerable. Yet, it these exact conditions for Aldo that instilled a deep sense of resilience and purpose to pursue a better life from what he had known, stating "Because of my life changes, I get stronger."

Precarious work experience in Canada

At age 35, Isaac's main motivation to migrate to Canada from Jamacia was driven by the desire to challenge and develop himself or, as he puts, to "self-actualize". Describing his move to Canada, he shared that "It was just another personal adventure for me as it speaks to my curiosity and desire for growth and development…. I just wanted to leave the bubble and try something here." He further explained that he had no dependents back home he had to care for allowing him to pursue his curiosities. Upon his arrival in Canada in April 2018, he worked as a farmworker for two seasons 8 months at time in an Ontario farm. While working in Ontario, he describes the transition from planter to cashier to jack of all trades:

> I evolved because of my educational background and so forth. I evolved in the sense that I first started as a simple planter. And then within that first season I was able to do cashiering. So, I told the boss to move from collecting the money and using the calculator to buying and using a cash register. So, he start advertising the product and so forth, labeling and all of those things. When I came back in season two, 2019, I got the full fledge work duties, doing everything. So, I was all over the place. And as I said, in 2018, the place was 10 percent. And when I leave, it was 110 percent.
>
> I use my sales marketing background at work. At first, my boss wasn't too much interested in Facebook but I was saying to him, hey, technology can boost your business. I was also saying OK, you can do virtual buys like the person can look at the fruits and vegetable in the coolers by just simply installing a small camera, and they do virtual buys and then come in and pick up. So, I was giving him so much revenue to his business because he was using some of my ideas.

Here, Isaac's high regard for education shone through in his work ethic on the farm. Owing much to his educational and work background in finance and management in Jamaica, he prided himself on taking initiative and being entrepreneurial wherever he worked. Unfortunately, in 2019, he would return back to Jamacia to tend to his father's funeral spending nearly all of his earnings on funeral costs alone. "It works out for me because as I say, being a spiritual person, I was thrown out there to make some money. The money went into the funeral. So, it was like, hey, go make some money so you can burry your dad and it worked out." Instead of letting his father's death deter his resolve, he optimistically viewed the money he earned going into good use resigning his circumstance to something divine and serendipitous. Although he was raised Catholic, he viewed himself more as a spiritual person. For Isaac, religion was the root of evil

and division among society, yet he saw value in the different tenets it carried. This had a profound impact in the ways he engaged, supported, and participated in his Jamaican community, believing in the notion of paying it forward and bestowing onto others the support that were bestowed upon him. For many of my interlocutors, their unwavering faith and moral sense of righteousness instilled in them a sense of hope and conceptual framework for the unfathomable hardships they had to endure.

> Yeah. I was brought up [Catholic]. I was brought up that way. But religion is division. So now I would say I'm a spiritual person—there are certain principles and practices that I participate in…. If you follow before our time, religion is one of the most cruel thing, especially if you look at it from the Catholicism, so.
>
> So, as I say, religion is division. It's chaos in its own sense. But at the end of the day, you know that you have the creator, you know, we didn't create ourselves. And you know, if you look at it, looking at it from law of attraction, whatever you put out there is what you get. For me my spiritual practices are very diverse in the sense that I fuse so many things together. I try to find my own personal path.

While in Jamaica for his father's funeral, Isaac began to correspond with his future wife on an online dating site. He eventually moved to Manitoba where she lived to marry her and then would move back to Ontario to finish the rest of his contract. In the excerpt below he describes the stress of having his work visa almost expired leading him to miss his flight back to his wife in Manitoba

> I got wind of the information from the travel agent saying, "Hey, once your, once your work contract expires on December 15th you can't go back and work. So, you need to get

> out of here." So, I get on of Ontario on the 13th, missed my flight, catch the next flight and from December 16th or 15th, I came to Manitoba and I haven't left.

Upon reuniting with his wife in December 2019, his work visa had expired leaving him undocumented and forced to work under the table. During this time, Isaac and his wife lived with his parents-in-law until they were both able to find a place of their own. This was a particularly hard time for Isaac as he lacked steady employment and also had a newborn to care for. As someone who considers himself to have a strong and disciplined work ethic, his inability to find work was a major source of anxiety and depression. Not only was he unable to fulfill his duties as the breadwinner for his family, but he also felt like his talents were going to waste. Eventually, he would receive his work permit in September 2021. After which, he began to work two jobs, one as a cleaning operator at a multi-purpose recreational center complete with a hockey rink, swimming pool and gym and the other as a cook in Chicken Chef.

A land of opportunities

At the ages of 43 and 41 respectively, Sherald and Kristine preferred doing their interview together with me. Born in Pampanga, Philippines, Sherald has a husband and two kids who are the ages of 14 and 17. As a single parent to 17-year-old daughter, Kristine had to leave her 17-year-old daughter in Laguna under the care of her brother and sister-in-law to work in Manitoba. With the support of my female interpreter, both Sherald and Kristine felt more at ease to share their lives with me.

As close friends and housemates in Neepawa, they have known each other since 2019 in the Philippines during their training days at the Technical Education and Skills Development (TESDA) program, a government agency designed to develop the Filipino workforce, where they

both applied to work at HyLife. For both women, their training offered them a competitive advantage—providing them with the technical expertise—they would have not received elsewhere. In the following conversation, Sherald and Kristine detail their motivations behind their training with TESDA:

> Kristine: We heard that trainings is a plus point in applying in HyLife that's why while we were working we get our training, we get our certificates.
>
> Interviewer: And in your training, do they give you real experience, like you also are working in a butcher shop?
>
> Sherald: Yes. Yes, sir.
>
> Kristine: TESDA have a short course. And when you get TESDA it's $360 and they give you a certificate, like you are graduated for a slaughtering course.

Having already worked overseas, each woman was already accustomed to a life of working abroad. For Kristine, she had worked in Saudia Arabia as a domestic helper for five years while Sherald worked as a steward/dishwasher at a Riviera hotel in Macau. Although leaving their family was not easy, they expressed that moving so often helped them prepare for their journey to Canada. Eventually, on May 27, 2022 both Sherald and Kristine arrived to Neepawa where they would work for HyLife

In HyLife both woman worked on the kill floor, where they inverted intestines and packaged them into boxes. Sherald worked the night shift (5pm to 2am) whereas Kristine works the morning shift. Given their workplace was predominately male, they describe the gender makeup in their department as follows "There's only a few of us…. I guess it's nine and most of them are men." However, they noted that this tended to differ floor to floor but men generally

outnumbered women in the workplace. As the other male interlocutors have noted, the ratio of female to male employees was around one to four. However, this did not negatively impact Sherald and Kristine' s experience noting how men often would treat them with courtesy and concern due to their gender. Sherald shares: "The men keep on asking us if we are ok. It feels like we are in the Philippines here, it's very comfortable working with them."

For Sherald, her work at HyLife symbolized new opportunities and futures for herself and children.

> For me, sir, coming here is life-changing. There are more opportunities here for me and my kids. We have health benefits and the salary is better. Because in the Philippines it's harder to get a job because you need to have a college degree in order to work, but even if you graduate it's still the salary is really low. And moving here is good for the kids' future because in the long run you can bring them here and it'll be beneficial for them.

For Sherald, the lack of education back in her home country was a huge hindrance for her to obtain employment needed to support her family. In fact, it was this dearth of opportunities in her home country that compelled her to leave. Contrasting the reality of workers back in her home country, Kristine believed that workers who worked a modest wage job in Canada had enough to survive:

> Because based on my experiences and relatives' experiences, you can buy and afford anything in Canada. But in the Philippines, you can't afford to buy a car even as a simple employee only. You have to be a bank manager to afford to buy a car but here when you are a simple employee you can afford to buy a car. There's no rich, there's no poor,

> everyone can afford everything if you work hard. It's beneficial for the kids' future and you can support your family.

As shown, Kristine had painted this idyllic picture of Canada as a place where people were not separated along lines of class—that if one worked hard enough, they could do everything and anything. Despite a person's low educational level, she viewed that they could still achieve a decent quality of life in Canada, in contrast to the Philippines where people had to work themselves tirelessly and still struggle to survive.

Born and raised in Isabela, Philippines, Jacob, age 30, moved to La Broquerie, Manitoba in February 2021 to work in a dairy farm, where he has been able to utilize his previous work experience in the Philippines. Graduated from Isabella State University with a degree in animal science and agriculture and animal husbandry, he worked as a farm technician for seven years producing animal feed for one of the largest multi-national conglomerates in the Philippines, San Miguel Corporation. Even so, he was making barely enough to support his wife and two sons, an eight-year-old and nine-month-old. As Jacob explains: "The money I earn [in] the company is not enough for [my] family [s]o we need to earn more money for them, for their future." This desire to support his family and eventually sponsor them became the impetus for him to move overseas even if it meant being isolated from them for the first time. Jacob shares:

> It's hard to be separated [from] my family because it's too far, because it's miles to go back home [but] we need to make the sacrifice for them…. I have so many purpose that I come here, because some day when we are applying for permanent residency and we achieve that, we can, get my family here. So I think that's the reason why, yeah, I push to come here.

Despite the isolation of being away from his family, Jacob viewed his move overseas as a necessary sacrifice to support and eventually be reunited with his family. This support often came in the form of earning money and sending remittances back home. As with many of my interlocutors, the collective desire for a better life propelled many to set their sights overseas.

> Yeah, everyone Filipinos in the Philippines, our dreams to come here in Canada to work and earn more money. Because here, you can earn money to send to Philippines it's something important for me. Yeah. *(Jacob)*

Aged 33, Ethan is from Tagum city, a two-hour drive from Davao city, the capital of Mindanao. He obtained his high school diploma and a two-year computer systems technician college diploma in the Philippines. However, before moving to Canada, Ethan first applied to Australia where his brother was a citizen. Although he was selected for a trades assessment background check, once the pandemic hit, he had to set his sights elsewhere due to Australian government banning international traveling. This led him to apply to HyLife where he received his letter of employment in November 2019.

> Back in the Philippines, I have been training as a butcher for the purpose of applying abroad. My first option was Australia, because my brother was there, he's a citizen. And since the pandemic hit, there were no Australian employers coming to the Philippines. And I was selected at HyLife, way back November 2019 and I found out, I found that their job hiring through the agencies that we asked. And that's it, August, on August 26 2021 I came here in Canada.

Leaving behind his wife and 10-year-old son, he along with his other workmates moved to Neepawa, Manitoba in August 2021 to work at HyLife. There, Ethan provided operational

support which entailed trimming the meat from the bones, packing the meat and shifting to work in other departments if needed. He explains: "I'm on operations support, my job is to trim products from the products and sometimes if there are a shortage of workforce in other departments, we are the ones who are borrowed in our department."

Prior to his employment in Neepawa, he trained as a butcher in the Philippines. Like many of his colleagues, Ethan's main purpose for migrating was to financially support his family and, in the process, give his children opportunities they would not have received otherwise "First things first, the most, the reason why I want to leave Philippines and work abroad is for the finances. And the healthcare, yeah, that's the reason … and this also for my son education, yeah, education, that's the three main reasons why I want to go abroad."

Furthermore, Ethan's earnings from back home were barely sufficient to support his family. This became the impetus for him to move to Canada where he describes being able to provide for his family and simultaneously achieve a better quality of life for himself.

> First of all in the Philippines, my salary is really not enough. When I came here I can also help my sister, my brother, my mother and father, I can give a little extra. But when I'm in the Philippines, I am very tight with money. It's expensive, too. And yeah, the economy in the Philippines doesn't support you but here is different. The medical healthcare system is great. It's free even though I'm not a permanent resident yet. Last year when I got sick, all free.

As Ethan highlights, his life in Canada afforded him quality health care and the financial means to support his family he would not experience if he stayed in the Philippines.

At age 56, Santiago first arrived in Canada from Tlaxcala, Mexico in 2005 to work in an Ontario farm where he would later move in 2008 to Manitoba to work at Connery's farm in Portage la Prairie. Here his roles included weeding and cleaning up the strawberries. During his many years on the farm, he found his experience working there to be generally positive. For as long as he did as he was told, he faced no issues.

> My experience here has been very good, at least for me. We have to come; we have to work; we have to run errands; we do what our bosses tell us. Like I said, we keep working. I am 56, and, God willing, I will keep working a few more years. The dollar here goes a longer way in Mexico. So it can really help the family, and it can help them to come to Canada one day.

Moreover, with the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, Santiago found the move to Canada as even more urgent due to the lack of job opportunities in Mexico. During this time in Mexico, he was afforded only a few hours of work a day. He had to take extra precautions to ensure that he was neither a risk to himself nor others, leaving his home early in the day for work to avoid crowded areas. Given that these reduced hours greatly affected his earnings, Santiago had to begin finding work elsewhere.

> My family? It has not affected us. Not like the economy. In Mexico, we work in the fields there too. We couldn't leave (our homes). Because I couldn't leave, I couldn't work as much. The wages are much lower there. You have to leave home very early and come home late. So it has been even more difficult (in Mexico).

As such, Santiago's move to Canada was thoughtfully planned in terms of better job prospects and the Canadian dollar carrying itself further in Mexico—all of which would support his family of five.

At the age of 53, Diego had been working at Itzke's farm in Marquette, Manitoba since 2000. Back in his home country of Tlaxcala in central Mexico, Diego worked many jobs including clothing factory worker, construction worker, and farmer. Never having left Mexico, he decided to take the bold move to uproot his life leaving behind his wife, 22-year-old son and 20-year-old daughter to work in Canada—all in the hopes of improving his family's livelihood. For Diego, he had a personal relationship to farming as most of what he had learned came from his experience helping his grandfather on the farm:

> Normally, before coming into the program, I worked in a clothing factory. I also was a construction worker and a farmer. I got married. So I tried to improve myself. I heard about this program. I applied and they accepted me. I don't have much land and I help my grandfather with his land. He taught me how to farm. We cultivate corn, beans and squash. Almost everyone cultivates those, as well as wheat. That is what they cultivate in my area.

As part of supplementing the costs of his family's expenses, Diego's work overseas provided him the purchasing power to build a stable and secure lifestyle he would have not otherwise receive working in Mexico.

> In Mexico, when one gets married, he leaves the home of his parents to live in his own house. But I did not have enough to have my own house or land. So, by coming to Canada, I could buy some land and a house and pay for other expenses.

However, within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Diego describes the move to Canada as a critical lifeline to ensure the survival of his family.

> Fortunately – or unfortunately – it might have been better because I might also have gotten Covid. The way the economy is in Mexico, we have to travel. In Mexico, it is hard to survive with the economy the way it is. So we have to travel and to take advantage of the opportunities in Canada to work here and to make a little more. In fact, we travel from there to here to look for a better situation for our families, to be better off financially – not just me, but all those who have travelled here. And we all hope that no one will be sick and that our families will not get sick either.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, Diego viewed his work in Canada as an essential opportunity to support his family back home due to the lack of job prospects in Mexico. Despite his desire to work in Canada, COVID-19 was a prevailing and haunting specter that carried with it the future livelihoods of these workers. For Diego, there was a great sense of fear that COVID-19 would prevent him and other workers from travelling for work and supporting their families. For this reason, many workers prefaced the importance of staying healthy and COVID-19-free to secure their positions.

Challenges of the migration process

At the age of 47, Gabriel moved from Davao, Philippines in October 2020 to Neepawa. With a high school education, he came to Manitoba through the PNP working as an industrial meat cutter. During our interviews, Gabriel made it his goal to display his English skills to me. For him, the English language came naturally to him as breathing. Gabriel says “So, English is something like a part of me. I can talk I can express myself more in English than Tagalog, in my

own language." At a young age he was an avid reader of English text, reading anything from comic books to newspapers. His English language proficiency was further supported when his parents moved to Davao, where he was exposed to English-speaking locals and tourists alike. There, his father worked as a driver and his mother a personal home cook. Describing his upbringing in Davao, he shares: "Our neighbors were foreigners. In the beginning I had a hard time communicating with them but the more I spoke to them, the more easy it was for me."

Of the many people I've interviewed, Gabriel was perhaps the most candid. He was not shy to share his complex journey as a migrant worker. While in the Philippines, Gabriel worked as a butcher but with the technological boom of mobile devices, he was able to transfer his electronic training and find work as a part-time technician in a mobile repair shop:

> I worked a lot of jobs because I'm the kind of person cannot stay in just one corner. I like my mind to keep on running, running. So I was working as a butcher in the nighttime and I had lots of spare time during the day. Back then, there was also a boom in cell phone use. One day, my phone is not working so I visited the cell phone repair shop. I look at them repair my phone once and I think "this job is easy" because during my younger years before I got married, I studied electronics. So I can learn from like, I can do this. So I befriended the technician. Then later on, he was amazed in just a couple of days, weeks, I repair phone way, way much better than him. So he had me work for him. So that was my part time job during the day, but I was doing slaughtering work at night.

Given the Philippine's poor economy, Gabriel required more than one job if he was to support his family. However, to do this he had to leverage his connections, which played a crucial role in providing him with employment opportunities. More than just contacts, they were enmeshed

within a larger system of networks built around reciprocity, connection and community. For workers, the pathway to employment was not always based on qualification but on the relations one could leverage. However, this is not to say that relationships were solely transactional but rather they were based on a confluence of personal and professional connections that weaved together to form the social fabric of society.

Overtime, Gabriel would start to apply for work outside the Philippines where he was offered better pay and work to support his family. He had his sights first set in Australia where he would be in closer proximity to his family. Compared to Australia, he found the hiring process in Canada more stringent and the recruitment agencies more difficult to access given they were based in Manilla—an area far where he lived. In 2015, he was able to connect with his potential employer in Australia who applied him to the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme in which he would obtain PR upon arrival. Below Gabriel details the complex minefield he had to navigate to apply for work in Australia:

> We heard about the application in Australia for butcher. Because in Mindanao, particularly in Davao province, we're not so keen regarding about Canada, because Canada is far, far away from us, whereas Australia is very, very near to us. And the employer, Canadian employer doing interviews back then only in Manila—few agencies in Manila—and the requirements are very, very strict. And so I applied to Australia, then I applied for the trade assessment, then I guess, way back 2015 I was able to get an employer, and then they were thinking of hiring me as a temporary work worker. But during that time, I guess maybe 2015 in that's the time that the Australians or something like against the hiring of foreign employees, as they said they lost their jobs to them. So my employer back then decided to apply me in something like similar to a Provincial

> Nominee Program here but in Australia, it's RSMS [regional sponsored migration scheme]. The temporary worker there visa 491, but me the visa that was offered to me is RSMS, regional sponsored migration scheme, Visa 189.

For Gabriel, the Subclass 189 to which employer applied would ensure his pathway towards permanent residence (Vevs Global, n.d.). However, this process quickly fell through when hiring company's secretary failed to provide Gabriel with the correct information on his trade assessment eligibility to procure his sponsorship. In the following, Gabriel explains the arduous, lengthy process of applying for his RSMS:

> So the thing is applying to a temporary work permit is very easy. But my employer decided to something like apply me for Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme similar to PNP, Provincial Nominee Program. But their requirements are high. And then they asked the requirements regarding my family documents and all and all that. Then later on my employer advised me that to keep in touch with the secretary so that my secretary will be the ones to guide me on the online application. But that secretary has no, she has no experience regarding about immigration laws. So the thing that is he's the one who's guiding me, and then there's a clause that I read, they will get some agent or immigration experts to help me. But because I have no knowledge, I just will go go with my employer. And then the guidance, the guidance of the company's secretary. Then later on, there is a question in the application if I have taken the trade assessment for Australia. So I asked the personal secretary … and she tells me to answer no 'We can take that if needed.' So I just answered No … and then we continue continue. And then later on, they asked for the documents of my family, the passport, the medical and then the sad part is we need to pay

> the Australian Government something like it's like a landing fee here. So I have no money. My aunt in Toronto had to shell out $3,000 just for my application but 10,000 to bring my whole family. So I waited for a year we comply with the few documents that is asked we comply with the medical that is needed for my kids. Then the decision came my application was denied because I was not able to take the trade assessment whose fault this? Mine or my employer? I have no idea. I provide all the documents that we need. They asked so that's the sad part.

Given the company's lack of oversight, Gabriel's RSMS application was disqualified and, in the process, he lost $3000 in application fees, which was half his yearly earnings in the Philippines. In the case of Gabriel, the immigration system worked in ways that simultaneously propelled and hindered his movements. This created a mirage of a better future; as he got closer to it being realized, it vanished, putting him in a further state of financial and emotional precarity.

This eventually led Gabriel to move to Canada to work as a butcher at HyLife. For Gabriel, He believed that moving to Canada would afford him and his family a better life and future: Compared to life in Canada, he describes the challenges of living in the Philippines due its lack of opportunities for his children and him.

> In the Philippines if you work minimum wage job, the food cost alone barely enough not to mention the bills for water and electricity. And I have five kids and I have big dreams for all of us. Just speaking for myself I have lots of potential. I wanted to go to university but I was not able to go because I didn't have the means. So as a father you want to maximize their potential [to] be educated so that they can be whoever they want what they want so your kids will be able to earn. I read that work in Canada and Australia is

> way better compared to the Middle East, because they're not well compensated not to mention the working environment is not so good and secure and you're there on a contract basis. You can work and work but by the time you get old, all those things that you saved will be shelled out again, so it's not so secure. So I'm glad I chose an English speaking country rather than another country. Yeah.

Thus, Gabriel's decision to move to Canada was a deliberate one for it meant providing him and his family the means and opportunities needed to live a quality life. This was often spoken of in terms of maximizing his and his children's potential via the pursuit of higher education. Given that he did not want his children to suffer the same hardships as him, education was viewed as a means of escaping poverty. In the following, Gabriel further details the benefits of living in Canada:

> There's the good and the bad, but the good outweighs the bad. The good thing is it's everybody's dream to be in Canada, You can provide good future for you children because by the time you get permanent residency, you'll have made enough and can bring your children here. In other countries overseas, you just keep working and you have to go back home to see your family…. You can have access to all the government services here. Your kids can avail themselves of free education and health care. And from what I observe also Canada is way much better compared to the US because of the racism there. But I don't see much racism here in Canada compared to Europe or the US.

According to Gabriel, Canada was a place where workers were afforded all kinds of opportunities and privileges that could be passed down to family members. This included an easier pathway to sponsoring their families to Canada, accessing government services and free

education and healthcare, and the perception of a more tolerant and just society. Thus, Gabriel's move to Canada was a calculated decision, one in which he and his family could gain the most benefits.

Barriers upon arrival

Isolation

Moreover, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, workers often experienced heightened forms of social and economic vulnerabilities upon their arrival in Canada. These had deep psychological implications on workers that came from the uncertainty of being far away from their families and not knowing when or if they would be able to see their families again. As a result, workers often expressed feelings of homesickness and isolation while away from their families. For 41-year-old Sonny, who worked at HyLife for two years, the pandemic only increased his longing to be back in the Philippines with his family:

> I thought I had already adjusted after one year or two years in Canada, but because of this COVID, I don't know when I'll see my family. And I start feeling homesick again. Because I keep on waiting for my family and because of COVID Oh my god, the stress will just add up.

In the case of 46-year-old Samuel, he moved to Neepawa from Philippines in April 2017 to work at HyLife. During the pandemic, he came to the startling revelation that he could not be there for his family, remarking:

> I'm so much worried about my family back home because I cannot monitor them. I cannot comfort them and I'm not there to take care of them during all this. I struggle a lot

> because I'm here in Canada and my family is back home. And with COVID, we should be like going through this all together, but because I'm here in Canda, I cannot you know take care and monitor them, I cannot share my struggles with my family because there back home.

As Samuel described, the inability to be with his family during such a devastating time weighed heavily on his conscience, deepening his feelings of anxiety and homesickness.

For Santiago, the COVID-19 pandemic left him in a further state of uncertainty causing him to straddle the line between staying in Canada to work to support his family and wanting to return to Mexico to be my his family's side. On one hand, he worried about being sick and not sending money back home, and on the other, he worried about his family members falling ill while he was in Canada. However, given his family's dire financial situation, he chose to stay, which came at his own mental and emotional detriment. He states:

> My health, up to now, has been good. I worry always about the same thing: not to become infected, or that my family might get sick, and we are not together. I send messages to my wife and I keep working. I feel better when I know that she has seen my message. What keeps me going is knowing that I am doing this to benefit my family. If someone in my family would be sick, I would ask my boss and go home right away. That is what worries me. It is mentally draining. But I know I could die of another sickness too. So that is my only worry.

Similarly, Ricci describes the bittersweet moment of having to leave his family behind in the Philippines.

> So when I flew out to work in Canada, it was the saddest experience that I've had my entire life, so leaving my family at the airport. So because they shuttled me to the airport and made our goodbyes. So the children started crying, so that was bittersweet for me. Sweet because I know that I could provide for them more. I could give them more. But bitter because I would have to leave them for some time. So I would not be seeing them for a while personally and physically we would be far apart. *(Ricci)*

Despite the benefits that working in Canada offered his family, Ricci's transition was still quite difficult as he no longer had his family for support. Not only was he dealing with physical demands of work, but he also had to endure the isolation of being away from his family. Despite living with his co-workers, their schedules did not always align to meet. Altogether, this lack of social support left Ricci in an emotionally and mentally vulnerable place, which he describes in the following:

> For me it took me three months to adjust physically and mentally. Physically to the work that I have, so it's really hard, the work that we have here. And mentally, because I'm far from the family, so. Every day I go home, I do miss them, so I try to call them and message but that doesn't seem to be enough. So the physical presence, is really better than just calling. Then there would be times when you need someone to talk to and all the friends that you have in the house or all the co-tenants that you have are doing their shift. And you're – because in my case all of my companions here in the house, they're doing the day shift – I'm the only one on the nightshift….
>
> So when I wake up I usually am all alone, so. Then that's it. [Laughs] Time to prepare, so I don't have anyone to talk to. But I got used to it eventually. So the first three

> months were the trying months for me, so. There were times when tears were just falling out my eyes without me knowing. [Laughs] And I don't know what the reason is. It just comes out. It is hard when you're alone, so.

Even with the advancements of technology to videocall his family, the difference in time zones proved to be a great barrier in communicating with their families. As Ricci notes, after a long day of work he was often too tired to engage in any lengthy or quality conversations with his family.

> So the time in the Philippines is 13 hours advance, compared to the time here in Canada. So talking to my family is a bit difficult. So when I'm working – they're awake yes – but I'm working. So when I come home, they're still awake – but I'm tired – so the phone time that we have is quite short. I have to rest.

At most, workers only had limited time to engage with their families. Ricci goes on to liken his circumstance to modern day slavery stating:

> So the only quality communication that we have, is during weekends – so Saturdays and Sundays. We don't have a lot of time on Saturday. Basically that's just the life that we have here, so. it feels like we're modern-day slaves here,

For Edwin, this transition from family-oriented communal life to minimal social interaction was vastly different from what he had known. "Back home, we are very close to people. We get to see our cousins, friends every weekend, and leaving them is very hard and sad for us."

Such lack of social support often led workers to a state of deep depression. As Ricci highlights, the isolation workers experienced was sometimes unbearable, leading some to take their own lives.

> Yes. So some of my friends even had – they told me that they're so depressed. They're having depression, so. And say, "Man, when that thing happens to you, just call us. OK, so if you're in that – alone – that is not loneliness anymore, so that's borderline depression, so call us." There are cases of workers in HyLife, I think just last year, one tried to commit suicide.
>
> He had family problems way back in the Philippines. And in here he doesn't have anyone to talk to, so he got depressed and eventually tried to take his life.

This longing for their families was further echoed by Gabriel who recounted an emotional conversation he had with his 3-year-old daughter in the Philippines.

> Every time my little girl is talking with me, she wanted to see me and asking me when I'm coming home because she was thinking that Winnipeg and Philippines is just a walk in the park or just like the Jeepney will pop up and take you home. I said I still need to work because I need to buy you Jollibee or something like that. And she responds: "I don't like Jollibee. I want you to come home. Don't you know the place. Don't you know the way to come back?"
>
> How do you think that makes me feel. But there are times she won't talk to me seriously. She'll turn her back to me that's the painful part. I can bear the pain but I know my child is suffering from the pain also. The best is to release. There's nothing you can do for now, so I just hope things will be better in the coming days so I can bring them here

> so we won't be separated, I am just comforting myself. At least they're in a better place now, at least they are provided, at least they have food on the table.

For Gabriel, the sadness and grief of leaving his family was sometimes too much to bear or process. This brought upon a combination of feelings from what can be perceived as depression, listlessness, and overwhelm. He described the painful conflict between staying in Canada to support his family and longing to see his family in the Philippines. However, to soothe these feelings of ambivalence, Gabriel would come to find solace and comfort in the knowing that he was able to provide for his family. His vision of a future full of possibilities propelled him to endure the harshness and isolation of his reality. It is this imagining of what ideal future laid ahead for him and his family that made his sacrifice seem tolerable and justifiable.

Similarly, Sonny expressed the sorrow and isolation that came along with the culture of moving into a new country. Without family and friends for support, he began to feel homesick and depressed. Despite the moments of regrets he had moving to Canada, he recognized that he had to stay and endure the hardships that laid ahead.

> I've been here almost two years and three months, to be exact. First, when I came here to Canada. I am really really sad. I blame myself for coming here because at first "Oh my god. Why am I here?" Because work is very hard. The weather too. You will meet different people. Everything's new. So that time that was the first time I last year towards last year. I felt very very sad with homesickness and with depression because that was the first time I was separated from my family from my loved ones from my friends. But I keep on fighting. All I can do is look at whats ahead of me.

For many workers like Sonny, moving to a new country and leaving behind their families was their first experience. As a result, the feelings of homesickness and isolation were often too much to bear. Such scenarios led workers to feel a sense of entrapment with little other option than to face and experience this extreme sense of alienation alone or risk the livelihood of their families.

Cost of living

In addition to workers' alienating environment, the cost of living was an important stressor for workers. What they believed about Canada as the land of abundance was, in reality, quite the opposite, with workers making barely enough to support themselves let alone their families overseas. Kristine and Sherald describe the shock they felt upon arriving in Neepawa believing that they would be able to earn enough for her and her family overseas.

> Coming here to Canada I felt I had to adjust a lot– because the culture is very different in the Philippines than here in Canada. *(Kristine)*

> When I was in the Philippines looking at the salary I thought that the salary was really huge. The grass looked greener on the other side. But when I came here to Canada I realized that that salary isn't enough. So it's not enough, it's very different from my expectations. So in the first two months living in Canada I had to adjust to a lot of things. Because I came here without things, so I had to buy things, so food, clothe, because it's very expensive, yes. *(Sherald)*

Similarly, Edwin explained how the conversion rate from Canadian to Filipino currency failed to account for the actual cost of living in Canada. He dispels the conception that because he earned a wage in Canada, he was well off likening cost of living in Canada to that of the Philippines. In

fact, many of my interlocutors discussed barely earning enough to support themselves in Canada let alone the dependents back home.

> Yes, we have plenty more money but what they don't realise that we are spending also dollars you know. Although Canadian dollar as much as the exchange rate is concerned, it's big amount compared to our Peso but you know, what they don't realise is that we are spending also in dollars like in Peso so. *(Edwin)*

For Rachel, her living situation was rather complicated and precarious. At the age of 44, she moved from Ortigas, Philippines, to Russell, Manitoba in 2019, where she worked as a room attendant at an inn. As a migrant worker, she worked to support her family in Philippines, which included her 24-year-old daughter, 13-year-old son, mother, brother and sister in the Philippines. Living in a two-bedroom trailer in the Russel area, she paid $700/month of rent and $83/week of hydro bills just to cover the cost of maintenance for her living. With no vacancy left in her area, she had no other option but to live in a trailer.

> I always save money for my family before. Before I get the first time I got here because my, my, I need to send money to my daughter, because she is studying there. And but now it's okay, because she's already graduated. But still, I need to save money because I have a lot of debt. I owe 200,000 pesos to the Philippines so I try to only spend less than $400 a month on food. *(Rachel)*

However, within the context of the pandemic, her work hours were drastically cut, averaging 25 hours/week:

> There's less time working every day. We have less and less hours. I cannot pay rent for my trailer and I have to money to send back to my family. Sometimes my salary for biweekly 580 And then 620 like that. Yeah, but before if there's no COVID my salary turns to higher higher than six hundred.

As demonstrated above, COVID-19 had a detrimental effect on workers' living conditions. For Rachel, she was confronted with the daunting reality of their work hours being cut down, putting them and their families in a further state of precarity.

Lack of financial literacy

As part of their financial struggles, workers would often detail financial trappings that came along with entering the Canadian social cultural milieu. For many of the workers, they lacked the financial literacy to manage their finances. This often left workers in financially risky situations of spending beyond their means. One such classic example among workers was the use of credit cards. For many of the workers, who never owned or used a credit card, they spoke of the trapping of overspending/conspicuous consumption and accruing large amounts of debt over time. A few workers described this as "candy eye" spending on things they would not otherwise been able to afford in the Philippines not realizing that they would eventually have to pay this all back. As a worker from HyLife, 33-year-old Nathan described how credit cards made it accessible for workers like him to easily purchase whatever they wanted.

> There it will be – you're – it's just like you're just out of – you're in a new place in your country back then you cannot afford to buy the kind of product. But here because the easy swipe of credit card, so the access is another thing. Yeah you have to be responsible as well, you know…. Because everything can be obtained here easily.

> I've seen people, who you know who are new to Canada and you know, and they don't how to, they're not taught about financial literacy so they don't know how to spend.

Other workers also noted the poor spending habits of those from the same background as them, stemming from a "third world" mentality of lack and scarcity that carried itself over into their new Canadian environment. The act of overspending was not just to compensate for this lack but also as a way for them to integrate within Canadian society. As Edwin described, the perception of Canadian living then was synonymous with lavish spending:

> It's probably because of you know our background, we belong to a third world country so way back when before coming here in Canada….
>
> Probably there were you know, they live in hardship, they don't have enough money to buy the things that they like or deprived of material things before. So, when they arrive here you know earning dollars and you know since they were deprived of those things so they were given the credit cards you know to, things like that. I can see many Filipino migrant workers are struggling financially because of that mentality you know….
>
> I even have a one friend when his wife arrived here, his wife demanded to buy a house right away and you know it's not an easy thing you know buying a house. I mean it needs to, you need to you know plan before getting into it…so yeah, they're struggling and some are you know working hard, getting three jobs in a day just to you know pay all their debts.

Despite the debt that some workers found themselves incurring overtime, spending or overspending became a status symbol that led to their financial ruin. These acts were often informed by visions or ideals of what it meant to be a Canadian.

Permanent residence (PR) application delays

For many workers, applying to their PR was often a cumbersome, challenging and lengthy process. Due to COVID-19, many vital services for TFWs were closed which further delayed their PR application. In the case of Gabriel, upon arriving in Manitoba, he had plans to retake his IELTS examination, which he needed to pass to apply for PR. However, this process was further delayed when he had to quarantine for 16 days as part of the Canadian government's COVID-19 health and safety protocol. Similarly, Sonny describes his frustration over the closures of government services required to process his PR application:

> Yes, because of COVID this [delay] is happening … [I]f there's no COVID I would already have my PR. I already would bring my family here. But because of COVID there are no workers at immigration CIC or IRCC…. [N]o one is taking care of your documents. So that's why it got delayed almost a year. We've been waiting not just me but many of the people in HyLife. So it really affects not just us in HyLife, but also our families in the Philippines who are waiting for us to get our PRs.

Despite these setbacks, the PR application itself proved to be a great challenge for workers to navigate. A few of my interlocutors attributed this to a lack of understanding of the application process which resulted in several mistakes in his application. For example, workers who were not computer literate had trouble applying for their PR online. Often this would lead to consulting with immigration consultancies that would scam them for money. Gabriel shares

paying $50 to an immigration company to help him with his PR application. After waiting for a month, his application was returned with multiple corrections to which he was told by the agency to fill it up himself. Even after much argument with the company they were unable to return his money back stating they had other clients availing of their services.

> I wait for maybe around a month because as he said he also has so many clients that avail of his services. And then what happened is after a month he gave that to me then I pass it to the HR department. Then maybe after a week or two sometimes three weeks … they returned to me and there were so many corrections. Then when I give it back to him "hey bro there's a lot of correction so what should we do. he said "what you're going to do is you're going to go to something like internet and then you fill it up and then I'll print it" I said "you know what I avail of your services because I'm not so good in paperwork because when I do this on Adobe I'm going to have to type on it but it won't let me save. I'm sorry I'm not really good with computers.

Here, Gabriel's lack of understanding of the PR application process made him vulnerable to scenarios where he was scammed and taken advantage of by immigration consultancy companies. Not only did he lose his money but his PR application was further delayed.

Given delays in PR status, workers experienced increasing levels of homesickness and isolation. This was due to the fact that while under consideration for PR, workers were not allowed to leave their host country or travel back home. For Edwin, all the accomplishments he achieved at work were often overshadowed by a deep longing to be with his family. As Edwin shares, "The longer we are without our PRs, the longer the isolation becomes. The isolation sometimes is too great". Here, a worker's PR status afforded them the ability to sponsor their

family members. However, with the pandemic, this process was further delayed to what felt like an eternity to many workers. Edwin further explains, “Oh, yes. I do miss my friends, my family, but I have to make sacrifices for the kids. It's for the kids' future.” As a father of a 19-year-old daughter and 13-year-old son, Edwin had to reconcile with the fact that the isolation he experienced was a necessary sacrifice if it meant providing a better life for his family.

As shown by the above narratives, the act of waiting for their PR status was a point of frustration and devastation for both workers and their families. For they had to live with the uncertainty of not knowing when or if they would be reunited with their families or what would become of them, leading many to experience waves of anxiety and depression during the course of the pandemic.

Moreover, workers’ PR status or lack thereof was tied to their vicious cycle of precariousness. Their lack of literacy and understanding surrounding the PR application process not only delayed their PR status but also put them in a further state of precarity, uncertainty and vulnerability. Given that these TFWs were still under the mercy of their employers, many were eager to obtain their PRs to protect themselves from the risk of deportation. As Jacob highlights, having his PR would afford them a sense of stability they otherwise had not known:

> Yes having PR is very important for us. Because we are temporary foreigners workers. Our situation is very difficult for this time because at any minute we can get in trouble and any time a person can be fired and be sent back to the Philippines. So my goal now is to become a permanent resident. [But] what's most challenging for us right now is the language barrier, and so if there is some support or resources that will be given to us it would help a lot to, for them to become PR.

Conclusion

As the different portraits of the migrant workers convey, workers migration was not a simple, linear path but a messy and complex process fraught with lack, anticipation, dread, and desire. Given the rise of the COVID-19, workers experienced higher levels of precarity in both country of origin and host country. This came in the form of unsteady or lack of employment in their home countries, which often propelled workers to migrate. Or in more extreme cases, workers, like Isaac, were left undocumented in Canada due to work permit delays. Such cases only intensified worker's precarity who had the additional burden of supporting their families, For this reason, many workers move overseas were driven by a desire for a better life for their families and themselves premised upon future notions of opportunities, security and mobility.

However, such pathways to migration were rather complex. As shown by Gabriel and Ethan, workers encountered stoppages—brought upon by systemic and bureaucratic forces—that prevented them from working overseas leaving them in a further state of precarity. Although some workers were acutely aware of the systemic barriers that led to their migration, they expressed little option but to move. Even upon arrival, workers encountered a myriad of social and economic barriers that were further heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. This included social isolation, the exorbitant cost of living, lack of financial literacy, and PR application delays. As such, these stories play an integral role in highlighting the various precarious pathways of employment through which many migrant workers had to navigate in their country of origin and other sending countries before arriving in Canada.

CHAPTER 4: BECOMING THE MODEL MINORITY

In this section, I describe the process through which the model minority develops and becomes contingent upon a myriad of factors. From pre-departure to arrival in Canada, the model minority was not an innate characteristic but a state of constant becoming and learning. As my interlocutors illuminate, the model minority was not merely a passive state but fraught with notions of productivity, self-discipline, class mobility, exhaustion, and precarity. Such a process of becoming the model minority was further expedited and bolstered by different channels through which migrant workers were mobilized and sent overseas.

Qualities of a model minority

For Isaac, he shared his values in the importance of hard work and how this figured into everyday beliefs and practices. As Isaac shares, his work discipline was not some abstract phenomenon but instilled in him early on:

> So, I'm always passionate with what I do. If you're not doing it one hundred percent it doesn't make any sense not doing it. And everything that I've done to date, I give my best, I can't be mediocre. I'm not saying that I have not slipped up one or two times but my goal or my philosophy is always give one hundred percent because life is a full circle and you will get a, say, my mom would say whatever you sow, you will reap. So, we are always built for work. That's how my parents brought me up. So, give your best and life will repay you on its own terms.

For Isaac, he prided himself on his work ethic, which played a pivotal role in his sense of identity. Like many of my interlocutors, the dedication and philosophy they had towards work was heavily informed by the cultural upbringing in which they were raised. Part of their work

ethic meant pushing beyond their limits or as Isaac puts it, "I can't be mediocre" or "we're always built for work." This philosophy or embodied way of being and living came with it the hope that what workers "sowed" they would "reap." In other words, this reward or prospect of a reward came at a great price. This notion or need to be the ideal worker was rooted in cultural norms, values and beliefs that figured into the everyday articulations of their work, relationships and life. It was something to be constantly achieved but never fully achievable. It is this constant drive to be this ideal worker that placed many workers in vulnerable positions compelling themselves to work beyond their physical and mental capacity. In so doing, the ideal worker is ideal by virtue of their ability to endure and put up with conditions that would be considered intolerable by others. This type of embodied form of discipline, as expressed by Isaac, reveals the ontological importance that one's upbringing can have in informing one's sense of self and identity.

For Gabriel, he was deliberate in reminding me that he was grateful for his position at HyLife, a sentiment which was fraught with gratitude and ingratiation. This was made evident in the pride he took in being an industrious, amiable, and flexible worker who was amenable to the needs/whims of his company:

> In my workplace, I'm very very friendly and very helpful so I have no problems. I can talk to anybody and help anybody…. I do the extra mile for example … back then they're supposed to work at for 3:30am [but] I'm already there in that position I set up my area. And then by the time our shift is done, I wanted our area to be clean. I stay even though I don't know if I'm required or not. I keep on cleaning the area I leave the area as clean as possible. So that guess I'm trying to set an example and then trying to just trying to give

> my best. The thing also is a wanted to give the impression that I do my job. I treasure my job.

According to Gabriel, he saw his work ethic or doing the "extra miles" as something to be highlighted and recognized. He notes being the first and last person at his station staying even after his shift ends to ensure his workplace was as clean possible. This engrained sense of hard work ethic was one in which he viewed as setting him apart from his colleagues. What is telling, however, in Gabriel's quote was the need to impress upon the fact that he indeed performed his work and that he valued it. This kind of performative action reveals the insidious nature of how the model minority archetype required constant self-monitoring and reproduction to be maintained, creating an image both desirable and unattainable.

Strategic deployment of the model minority

The notion of the model minority was rooted in productivity. For Gabriel, the strong need to contribute to the Canadian economy stemmed from an indebtedness towards the Canadian nation-state—a need to prove his place and value in a new society as outsider. Such sentiments formed the basis in which workers would mold, regiment and construe themselves to be the ideal worker, one which was simultaneously subservient and productive to the state. Strategically, however, Gabriel also used the notion of the ideal worker to demand for opportunities that would not otherwise be afforded to him if he was not the so-called embodiment of the ideal worker.

> We want to contribute to Canada. We're thankful to HyLife that they hired us. Once we are done in HyLife … that's the time we are going to start anew … we can share with Canada what we learned. For example, we can do the nursing aide course, the caregiver course or the safety course … then we can fill in the manpower shortage where we

> already have certificates to do something. Like why minimize the productivity of the person why minimize his potential? We're already here, we're not going anywhere. I'm not gonna jump tomorrow on a plane to the Philippines. If we stay here, we plan to stay here. Why not make us productive? The more we educated we are the more we are productive, the more we can contribute to Canada. We love Canada we wanted to help you guys.

Given that TFWs were tied to one employer, workers' horizons of opportunities were quite narrow. To change this, Gabriel suggested workers be afforded educational opportunities in their desired fields in case they wanted to leave their current workplace after receiving their PR. This desire for social mobility by way of educational and career opportunities became synonymous with being a productive worker contributing to the Canadian economy. However, to many workers, it was through this veil of productivity that they were able to realize the full spectrum of their humanity/human potential that was denied to them as TFWs. For Gabriel, Canada was viewed as a land of opportunities contingent upon one's ability to be productive. As such, he found that being limited in what he was able to do in terms of employment prospects as counterintuitive to what Canada represented.

While sharing his story, Gabriel struggled to hold back tears when describing the unfairness of his reality. In these moments, I saw a man desperately trying to cling onto his place in a foreign land as someone worthy of rights and dignity, and willing to work tirelessly to prove his mettle and loyalty to his employers and Canada. Here worker's sense of indebtedness and servitude to Canada was intricately linked to their desire for social belonging and mobility and to contribute to the Canadian state. As such, it is this tension between having their potential

minimized and their desire to be productive subjects that led to their feelings of unrest, frustration, and unfulfillment.

Given his precarious state, Gabriel was keen to explore various educational pathways to ensure he had other options lined up outside of HyLife. To do this, he described the self-disciplinary practices required to realize his goals—specifically, the act of developing specific regimen and routines throughout his day. Gabriel discussed the tight window of period he would have to carve out to travel to school and back home to rest and then to work:

> Back then I was thinking of doing a care giver course because it's frontline worker job and Canada need something like that. And there's a school in Brandon that goes from 8am to 12pm. So I said if I came home at 12am I can sleep at 1am. I can rise at 7am then … I can be in Brandon at 8am and it just a 4 hour course…. I can I can be here at home at 12pm then I can still sleep at around two hours again. So I'll be productive and competitive. Look I've been to here for two years doing nothing. If I was allowed to take courses maybe I already have two certificates, which will open other doors.

Again, Gabriel brings back this need to be 'productive' through a meticulous planning of his schooling in his already busy schedule. He describes coordinating school in between work and rest to ensure he had the skills and training to meet the demands of the labour market as well as have other work prospects lined up. This self-regimenting was intricately linked to a sense of being productive. For it was not simply some output Gabriel performed at work but also the types of activity engaged on a day-to-day basis that would prepare him for any future obstacles or career paths that would come his way. As such, we can imagine the model minority as not

being some innate character but required constant routinization, maintenance, and regulation to attain the level of productivity desired.

Physical implications of the model minority: breaking down of bodies

The model minority trope was not without its physical consequences. Although workers strived to maintain their health, their work environment did not always allow for this. As Edwin explained:

> Work has been exhausting. Every day you want the weekend to come soon, so you can rest. But then, that's life. I mean, life must go on. I have a family to feed [laughs]. We actually have this saying that it's not good to be sick when you're in Canada. It's not good to be sick because if you're sick, you cannot go to work and that means you have less money [laughs].

For Edwin, it was vital that workers maintained their health, as this meant that they could continue to earn and support their families. In other words, being productive was linked to being able to provide for their families. However, Edwin's heavy workload often left him feeling exhausted and worn out. To be sick or injured, according to Edwin, was a situation he strongly attempted to prevent as it meant a reduction in his earning potential and ability to provide for one's family. Rest, then, was vital in the maintenance of workers' health and high output performance—a luxury that was hard to come by and resulted in workers pushing beyond their physical capabilities.

Furthermore, the model minority was internalized in the sense of the commitment and duty workers had towards their workplace. For Edwin, despite the unpleasant side effects of the

vaccination, he decided to endure the pain and work to make up for lost wages and to fulfill his duty to his workplace.

> I have a story for that to tell. This is funny because you know. Prior to, a week prior to my first shot I was absent because the son of my landlord here was sick, he actually showed symptoms of you know like coughing, runny nose, something like that. So, we were told to isolate for four days.
>
> I had to wait until you know the result of the COVID test will arrive so you have to stay home. But you know even added to the boredom you know, just being home, cannot go out, you're always you know in your room. Anyway, after that Monday I also scheduled to have my first dose so.
>
> I, I feeling really tired you know after like probably a few hours, my shoulder was sore, I couldn't even you know lift my, my left shoulder but then since I was already absent for the previous week, you know it's, to me it's also my duty since we are short of you know, people to you know at least help my team.
>
> So, thank God I able to finish the day with all this sore shoulders and you know what happened when I get home? I feel really, really tired it's like I've been working for 24-hours straight so that was the affect of it you know. And we were supposed to, I was supposed to rest because of that but I chose not to because you know, I have my duty also in my workplace you know.
>
> So the following morning after taking a bath I had you know chills I just took a Tylenol, a sweat, you know the doctor advised if you show some fever you know you just have to take Tylenol so I did that I took a Tylenol and thank God you know chills

> disappeared, so there I go I have to again go back to work and you know, so yeah I can't afford to be absent all the time because means no, no pay so.

As described above, Edwin expressed a sense of urgency and duty to return to work. This was especially pressing for him as his workplace was short of workers and he did not want to let his team down. Instead of resting, he chose to work and take medication to alleviate the soreness and chills he was feeling. As he makes explicit, absences from work were not a luxury he could afford. Like many of my interlocutors, they would often repress their pain to appeal to western capitalist logics of productivity, but most importantly to be able to support their loved ones overseas.

Double-edged nature of the model minority

Workers were also consciously aware of how the model minority trope was exploited and coopted to subjugate workers. Despite such culturally limiting stereotypes, Edwin insisted on working to support his family, stating:

> Me personally, [work] is the reason why I'm here … and the company knows this and takes advantage. So, instead, I try not to complain. So, I'll just have to take it on the chin focus on the job that's given to me. I mean, at the end of the day it's still me and my family is going to be….

For Edwin, this desire to provide for his family meant subjugating himself to unscrupulous working conditions. For it was not lost among workers that if they failed to adhere to their employers, they risked the livelihood of so many others who depended on them. The model minority then was not a trait that was innate but one that is shaped, endured, tolerated and

embodied. As Sherald reveals, the ideal worker trope worked simultaneously in favor and against workers.

> Well for me, sir, maybe because way back I've been abroad also. I went to Macau but it's way back, I don't remember. And then you're earning – I'm earning also money there and then I send some for my family. But then when I come home and then from hero to zero, sir. You know what I mean, from hero to zero? You're hero, you're sending money and then you go back to the Philippines and then you're earning nothing.
>
> So when I felt that I need to do something, so I worked for a slaughterhouse and then get some training, so I came back in Canada. So there's no feeling of homesick because I know how it feels when you have nothing. When your kids want to buy something and then you don't have – you have only enough money, you cannot buy that thing then you only have to cry and then think for some better opportunity. So that's why.

Here, Sherald reveals how the model minority is not just a phenomenon that is specific to the host country but also the sending country in which they exemplify the model Filipino citizen. In other words, becoming a model minority unfolded across a transnational trajectory of precarity. Instead of working for work's sake, work itself held the markers of heroism and self-sacrifice.[6] For she was not just working for herself but contributing to the family and country's economy through remittances. Further complicating this idea, the ability to earn was also associated with the lessening of suffering. For Sherald, this meant that she was able to feed her children. Here,

[6] The discourse of the modern-day hero and everyday hero has been widely propagated by former President Rodrigo Duterte and current President Bong Bong Marcos (Delizo, 2022; Parry-Davies, 2020).

workers constantly vacillated between modern day hero and modern-day slave—for their enslavement and suffering was also what brought them honor. As Sherald conveys:

> I'm earning also money there and then I send some for my family. But then when I come home and then from hero to zero, sir. You know what I mean, from hero to zero? You're hero, you're sending money and then you go back to the Philippines and then you're earning nothing.

According to Sherald, her worth and value was inextricably tied to her productivity/earning potential both in Canada and their home countries. For many of the workers, the ideal worker becomes an archetype reinforced and perpetuated both by families, companies, and the government of sending and receiving countries.

When asked if they needed support, workers' first reaction tended to be of embarrassment or discomfort—a fear of being burden and nuisance. This was highlighted in a following conversation I had with Sonny, "So is there anything you need right now? Or do you think you need any? Is there anything you'd like to know? Right now? I don't want you to think that I'm taking advantage. So right now, I don't need anything".

To Sonny, he was reluctant to bring attention to his needs, fearing that he would appear to be taking advantage of the system. Here the model minority figured into workers' everyday realities and possibilities constricting on what could be said and done. In the case of few workers, this meant denying themselves of critical services to appear grateful for what they had.

Government training program: Molding the model minority

For TFWs based in the Philippines aspiring to work in Neepawa HyLife Foods, they were required to complete a 280 hours Slaughtering Operations NC II training program through

TESDA (Technical Education Development Skills Authority). Some of the skills they acquired included the following: applying food safety and sanitation; using standard measuring devices, implementing good manufacturing practice procedures; stunning, shackling and lifting animals; sticking and bleeding them; splitting and quartering the carcass; and washing, trimming and weighing the carcass (Courses.com.ph, n.d.).

As a government agency, TESDA serves as the Philippines' Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) authority providing education and training opportunities for students and clients in preparation for employment. Its primary aim is to develop the Filipino workforce with "world-class competence and positive work values" and to provide quality technical-educational and skills development. According to their website (TESDA, n.d.):

> The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) was established through the enactment of Republic Act No. 7796 otherwise known as the "Technical Education and Skills Development Act of 1994", which was signed into law by President Fidel V. Ramos on August 25, 1994. This Act aims to encourage the full participation of and mobilize the industry, labor, local government units and technical-vocational institutions in the skills development of the country's human resources.

TESDA aims to provide workers with the skill necessary to be viable and suitable candidates to fill the labour shortages in other countries. This was explained by my interlocutors, Ethan and Edwin, who had to train at TESDA in order to be eligible for their butchering position at HyLife.

> I trained and worked as a slaughterer at the slaughterhouse and received a national certification through TESDA. It's a government funded training for slaughtering operations, so that I can get a certificate to be qualified butcher, yeah. *(Ethan)*

> Like the easiest way going abroad either in Canada or Australia is to do your training in slaughtering and butchering. I had the opportunity to receive a scholarship to enroll in a slaughtering course so yeah. *(Edwin)*

Within the Canadian context, TESDA and the Canadian government have established an agreement to work together in "strengthening skills development and providing employment opportunities to Filipinos who want to work in Canada" (TESDA, 2022, para. 1). In a meeting with Health Minister Paul Merriman of the Province of Saskatchewan to discuss future areas of technical vocational training in the Philippines, TESDA Director General Danilo Cruz states "We will continue to develop and improve our training programs for Filipinos to be equipped with the necessary skills needed in the industry and for them to have better employment opportunities here and abroad" (TESDA, 2022, para. 4). As shown, the Filipino government is deeply invested in the political machinery responsible for the deployment and recruitment of their people overseas. Instead of building an economy to support its people, the Filipino government has continually spent their resources on producing the ideal worker for work developing the economy of already "developed" nations. However, in 1963 Republic Act, the Department of Education formed a bureau known as the Bureau of Vocational Education to "enhance the socio-economic program of the Philippines through the development of skilled manpower in agricultural, industrial and trade-technical, fishery and other vocational courses" (Republic Act, 1963, para. 1)

This radically changed in 1994 when TESDA subsumed the primary role as the agents of TVET. Under TESDA, the explicit goal of the program has been to strategically develop a workforce that satisfies the economic needs of their international partners in already

industrialized settings under the guise of "international collaboration" and "nationalism" through which to serve their compatriots (TESDA, n.d.a).

This is exemplified (see Figure I) under their value statement where they emphasize "We believe in demonstrated competence, institutional integrity, personal commitment, culture of innovativeness and a deep sense of nationalism," which is followed by the company's quality policy, "We measure our worth by the satisfaction of the customers we serve. To achieve this, we commit to comply with applicable requirement and continually improve our systems and processes through: Strategic Decisions, Effectiveness, Responsiveness, Value added performance, Integrity, Citizen-focus, Efficiency" (TESDA, n.d.a., para. 5).

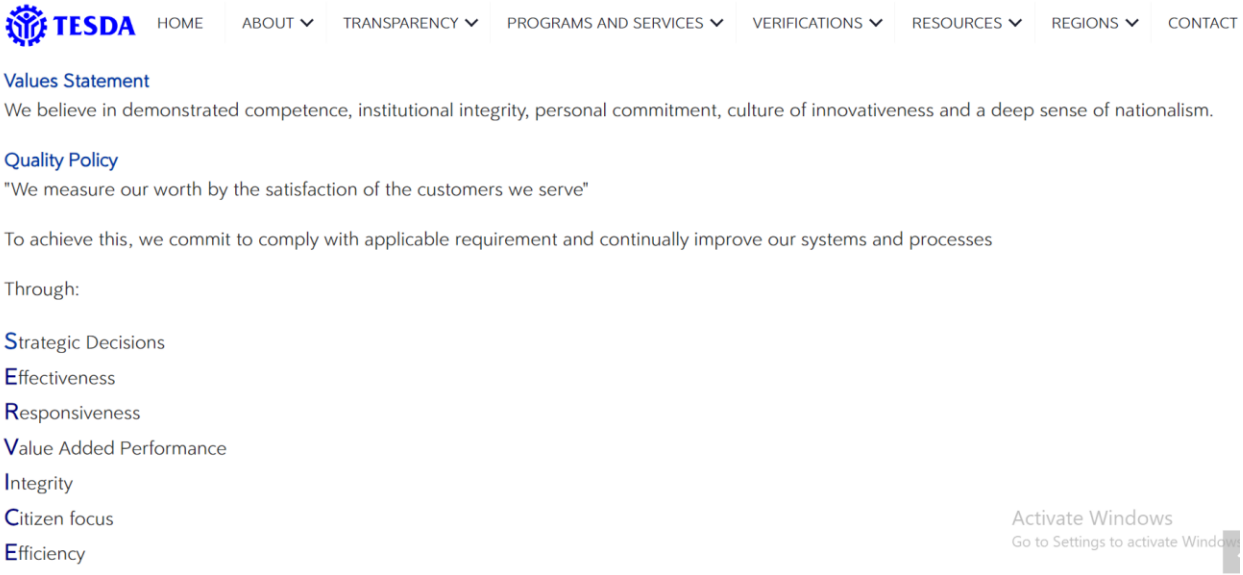


Figure I: TESDA's Vision, Mission, Value and Quality Statement. Image source: https://www.tesda.gov.ph/About/TESDA/11

Through the use of the SERVICE acronym, TESDA provides an integral role in building a compliant workforce that serves the needs of their international clientele. This is linked to languages of nationalism which promulgates the idea that one's labour is inextricably tied to one's personhood and by extension serving one's country. In so doing, this creates a process of

model minoritization in which workers are not only conditioned to be docile, industrious and subservient but in the process assumes this role as their own.

Recruitment Process

Recruitment Agency

Before their training at TESDA, the TFWs were first recruited by recruitment agencies accredited by the Department of Migrant Workers (formerly known as the Philippines Overseas Education Administration) specializing in the career placement of Filipino professionals and skilled workers for overseas employment. As the executive department of the Filipino government responsible for the protection of the rights and welfare of OFWs, the DMW was created under the Department of Migrant Workers act signed by former President Rodrigo Duterte on December 20, 2021 (Department of Migrant Workers, n.d.). For OFWs, there were two main DMW-accredited recruitment agencies that hired them, one was Magsasay and the other was international staffing organization (ISO) inc. Once recruited, they would proceed to enroll in TESDA where they would be trained and certified to be deployed work overseas.

Licensed by DMW and Department of Labour and Employment, ISO INC is a recruitment agency formed in 2002 focused on the recruitment of Filipino skilled workers and professional for overseas employment. According to POEA job site, the ISO was formed in response to the global demand for Filipino workers and whose goals is to find the most "suitable candidates for the job positions needed by its Principals" (n.d., para. 3). Furthermore, ISO aims for "professionalism, transparency and has a long-term view in building the best working relationships between the worker, the employers and the agency" (POEA, n.d., para.3). Here ISO acts as an intermediary between different actors facilitating the transition by which workers are able to transition seamlessly from the Philippines to Canada. However, what the site fails to note

is the prominent role the government has in sending their people overseas. The function of the ISO is further elaborated in the following statement (POEA, n.d., para. 5):

> ISO boasts a recruitment record that shows experience in handling local or international, medium or large scale recruitment projects. Unique to ISO is that we offer flexible Recruitment Process Outsourcing; whether you are a direct employer or a foreign recruitment or staffing agency you may choose to outsource a recruitment project, a particular task or the entire function of Philippine recruitment to ISO. Our goal is to provide quality service that meets your needs in a cost effective manner.

ISO is in the business of outsourcing human labour or rather make resources of humans to be sent to other countries. ISO not only play an intermediary role but an active and integral role in the facilitation and maneuvering of the recruitment process itself. In particular, they were a key player in handling the outsourcing recruitment process at 'cost-effective' rates on behalf of foreign recruitment agencies to ensure the smooth recruitment of Filipino workers.

Magsaysay Global Services INC. is another popular recruitment agency based in the Philippines used by many of my interlocutors. As an international recruitment and placement service, the agency is designed to act as an "extension of [employers] recruitment and manpower services department" (Magsaysay Global, n.d.a., para. 2). Licensed by the department of Migrant workers (DMW), Magsaysay processes applicants to work abroad, which according to their website "serve[s] a wide range of positions placed in different industry verticals with talent sourced primarily from the Philippines, or in Indonesia and China through our international affiliates" (Magsaysay Global, n.d.a., para. 2). This is further evident in their network of offices spanning across the Philippines, Indonesia, and China and through their health care staffing

subsidiary, Carline Services Inc. in New York. As noted in their website, the agency has provided strategic recruitment, staffing, and management services to clients in the Middle East, Asia, the US, Canada, and Europe.

As stated by the Magsaysay's website, their expertise in recruitment and talent acquisition helps companies find the "right candidates" for a myriad of positions in the industries related to Maritime and Marine Support, Hospitality and Food Service, Information Technology, Health, Engineering and Trades, Retail and Fast Moving Consumer Goods, Facilities and Household Support, and Child and Senior Care.

However, before workers could be deployed to their assigned country, Magsaysay Global (n.d., para. 3) would have to ensure the proper channels were set up to meet the needs of prospective employers:

> Our systems, based on the traditional hiring process that consists of a series of steps that begin with defining the position and hiring standards and progressing through contracting and deployment, can be adapted to complement and augment your recruitment process and human resource services, from sourcing and screening through background checks and verification up to facilitating the movement of the selected persons from their country of origin to the country of assignment."

As shown, the Magsaysay's role involved a series of steps from defining and contracting the position to sourcing and screening potential candidates to facilitating the movement of workers to the country of assignment. According to the Magsaysay website (n.d.a, para. 4), all these steps were necessary "to build a robust talent pool by integrating concepts of strategic recruitment, training, and development [and] employee retention into its overall service delivery process"

This was done to ensure that workers adhered to the needs and demands of foreign companies. By acting as the medium between companies and workers, recruitment agencies played an integral in facilitating the movement of workers from country of origin to the hiring company's host country. As such, their clients/prospective employers of migrant workers came to benefit not only from the steady stream of workers coming their way but also from the worker's skills, training and capabilities needed to meet the high demands of the company's production output.

The recruitment advertisements by Magsaysay and ISO played an integral role in appealing to desperate and precarious realities of migrant workers. Facebook, from which I drew these advertisements was a common medium in recruitment agencies would post job listings from other countries. In Figure II, a Filipino overseas worker is smiling, eyes direct at the reader, posture upright and hands-crossed in his worker uniform. We are invited to see a possible future that is better than our own.

In Figure III, Magsaysay's job positing is more straight forward. To work at HyLife, workers were expected to obtain the key skills and training to be deployed overseas. This included 3 years of continuous work experience in the same butchering profession, a high school education, passing the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examination and work experience within the last five years.

The last image (Figure IV) by ISO is the most compelling. Linked is a video of Mr. Erlfred Gatillo providing a testimonial of his recruitment experiences, stating:

> My countrymen, I am the one who used to work as a butcher in our province. I dreamed of applying and I found ISO is recruiting for a good position to Canada. I have no idea what a butcher's job is in Canada. I just tried to apply and go to ISO and by the grace of God I have fulfilled all the requirements requested by ISO. That's why because of ISO I

> am here. Way back 2016 so now its 2022. That's why I'm very grateful to the Lord God and ISO is there. So my countrymen if you are also dreaming of applying for a good job here in Canada. Come closer to ISO. God bless.

In the video, Mr. Gatillo is grateful for ISO praising the company and his faith for the opportunity to work at HyLife. He describes his experience as deceptively smooth and seamless. Together with the caption: "Stop Dreaming your life and start Living your Dreams!!!" Workers are invited to imagine a life that is obtainable—one of opportunity and less suffering. Here the worker is no longer a passive subject but can be an active player in their life through the so-called liberatory act of being employed overseas. This messaging appeals not only to workers' precarity and material lack but also dreams and hopes for the future.

Figure II: Facebook ad circulated by the recruitment agency, International Staffing Organization, targeting potential Filipino work as OFWs on behalf of the meat packing company, HyLife. Image source: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2082980535196475&id=417800978381114&set=a.466495016845043

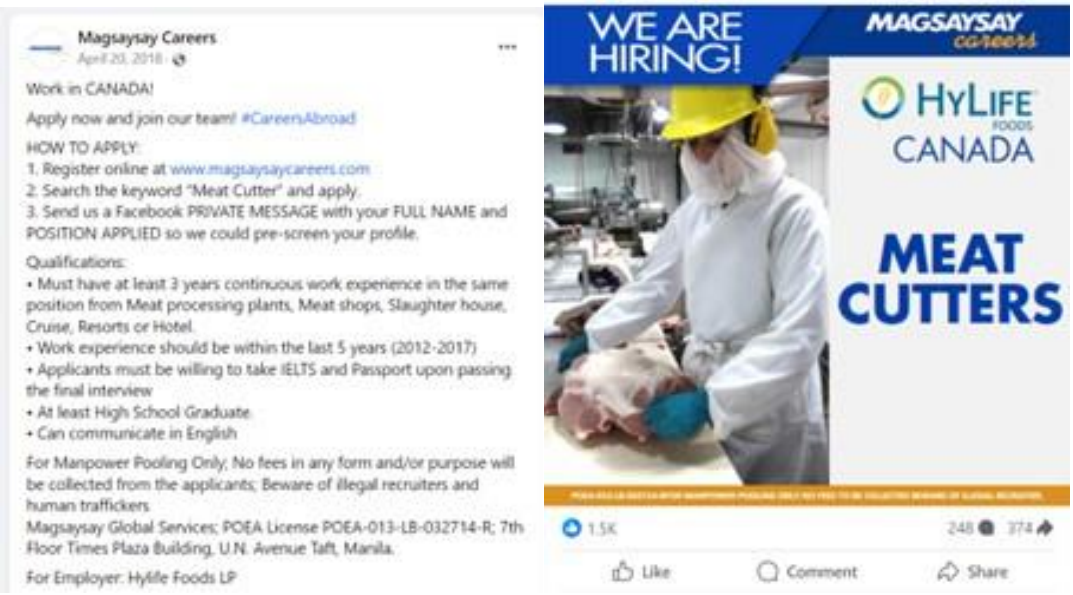


Figure III: OFW recruitment ad circulated by Magsaysay recruitment agency for HyLife. Image source: https://www.facebook.com/MagsaysayCareers/posts/work-in-canadaapply-now-and-join-our-team-careersabroadhow-to-apply1-register-on/2051684885051452/

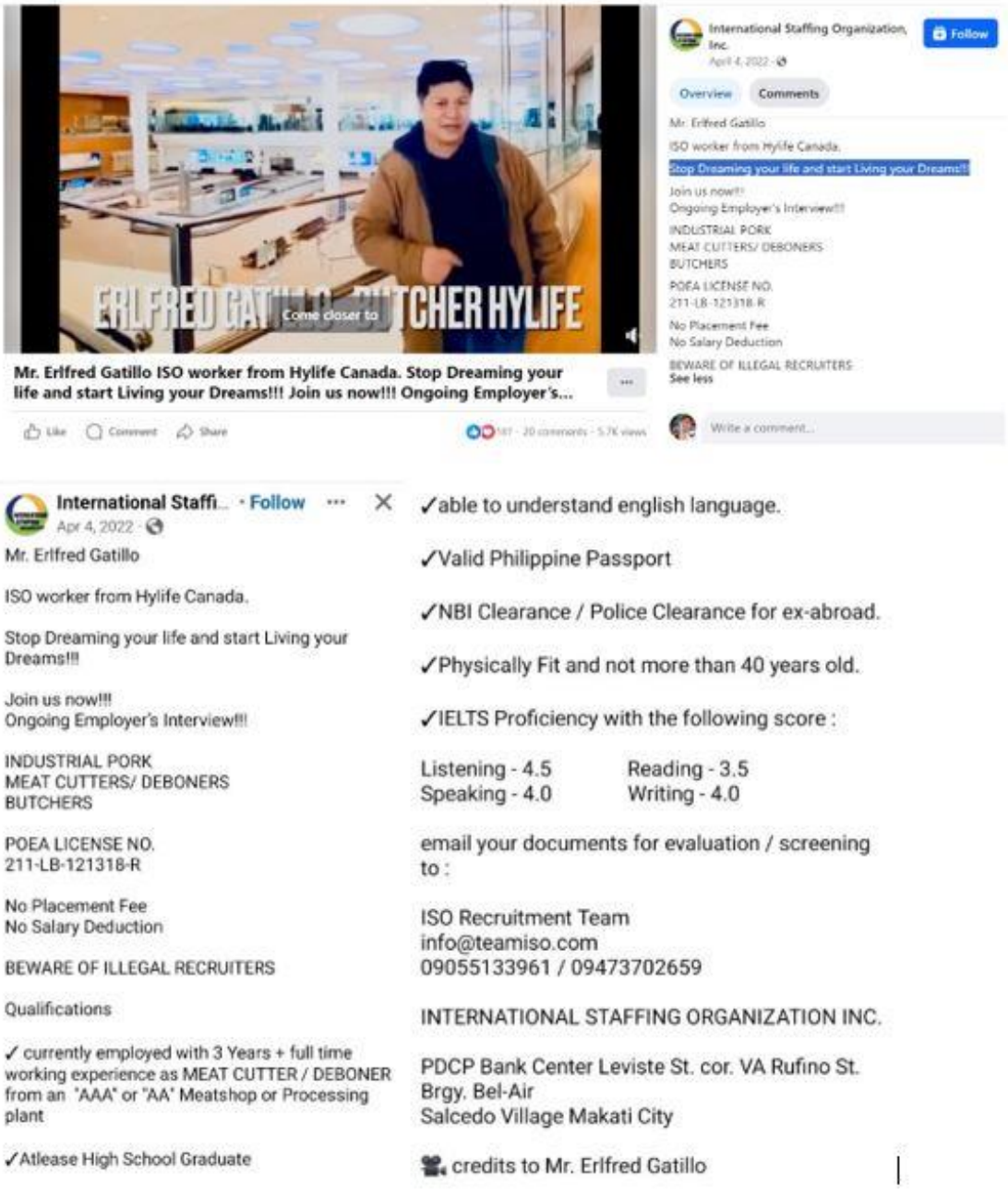


Figure IV: Recruitment ad generated by the agency, International Staffing Organization. Image source: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=4933205260104663

With respect to Mexican farmworkers, their recruitment into Canada through SAWP have been highly mediated between the Mexican and Canadian state. Under SAWP, they are legally employed to work in Canadian agriculture in a temporary and circular basis (McLaughlin, 2010).

In Mexico, the SAWP has been run as a social welfare program for economically marginalized and struggling rural communities (Grez, 2022). Often, farm workers are hired from the Global South under the premise that they are efficient workers who can serve Canadian state and capitalist interests. In return, sending countries like Mexico rely on the remittances of their workers as an important source of income to their national economy (Grez, 2022).

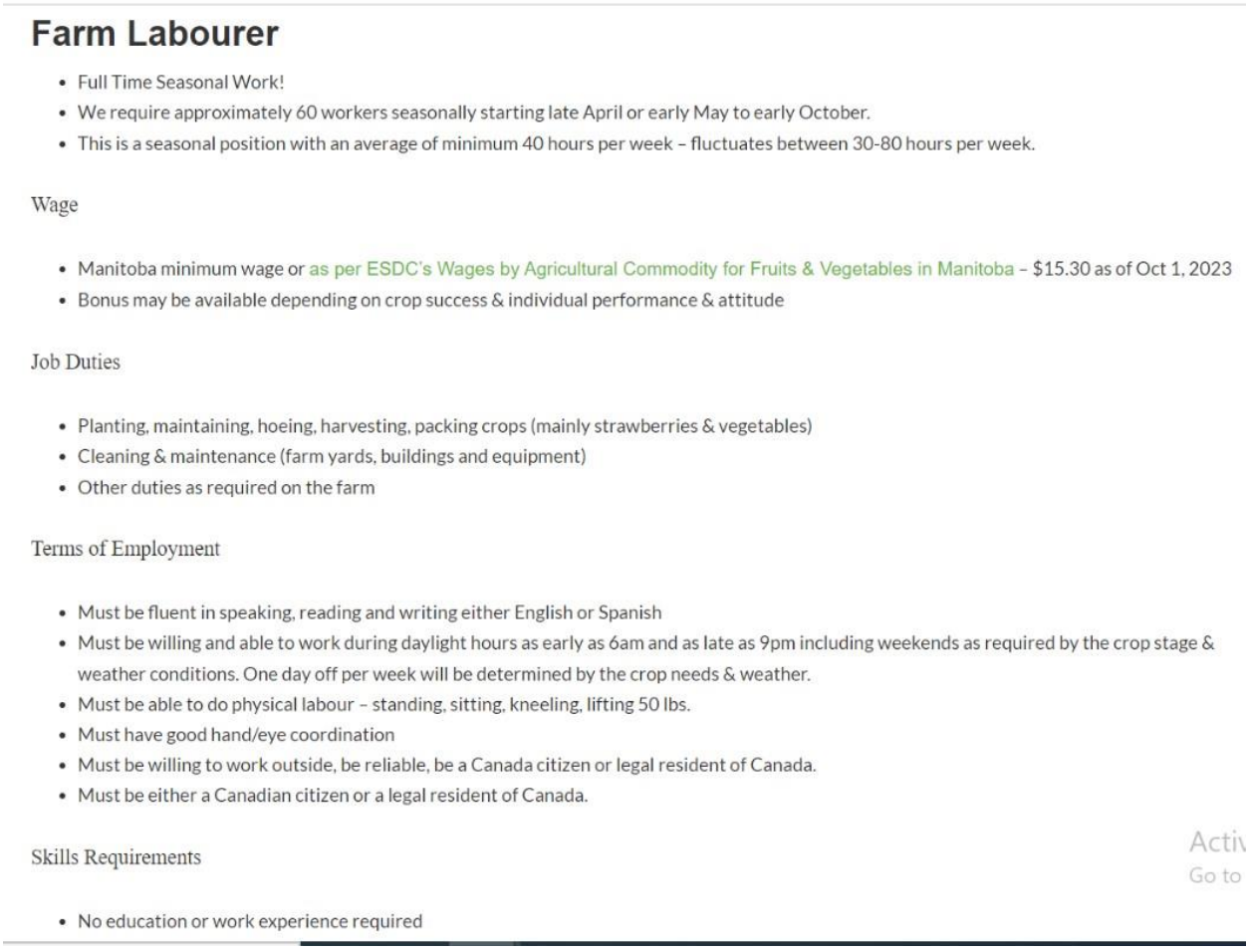
As McLaughlin (2010, p. 80) notes, these ideal workers are those with limited education "who work hard, obey rules, and are completely flexible; they do not aspire to advance their positions, develop personal or romantic relationships, or settle in Canada." This is further evident in the recruitment practices by Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (STPS). Known as the Ministry of Labour and Social Wellbeing, STPS is a federal government department "in charge of recruiting, choosing and promoting the sending off of agricultural workers to the different provinces of Canada, in accordance with the requirements of the Canadian employers" (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, n.d., para. 5). Through the National Employment Service, STPS select workers on the following criteria: rural residency, responsibility for immediate dependents to whom to return, agricultural work experience, and age (between twenty-two and forty-five years). In describing the application process, Luis stated: "I made an application through the National Service of Employment in Mexico. I was approved [then] I was assigned to this farm [Connery's]."

Although Luis's application process appeared seamless at first, the reality was far more complex. In the following interaction between my interpreter and Luis, he described how employers would first check workers' hands to see if they were 'calloused' before hiring them:

> There was a rumour a few years ago that some bosses went to Mexico and they would check the hands of the men to see if they were calloused. Then they would know they

> were working in agriculture. That is partly true. Someone checks their hands and they will check what they (the worker applicants) do come from the agricultural sector. Someone in Mexico checks before we are accepted into the program. When we would hand in the application, they would check our hands.

As Luis explains, the level of callousness on one's hands was indicative of a workers' experience working on the fields. To be hired then required the workers to undergo what was perceived as prior experience (as per the STPS criteria) through the weathering of their bodies. Although this was believed to be no longer in practice, employers still demanded workers to perform high levels of rigorous activity. This can be further contextualized within the job description for Connery's Riverdale Farm where some of my interlocutors worked (see figure 1). With an hourly pay of $15/hour, workers were required to work not only in hot, dusty, cold, and noisy environments, they were also expected to be physical capable, which included the following activities: repetitive tasks, handling heavy loads, hand-eye co-ordination; attention to detail; standing for extended periods, and bending, crouching, kneeling. As with the Filipino TFWs at HyLife, the recruitment process required farmworkers to possess the desired levels of physical fitness and tolerance to perform their work—the makings of which made the ideal worker.



Farm Labourer

- Full Time Seasonal Work!
- We require approximately 60 workers seasonally starting late April or early May to early October.
- This is a seasonal position with an average of minimum 40 hours per week – fluctuates between 30-80 hours per week.

Wage

- Manitoba minimum wage or as per ESDC's Wages by Agricultural Commodity for Fruits & Vegetables in Manitoba – $15.30 as of Oct 1, 2023
- Bonus may be available depending on crop success & individual performance & attitude

Job Duties

- Planting, maintaining, hoeing, harvesting, packing crops (mainly strawberries & vegetables)
- Cleaning & maintenance (farm yards, buildings and equipment)
- Other duties as required on the farm

Terms of Employment

- Must be fluent in speaking, reading and writing either English or Spanish
- Must be willing and able to work during daylight hours as early as 6am and as late as 9pm including weekends as required by the crop stage & weather conditions. One day off per week will be determined by the crop needs & weather.
- Must be able to do physical labour – standing, sitting, kneeling, lifting 50 lbs.
- Must have good hand/eye coordination
- Must be willing to work outside, be reliable, be a Canada citizen or legal resident of Canada.
- Must be either a Canadian citizen or a legal resident of Canada.

Skills Requirements

Acti
Go to

- No education or work experience required

Figure V: A job advertisement for farm labourers at Connery Farms. Image source: https://www.conneryfarms.ca/farm-labourer/

Recruitment Documentation

As per worker's recruitment eligibility, TFWs had to undergo a cumbersome, expensive and lengthy documentation process. This included biometrics (such as fingerprints and photos) to prove one's identity, medical tests to ensure that workers were medically 'fit' and well enough to work in Canada as well as a police clearance form otherwise known as a criminal clearance certificate. Aldo explains "Before leaving, the employer request you give your medical biometrics, medical results and police clearance form but you have to pay for all these out of your pocket".

Many workers expressed the frustration of having to pay for these required background-related documents without reimbursement from their companies. Biometrics alone cost workers $85 CAD. James further details lengthy documentation process in the following:

> Yeah, first and foremost, regarding the documents. They take so very long like We have to search for the documents? Where is this? Where is that? They take time to respond I'll say this. You will wait three to four or five days till they will reply to you and then if they are not satisfied, you need to reply again…. Before I come here, I have to also provide my butcher certificate training at TESDA … I can say that I'm like, I'm a legitimate butcher, I'm a certified butcher because I work in a meat plant, a slaughterhouse in our country for three years before coming here. So, my skills is actually not a joke, so yeah that's where it started, so I was lucky to be hired by High-life and yeah that's where my story of being an immigrant worker started.

The employment process was quite lengthy as workers required the necessary documentation to proceed. This was particularly the case with their accreditation which required they received 300 hours, one-month intensive training at TESDA along with three years mandatory work experience in slaughtering operations (swine and/or large animals) (TESDA, 2016). However, with respect to farmworker interlocutors, once they entered SAWP, acquiring the necessary documentation (including a work permit and visa) was much more straightforward as they had the support from STPS.

Recruitment through relations

In the case of Jacob, he found his position through a friend who shared a link that a Canadian company was hiring TFWs. As luck would have it, Jacob was chosen among six other candidates to work at HyLife, stating:

> It's a little bit, I'm lucky because I have friends in there that they are sharing the [job post] link, that they have hiring here, and I was going to try to send my Gmail originally to the site, so I'm lucky that my name was going be picking up. So, yeah. [Laughs] That's the story of me.
>
> Yeah, and I'm very lucky with that because we are too many peoples coming from the Philippines…from different countries, something like that, that we were applying here to work in this company. And we are lucky because we are only six that are needed for this company. So that's why, yeah. [Laughs]

For Kristine, her cousin (who had worked at HyLife) referred her to the position: [My cousin] said HyLife is hiring Filipinos, so many Filipino butchers. That's why we get our experience and then we applied at HyLife and thankfully we are hired."

Similarly, farmworkers discussed the importance of word in mouth in connecting them to SAWP. However, given the cyclical and seasonal nature of farmwork in Canada, most of the Mexican farmworkers had already returned from previous seasons. Among my interlocutors, their connections and network were vital to helping them find employment. Workers were enmeshed in a closely knit web of relations so much so that work prospects were often by way of a reference or word of mouth. These relations were not to be underestimated as they were the

cornerstone to the collective and social formation of society. More than just means to an end, these bonds formed the basis for people's everyday way of life and socialization.

Internet and social media

For many of my interlocutors, Facebook was the main foray through which they had learnt about the employment opportunities at HyLife. According to Ragragio (2022), media platforms like Facebook deploy sophisticated marketing and algorithmic techniques to reach specialized-consumer audiences. These algorithms played a critical role in providing HyLife workers with workplace information and opportunities they would have not received otherwise. As Nathan highlights:

> Actually one of the powerful tools that we have is social media. So advertisements of course went through the social media platforms like Facebook reaches us workers to see this opportunity. So through an agency contacted by the principal sponsor which is HyLife saying we were interviewed, we submitted documents, and we were processed and that's it. So we have an agency collaborating with the employee, us, and employer. That's how the process is.

Nathan described the integral role the social media—specifically Facebook—played in ensuring recruitment agencies' advertisements reached their intended audience. Similarly, the majority of Filipino interlocutors mentioned Facebook as the main source of information where they encountered these recruitment ads hiring from HyLife. As noted by Devito (2016), Facebook algorithms operate on a system of criteria based on the exclusion and inclusion of material to present in an algorithmically driven news feed. Here, the goal of algorithms is to maximize

engagement by analyzing what people like and placing it at the top of their news feeds (Menczer, 2021).

Conclusion

As shown by my interlocutors, the model minority was a response to and consequence of their precarity. Within the context of Canadian Western capitalist logics, workers who demonstrated ideals of the model minority (i.e. docile, disciplined, industrious and resilient) were deemed as both desirable and hirable. However, adherence to such ideals required painstaking self-regulation, self-disciplining, and self-monitoring—continual practices of becoming and maintaining the model minority. Instead of passive subjects, however, workers strategically deployed the model minority trope to bargain for opportunities in the attempt to pursue other career paths. These narratives highlight how workers used their perceived model minority status to achieve economic and social mobility.

Despite the perceived affordances of their status, workers expressed the physical repercussion maintaining such ideals had their bodies. For many workers, the desire and drive to support their families overseas encouraged them to work through their bodily pain and injuries. This tolerance and endurance of pain became inextricably linked to workers values a ideal workers in Canada as well the heroic self-sacrificing citizen back in their home country. Such archetypes not only reinforce the commodification of workers but also subject them to further states of precarity and servitude.

This process of becoming was further intensified through training programs of workers' home countries—which aimed to create the ideal workforce for Canadian oversea companies—and facilitated through different mediums of recruitment. In the case of HyLife workers and farm workers , recruitment agencies played an integral role in hiring the ideal worker and connecting

them to their designated employer. As illustrated in this chapter, becoming the model minority was not some monolithic trope but developed and formed across time and space through various state and recruitment mechanisms and parties—all of which and whom rely on the labour power of migrant workers.

CHAPTER 5: WORKPLACE AND THE MIGRANT BODY

Among my interlocutors, the workplace was a fraught and contentious place where their health and safety were constantly being confronted and negotiated, further exacerbating their precarious status. In this chapter, I highlight the different forms of precarity TFWs encountered with respect to accessing healthcare, workplace injuries and abuses, and the racial and cultural workplace dynamics. Together, these conditions formed a complex and nuanced understanding of the varying and deeply rooted vulnerabilities of migrant workers.

Workplace structure and the breaking of bodies

To fully appreciate the working conditions of HyLife workers, it is useful to understand the organizational structure in which their work takes places. Based in Neepawa, Manitoba, two-hour Northwest of Winnipeg, HyLife employs around 1700 workers, many of whom make up the 5680 members of the Neepawa population (Town of Neepawa Economic Development, 2023) (see Figure VI).

Figure VI: HyLife plant in Neepawa, Manitoba. Image source: https://hylife.com/about/

Despite the alienating nature of their work, HyLife itself has been organizationally designed to ensure the highest level of output and efficiency from its workers. This can be illustrated in the production workflow setup of the different shop floor positions in the company, as Nathan succinctly puts:

> So first the hogs enter the kill floor where they are slaughtered and cleaned. They are then taken to the cooler. After, they are moved to the cut floor where they cut into different cuts of meat. From there, they are taken to the production floor [where] they put the meat inside the box. So those boxes will come into the shipping department, it will be stocked and strapped then put in [a] truck for shipping to domestic and international clients.

Moreover, the transformation of pig to carcass is further elaborated by Gabriel in the following process:

> I'm in the cut floor department and my work is on the shoulder line…first there's is the kill floor kill floor [where] the hog going in alive and then it will be slaughtered. They are cleaned, hung then pushed [in]to the cooler. They are then moved to the cut floor where they are taken to different lines. The hind legs go to the ham line, the belly and the loin go to the loin line. and the shoulder go to shoulder line. On the line, the skin and fat is removed then deboned. Once this is done, they get boxed and shipped in the shipping department.

Here, in this schematic production overview, we see how the pigs transform from live creatures to mere 'product' through the different stages of the shop floor positions (that is: 1) kill floor; 2)

cooler 3) cut floor; 4) and packaging and shipping). The shift from animate to 'inanimate' object reflects not only alienation of labour in terms of the physical activity extolled onto workers but also the alienation that came in the relation with the animal. From being alive to unalive, the pig-turned-carcass, is nothing more than an object of capital. Symbolically and materially, the breaking down of its flesh cues us to the weathering/breaking down of workers bodies inflicted upon them by the same market production forces within the larger workplace milieu. Through the extractive and exploitative capitalist relations of production, workers like the pig in which they are tasked to slaughter become expendable—fodder that is continually being thrown away and replenished for the accumulation of capital. This expendability of their work can be best captured in the high turnover rates of foreign racialized migrant bodies. As Edwin compellingly states:

> Because, of course, the majority here, are Filipinos. So, as a matter of fact, there was a group that arrived last week. Like a process. So, I guess HyLife has already settled with calling it a cycle. You know, that once people are already a permanent resident or terminated, they need to hire new guys every year.
>
> Like, right. You know, somehow, I would, I don't want to think it this way. But then I would say the majority, if not, most of the guys who move out from HyLife is because of the nature of the job—how management are dealing with the workers. On the positive side. It's also an advantage to the new guys who will come here and just replace them.

Here, the high turnover of workers is indicative of both the exploitative and expendable nature of their work. Workers left either on their own 'volition' (usually upon receiving their PR) or from termination. In such instances of turnover, workers were easily replaced by other Filipino

workers, making their labour both an essential and expendable commodity of the company's. As Marx (2013) notes, the more workers produce the less they possess such that the object of their labour is subject to capital and its accumulation. In other words, the more they produce the more alien their labour becomes and in the process their labour becomes expendable. Moreover, within the context of racialized workers, Robinson's notion of "racial capitalism" (Robinson, 2020) helps us to understand how migrant workers were instrumentalized and valued for the production of wealth while, simultaneously, they were sidelined and invisibilized as some "thing" that is disposable and replaceable.

Within the context of the large farms like Itzke's and Connery's, workers arrived in March or as early as January (see Figure VII). In winter months, they spent most of their times seeding in the greenhouse. Then in May, they started transplanting the vegetables via a transplanter (see Figure VIII) from the greenhouse to the fields. For my farmworker interlocutors, late spring was the time to harvest perennials. Asparagus was especially difficult, as workers had to walk, bent over, cutting -- sometimes up to 14 hours per day. This was particularly case during the rainy season where the asparagus would grow fast and thick. In contrast strawberries were easier to handle as workers were able to sit while harvesting. After these labour-intensive crops were completed, some of the farms sent some or all of their workers to other farms for the vegetable harvest or back to their homes.

Figure VII: Connery's Farm layout in the rural municipality of Portage la Prairie. Image source: https://www.conneryfarms.ca/

Figure VIII: Transplanter used to move crops from greenhouse to fields

Then in the summer of June and July at Itzke's farm, the first transplanted crops (e.g. leaf lettuce, broccoli and head lettuce) were ready for harvest by hand. Some of these fast-growing

crops may have a second planting and harvest in Manitoba. Then, towards the Fall, some vegetables like potatoes, carrots, cauliflower, onions, and garlic were harvested by a machine (see Figure IX).

Figure IX: Behind the harvester is a large wagon being pulled by a tractor

As detailed above, the division of labor was delineated according to the fragility of crops. For example, more sturdy crops like cauliflower and potatoes were machine-harvested whereas more fragile crops like asparagus and strawberries by hand. With respect to operating the harvester, there were usually two workers at a time one driving and the other wrapping up in cellophane or dropping the vegetables in the back wagon.

As the number of harvesting decreased, workers began leaving in late September. Some workers stayed to harvest the last crops, like cauliflower and cabbage, to clean and pack, then loaded onto trucks to be taken to the markets in towns and cities. By December 15, as per their contract, workers had to be sent back home.

Once their season ended, workers were given a letter of evaluation of their performance by their Canadian employer to present to STPS. If employers provided farmworker with an unfavourable assessment, they risked losing their employment in Canada making their employer their de facto immigration broker (Grez, 2022). Within this closed work permit, employers were granted legal and structural control over the intimate and social lives of migrant workers. Thus, this highly managed and restrictive system of SAWP in the recruitment of an ideal, docile labour force ensured workers remained complaint or risked being replaced by their compatriots (McLaughlin, 2010).

Workplace and the breaking down bodies

In this section, I will illuminate on the different forms of workplace injuries and exploitation that TFWs experienced in their workplace. This will provide key insights into the nuanced and complex vulnerabilities migrant workers come to endure and the ways through which their precarious status becomes amplified.

Workplace culture shock and the body

Despite their training the Filipino TFWs at HyLife received back home, many of workers still experienced a shock and unfamiliarity on the work role expected of them. In particular, the high workload workers had to endure place a tremendous strain on their bodies. As Ricci describes:

> When I came here to Canada, I really wasn't expecting the bulk of work that I have to do here. So I was just expecting – because when we applied, the contract that I read – I know that it's an old contract, there would be an increase in the production – but when I read the contract, it was just for [processing] 2500 hogs. I said, "OK. That's very doable for eight hours," considering the industrial setup. But when I came here, it is already 3600

> per shift, so it is already fast. Then they kept on increasing that one. So up to today, [we] … basically [slaughter and process] 4400, close to 4500 [per shift]. So I just didn't imagine myself doing all of this work, very far from my family, so. The work is doable, but yes, you would incur injuries along the way because of the line speed.

As with many of my interlocutors, they did not expect to slaughter such a high output of hogs on the line speed. Here the line speed can be depicted as a conveyor belt that moves the different parts of the hog to the workers' designated lines (i.e. loin line, ham line, and shoulder line) on the cut floor where the skin and fat is removed then deboned (see Figures X, XI, XII for reference). Altogether, workers would express slaughtering and processing (i.e. trimming, deboning, and cutting) up to 4500 hogs per shift.

Figure X: HyLife factory workers on the line. Image source: https://kgsgroup.com/projects/hylife-pork-processing-plant/

Figure XI: HyLife factory workers on the line. Image source: https://kgsgroup.com/projects/hylife-pork-processing-plant/

Figure XII: HyLife factory workers on the line. Image source: https://kgsgroup.com/projects/hylife-pork-processing-plant/

For Aldo, unlike other places he worked, the first few months at HyLife proved to be the most difficult and demanding.

> When we first work here in HyLife, of course you haven't adjust yet. If you're working other place, it's not that hard. [Cutting up meat] is not that hard. But when you start working, HyLife it just like shocked. You didn't know that there's a line and that's not stopping. So you continue working, working. So at my first and second month my hands are really hurt. Every time I sleep it hurts, then you cannot even close it. My last, I remember I just can't close like this. Then after a few months now it's OK. So it's very hard in HyLife, especially on the line. If the line doesn't stop until it only stops if it's the break or something.

For Aldo, the fast line speed became an unexpected obstacle during the transitional phase from when he started working. He describes the line speed as "not stopping" to the point where he could not even close his fingers—a condition he called trigger fingers. Here the line speed was increased to engage in forceful repetitive motions—such cutting, slicing deboning—leading to their injuries. Despite his repetitive stress injury, he continued to endure his pain for months on end.

Similarly, Kristine and Sherald spoke of the body pain they experienced at work due to the high workload:

> I had a hard time at first because it's not like in the Philippines because here you have to slaughter a lot in the line. And at first I would have body pain [from butchering], I'd experience body pain and swelling…. Every day my hands feel sore and in the morning it will get better. But I felt only that on my first month and the other. (*Kristine*)

> Yes. Because in the Philippines we only have [to slaughter] 400 pigs every day and like here in Canada we have at least 4,400 [per shift]. So it's kind of a big difference, sir, that's why we had a hard time at first. But so far, sir, we have to get used to it. (*Sherald*)

As both noted, the transition period into HyLife was physically demanding and stressful for their bodies. Sherald notes the huge workload discrepancy she experienced in Canada compared to the Philippines. From the first day of work, they expressed difficulty moving their bodies feeling both swollen and stiff. Even the subtle movements of their fingers were enough to provoke discomfort and pain. As Sherald puts it, her pain was something to 'get used to'—an inevitability and the nature of which she had to eventually overcome—a sentiment shared by many others.

For Gabriel, however, he had a clearer idea of the high workload that was to be expected through the counsel of other friends. Upon his arrival at HyLife in Manitoba, he had to undergo mandatory quarantine for 28 days as per COVID-19 guideline protocol during which time he made sure to prepare himself through physical activity. Despite this, he still did not imagine the toll his work would have his on physical and mental state.

> It depends on a person perspective because before I came in Canada, I already knew that something like the work is going to be busy physically demanding. Just before I arrived here I already had some friends interviewed for different positions so I have an idea regarding what kind of job is physically demanding. So what I did when I was holed up in the hotel for 28 days—unlike others who just keep on doing the cellphone stuff and doing nothing like lying down and eating—Me and my roommate back in the hotel we would start preparing ourselves for the physically demanding jobs. So in the morning we do the pushups, run in our rooms. We do that twice a day so that by the time we arrive at

> HyLife, we are basically physically ready for hard tasks. But even though we prepared ourselves, we're still shocked that a job is that very, very rigorous and very, very taxing. But in my first two days, I almost as I was trying to catch my breath. And then later on, I keep on working and keep on working. I didn't notice but by the time we're done with our shift, it's very difficult for me to walk. my legs aching, my back aching my shoulder, my neck, everything's aching. I prepared myself for this. Right? How about those who are not? So that's all I can say. But as I said, there's a good there's a bad I just thought to myself that we are well compensated—five times way way much higher compared to the Philippines. So it's part of the payment. So rather than complain or something like not appreciating the status that we are in, I just look on the bright side. I just said, Thank you for HyLife for the job- the salary.

Despite the information he received from his friends and the physical training he endured during quarantine, Gabriel was not physically prepared for the rigorous workload. In the first two days of his position, he had difficulty walking, struggling breathing, and body aches. Instead of complaining, however, Gabriel's pay was not only enough to incentivize him to continue his grueling work but also instilled a sense of gratitude towards employment.

For Edwin, he carried his positive working experience at a Canadian call center company in the Philippines into his new place of work in Manitoba. However, this expectation of working for a Canadian company was quickly shattered when he realized that most of his colleagues at HyLife came from the same country of origin as him:

> It was paid, everything was paid, they came here. He had an experience of you know working with Canadian and I learned from her that Canadians are very warm mannered people you know, they're professional people.
>
> So, coming here I have, like my expectations was very high, yeah. Because I've had like several jobs before coming here and you know it's not good, I had a bad experience but anyway it's like water under the bridge now. So, coming here I was, I was actually excited you know, but then when I started working you know, those expectations are because I don't know if you're familiar with the set-up here?
>
> I can say that as far as this operation is concerned in our meat plant, it's run by a majority of Filipinos. Probably every five supervisors only one is Canadian so something that you know I have to deal with because you're not familiar with you know Filipino culture because you're not Filipino but anyway.

Unlike his work as a butcher in the Philippines, Nathan was required to achieve high production output which also came at the expense of his physical wellbeing. For Nathan, this required his body to adjust to the new demands of his workplace.

> And the type of work on the face from my previous job is different because we have conveyers here so we're talking about speed. Higher production output. But in the Philippines, we don't have like that, it's a store that you're going to only work when some customer enters and buys our products.

With the more complex and advanced technological equipment, Nathan's workload at HyLife also took a noticeable shift. In particular, there was a higher production output required of each

worker. This was a drastic transition from his former workplace which required him to only serve customers per product order.

Within the context of my farmworker interlocutors, the technological advancement of farming equipment proved to be both a benefit and detriment to workers. Upon his arrival in Manitoba's farm, Luis found that operating on new machinery to be a steep learning curve. Although these new technologies—tractors, tillage and seeding equipment—were vital in preparing the soil for seeding, it also afforded his work a level of ease he was not afforded back home, it also meant he had to work twice as hard. "During the first year, I was new in the program. I did the same work as I do in Mexico. But here it is more technical, there is more machinery. We have to work harder now because we have the equipment."

Similarly, Isaac notes how the new farming technology also came at the expense of the quality of crops in favor of mass production: "[I]n Jamaica, we pay more attention to quality. And in Canada you pay attention to quantity. And it speaks to mass production. They want more us to produce more if we are to keep our job…. These equipment mainly benefit the employer but come at the cost of us."

As Isaac and Luis highlights above, the capitalist output-driven nature of the Canadian farm system contributed to the harsh and demanding working conditions for farmworkers. Many of the farmworkers would express spending as long as 10 hours on the field either on their knees or feet harvesting by hand strawberries, asparagus, tomatoes, lettuce, and broccoli.

Often, they were exposed to high heat and UV sun without breaks or eye wear protection. Unlike most workers' farming experiences back home, the amount of output was integral in Canadian farming production. Such harsh labour conditions, however, often came at the cost of the workers' health. During a conversation with Migrante MB's solidarity farmworker contact, I

came to learn that a few of the farmworkers at Portage la Prairie had a growth developing in their eyes, a condition known as pterygium, from excessive exposure to ultraviolet radiation in the sunlight and dusty environments. Moreover, he described that most of the workers had to wait a year before they could meet with an ophthalmologist. Given that workers contracts usually lasted for eight months, they not only would have already settled back in Mexico but were also not guaranteed to return to work on a Canadian farm let alone the same farm for the following year. One worker, my informant described had his appointment canceled and rescheduled a year later after sharing to the doctor that he had COVID-19-like symptoms. Although he managed to secure a surgery date in Manitoba, the deterioration of his eye was too great at that point leaving with him only partial vision.

Repetitive Stress Injury

For many of my Filipino interlocutors at HyLife, repetitive stress injury was a common workplace injury. According to Ricci, workers' repetitive work together with the poorly managed equipment predisposed them to their injuries, leading them to require medication and physiotherapy to continue working.

> That's the thing. It's repetitive work, so eventually you would get injured, if you don't know what you're doing. Or if you're forcing the things that you're doing – like not having a sharp knife – you would eventually get hurt. A lot of my colleagues – two of my batchmates actually – people that I came in together with and we went into Canada – they already have wrist supports on their hands because – and they're taking medicine and doing therapy for the injury that they have.

For Sherald, the repetitive stress injury of cutting different parts of the pig carcass at work left her hands in a constant state of pain making it difficult to close completely. To relieve her pain, she would dip her hands in cold water after work.

> I have a hard time closing my hands completely [into]a fist, right. The work we do is not easy…[I]t is repetitive. I have pain in my hands. But sometimes you just have to put your hand in warm water so that it – the pain will get relief.

Despite many of my interlocutors demanding for a slower line speed, employers ignored such requests continuing to put workers in vulnerable and dangerous positions. For Ricci, due to his injuries, his supervisor moved him down to "light work", which also came with a reduction in his pay.

> That's what I've been telling my supervisors – "Sirs, can we do anything on the line speed that we have now and the way that things are being done here in the plant? Because the way I see it, it's a little bit risky. And it could be prevented, if safety precautions are put into place, more aggressively." Me for myself, in my experience, I have had a fall already in my work. So, I was just put on light duty. So my salary went – when you're put on light duty now.

Adding to his frustration, Ricci's employer insisted he continue working instead of seeking medical treatment. This was compounded with the additional hurdle he had to navigate in terms of seeking external support to compensate for his income loss.

> Yes. Because for me I am holding a bracket four and every now and then I do bracket five. So when I do light duty, I would be placed in a bracket one. So that would be the

> lowest salary that we have for regular employees. So – and HyLife didn't say anything about, "Oh, go to the doctor." You have to do that yourself. And you have to find ways to compensate for the loss in income that you've had. So in my case, I was told that I could go to WCB – Worker's Compensation Board of Manitoba. So luckily they compensated me for the loss in income that I have had because of my injury.

Here, the bracket Ricci refers to represents the workers pay grade. Workers who encountered injuries at work were often moved to "light work", which resulted in a lower pay grade. Here "light work" included less 'laborious' or 'physically intensive' work (e.g. lifting, packing or shipping boxes of meat), which many workers protested as still doing harm on their bodies from their more physically demanding butchering work.

Exposure to hazardous and unsafe working conditions

In relation to farmworkers, the toxic chemicals they were exposed to had negative consequences on their health. For Jacob, the poor and unsafe conditions at his dairy farm led to a serious bacterial infection. While preparing to bathe the calves, he cut his thumb on a piece of hay exposing his wound to unknown bacteria and other toxic chemicals. (like manure and cleaning products). At first, he ignored his pain to focus on his work duties but after a while he sought a doctor for medical treatment due to the worsening conditions of his infection.

> We are preparing the baths of the calves on the other building. So, yeah, accidentally [my thumb] cut by that hay, suddenly my thumb's going to be infected. At first, I didn't want to go to the doctor and miss work but I [went] to doctor when [my] inflammation got worse but you know, I have a family to feed [Laughs]….

> So doctor tell me [my] infected, thumb, is going to be worse because it's going to be damage my bone then comes to my lungs. And, yeah, it's very devastating for me for that happen, [the doctor] say he must fix it for me before that happens. [Laughs] And, yes. Now it's going to be fine, but as a result of my CT scan, X-ray, the assessment of the doctor was, the findings was fine. And, yeah, I'm happy and I'm going back to work again. Yeah.

In order to receive treatment, Jacob had to travel all the way from la Broquerie to Steinbach. However, despite the medication he received from his doctor, Jacob's infection worsened to the point where he developed tolerance from the drugs.

> I had to travel to Steinbach to see my doctor. He prescribed me [medicine] At first, it worked, but it's not properly working, it's not going to be healed, my thumb… but the medicine cannot affect my body any more, so that's why, yeah, then it be worse and worse in the long run. And probably then it was able to destroy my hand. [Laughs]

After a failed treatment in Steinbach, Jacob was referred to a doctor in Winnipeg where he received intensive treatment. As a result, he had to miss six weeks of work with reduced pay:

> Yeah, I didn't work for six weeks because I have a daily antibiotic in the clinic and every day I'll go to the clinic for my IV. This, this is my PICC line. WCB will they will help pay compensation, but only partially.

Similarly, Isaac describes the poor health and safety conditions of working on the farm upon his arrival in Manitoba. For two seasons, his workplace failed to equip him and his coworkers with the proper PPE to deal with the toxic chemicals (such as pesticide spray) in his

workplace, exposing them to greenhouse gases on a regular basis. Instead, Isaac's employers advised them to wash off the chemicals after work.

> At that time, I was young and naive…. So, knowing about PPE and so forth, I started December of 2020, learning about that. And I'm like, seriously, this is all the stuff that I put myself through for the two seasons. But no PPE was provided and all of those things. So, to learn is after the fact….
>
> Yeah. I work around greenhouse gases in a green house. You know, when you're back home, you hear about greenhouse gases and so forth. But my supervisors, was like, well, he's not too educated but his way of warning us against it was, hey, you got to take a shower after you get out of the greenhouse… But it doesn't account that you're still inhaling, you're still smelling these chemicals, you know…the body deterioration from greenhouse gases and stuff like that.

As shown by both Jacob and Isaac, their workplaces at the farm neglected to provide them with the proper equipment to protect them from the everyday hazardous and toxic chemicals. As a result, workers reported injury and other safety concerns surrounding their workplace environment. The deterioration of the body then, as Isaac puts, is a useful metaphor in which to breaking down of workers' bodies with respect to precarity they encountered at work.

Within the context at HyLife, workers on the killing floor also expressed the and physically demanding nature of their work. For Aldo, this involved carrying around a five kilogram shield for around eight hours of the day and pushing the pigs in a machine where they were slaughtered.

> At the barn, I carry a heavy shield because you're dealing with a live pigs so you don't know what to expect. And it's a big stick like there's a paddle on the top. So you have to tap the pigs to move [them] front. So I think it's around five kilos the shield. And around two to three kilos for the one or something the stick thing to tap the pigs. Now the problem here is, since you're working with the live pigs the dirt of their poop you can step on it.
>
> Once you tap the pig because they are dry. sometimes they're dry. They're poop is all around their bodies when you tap them this will fly then come to your nose, your face, hair, everything. And also there's like a toxic thing in under to remove chemical there's chemical under that you can smell it … so we have to use the mask.

As described above, Aldo's work was physically intensive demanding that he handled heavy equipment while pushing the pigs to their assigned destination. Despite wearing his face mask, he described how fecal matter and toxic chemicals fumes would still enter from under nose and inside his hair.

For Aldo, his work also carried with it an element of uncertainty and injury. Given the spontaneous nature of pigs, Aldo expressed the challenges of not knowing how each of them would behave when handling them:

> So like live hogs, you know, when you push in the machine, like they're walking, walking, something like that. Not all of them are behaving good. Sometimes they push back, they fight back. So you have to be careful about your legs because your legs is the one carrying them pushing them Yeah. Sometimes hogs are doesn't want to move. So you have to do some extra work for that kind of work….

> Once you used it, I think it's fine. But for the first few months I think you have to readjust for that much because the toxic that you smell every day. The dirt that you got every day and every time you go home you have to take a bath before going to because you smell like this thing too much, I think. That's why all of my colleagues there are bald head. I am only the one who has long hair.

Similarly, Sonny's work entailed pushing around 4000 hog parts into a cooler per day. After being slaughtered in the aptly named kill floor, the carcass would be hung to a clothesline on a conveyor rail where they would be transported to the cooler area where Sonny worked. Other than the usual shoulder pain from pushing hogs, his work posed great risk for injury due to the slippery and icy conditions of his workplace.

> There are 4000 Hugs. I'm the one who will push them. I'm the one who will put them in a very, very large cooler. We are in a building on one floor. But the whole space is like a refrigerator with a very wide range. So in order for me to pile up the pigs the hogs, I need to push them. I'm the one who's filing them on every rail of every zone until you reach the 4000 Hugs. And sometimes the floor are very slippery because of the ice. So if sometimes you're gonna slip, it's gonna hurt your back or you're gonna hurt your shoulder.

He also describes the fast-paced and laborious nature of his work, stating:

> So kill floor kill floor is where you cut the pigs is where you remove the skin or the inside of the pigs. And it's [hanging] on a conveyor. So it is moving it will never stop. So, for example, every four seconds, every five seconds, there's a pig that's coming in your

> place. So you will just stand there and do your job until they will reach the cooler so when they reach the cooler. I'm the one who will take care of it.

Like many of my interlocutors, Aldo and Sonny had to adapt to or "get used to" their working conditions—from the smell of harmful chemicals (including cleaning chemicals) to the strenuous, unpredictable labour—all of which they had to learn to endure for his position. As such, the worker's body was an integral site that was constantly under pressure and re-tempering for the purposes of the workplace. In turn, the workplace played an integral role in ensuring workers remained moldable and exploitable.

Healthcare barriers

Travelling and the lack of services

In the remote, small town of Neepawa, workers who did not have access to vehicles experienced great barriers to see their health care practitioners. They would often have to travel long distances to see a family doctor if they needed a checkup or medical note. Workers articulated the need for more accessible and immediate health care services and professionals within reach of their community. This was a major issue among workers causing many to endure and wait out their pain. According to Gabriel:

> The problem here in Neepawa there is no personal doctors or dentists here because it's already loaded, and population is rising. Maybe it's time to add some more. It's been two years since I go to the dentist. You need to travel to Winnipeg, to Brandon first. So how about those with no cars? What can you do about it? Just bear the pain. How about something like well, for those people who have like high blood pressure? What becomes of them? Do you just keep it by themselves and then disappear one day?

Moreover, the lack of available doctors in their community led many to self-medicate. For workers, the time and energy alone to travel to see the doctor for a check-up or medical note was too much of an inconvenience:

> Because [the company] would ask for a doctor's note in order to pay us for missing work. And people usually – especially [laughs] those coming from the Philippines it is – I don't know if it's because of common practice – but people in the Philippines, don't just really go to the doctors. We tend to self-medicate, is the way [laughs] – just the way Filipinos are, so. If you have a fever, just take Paracetamol. If you have colds you just take nasal decongestants, things like those. So if they're going to ask for a doctor's note – and the doctors that we have – especially the newcomers – they're far – in Minnedosa, they're in Brandon, they're in Winnipeg. And good for those that their doctors are just here in Neepawa but for us, it would be very hard and inconvenient, especially for those that does not have a vehicle yet to go to those places just to ask for a doctor's note….
> An absence of that doctor's note, they wouldn't process your sick leave. So just think about, when are you going to go there when you have a shift, especially if you're working the mornings? The time that you'd have, would be in the afternoon, after [workers] free. Those times usually the doctors are out. And doctors that usually fill out doctor's notes, they would sign it themselves because they would want to make sure that it is you and that you did in fact have that injury or that sickness. So it's a little bit hard. *(Ricci)*

Workers required a medical note to be compensated for missing work. However, this was not always a feasible option as some workers lacked a vehicle or their work schedule did not permit them to see their doctors. As a result, workers chose to self-medicate rather than deal with the

hassle of travelling to see a doctor for a medical note. Here, the medical note was a form of documentation that not only legitimated worker's work-related pain or injury but also posed to be an obstacle for workers who needed sick pay. In this way, the medical note was viewed more as a detriment than a benefit given the healthcare barriers workers already had to encounter.

This was further complicated by the fact that self-medication was a common practice that carried itself over the Philippines. As Ricci clarifies: "Because in our country, we don't go to the doctor because expensive – the fees that they charge are very high – it's expensive. So if you have a stomach pain you just drink something to settle down the pain and live with it [Laughs]." Given the Philippines' poor, understaffed healthcare system, many of the Filipino TFWs at HyLife described turning to self-medication (i.e. non prescribed medication) to manage their work-related pain. This can be further contextualized in the 1997 Philippines launch of their national health insurance agency, PhilHealth to increase population coverage; however, given the limited breadth and depth of coverage, many of its citizens have had to pay out of pockets disproportionately affecting poor and rural areas (WHO, 2018).

Workers also viewed doctors as obstacles/gatekeepers/arbiters to accessing medical documentation, as workers had to be physically present for their doctor to examine, diagnose and legitimate their pain. Instead, workers preferred a phone consultation through which they were able to express their health issues and receive the necessary medical documentation without the barriers and costs that resulted from travelling.

> So why not just – if they call in sick – use some kind of – another kind of very fine tool that make sure the person calling in is sick and just give him what is near him and not hassle him with those paperwork – that is a little bit ridiculous in my point of view to get – because you just go to Minnedosa to get a doctor's note. If your – if you don't have a

> vehicle, you would have to pay for gas, or hire a vehicle to go there and say what – pay $30.00, $40.00 and get paid for that day $80.00 because that is the minimum that we get paid if on a sick leave – so that already would be $40.00 off. [Laughs] *(Ethan)*

However, even with their sick pay, workers had their compensation drastically reduced to the lowest bracket.

> You need to have a doctor's note to be paid. If you would just call in sick, you would not be paid. So for you to get paid, you would have to fill up a form, for you to be processed. It would be filed in the office. They would not process that one, without the doctor's note. [But] even with sick leave the pay is also in the lower bracket – the lowest bracket – bracket one. *(James)*

Applying for sick leave left workers with not only reduced pay but also came with a lengthy submission process, which entailed the cumbersome and costly task of retrieving a medical note. As Ricci explains, the cost accrued by driving from renting a vehicle to mileage would offset the reduced pay he would receive from sick leave. He states: "I think it's on borderline useless, to process those things. So the tendency would be for them to not just claim it…and continue working." For this reason, many of my interlocutors decided to continue working and push through their pain.

Social politics of workplace exploitation

In this section, I highlight the exploitation workers faced at their workplace in Canada. I draw out the various forms of exploitations migrant workers encountered and endure and how this becomes intensified through their precarious status.

Psychological intimidation at workplace

At HyLife, workers often discussed the target driven and high performing nature of their workplace. This was in part due to the bonuses higher-ranked employees and management would receive after their subordinates fulfilled their production quota. Ricci and Nathan described this distribution of bonuses in the following way:

> Yes blue hats (lead hands) do possess the highest bracket in salary, so they are bracket 6. At the same time, I think they do get an incentive biweekly for hitting the quota – same with the supervisors. And it is not – it is not stipulated. And everyone there on the management side will deny it – but it is common knowledge within the employees that the quota – when we hit them – supposedly that the lead hands would be given productivity bonus – because we were the ones working our asses for that quota to be hit. But the bonuses that we have for the productivity that we'll work to get is usually would just be divided amongst the supervisors [in dark purple hats]. *(Ricci)*

> You're outside of your scope in terms of how the management goes in certain companies. But it's really happening this kind of management that lets their employees feel that, you know, they're walking around with their title and just thinking of their incentives and bonuses "because we have incentives and bonuses whenever our workers reach the target," but it only benefits the management. So as simple employees we don't get that. So what's the tendency right now? It is to reach our targets no matter what even if you have to increase the production line speed. *(Nathan)*

As shown, workers experienced firsthand the underhanded politics of their workplace that pressured them to reach the company's target goals. Even though the workers were the primary force behind production, the supervisors were the primary beneficiaries of these bonuses.

Although heavily implicit, workers confirmed bonuses were afforded to lead hands who reached their production line quota. Here, the division of the workforce can be delineated as such: brown hats=workers on probation, green hats=union representatives, blue hats=lead hands, purple hats=supervisors, white hats=regular workers. Despite ranking below supervisors, lead hands were responsible for covering the shifts of workers, maintaining the flow of production line, and ensuring workers performed their task and reached their quota. As Ricci states,

> So let's say for example me, I'm doing knife work [trimming the fat off the meat]. If ever I get a washroom break, which is hard to get, they would be the one to replace me. And if there is something wrong with the equipment that we have, they are the ones to report it, or if not to fix it, if they know how. So everything that needs to be done, if there's a problem during the operations, is the job of the blue hats. So they would be the one to monitor everyone. They would be the one to, yes, take the lead – lead the others to whatever needs to be done – so that we would hit the quota.

Whereas supervisors were part of the management team, lead hands were also employees as per their collective bargaining agreement (CBA)—albeit with higher rank and authority than their TFW subordinates—subject to the same pressures of performing their duties and reaching their targets as other workers. This is clarified by Ricci in the following, "Lead hands are not our supervisors. They also are covered under our CBA. So they are – they too are HyLife employees. They belong on the employee's [TFW's] side. The supervisors are on the company side."

Like my interlocutors, lead hands also had to adhere to the rules and regulations of their CBA often doing what they are told by management:

> Yes. It's complicated. As much as they wanted to be the good guys, they were just following orders from their supervisors – from our supervisors. If they don't do that one, they don't comply, they would be basically just reprimanded or scolded just like the rest of us. So as much as they wanted to do good, their hands are somewhat tied, so they would just have to follow what is given to them. *(Ricci)*

Compared to other meat processing plants, workers, like Ricci, have spoken out about their pay disparity:

> So ever since I came into HyLife, the employees – I think even those employees – way before me – they're not receiving any productivity bonuses whatsoever. In December, we also don't receive any bonuses. So as compared to the other company that we have here in Manitoba – and the same line of production that we have, which is Maple Leaf – they do all the productivity incentives or productivity bonuses. And at Christmas time – in December – they usually give something to their employees…. So HyLife does not do that one. We're not complaining that we're not getting any, but we tend to see a better [laughs] work situation with the other companies, than in HyLife.

As shown by Ricci, his company, unlike other meat processing plants, failed to provide their workers with productivity incentives and bonuses. This lack of pay, Ricci expressed, was indicative of the lack of recognition for the labour and profits workers provided for their company. Although much to his chagrin, this was not a battle worth fighting or spending his energy on as he and many of his colleagues were still waiting for their PRs to be approved. As Ricci notes below, being "tied to their employment" put them in a vulnerable position where they

did not want to lose their jobs and PR status. As such, the unfair treatment and pay they received at work was something they had to bear at work until their PR status was approved.

> Yes. That's what I've been telling people – my friends, "Why is this being done to us?" So I was telling them also, "I just don't want any trouble." So we're still on a work permit or in a PR. So most of them will advise and like, "Let's just take it as it is and wait for our PRs. And by that time we could transfer to another line of work, or another company." So for now, most of the people there, since we're on a work permit processed by HyLife and most of – most if not all of us also are processing our PRs – going through our papers through their office. So we are tied up to the company, I could say for the time being, before we could get our Permanent Resident cards. So for two to three years, you don't have any choice but to work for them.

According to Ricci, workers' sense of agency was limited with respect to their temporary status. He expressed the need to bide his time and endure the pain, evening warning his fellow co-workers from speaking out against their employers until they received their PRs.

Similarly, Isaac expressed the fear of losing his job on the farm over a medical-related absence:

> Each of these farms are productivity driven…I can share one big example that happened. I got sick, I had to go into the hospital with my health card and everything, 2am in the morning and then get back to work 5am. No sleep, no nothing and go to work because I couldn't stop production. And then, at the end of that day, I was totally out of it. Because as I say, you couldn't stop production, you couldn't report being sick or anything like that. Because as I say, you can be replaced. It's partly racial profiling. We're disposable

> and this speaks to immigrants or farmworkers, we're replaceable. So, if our output is not up to notch then we're replaced by the next best person.

As Isaac notes, he and many other migrant workers were easily disposable and replaced if they were not able to perform the duties expected of them at work. This led Isaac to endure and push through his physical limits even shortly arriving back from the hospital. Here, Isaac's signaling of race with respect to the worker's perceived sense of expendability figured into the everyday vulnerabilities encountered by migrant workers. As racialized migrant workers, their bodies were expendable but simultaneously vital in the translational flow of capitalist production. Here, it is within this very precarity—which governed and shaped migrant workers' lives—that compelled and conditioned them to endure and tolerate their workplace exploitation.

Profit driven work

Moreover, the profit-driven nature of employment companies can be exemplified by the varying degrees of vulnerability and exploitation workers were forced to endure in the workplace. During the company's staff meeting, Gabriel described his employer's insistence on increasing the amount of hogs per hour for the sake of increasing a company's revenues. Despite being critical of the potential safety risks, Gabriel did not feel safe to bringing his concerns up to management, sharing:

> When they were meeting up, I didn't want to argue about the speed with the management, because it's business, we have targets that need to reach. But what I'm trying to say is, in a construction workplace, there is a safety officer, right? So what is the proper safety for us to work as deboner or butcher? At work, they want it to reach something like 600 carcasses per hour. But what I'm trying to ask is how many deboners are needed for this.

> From what I observe, we usually need 12 seconds to debone but if you take 16 or 17 seconds, it will pile up. So that's the problem by the time you're deboning the speedline is very very fast [during] which time you're not able to find time to sharpen your knives because the carcasses are piling up and then the injuries coming. So what I'm trying to say is, what is the right way? We adhere to the management the production target that they wanted to reach. But how about us? How can we avoid injuries?

As illustrated, the employer's decision to increase the speed line had a detrimental effect on worker safety. For Gabriel, this meant he did not have enough time to sharpen his knives to safely debone the meat. Similarly, other workers questioned the legitimacy of their company's work and safety protocols stating the challenge of maintaining safe working conditions when they also were expected to reach their targets in a limited time. When I questioned Gabriel on why he was reluctant to speak out, he exclaimed:

> What I'm trying to say is I don't want them to think that we are something like people who are complaining—not keen on achieving the company's goal, right? Because we are. Because we want to. We wanted to instill that we Filipinos are hardworking, but what I'm trying to say is: "Please kindly, kindly, kindly look at the entire human capacity. Is it abusive?" Most of us don't complain. But every time we get out work we just, you know what man, my mind, and my hand is shaking and shaking. You know what man? I cannot sleep that much. Yeah. Not only my hands my shoulder there, man. You know what, man, for me to be able to sleep I sleep I keep taking medicines and things like that. It's not good. It's not good.

Like many of my interlocutors, Gabriel's reluctance to speak out against his company was reflective of precarious status he occupied at work. Instead of out rightly criticizing his company, he would pose his frustration in the form of a question—that is, indirectly critical yet still careful of the repercussions. Moreover, Gabriel conjures the ideal of the 'hardworking' Filipino to safely express his health concerns in a way that was non-threatening to the company yet appealed to Western capitalist logics of productivity.

Furthermore, Gabriel revealed that during a staff meeting, employers would attempt to attribute their losses to their workers' lack of performance. According to Gabriel, the company's negligence and disregard of workers' struggles were evident through their value of profits over workers' health and safety.

> So what I'm trying to say in our staff meeting back then "Can we find time to have an open discussion? I'm not saying, 'Hey you are abusing us!' Maybe they don't have idea because we're not opening up. "So sir. Isn't it too much that we're running at 600 hogs per hour, and we're just provided 18 people? Why can't we make it 24?" In our meeting, they even told us that the company is losing like something like 500,000 amount a year. I couldn't help but smile for their losses because we were not able to debone the meat properly. [M]any, many meat left in in the bone that's supposed to be taken out. And the fats and the skin is not properly cut so they turn into waste. I was just laughing at the back of my mind. I just thought: 'You're losing 500k. Whereas if you're going to add four more people in deboning, you'll just be spending like 50 or 55k per year on new workers. But you'll be saving 300k and then the product outcome is very very good because there is no skin or blood on the bones.' So from what I hear, supervisors and the managerial team get incentives for squeezing the budgets…. [E]very department has a budget they

> intend to use. For example, the ham department has 100k a month to spend. So what they're going to say, 'Oh 100k: We could minimize the expenses for example by doing 600 carcasses per hour.' What's happening now is the production is high, but we're still under time…. We're something like advised to go off around 12:10 am instead of 12:30pm. We're losing 20 minutes a day come in 10 days--that's more than enough to buy gas and things. So that's questionable: why [the] high production? And then going back to the incentives I was wondering why you're squeezing, squeezing us to do so much with less personnel. Whatever budget left, because this goes to the supervisor. They get the incentives. There's just something wrong.

Here, Gabriel uses the metaphor of "squeezing" to speak to the exploitative and extractive nature of his workplace. This included the high output performance activity at the expense of worker's safety, the lack of personnel support in each station, and pay cut from forced undertime. In particular, he found his company's budgeting of expenses to be highly insidious and unscrupulous. Instead of hiring more workers to meet the company's quota, workers had to increase the speed and effort in which they worked to match the higher line speed. This resulted, Gabriel expressed, in forced undertime leaving many workers with reduced pay,

> I was just wondering, because the conveyors move very, very, very fast. The production output is very, very high. [Yet] how come that we still have to go under time. I'm supposed to go out at 12: 30 but how come we go out around 12:10pm or 12:05 to 12:15pm. So undertime, [losing] 10 or 15 minutes a day. So I was just wondering … if you have something like concern for the employee, will you not give the 15 minutes to them? Right? Just like how they can make it very, very fast, when you can just something

> like, run it the proper time to make it that the employees can be able to reach the eight hour work. Maybe it's part of their production to minimize expenses.

Moreover, this forced undertime, Ethan states, came down to corporate greed:

> Because as what I have heard, here in HyLife, the supervisors have an incentive if they finish the production that they, way ahead of the target time. So, if they finish it early, the remaining time will be the employer's incentive … the rate, the hours of employees will go to the supervisors… [S]o that's why they want the production to finish early.

Within this workplace economic calculus, workers expressed the early production time was a tactic deployed by the management to increase their pay at the expense of workers' wages. For Gabriel, this forced undertime had the unintended effect of compromising worker's quality of work and overall quality of production and in turn costing the company's their profits. Despite the company's conflation of losses with workers' 'lack' of performance, these narratives highlight how the company's strict budget served to benefit the management in two interrelated ways: first, by overworking and 'undertiming' their employees to save on production cost; and second, by claiming the unspent budget intended for production as their incentive bonuses.

Limited breaks

As part of their exploitative workplace culture, HyLife workers faced limited breaks in the pursuit of reaching their targets, workers experienced limited breaks. For example, meat processing workers described instances where their production line would still run even after their break had started. As a result, my Filipino TFW interlocutors had to wait for their line to completely stop before they could leave for their actual break, which resulted in reduced break times.

> That's another thing. So the breaks that we have – we have two 15-minute breaks and for lunchtime we have 30 minutes. So I find it very – I will not use bad words – I find it very amusing that when they stop the clock for our 15-minute break, sometimes the line is still running, so we could not leave it. So let us say for example, in our case, the nightshift, our first break would be at 6:10. So when the clock hits 6:10, the time stops and the break starts. So we're still on the line. The line is still running. So most of the time they would take – it would take a minute before the line stops. So the 15-minute break that we have – or so it would be deducted a bit for waiting for the line to stop, so that we could leave. So from the lines we would have to walk to the cafeteria. So walking to the cafeteria would usually take two minutes – so that's three minutes already. So you got to eat your food and all that, let's say for five to eight minutes. So you have to go to the washroom because it's hard to – it's very hard to get a washroom break – so you would make sure that we go to the washroom, then go back to the line. *(Ricci)*

> I'm a deboner right, so the last drop they came to say 8:40 cut off. But there were so many carcasses running around still to process, right? So for example, with me if it's cut off at 8:40. Or they're still deboning. I can be finished with around 8:45. But I need to go back before 9:05 Because that is the time work starts. So I lost five minutes … but I need to go about five minutes earlier to reach my station. So I just had break for, just five minutes, it's not 15 minutes. *(Gabriel)*

Here, the loss in break time also came at the cost of their time to rest and recover whether that was replenishing themselves with food or relieving themselves in the washroom. For many workers, they simply desired their company provide them with the appropriate break time. Such

seemingly mundane break-related activity was a necessity for them to do the work they needed. Within their 15 minutes, they had only six to eight minutes to enjoy their break while the reminder of time was lost to walking between their designated break areas and workstations, or the production line failing to stop on time. Moreover, workers' break times were further diminished by their supervisors with the early initiation of their production line their supervisors resumed production line earlier. As Ricci explains:

> So I find it amusing that they're giving us 15 minutes, that basically they would – if I were to compute it right – the breaks that we have usually is just eight minutes for eating and everything else – we have to do the walk, we have to go to the washroom, and sometimes, especially for us, we don't have any watches – so when we do ask those employees that have – those that were given because of their line of work – they would usually tell us, "Oh the line was started way too early. They made it earlier – two minutes early," and it was stopped a minute too late but they would still call it, as if it's 6:10.

Instead of completing their break time as intended, Ricci described how companies would further reduce their break times by resuming their production earlier earlier—sometimes by a few minutes—before arriving at their stations. Again, this is in line with the company's objective of fulfilling their quota even at the cost of worker's break time.

Workers raised the issue of the lack describes lack of washroom breaks afforded to them due to the high quota workers were expected to achieve. However, after much complaint, workers noticed some changes to their washroom policy breaks:

> The thing is that they cannot let you leave your work assignment without your labor. Prior to us have meeting back then it's very, very difficult for me and speaking I can only

> have washroom because one for a month. Luckily, luckily, I can have washroom for one month, once back then. But when we have our meeting, maybe some information was relayed onto them. Our blue hats and other … maybe they were briefed that a complaint has reached the office, they are accommodating now was washroom no complaints because back then they say: "washroom I cannot accommodate you because they were five ahead of you, I need to send five and then you'll be the last then by the time that they will reach your turn, they will say we only have 10 minutes to dinner, go to break, just hold on to it [laughs]." I have to go something like this. But now lately, in fairness to my supervisor and my blue hats. Lately since we have a meeting, maybe some information relayed to them regarding the complaint, they are accommodating now. So why what our department is doing well, I don't know in other department. *(Gabriel)*

Despite these so called changes, Nathan still encountered resistance by his lead hand and supervisor to use the washroom. He describes an altercation with his lead hand stating:

> I asked 'I would like to go to the washroom, washing bay.' He's going to tell, 'It's not your time.' So I responded 'this peeing have time?' That's a human right. I need to go to the washroom. It's my human right.

Even with their 'new' washroom breaks in effect, workers still faced barriers accessing the washroom. As our interlocutors reveal, this act of refusing them the relief/release of their bodily waste alluded to a larger systemic problem of prioritizing the needs of companies before workers.

Moreover, workers criticized their workplace for breaching the CBA by regularly changing their break times to start earlier, resulting in longer work periods. According to the CBA, workers' shifts were segmented in four two and a half hours time slots:

> A fifteen (15) minute rest period will be given twice each shift, midway before lunch, and midway after lunch, provided that each work period is of not more than two and one half (2½) hours. It is agreed that except in cases of personal necessity, employees shall not ask for additional time off during the day. It is mutually agreed that the rest period shall not be abused (HyLife Foods, 2020, p.10).

By breaking early, however, this forced workers to work longer (exceeding the two and a half hours standard time) between their first break and lunch break. In the following examples, Ricci and Edwin describe his employers lack of regard for worker's break time:

> And another thing to point out, before I forget. The breaks that we have, it is stipulated in our CBA, so it is standardized. So the first break is 6:10. The second break – the lunch break is 8:40. And the third break is 11:10 in the evening. So it is stipulated there, that it should not be changed regularly. There came a time in the plant when our breaks were changed frequently. So we would have either an early break – that is usually the case – because the production line is somewhat swamped, or they would have a difficulty boxing the products at the end of the line, so it would be stopped early, then we would necessarily go back early. This spot of time that when we came in, they would not adjust the time for the lunch. So we would have a longer work hour for that shift. For example for the second shift – because our shifts are divided into four – basically two and a half hours shift. So when we did take an early break, the tendency is that for the second shift –

> which we're supposed to do two hours – that would be increased. So I'm telling them, "That shouldn't be the case. It should be adjusted…
>
> Case in point, yesterday night, so we took an early break – so it should be 6:10, which the break was done at 5:45 – so that's 25 minutes –hold on a second –yes, 25 minutes earlier than the usual break. So after the break, the time was not adjusted. We still took the break at 8:40. So that would – that's a longer working time for the second shift. Here we go again. "Well it shouldn't be done. This shouldn't have been the case." Nevertheless, they did it. They do it every now and then – not as frequent though as maybe before when there was still the pandemic. *(Ricci)*

Similarly, Edwin states:

> So, imagine you have your break at 6:10, and then then your supervisors moves your lunch earlier to 7:30 [laughs]. Because they want to do another routine check even if there there's no problem with the line. Then on our last break starts early again so when we go back to the line we have to work longer and faster so they can cover more, produce more.

Alternatively, HyLife workers would sometimes lose their last break all together in order to meet production quota, Aldo explains:

> So, let's say the number of hogs that will be done in a day is only 3,400 but the tarhet is 4200. They will try to make the line faster so we will skip our last break. That's how they're trying to save time and money. Because that 15-minute break, the last break, is still paid. It's another scheme that they are doing at our expense. I strongly believe that should not be the case because the employees are entitled to the break, right? It's in our

> bargaining [agreement]…. So, when the line is faster, so we are thinking "oh, OK, they're up to that scheme again, they are doing it again so that there will not be a last break.

As illustrated, these constant changes in their breaks were a major point of psychological, social and physical stress for workers. In accordance with their CBA, nightshift workers intended break times were divided between two half hour intervals such as: 6:10pm (first break) 8:40pm (lunch) and 11:10pm (last break). However, workers often described these break times occurring on the whim of their employers. For example, workers' breaks often started earlier or not at all—with respect to their last break—forcing them to work beyond their two and a half hour standard shift. As per their CBA clause above, these changes were a clear violation of their contract, which stated workers' rest period as a "mutually agreed" upon decision to respect instead of something to be "abused" by their company. For Ricci, this led to more demanding shifts that put unnecessary and additional strain on their bodies: "And the down times that we have, shouldn't be compensated by a faster line speed and adjusted because that would result to more injuries. Because the longer you're exposed to that line speed for a longer time, that would eventually hurt your body."

From these narratives, HyLife workers rest period were abused in several ways. This primarily appeared in a reduced break time, extended work shift hours, or in few cases no washroom breaks during their work shift. For workers, these constant changes and mishandling of their work schedules and breaks not only added to their workload but also stress on their bodies. Instead of being rooted in some individual, subjective grievance, workers complaints were rooted in a material collective reality of deep disparity and injustice.

Overwork

During the pandemic, workers expressed a higher-than-normal work time to make up for the workplaces' COVID-19-related. Edwin describes an incident three years ago when him and his colleagues were forced to work overtime.

> Yes, it was, like, one week or probably two weeks when we were asked to work 10 hours in the day. So it's the a.m. and p.m. shift combined, so [laughs] it's crazy. So, instead of two shifts we only have, like, one shift because many coworkers were absent, quarantined. I think that's when the third wave of pandemic actually hit us.

Given the lack of workers to meet the company's quotas, workers, like Edwin, had to work overtime and increase their performance activity:

> Then the only thing is that we were working much compared to the pandemic started because there were many times that we are under-manned, so we still have to work, just have to do our routine even if we are under-manned. Because there were a lot of people who would skip work because they were sick.

As a result of these absences, workers experienced higher workload:

> Company still requires us to work even if there's not enough people, although if you are not able to work they would allow you to skip work…but because most of are TFWs we can't easily say no to our bosses. that's just the only thing that – so, the job is more heavier compared to before. More pressure now to meet the quota, right, because people are not well and so you have to put more of yourself.

Although workers had the choice to leave earlier, they expressed concern over disappointing their employers and possibly jeopardizing their PR status. As a result, workers endured a higher workload and more shifts or as Edwin described "put more" of themselves in their work to meet the company's targets. Likening his body to a machine, James describes his company lack of disregard for worker's bodily capacity stating: "We are not machines. We only have two hands. We need four hands to do this kind of work." Here the body is something to be used and discarded.

Moreover, upon returning to work after the forced shut down of his company, workers discussed the higher speed of the production line in which they were forced to push through.

> After company shutdown because we have a target like time is running out like waste time. They will not say it but they will fast the conveyor, with the carcass remaining. They will just like one day conveyor will stop, and then it will go fast. *(James)*

> [A]fter shutdown phase it's just to fast in the work place, I mean production is too fast. I'm working actually in the shipping department and it's rush, rush, rush. *(Edwin)*

As described, workers had to operate under a faster line speed to compensate for the company's loss of time and profit. As Edwin notes, under the implicit counsel of their companies, workers would attempt to bypass the detection of their health and safety officers for these unscrupulous activities:

> Sometimes when those health and safety guys are not around, you have no choice but to do things the fast way, not following the right way but you know, those are the things that you have to do it in shortcut. You know what I mean? Our lead hands and supervisors

> know this and even condone it. You know, from time to time you know, you have to do it, otherwise you'll be behind and get in trouble for not meeting company's targets.

For Ethan, the poor working conditions were reflected in the company's high turnover of employees.

> Truly right now, they are on a massive hiring, because there's a lot of workers at HyLife now that wants to resign. Yes, especially when they got their PR cards and everything. Mostly, I think because maybe the main factor will be the, like I said, the workload and the working environment, management.

Similarly, Sonny details the complex, grueling and demanding nature of his work that have caused workers to leave the company upon receiving their PR.

> Yes, I work at the plant. We need to work with 4100 Hugs for eight hours…. Yes. It's very hard even until now. Work is very heavy today. But as day goes by as time goes by, you'll get used to it. Yeah, Let's say for example, you are the one who was removing the intestine or the pig's head for eight hours. We'll do that for eight hours. If you're shaving the head. Remove the hair, you will do that for eight hours.
>
> Yes, it's really hard work. That's why many Filipinos will resign when they get their PR status. We'll just go. Because we have no choice. All we can do is just work and wait for the PR status.

As these compelling narratives illustrate, workers expressed feelings of injustice perceiving as though they had little choice but to stay in their position until they received their PR. Given the high turnover, they worried that if they refused, they would easily be replaced by

another worker. Such realities then speak to the vicious cycle of precariousness of workers' occupation, defined by its inherently exploitative and expendable nature.

Squeezing the migrant body

For some workers, they described instances of being coerced to work through an illness or injury by their employers. Instead of suggesting him to leave work and rest after a spleen injury from work, Edwin's supervisor insisted he continued to work and be put on "lighter" duties:

> Even if say you come in to do your work, even if you're not feeling well, and then when you're in your work already, and you wanted to go home, it's like they won't allow you. They will just put you in like a modified job or duty because they don't want you to go home because they want people to work. So, instead, they will put you in a modified work, something like that. So, that's how – I don't know. I don't want to say the word, but it's cruel [laughs].

Similarly, Ricci's supervisor assigned him on 'light-duty', which included lifting and shipping boxes, for two weeks for a workplace injury resulting from his supervisor's negligence:

> I fell on the floor using the pallet jack. So the pallet jack, I already pointed out to my lead hand and my supervisor that it's faulty. Nevertheless, they made me use it because there is no other pallet jack available. So I used it and I fell, [laughs] unluckily. So my hips hurt at times and my ankle too. And so – and they made an Incident Report. They just advised me to take a light duty for two weeks. That's it.

However, given that Ricci was still on probationary during this time, he expressed the need to comply to his supervisor to secure his position:

> So I got the injury when I was still a brown hat – so when you're a brown hat in the company that is the probationary hat. I think two months into my work here in Canada. I'm sorry, or I think it was in October, or November last year. I was new and did not want to risk losing my job.

Further complicating this notion of 'light duty' work of stocking and shipping, Edwin argues:

> So, before my accident, I was, like, stocking and shipping boxes. And then after my accident, my manager actually needed to modify my job, so I'm no longer lifting boxes, but still, I'm in the shipping [department] as a strapping operator. I don't know if you're familiar with the strapping machine. It's actually the machine that straps the boxes. So, we use the strapping machine just to secure the product in the box. So, that's what I'm doing right now. It's not as heavy as what I'm doing before, although it's still physical because you're standing the whole day [for] eight hours. And then in the cold environment because it's the shipping department. It's a bit challenging, but somehow I was able to – I have to [laughs].

As Edwin astutely highlights, although workers were placed on 'lighter duties' to 'accommodate' their injuries, their work was not any less strenuous or demanding on their bodies. In describing the exploitative nature of his work, he offers the analogy of squeezing blood from a rock:

> It's exploitation, really. Exploitation because it's, like, about making profit, right? It's like squeezing blood from a rock, right? They're basically trying to take as much out of you. So, even if you can't really give, they're still, like, we want you to do more.

> So one time, I had my tooth extracted, but then I still have to go to work because I won't be able to support my family. So, I went there, I went to work, but then after first break, the bleeding didn't stop.

Edwin's allusion to squeezing blood out of a rock aptly describes the pressures workers experienced to continue working even to the detriment of their already damaged bodies. Despite his injury, Edwin persisted to work to support his family back home.

Race, the workplace, and the exploited body

Racial dynamics at work

For many workers, the workplace was a site fraught with racial and cultural tensions. Within the context of the farm, this was evident by Isaac who shared his educational background alone was not enough overcome the racism he faced at his farm. For Isaac, this not only made him a target of abuse but also easily expendable:

> Yeah. And as I was sharing with you like, I thought, you know, education put me above the racial tension but it didn't, you know, you still in a class with the same group. They just focus on the colour of your skin and treat you differently because of that. They work you like slaves and will throw you out if you don't obey them.

For Isaac, his sense of enslavement was predicated upon his perceived racial difference. It was this marker of difference, he notes, that enabled and justified his employers' poor treatment of him. Even with a university degree, he explained that this was not enough to put him at a higher social standing or work life quality than his less educated employees; instead, his education had no bearing on the racial discrimination he experienced at work.

Within the context of HyLife, complex racial dynamics played out in the very community itself. Among my Filipino interlocutors, they expressed that the abuses they suffered often came at the hands of their fellow Filipino workers.

> Sad to say, I was mostly discriminated by my fellow Filipino that's, that's a sad you know reality. Those people who you think are your friends are actually the ones doing it to you, you know this Filipinos. So, I have to live with it you know, you can't be distracted with you know this type of thing. I have to think about my family. I have to again refocus my mind and I'm glad I was able to overcome it for three years now. *(Edwin)*

For Edwin, he chose to endure the mistreatment he received at work, viewing work as merely a means to supporting his family back home, stating: "Sometimes that the kind of bullshit you have to put with. It's the reason why you're able to sponsor your family." On one occasion, he recounted an incident at work where he was discouraged to apply for a higher salaried position by his Filipino assistant manager:

> I was applying for a different position because of my work experience. I was up against two other men so I applied for like, it's a higher bracket in my chain so higher bracket means a higher salary position but then you know what the assistant manager, the Filipino manager told me, no you can't do it, it's different from your experience. The Philippines is different from here. It's, it's sad I mean I was disappointed I mean I said to myself he didn't even, you know, let me try doing it and see if I can handle it or not.

Instead of encouraging him to apply, his Filipino manager dismissed his qualifications deeming them as inadequate. Like many of my Filipino interlocutors, they found their workplace to be a microcosm of the deeply hierarchical work environment in the Philippines. Such workplace

dynamics according to Edwin can be further contextualized within the feudal colonial history of the Philippines:

> I mean, way back in the Philippines my previous job I'm used to it you know in the Philippines because as I've said it's already part of culture and if there's something I would want to change, it's our culture mindset. Everyone looks out for themselves or own group. We were under Spanish rule so we have that obey first ask later mentality. But we are also influenced by the West so we have this vision of greener pastures overseas.

Similarly, Ricci noted the 'Filipino' working conditions at HyLife, stating, "What's funny is that I left the Philippines for better wages, better working conditions. When I came here, yes it's true, better wages, but the working conditions are no different."

As illustrated above, the workplace was a contested site of contradictory influences and relations. On one hand, workers were deeply influenced by the hierarchical structures of their Filipino society and, on the other, the ideals of freedom and rights afforded to them by the West.

Nepotism

As a result of these conflicting influences, workers were often dismayed to learn of the nepotistic relations in their workplace upon arriving at HyLife. They described the regionalist practices that unfolded at work in which workers from the same regional background as their supervisors would receive preferential treatment. According to Edwin:

> Yeah I can give you an example you know. There's like this new guy that joined our group and obviously he belongs to the [supervisor's] group you know. So, he was given you know a light task almost everyday and it sucks because we are paid the same.

> And you're supposed to you know do your part also because of course we have the same salary rate then why not do your job. Some other people are you know working hard and you're just you know taking it lightly, taking it easy since you know the boss or you know something like that.
>
> If the job doesn't require you know physical strength, I, I can take it you know. [But] the job is actually hard you know you need somebody to, to help you and it's sad to say you know there are just people who are just I know taking it easy, you know, don't help you out, because they're a relative to some guy or from the same place as him. But I just have to bear it. I have to be focused on getting my family here, you know.

Similarly, Ricci states:

> So… it is safe to say that positions there is not based on merits. It is based on whom you know. So your skills that you possess or the merits that you have, they're secondary consideration.

As highlighted above, nepotism in the workplace played itself out in terms of a workers' proximity of relatedness to supervisors/management affording them the means to advance professionally or obtain better working conditions. Though, in the case of Edwin and Ricci, this uneven division of labour meant they had to take on higher workload for the same pay. Despite these unfair and insidious work practices, workers simply viewed this as necessary sacrifice to support and reunite with their families.

Racial division of labour

The cultural tensions HyLife workers experienced at work can be partly explained by the organizational makeup of their workplace. In the following, Gabriel describes the differential

treatment him and other Filipino workers received in relation to their white counterparts who worked the morning shift:

> Okay, the task is very, very high. That is very, very hard. The task is very, very heavy. There's an AM shift and there's a PM shift, the a shift all the the white guys the Canadian guys are working there and then there's an HR department and then I guess there's a health and safety inspector from the Canadian government are there. I don't know but you can ask other people from what I hear. Why is it be light working during the daytime? Why didn't Why is very high, very, very heavy working during the PM shift.

Moreover, Filipino night-shift workers noted the vast differences in working condition compared to their white day-shift counterparts. A few of my interlocutors observed more people in blue hats and Canadian supervisors monitoring the floors. During COVID-19, before entering worker, Ricci noticed that the supervisors and blue hats were more vigilant around workers' safety and the speed of the production line.

> If you compare the morning shift, they tend to standardize their work ethics – work conditions more. So line speed for the morning, I think was just 580, if I'm not mistaken. So for us in the night it's 600. It seems there are many Canadian supervisors, blue hats, [and] lead hands in the morning. When they could see that the workers are having a hard time – finding it difficult to comply with the line speed, or the way of work – they tend to stop the line. I've experienced that because when COVID broke out in the plant, the shift for the morning and the evening was fused – so there was only one shift that went around for two weeks – I think one week or two weeks. So when that happened, we were absorbed by the day shift – the nightshift was absorbed by the day shift. So we got to

> experience the work conditions that they have – the way they do things – so the lines are much slower, so we were surprised. And whenever the blue hat or the supervisor could see that, they'd say "Oh, this amount of work, or this condition is very ridiculous, or very unsafe," they would advise that it isn't safe, or they would stop the lines, just so that the work would not be so difficult for the workers. They follow the standard – more or less – the standard way of doing things, compared to the night.

As illustrated, these differences in the organizational structure between the day and night shift prominently manifested in its racial composition. According to Gabriel, workers in the day shift were afforded more thorough health and safety measures and leniency around performance output and activity. As a night shift worker, Gabriel recounted many incidents where he and his Filipino nightshift workers would receive the back lot of work that was not complete by the day shift workers. Although this put tremendous pressure on his body, he cited the need to be a 'good employee' or risk possible demotion. Upon reflection, he attributed their mistreatment to the social and cultural misgivings to corruption of the Filipino regime:

> When all of the workers are all Filipinos, the supervisors are all Filipinos. Back home there are no safety there's no government there, well, whatever. They just care about making money and their output. So I leave it up to you to analyze things, I just give you an idea. During the am shift from what I hear. If the conveyor is running very, very fast, you can throw it in the blue bin and it'll just keep piling up and up. But during the PM shift, by hook or by crook, you must debone what AM shift did not. If not, they will take notice and they tell you how you can't keep up with us. We can toss you back at the packing department. And the deboning department is like Creme de la Creme is like the

> highest position with the highest rate and many people are bidding to be in that position. And me I sacrificed a lot to be in this position. So by hook or by crook, you need to do something like meet expectations in return for injuries. And that's when the injury happens. That's from me, I said I don't complain, I appreciate and I try to be a good employee. I tried to do something like meet up these expectations. But according to some of my co workers who are in that position for five or seven years, they keep on telling that something is not right. Something's not right. I am not in the liberty to say it's not right because I am new. And as I've said I am a person who doesn't complain I just give my best but primarily there were so many complaints that we wanted to complain so that's all I can say.

Intrapersonal conflict

Given the lack of support channels during the night shift, workers often experienced poor treatment from their lead hands who they deemed as punitive and entitled. According to workers, this was a result of deeply engrained cultural traditions rooted in hierarchical social relations:

> Our lead hands act like supervisors. You will be noticed if you're trying to voice you're your concerns. Those 'supervisors' might gang up on me. And they have Filipino mob mentality. They'll might find ways to kick you out. If you don't agree, if you don't like what they're doing then you know, you'll get in trouble, right? Because you have to like respect the hierarchy. *(Gabriel)*

> I think what you're seeing is the management style of Filipinos, right, because if it's another Filipino they think they can do whatever they want. They think they have more power over them…. It's part of the culture, right? So they think that it's because, you

> know, we're from the same culture I have the right to look down at you, you know, or to tell you what to do, right. So there's that hierarchy.…
>
> On my first three months I was bullied at work. And I, you know, held my temper and patience since I am a trainee. So again just to be honest with you, we have a saying that when you go to a place where Filipinos are the bosses the system will be fucked up. So the mentality of having a Filipina boss in a foreign land. *(Nathan)*

As shown above, the racial composition in the workplace at HyLife played an integral role in maintaining the social hierarchies in the workplace. Such a racial layout, my interlocutors noted, was intentional in design—to keep workers in check and simultaneously pit them against one another other. In particular, the deeply embedded hierarchical structure of the nightshift enabled lead hands and supervisors to take advantage of TFWs vulnerable status. Among workers, this was met with deep frustration and anger, viewing their workplace an extension of their former Filipino work culture. Moreover, the hierarchical nature of workers' company was made more visible by the ideals they held around Canadian work life. Before arrival, many workers imagined Canada as a bastion of democracy and human rights. For Edwin, his fantasies of a Canadian work life shattered upon arriving at HyLife, stating:

> When I got here, I was shocked. I mean, I, I was culture shocked. Because I was thinking that when I get here, it's it's the company is run by, owned by Canadians run by Canadian, but then when I got here, it was not like that. Back in the Philippines, I had the chance to be employed by a foreigner, because I was working in a call center. It was an American company. So I know exactly the difference between how Filipino companies would deal with employees and how foreigners would deal with their employees. So I was kind of

> thinking that okay. I guess it would be nice, because, you know, it's Canadian company. But then when I got here, it was completely opposite. It's like, oh, it's like working still in the Philippines.

Nathan shared similarly sentiments, stating:

> In the plant, the majority of Filipinos even in the administration, in the management, the majority are Filipinos.[So] the Canadian way is gone. It's gone. As you know the mentality of the Filipino has—it's pinoy. They're Filipinos, they think they can do whatever they want. It's different from Canadian society values. They value their employees. That's number one….
>
> So, they still have some of the negative, you know, some qualities of the, you know, like being bossy, but considering that we are not in the Philippines, and we have to embody the Canadian values.

As shown, workers had imagined Canada as an idyllic place where workers were respected and valued. For Nathan, Canadian values was something to be embodied and adopted upon arriving in Canada. However, many workers were disillusioned to enter what they deemed another Filipino work culture, which they had hoped to escape from. This ideal of the Canadian nation state then had the unintended effect of intensifying workers' frustrations and disappointments over their workplace politics.

Leveraging the model minority trope

Further raising the cultural tensions in the workplace, workers expressed the insidious use of the model minority trope used by Filipino lead hands and supervisors to further subjugate and

oppress workers. To do this, Filipino supervisors and lead hands relied on ethnic stereotypes of the hardworking Filipino to justify their unsafe working conditions. As Ricci states:

> So, there is this tendency for Filipinos to – I don't know if it's a strength, or it's a weakness – but there had always been this – especially in my country – Filipinos tend to over perform, even if the means to attain it is not ideal and safe anymore. So I think that contributes to the line speed that we have. We've had the big bosses in La Broquerie ask "Is it's safe to operate at that speed?" and the managers and supervisors– who are Filipino – just tell them that, "It's OK." When it's not. And it's in that mindset that Filipino supervisors and managers tell the head office "Oh these are – these are Filipino workers. They are used to working through the work conditions in the Philippines. So there would be no – not much difference if the work that [Filipinos] are doing would be carried to the work culture that they have here in Canada, so.

Here, the Filipino worker came to embody ideals of subservience, industriousness, and productivity. Such qualities, Ricci expressed, came to justify worker's unsafe working conditions as it would be something they were 'used to' back in the Philippines. Although this came at the expense of workers' safety, workers themselves expressed the need to also assume this model minority archetype.

> So we are not against performing because as I've said, "We Filipinos, we really are hard workers." And we don't tend to complain about our work conditions, if we could tolerate it… The strength that we have, is also our weakness. So we get abused sometimes because of that resiliency to work. *(James)*

This is similarly detailed by Edwin:

> Not to be biased because I'm also Filipino but that's why there are you know so many Filipinos all over the world because Filipinos are really great workers. They work hard and because of that sometimes you know people sad to say. Fellow Filipino would you know push you more to you know, something like that, overwork you.

Here, James and Edwin poignantly point out how it is this perceived strength of their people that also was their undoing. This ability to endure and weather any condition was something that made Filipino workers desirable and simultaneously exploitable. However, it is within this murky realm of tolerability that opened new possibilities of vulnerabilities for workers enabling employers, particularly those from the same cultural and geographic background, to push them beyond their physical capabilities.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the insidious and exploitative environment of their workplace. Although workers were afforded a vital means to support their families back home, the workplace was an integral site to further capitalize on workers already marginalized and vulnerable positions. This played out in the forms of unexpected intensive workloads, repetitive workplace injuries, and exposure to unsafe working conditions. To receive sick pay and legitimation for their injuries, workers were required to obtain a medical note from a doctor. However, this proved to be a great barrier. Given the lack of available health care services in their community, workers did not always have access to a vehicle or had to travel long distances to see a doctor—all of which they would of which they had to personally pay out of pocket. Instead, workers chose to self-medicate, a practice which they carried over into their host country.

Further intensifying workers' precarity, the workplace was a fraught site where workers bodies was both an valuable and expendable asset to the company. As my interlocutors expressed, there workplace was deeply exploitative and extractive in nature, profiting from the suffering and vulnerabilities of its workers. This often came in the form of unrealistic target goals, profit-driven work, limited-breaks, and coercion to work, which often came at the deleterious cost of workers' pay, health and safety.

The racial composition and organization of their workplace further contributed to the exploitation of workers. Specifically, worker discussed the racial organizational milieu of their workplaces where the majority of Filipino workers occupied the nightshift, and their Canadian white counterparts worked the dayshift. Given these racial dynamics, workers noted the better working conditions offered to their white Canadian counterparts. In addition, workers complained of the nepotistic practices and unfair treatment of their Filipino lead hands and supervisors, who provided workers from the same region as them special privileges. Such poor treatment, however, only exacerbated workers frustrations and disappointments of what they envisioned Canada work life to be.

Moreover, as shown in this chapter, such a racial layout at HyLife was intentional in design. According to my Filipino interlocutors, management's use of the model minority trope was not only a key strategy to pit worker against each other but also served to justify workers' unsafe working condition in so far as they were perceived as tolerating conditions otherwise intolerable to the average Canadian citizen. As such, the model minority trope cannot be overlooked, being an effective tool leveraged by the company both structurally and intimately to profit from workers' suffering and to put them a further state of precarity.

CHAPTER 6: HOPES AND DREAMS FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Many migrant workers aspired for a future of not only less suffering but one where they could realize a better life for themselves and future generations. For if given the option between staying and moving, most preferred to stay in their motherland where could be with their families. However, given the poverty and lack of economic prospects, many were compelled to leave. As Ricci notes,

> When we went from the Philippines to here, that had been the primary consideration. Because if it's not for the greener pasture that they have here, I think nobody would be leaving anybody's country, if we could just provide the needs of our family there comfortably. It's sad to say, it's not the case. So you would have to go to another part of the world and stay away from the family that they love, just so we could make ends meet.

The notion of greener pastures is further articulated by Sonny in the following:

> People all around the world. When you imagine when you think of living in Canada, you think you're going into a new life? Greener pasture, they said, Have a beautiful life a great life a great future. That's what they say but you'll really need to work hard. Came here just to have a little extra salary. And of course, to have a brighter future for our family.

Ricci also goes onto add that the struggles he felt as a TFW were not something he would ever want his children to experience, stating:

> We don't want them to be feeling what I thought – being a migrant worker and going away from my family – so that I could provide for them. I don't want them to experience

> that. So I want them to live their life here, if possible. That's just it – aside from world peace and for a cleaner environment.

For Ricci, his rationale to move to Canada came from a place of deep sacrifice—that if he could prevent a life of suffering and poverty for his children, all of his struggles and sacrifices would not be in vain. To suffer then was inextricably linked to an imagine promised future—a teleological point in which workers aimed to achieve even at their own detriment.

Among workers, narratives of a desired future came with the hope of a better life for themselves and family. Work was embedded in an intimate field of relations that anchored the motivations, dreams and hopes of workers. For Santiago, his work on the farm was intricately tied to his family's sense of security and livelihood.

> I feel happy when I am here. I feel like I am leaving behind my family but it is for their future. The dollar is stronger here; I am grateful for the opportunity to invest in my family. Or I would not be here. When we start working, we get paid and we send it to our families. To be honest, I have worked many years on this farm. I feel good here. I work and I keep on working. I will get my pension, then the young ones will take over and they will continue. It is a benefit to my children, who are studying – and I have to lend them a hand with their studies. And I told them if they want to come here, they will need to do as I do. I don't want them to go through the same things that I have. I don't speak English, so I tell them to study and learn English so they can get their visa and come here to work. My son is finishing his studies now. So, I tell him, "Finish your training as a public accountant, then you can come here to work." I want them to be able to help themselves and not to do the hard work I have to do.

Here, working offered Santiago a sense of gratification with the knowing that he was able to send money back home and support his children. It is in this motivation to provide his family a life of less suffering that made his work not only bearable but enjoyable. In particular, the narratives of giving their children the life workers could never have or could only imagine justified and even incentivized workers to take on such precarious and unsafe work. Similarly, Edwin and Sherald envision a future where they could support and be reunited with their children to cope with the pain of being separated from them.

> Yes, I have no choice but to look forward toward the future. providing them what they need. And then just like what I said, sir, in the long run, you can be with them here. So I am looking forward for a brighter future instead of feeling my own pain without being – instead of feeling the pain without being there. So you have to look for the future instead. *(Sherald)*

> You know for like I've been away for three years. So, for 16 years my eldest wake up every morning seeing them you know, prepare their meals, drive them to school and they both you know played, play football so you have to. I am present in almost all of their games you know, it sucks I mean it's something that I miss. But still, that's life. Sometimes you have to do you know sacrifices just to give them you know, a better future you know, it's for them anyway. *(Edwin)*

Workers tended to speak in future tense when describing their family and work to make sense or alleviate the hardships they experienced. For their struggles were made tolerable by imagining a future where their children would not suffer as they did. Such desired futures provided these workers the resolve they needed to continue working. As Sherald movingly described, she had no

choice but to look forward to the future if she was to endure the pain of being away from children. While for Edwin, he was prepared to sacrifice the everyday joys and routines with his children if it meant being able to provide for them. For many of these workers, they relinquished the idea of complaining as something they had to endure to receive their PR. As such, workers decided to harness their grievances, disappointments, and anger into what they could tangibly do to better the lives of their families. Although not enough to escape and resolve the systemic abuses at work, it was these visions for a new future/possibility that provided them with temporary refuge.

DISCUSSION

As the various portraits of migrant workers illustrate, workers' migration experiences cannot be depicted as simple, linear journeys. They are often messy and complicated processes fraught with lack, anticipation, dread and desire. Within the context of my needs assessment interviews, workers' precarity was only exacerbated with the loss of income and employment, while leaving others undocumented in their host countries. For many, COVID-19 played the role of the antagonist in the unfolding drama of their precarious lives. As a global pandemic, COVID-19 not only left workers' home countries in a state of economic collapse; but it also left their families impoverished and sick with lack of access to employment and quality healthcare. The ever-looming dread and uncertainty of COVID-19 that haunted workers led many to seek what some described as "greener pastures" where they would be able to support themselves and families—ideals and desires predicated upon future notions of opportunity, security, and mobility.

However, for many workers, the migration process was not a seamless process. Hurdles came in the form of bureaucratic and systemic stoppages (whether due to a lack of documentation or international travel bans due to COVID-19) that prevented workers from working in their desired host country. Within the context of their arrival in Canada, workers encountered myriad social and economic barriers that were further heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. This included social isolation, the exorbitant cost of living, lack of financial literacy, and PR application delays. In particular, the PR application delays only intensified workers' state of isolation and distress. For many, it was their first time being away from their families for such an extended period of time. This had a deep emotional impact on workers around the uncertainty of not knowing when or if they would see their families again. In addition, workers noted the added financial burden of sending remittances back home while trying to support

themselves. As Hennebry (2014) notes, such transnational practices instead of resisting globalization, extended the effects and reach of precarity to spouses and families of temporary migrants in source countries. In particular, these transnational practices not only reinforced the precarity of workers in their country of settlement but also reinforced the unequal divide between global north and south leaving the sending countries and its people economically dependent on remittances from family members.

Moreover, the workplace was a deeply fraught site where workers' bodies were both expendable and valuable to the company. Many viewed the workplace as exploitative capitalizing on workers' already vulnerable and precarious positions. This often came in the form of intensive workloads, unrealistic target goals, overworking, and coercion to work which increased their risk for workplace injuries. Given workers' 'temporary' status, they would often endure their workplace injuries due to the fear that they would be terminated. This was also in part attributed to the lack of available healthcare services for migrant workers within their areas coupled with the cost of transportation, which acted as a deterrent for workers seeking treatment and care According to Saxton and Steusse (2018) injured migrant workers in the US lacked or were denied appropriate healthcare and social services by way of fear, coercion or geographic remoteness. This is similarly seen in Sangaramoorthy's ethnography (2023) of the migrant workers in rural Maryland who encounter systemic, spatially configured barriers via limited transportation, healthcare shortages, and lack of resources to hospitals.

Even in cases where workers did report a workplace injury, they were still pressured to work and moved onto so-called 'lighter' duties at both the cost of their health and pay. Similarly, McLaughlin (2010) argues that in the managed migration system of the SAWP, Mexican farmworkers were expected to work in conditions of high stress and low control without

complaint and return home at the end of their contract—factors that played a critical role on whether their employer in Canada would hire them again for the next season. In addition, Saxton and Steusse (2018) describes how migrants may fail to report or work through their bodily pain due to the stigmas of being injured or unable to provide for their families.

Given such obstacles, some of my interlocutors preferred to remain silent or in the case of HyLife workers self-medicate until they received their PR. Upon arrival, many expressed the need to adapt to the pressures of work or risk deportation. For example, my Filipino interlocutors had the expression "obey now, ask later" to evoke the hierarchical structures of Filipino society, which entailed respecting authorities and doing as they told. In this process of performing their subordination—as theorized in McLaughlin's ethnography (2010) with Mexican and Jamaican farmworkers in Leamington, Ontario—workers expressed suffering serious health consequences. This was further compounded by the anxiety and depression of being isolated from their families and the dehumanization of their working conditions where they encountered high stress, lack of control and inadequate social supports.

Within the organizational milieu of the company, the racial composition of the workplace at HyLife further contributed to the abuses of the TFWs. My Filipino interlocutors described a racial hierarchy within their workplace wherein White Canadian day shift workers were afforded more health and safety protections than Filipino nightshift workers who often experienced poorer treatment in the form of the nepotistic practices by their Filipino supervisors and harsher working conditions. Within the context of HyLife, such racial layout, however, was intentional in design. Similarly, Holmes (2023) describes how the structures of transnational agricultural labour stratified along ethnicity and citizenship status shaped the work experiences of Mexican farmworkers in California and Washington. In particular, he contends how workers' position in

the ethnicity-citizenship hierarchy reproduced and naturalized their suffering and injuries (Holmes, 2023). Farmworkers similarly expressed how their perceived racial difference marked them as both expendable and controllable, making them vulnerable to termination and replacement for not being 'productive' or compliant, As many of my interlocutors noted, their company would leverage the model minority trope to justify their poor and unsafe working conditions and in the process profit from the perceived ability of workers' tolerance for injury and pain.

However, for both farm workers and HyLife workers alike, work was perceived as essential in improving the livelihood of workers and their families. It was this vision for a better life or future that left many workers to endure conditions (whether in the form of workplace abuse or isolation from their families) that would otherwise be deemed unacceptable to the Canadian public. Although this came at a great cost to workers' bodies, they channeled their grievances, frustrations, and anger into what they could tangibly do in the hopes of providing a better future for their families. Borrowing from Adelson (2013, p. 213), ideas of futurity can be interpreted as the "capacity to aspire…in situations where the stakes for human survival are especially high." Within the context of migrant workers, their heightened sense of anxiety around their own and family's future was commensurate with a profound sense of suffering and precarity.

More broadly, futurity, as an analytic tool is critical to understanding the extent of TFWs' precarity. Discourses around their future not only revealed the present-day precarious lives of workers but also how their future shaped their everyday present lives (Baldwin, 2012). Among TFWs, it was an important affective dimension of daily life that encompassed people's fears and hopes of what was to come. Similarly, Anderson (2010) has noted, the future can never be fully

actualized but remains in a state of permanent virtuality. It is distant yet imminent. However, an understanding of futurity should not be confined to the affective; for scholars have noted how the future is also integral to making (and unmaking) meaning. In other words, the significance attached to the future would vanish if not for "the anticipated". Here, workers dreamt of a future of reunification and stability. A vision of a life that was both desirable and possible. A future which drove them towards accepting conditions otherwise considered unacceptable to the Canadian public. It is this simultaneous sense of anticipation and urgency that made the intolerable tolerable. Understanding how the future is made present then provides an important site through which to understand how societies and people are governed (Anderson, 2010).

To envision the future they desired, however, many of the migrant workers would come to embody the model minority. This process of model minoritization, I refer to, speaks to the deliberate ongoing process whereby workers were continually crafting themselves to be the ideal worker. This constant citation and recitation of self-regulating, self-disciplining and self-monitoring practices undergirded the extreme and precarious tightrope workers had to walk between maintaining their employment and supporting their families back home. Such actions, as portrayed by my interlocutors, revealed the fraught nature of the model minority—one predicated upon affective registers of fear, anxiety, and gratitude towards their employers, and simultaneously a desire to advance economically and socially for themselves and family members.

This embodiment of the model minority was deeply rooted in (post)colonial fantasies of an idyllic Canadian life. Here, I refer to the colonial aspects of the model minority to speak to the perceived ethnic and cultural inferiority my Filipino interlocutors displayed as a result of a history of colonization. Post-colonial refers to the idea that despite the perceived affordances of

capitalism with respect to movement, freedom, and mobility, workers also encountered new forms of captive i.e. labour exploitation, healthcare barriers, poverty and racial and gender discrimination.

Unlike the collapsing economy of their home country, many of my interlocutors viewed Canada as a land of opportunities where if they worked hard enough, they could provide a better life and future for their families. As other scholars have noted, colonialism has played an integral role throughout the Global South shaping and enslaving the very imaginaries, desires and futures that people have come to adopt while reinforcing the superiority of Western colonial powers (Robinson, 2020). In particular, algorithmic marketing on platforms like Facebook played a key role in the kinds of information TFWs received and adopted. This inclusion and exclusion of material present in algorithmically driven news feed can influence and shape the very content and vocabulary of the public conversation and imaginary (Devito, 2016). According to other scholars (Alexander, 2004; Quesada et al., 2011), these embodied behaviours must be contextualized from a place of historic marginalization – behaviours necessary for capital to accumulate and labour to be disposed of. Borrowing from Mayers' (2016) work on the imperialist narratives of rescue of migrant children, state discourses on the model minority often elide the geopolitical relations of inequality that is the maldistribution of poverty, labor exploitation and structural violence that make TFW's adopt such model minority ideals. Among TFWs, this process of becoming the model minority was reinforced by state mechanisms of both receiving and sending countries.

Within the context of workers' home country, recruitment agencies and government programs were vital in the molding and creation of the ideal ensuring the smooth transition and integration of workers into their host country. The labour recruitment industry—in its facilitation

of the bureaucratic processes and the movement of migrant workers—was vital in the production of marketable entities and willing workers (Lindquist, 2010; Shire, 2020). Upon arrival at their workplace in Canada, my interlocutors continued to uphold their model minority status in hopes of achieving economic and social mobility even if it meant working through their bodily pain and injuries. From the capitalist perspective, this tolerance and endurance of pain became inextricably linked to a worker's value with respect to the ideal worker in Canada as well the heroic self-sacrificing citizen back in their home country. Such archetypes not only reinforced the commodification of workers but also subjected them to unsafe working conditions by the hands of their employers.

Transnational circuits of precarity: In conversation with

In this section, I highlight some of the key ethnographic work on migrants that has laid the groundwork for my theoretical framework TCP. Holmes' foundational work (2023) on the experiences of migration among the Triqui people, who migrate between rural Oaxaca and the farms in California and Washington uncovers the ethnicity-citizenship hierarchy structures within the farms. This is conceptually shown through the intersection between the structural violence of the free trade agreements, which drives migration, and the symbolic violence stereotypes—with its subtle naturalization of inequalities—to inform the violence, suffering and poor health of workers. According to Holmes, symbolic violence was subtly reinforced in the health care experiences of Mexican migrant labourers. For example, practitioners would attribute workers sickness and culture—often as a result of a language barrier—while dismissing the specific claims, concerns, and realities of workers.

In conversation with Holmes' work, De Leon's provocative ethnography on border-crossing among undocumented Mexican migrants through the Sonoran Desert illustrates how the

1993 US border enforcement policy "Prevention Through Deterrence" strategically uses the desert's natural treacherous terrain to impede, kill and erase migrant bodies. Such border enforcement policy, he argues, intentionally funnels migrants into a hostile environment enabling border patrol to outsource the work of punishment onto non-human actants such as animals, extreme temperatures and harsh terrains. In particular, he adapts Callon and Law's concept 'hybrid collectif' to show how these different actants are assembled to reinforce the violence of migrants although he is careful in decentering human agency from the brutal boundary enforcement strategies. The desert then becomes what De Leon describes as 'spaces of exception'—building from Agamben's 'state of exception'[7]—where the rights and protections of migrants are revoked in the name of security and reduced to bare life—humans whose lives are viewed insignificant and subject to any forms of violence with impunity.

Moreover, Sangaramoorthy's incisive ethnography (2023) explores how racial capitalism[8] and corporatization of healthcare have eroded the rural healthcare infrastructure in Maryland's Eastern Shore. This creates an environment, she argues, where the rapid influx of immigrants—from Mexico, Centra America, and Haiti working in agriculture, poultry and seafood processing—cannot keep up with a rural health system facing shortages of healthcare providers, limited access to healthcare centres, and high rates of sick and uninsured patients. In

[7] Agamben's 'state of exception' describe a process whereby the state implements an emergency order to remove legal protections to individuals within the margins of society while unleashing the state's power on them.

8 Racial capitalism is the notion of how racism is harnessed for capital accumulation by making profit on black and brown bodies via depressed wages, unfree and coerced labour, deplorable working conditions (Robinson, 2020). According to Sangaramoorthy (2023), commercial agriculture, poultry, and seafood processing industries have long recruited racialized and immigrant workers from Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean to work in job deemed unacceptable to the citizens. These organizations have shaped national immigration laws and federal labour policies by increasing global labor networks and ensuring a vulnerable surplus of foreign labour.

such moments, she adds, shared conditions of physical suffering and emotional anxiety generate powerful forms of belonging, mutual obligation and sociality among immigrants and health providers who improvise different strategies (e.g., bartering and rationing) to receive and offer care.

Although I am indebted to the groundbreaking research of ethnographers before me, I hope for my research to engage with but also build on the existing body of literature on migration and precarity. Similar to Holmes' description of symbolic violence experienced by Triqui, my Filipino interlocutors at HyLife also described how supervisors would invoke the hard-working nature of Filipinos to justify and normalize the violence enacted on workers' bodies by way of increasing the speed line. With respect to De Leon, his use of *hybrid collectif* shows the important role of human and non-human actants in the suffering and violence of migrants. This can be seen in the case of my Mexican farmworkers in which excess exposure to sunlight and dusty environment along with the employers' excessive work demands assembled to intensify the precarity and injuries of workers. For Sangaramoorthy, she theorizes rural precarity as a complex landscape "made up of policies that advance fiscal austerity and anti-immigration sentiment, a neoliberal era of health provision, racialized organizations that employ migrant laborers, and rural community contexts—[that] shapes immigrant health" (Sangaramoorthy, 2023, 11). Among my interlocutor, such landscapes of precarity brings to bear Canada's draconian TFWP and unfree employment relations, workplace exploitation and discrimination, and limited healthcare resources and services in shaping the health of TFWs.

In relation to TCP, however, I bring to focus the slippages and fragilities of TFWs' lives through transnational circuits that continually drive workers to migrate and toward states of incertitude and vulnerability. Like the electric current, circuits illustrate how the flow and

movement of things, people, and ideas varies in speed and strength but also subject to short-circuits and blockages by way of migration policies, unemployment, and conflicts (Cole & Groes, 2019). As such, circuits provides a useful metaphor in which to understand the potential conflicts and disconnections of transnational migration processes between the sending and receiving countries but also within the country themselves.

I came to view the lives of workers then as something constantly unfolding and unknown. Although rooted in an inherently vulnerability, the precarity of TFWs was not totalizing either. The precarity they encountered was not only material but also affective by way of their hopes, fears and desires, which made it possible to understand a life beyond precariousness and precarity—a life of what could be. Such possibilities made the intolerable more tolerable for workers, leading them to walk a delicate tightrope without guarantees of a safety net. For example, material remittances reinforced and reworked family ties but also intensified worker's precarity through increasing pressure to support their families and to tolerate workplace abuse and exploitation. In other words, workers' affective experiences had a deep influence on their labour and economic practices but also modes of being. This was evident among my interlocutors who illustrated how the process of becoming the model minority through and by way of transnational circuits was tenuous, self-(re)producing and destructive. On one hand, separation from their families made these remittance practices ever more vital to the circuits of care and social connection. On the other hand, feelings of longing, social obligation, and dread shaped the very dreams, desires, practices and subjectivities of workers.

Through TCP, I show how migration is not a seamless process but a fraught one whereby material and affective elements converged to form new modes of being, connecting and imagining. As Kathleen Stewards astutely notes in her interview with Shaw and Byler (n.d.: para.

62), "Precarity is about finding ways to be in circuits of force and form. This means there is always the weight of what can be hoped for and what can be feared. The weight of the world. The subject suffering that weight of the world is a subject laboring toward the possibility of possibility." Although precarity engenders vulnerability, uncertainty, and instability, it exposes a future where change and possibility—no matter how tenuous and fragile—feed back into the circuit.

Public health interventions

Within the context of public health intervention, it is vital for health officials, researchers, policy makers and advocates to not only focus on the biomedical aspect of migrant workers' health but also the temporal and spatial dimensions that weave together to form varying degrees of health vulnerabilities that disproportionately impact migrant workers. To do this is to acknowledge the complex realities of migrant workers and the complex struggles, traumas and hopes that shape and affect the precarious trajectories of their lives. To "diagnose" migrant workers' health down to merely their bodies fails to address the spatial and temporal trajectories that give rise to their illnesses and injuries in the first place.

Here, I refer to my notion of transnational circuits of precarity (TCP) as a useful theoretical framework to understand workers' precarity not as something that is spatially and temporally bounded but as something as more expansive—accounting for the accumulations and constellations of stressors across time and space. On one hand, TCP enables us to understand migration as political economic process reinforced by state mechanisms to 'make' the model minority and ensure the smooth arrival of workers in their host country, and on the other hand as an affective process driven by the desire for social and economic mobility. Along such 'circuits' of migration, workers were continually confronted with precarious situations that would lead to

the breaking down of their bodily and mental states, whether that was from their workplace injuries or isolation from their families. This was further encouraged through state discourses and policies in which workers were made to become vulnerable and treated as the 'other'—a group that blurred and vacillated between the lines of being valuable and expendable.

However, within the theoretical framework of TCP, workers' precarity could be further understood pre-arrival in their country-of-origin and post-arrival at their new work destination country. This paradigm shift allows us to view migrant workers vulnerability and health as existing along a temporal spatial continuum from country of origin where a confluence of factors merge to perpetuate the vulnerability and migration of migrant workers to host-country where they are met with the risk of deportation, workplace abuses, exploitation, and uncertain futures. Instead of being separate points on a timeline, these temporal realities simultaneously permeated across workers' past, present and future to shape their health trajectories. On one hand, workers' desires for a better future compelled them to work beyond their physical capabilities in their host country, and on the other, their precarious living conditions back home predisposed them to worsening health outcomes—something they continued to carry upon their stay in Canada. In other words, economic precarity started from workers' home country and continued upon their arrival in Canada.

To further exacerbate the spatial and temporal incertitude of migrant workers, companies deliberately preyed on workers' temporary status and moral affects. Without their PRs, TFWs faced the imminent threat of deportation with their fates tied to their perceived value within the company. As a result, workers often fell victim to the pressures to engage in unsafe and dangerous work, which was reinforced by their desires to support and reunite with their families. Importantly, appeals to the affective experiences of migrant workers were done both by receiving

and sending countries to harness and channel the labour power of migrant workers. In Canada, the model minority trope has been commonly used to legitimize the exploitative working conditions of migrant workers (McLaughlin, 2010; McLaughlin & Hennebry, 2013). Similarly, in the Philippines, the heroic self-sacrificing citizen, someone willing to put the welfare of their home country and families before themselves was vital for the growth of both the family and country's economy (Butt, 2014; Piocos III, 2019). As Piocos (2019, p. 43) eloquently states: "OFWs' [overseas Filipino workers] stakes in their own family's security and development are necessarily tethered to the nation-state's own nation-building project." Such circuits of affect between nation-states allowed and necessitated for the continued extraction of migrant labour and continued growth of sending and receiving country's economies. Confronted with this double-bind, TFWs' abilities and desires to change employment became severely limited.

Such forms of precarity through the temporal and spatial convergence and accumulation of stressors formed the basis for their exploitation as they were neither placed nor displaced; possessed nor dispossessed; and citizens nor non-citizens. This liminality then was vital and a necessity to employer's recruitment agencies and array of state actors benefiting from the surge of human capital—that is, migrant labour.

This liminality has also been highlighted among other scholars. In her ethnography, Sangaramoorthy (2019) details how the US guest worker programs ensured migrant women's liminality through its cyclical migration process between Maryland and sending countries from Haiti, Mexico, and Central America, selecting women who had more reasons to return to home (such as having children). Under such racialized and gendered ideologies of recruitment, women encountered an "enduring holding pattern" in which they experienced estrangement from other migrants and residents in their host country as well as family and friends back home

(Sangaramoorthy, 2019, p. 16). Furthermore, in Holmes' (2020) ethnographic research on the health conditions of Mexican farmworkers in Skagit Valley in Washington State, he draws on Berlant's notion of slow death to describe the extended temporality and naturalization of farm worker's injuries (via the physical wearing out of a population) upon their arrival at their farm. Instead of some locatable event or occurring in one moment, worker's injuries extended temporally and spatially as something ongoing or yet to happen, which Holmes defines as quasi-events. Such quasi-events inhere uncertainty and naturalize workers' injuries as something outside their employer's purview of responsibility eliding racialized hierarchies and political and economic structures (Holmes, 2020). Similarly, with my interlocutors, instead of being a fixed and locatable point in time, their health problems in the farm and HyLife were ongoing and chronic, contributing to workers injuries being misunderstood as "normal" or "natural".

In particular, the ideas of sacrifice played a key role in triggering the affective circuits of migrant workers' precarity. Although precarity started in workers' country of origin and continually upon arrival in Canada, affective notions of sacrifice kept them tethered and bounded to their workplace. According to Simpson and colleagues (2014, p. 763), notions of sacrifice (via hard work and endurance) among male butchers in UK was employed to provide a better life for their families framed via the "conversion of capital for future accrual". The very idea of sacrifice, then, was integral to the capitalist extraction of migrant labour [9] as resources (Piocos III, 2019). Through the TFWP, migrant workers' labour as well as their moral affects were exploited by both governments and multi-national companies. Here, the TFWP was instrumental

[9] Here, Simone's (2004) notion of *people as infrastructure* also provides a useful analytic lens to understand the economic collaboration among African residents seemingly marginalized and reduced to poverty by urban life in Johannesburg. Foreign Africans and residents navigate through antagonistic relations to discover profitable opportunities while strengthening the pan-African service economy in the inner city

in ensuring the future of migrant workers remained and continued to be precarious. For many workers, these moral pursuits to provide often came at the cost of their emotional and physical well-being. Through the lens of TCP, workers bodies and moral subjectivities reside in a field of conflictual spatial-temporalities—formed not just exclusively at the workplace but at various points in time and space—orientating these 'sacrificing' subjects into the labour market. In other words, sacrifice was not some innate moral force but its vital presence in the global casualization of labour speaks to the power relations acting on the bodies and moral sensibilities of workers. Through these conflictual spaces and temporalities, workers' sensibilities and subjectivities were acted upon, shaping the very desires and futures workers envisioned.

Therefore, to see workers vulnerabilities as accumulating and traversing across time and space will help medical and public health professional to shift away from seeing health as confined to just the individual, the workplace, or "occupation health hazards" [see for example: Saxton and Steusse, 2018; Sterud et al. (2018)][10] to health as part of a larger transnational systemic process (Hennebry, 2014; Sangaramoorthy, 2023). TCP provides a useful lens to understand the conflictual convergences of spatial-temporalities and affects that weave together to form the precarious lives of TFWs. In particular, notions of futurity weighed heavily on the desires of workers' journeys. However, through the streaming of migrant workers labour into Canada, TFWs also encountered heightened forms of dehumanization and disposability. Therefore, TCP demands a more holistic and global examination of migrant health—one that

[10] Sterud et al. 2018 systemic review highlights the poor working conditions and occupational health hazards immigrant workers encountered in Canada and Europe. This included higher exposure to chemicals and poor psychosocial working conditions (e.g. perceived bullying and discrimination). Although important occupational research, Saxton and Steusse (2018) calls for research and interventions that moves beyond singular health issues decontextualizing the community and structural vulnerabilities in which diseases and injuries develop.

pushes across the temporal boundaries of nation-states and beyond diagnosing and fixing the physiological body. Such a paradigm shifts away from the temporal and spatial limits of the present will be critical if workers are to realize any meaningful and substantive changes to their overall physical and mental well-being.

Key Recommendations

Based on the findings of my research, I would like to suggest some key recommendations:

1) Due to their precarious status, workers should be granted permanent status or a clear pathway to permanent residency upon arrival to mitigate the abuse and exploitation they experience at work.

2) A single coordination body should be implemented to ensure migrant workers' rights are actively protected and engaged in at the federal, provincial and municipal level.

3) The TFWP must end its draconian closed work permit program and allow workers to freely change employers in any sector without limitation or prejudice.

4) Culturally sensitive and appropriate services should be implemented to address the systemic barriers migrant workers encounter at work. This includes organizational supports like counselling, workers' rights and safety workshops, and support groups for workers to safely share their grievances while also learning about their workers' rights and entitlements.

5) Given the isolation of being away from their families, workers should be offered the opportunity for family reunification upon their arrival to Canada.

6) Social service programs should be expanded and adapted to include PR application and financial literacy supports to prevent workers from extortion schemes and further debt.

7) To mitigate the barriers of accessing healthcare, more health care services should be readily available and accessible for workers. This would include offering workers from rural and smaller

towns transportation to seek health care, medical interpretation, and building more health care services within workers' reach.

8) Upon arrival in Canada, workers should be provided provincial health coverage instead of relying on private insurance.

9) Lastly, to effect any systemic changes, future efforts must center the voices of migrant workers while working together with migrant rights activists, health care and social service providers, and different levels of government.

As outlined above, these calls for action would help to form the beginnings of social, political, and economic changes for migrant workers to live a dignified and humane life in Canada.

Future Implications: Moving Forward

With a second Trump administration underway, I ask myself how my research findings can be applied as a means through which to engage and possibly serve as an antidote to the potential worsening of transnational precarities. Although I do not come bearing solutions, I hope to provide some perspective. Here, my notion of TCP forces us to move beyond viewing TFWs as mere labour for capital but human beings living rich and complex lives with their own desires, motivations and struggles. Understanding the affective, structural and temporal forces helps us to understand why workers decide to leave their families or stay in an exploitative working environment. For instance, workers' bodies are critical sites through which these forces converge to reflect the systemic abuses that workers have come to endure. Thus, instead of being the perpetrators to the ongoing crisis of capital in our society, TCP reveals that workers themselves are embedded in a system that benefits from their expendability and marginalization.

This is evident in the Trump's upcoming 25% tariffs on Canadian and Mexican goods in response to the "unresolved" undocumented migration and illicit fentanyl trafficking into the US (Dyer, 2024). Although importers would be responsible for paying tariffs, they would most likely shift the cost to American consumers to remedy the tariffs (Benchetrit, 2024). On the Canadian side, this could lead to a lack of demand for Canadian imports from key industries like oil and gas, agricultural and meat products, and transportation equipment (US Census Bureau 2025) resulting in massive unemployment among workers putting them in more desperate and precarious situations to avoid deportation. In Mexico, this could lead to further devastation of their economy that relies heavily on the exportation of goods to the U.S. This could force workers and their families in Mexico to move to the U.S in order to survive. Moreover, the effort to block migration through crackdowns could have the unintended effect of pushing migrant to take riskier moves to bypass detection, leading to human trafficking and potential violence and extortion (Isacson, Walsh, & Brewer, 2024). Furthermore, as shown in the past few decades, militarized drug control actions in Mexico have only furthered human rights violations instead of preventing illicit drug trade.

From these examples alone, we see how a multiplicity of political and economic forces converge to systematically exploit and abuse workers. Analogous to the canary in the coalmine, migrant workers' bodies not only offer a critical site into the harrowing lives of workers but also provide key insights to the kinks in the system that harm both TFWs and Canadian workers. To view migrant workers then as the enemy or the problem only fuels racist state discourse of the "other', Similarly, putting a cap on immigration as proposed by the Trudeau government in November 2024 will not resolve the housing crisis or improve living condition—a failure of the government to invest in public housing or implement rent control. Nor will increasing border

policing address the root causes of migration. Moving forward, we must closely examine the transnational capitalist forces that perpetuate the subordination and migration of TFWs. More so than ever, the work of worker-led grassroots movements in coordination with their different stakeholders will be vital in advocating for and expanding the rights and welfare of workers.

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