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Historicizing precarity: A labour geography of ‘transient’ migrant workers in Ontario tobacco



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ABSTRACT

So-called ‘transient workers’ from Quebec and Atlantic Canada made up a significant proportion of Ontario’s tobacco harvest workforce in the postwar era, though there is no existing research on this migrant population. Based on analysis of an unexamined archive, the article explores the relationship between seasonal transient workers, Ontario tobacco growers, and the federal Canadian government during the 1960s and 1970s. Migrants harnessed strategic forms of mobility or marketplace agency in precarious, unorganized and seasonal tobacco work. Further, the deepening of migrant precarity in Ontario agriculture can in part be traced back to this period of conflict between transients, tobacco growers and different levels of the Canadian government. Migrant precarity did not go uncontested among this population. Managed migration programs, still operational today, reflect the attempt to undermine migrants’ informal mobility agency. Transients travelled to find tobacco jobs with few constraints or pressures other than the compulsion to gain wages, using their relative freedom of mobility strategically, especially in public spaces, to disrupt local micro-hegemonies in tobacco areas. Government programs to manage farm labour migration were unveiled during this period in part to displace transients and solve a widely reported “transient problem” in tobacco.

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Introduction

Over several decades, under the rationale of chronic labour shortages, a rising proportion of seasonal waged farm work in Ontario has been performed by guestworkers from Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and South-East Asia under the *Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program* (SAWP), *Agricultural Stream* and *Low-Skill Occupation* sub-streams of the *Temporary Foreign Worker Program* (TFWP) (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2013). This reliance has become embedded in Ontario agriculture, stabilizing ‘niche’ crop production on small, medium and large farms (Basok, 2002; Binford, 2013; Preibisch, 2010; Satzewich, 1991; Sook Lee, 2004).¹ The popularity of guestworker programs among farm growers is explained not by their lower cost (as ‘cheaper’ workers) but rather as temporary, non-citizen, ‘unfree labour’ (Basok, 2002; Choudry and Smith, 2014; Perry, 2012; Satzewich, 1991; Sharma, 2006). Unfree work or unfree relations of production refer to “situations in which workers are not only subject to labour exploitation, but are not even free to choose the

buyer of their labour power” (McGrath, 2013, p. 1007; Miles, 1987; Satzewich, 1991). As Tom Brass has argued, the existence of unfree labour relations in contemporary settings has to be understood within “the process of class decomposition/recomposition (or restructuring) that accompanies struggles over the direction of agrarian change” (Brass, 1999, p. 2, emphasis added).² However, due to the focus in research on Ontario’s agricultural *guestworkers*, we know little of the experiences and governance of non-guestworkers among Ontario’s seasonal, low-wage farm worker population, be they undocumented workers, summer students, paid or unpaid family workers, or immigrants and refugees. In addition to the complex make-up of this migrant workforce, all Ontario farm workers are formally excluded from provincial collective bargaining rights.³ The focus on farm guestworkers arriving under the SAWP and newer streams of the TFWP implies that a structural dependence among Ontario growers on guestworkers in unfree relations of production

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¹ This list is by no means exhaustive or intentionally exclusive.

² New debates in geography and beyond have emerged regarding unfree labour in contemporary capitalism. This article does not engage in these debates at a conceptual level, but rather acknowledges the legal unfreedom which places migrant workers in Canada in secondary labour markets where they exercise limited physical, social and labour mobility.

³ For a review of the history of Ontario farm workers’ associational and collective bargaining rights see Fudge et al., 2012; Law Commission of Ontario, 2012, pp. 74–80.



Fig. 1. Transient tobacco workers in Aylmer, Ontario, 1974. Courtesy of Elgin County Archives (Image C8 Sh2 B2 F5 33b).

was uncontested if not inevitable, while the specific historical and place-contingent relationships between workers, growers and the state and the governance of migrant labour more generally, in different crop sectors and regions, have not been adequately documented (for exceptions see [Dunsworth, 2013](#); [Greyson, 1985](#); [Parr, 1985](#); [Satzewich, 1991, 2008](#)).

This paper contends that the production of migrant precarity experienced by the diverse groups that make up Ontario's farm worker population is historically inextricable from individual and collective attempts to contest the conditions of seasonal, poorly remunerated, difficult and often dangerous farm work. By using a labour geography perspective, the ways in which migrant precarity in Ontario agriculture were historically produced and contested become clearer. Labour geographers have become interested in understanding how workers at the interstices of precarious employment and precarious citizenship strategize to circumvent enormous barriers to gain better wages and/or working or living concessions from employers or governments, especially in settings where organizing is challenging and/or workers are geographically and temporally dispersed ([Coe, 2012](#); [Rogaly, 2009](#)). Rather than solely undercutting solidarity among workers, precarious employment has intermittently spurred innovative examples for organizing, documented by geographers in hospitality and cleaning sectors in London and Toronto ([Aguilar and Ryan, 2009](#); [Tufts and Savage, 2009](#); [Tufts, 2009](#); [Wills, 2005](#)). Taking a cue from contemporary and historical labour geography research, this paper provides a historical analysis of organizing and agency among Ontario migrant farm workers in the context of unabated precarious employment since the postwar era.

Specifically, this research traces the discursive and material contours of a purported problem with "transient" labour, based on analysis of tobacco-growing industry archives dating between 1965 and 1980 ([Bulbulian, 1977](#); [Macartney-Filgate, 1959](#); [Ramsey et al., 2003](#); [Smit et al., 1985](#)). Representations of transient tobacco harvesters reflected as well as shaped migrant mobility, governance and agency. So few accounts exist of transients *in their own words* in the archive I analyzed that I cannot adequately do their own voices justice here, despite the fact that this migrant workforce was the most important source of tobacco harvest labour after locally-recruited workers. Transients were primarily unemployed Canadians and students who arrived of their own accord to seek tobacco jobs during the 1960s and 1970s from Quebec, Northern Ontario and Atlantic Canada ([Fig. 1](#)). As will become clear, the term 'transient' also harboured anxieties about migrant mobility and agency. Transients were portrayed as threats and outsiders – spatially, culturally and socially – in ways unsurpassed by other groups of worker during this period (SAWP guestworkers; Mexican-Mennonite family labour; local recruits; European

exchange students; US tobacco curers; etc.). In part the threatening character which transients embodied is indicative of their relative freedom of mobility, as they circulated in the seasonal tobacco labour market with fewer constraints or pressures other than the need and compulsion to seek wages. They used their relative freedom of mobility strategically, especially in public spaces, to disrupt local micro-hegemonies in tobacco areas. These micro-hegemonies were characterized by (1) the disproportionate power of growers in relation to seasonal workers;⁴ (2) the tenet that migrants would consent to this scenario, and would be grateful for any work or welfare they were dealt without making waves; and finally; (3) the belief that these power relations constitutive of the tobacco growing economy were ultimately necessary and desirable in sustaining 'the good life' that tobacco growing livelihoods represented.

Representations of transients as intractable, out-of-place, and even as prone to criminality were integral to the political construction of a labour shortage crisis in tobacco growing specifically. These representations appear in debates between various levels of the government and growers over the social provisioning, governance and mobility of transient tobacco harvesters. Like other Ontario growers, tobacco growers' widely publicized claims that they faced absolute labour shortages ([Basok, 2002](#); [Satzewich, 1991, 2008](#); [Sharma, 2006](#)) were deeply entangled and legitimized through the "transient [labour] problem" (*Globe and Mail*, 9 August 1977; [Smit et al., 1985](#)). Moreover, this crisis helped justify in part what government-enforced limits and constraints could be imposed to control (both non-citizen and citizen) workers' seasonal mobility, particularly under the new *Canada Farm Labour Pool* (CFLP) (1974) and bilateral *Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program* (SAWP) agreements with Jamaica (1966), Barbados (1969), Mexico (1974) and Trinidad and Tobago (1978). Unveiled in the name of multiple interests, the federal government's CFLP and SAWP were intended to solve their own legitimacy crisis as well as improve working conditions for migrant farm workers themselves, not solely to meet employers' need for 'cheaper' labour ([Satzewich, 2008](#)). These managed labour migration programs remained somewhat unpopular with tobacco growers. Despite this the SAWP was used increasingly to recruit seasonal workers throughout the 1970s, just as the CFLP seems to have been eliminated. Yet the rolling-out of CFLP and SAWP programs together significantly broadened the remit of state-managed farm labour migration. Labour shortages signalled by tobacco growers thus appear to have been a labour management strategy which obscured much more

⁴ These power relations can be characterized in an abstract form as: growers paid workers as little as the market allowed them and resisted worker organizing while workers "work[ed] hard and diligently to maximize the profits of capitalists" ([Wright, 2000, p. 970](#)).

complex on-the-ground tensions between migrants, growers and migrant-receiving communities. Government-managed migration ultimately *institutionalized* tobacco growers' already considerable reliance on migrant workforces and workers' mobile-but-not-free status, stripping migrants of the tacit agency that inhered in mobility where they lacked formal collective bargaining rights.

The archive that forms the basis of the research is unique. I carefully reviewed the *Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers Marketing Board's* (OFCTGMB) news scrapbooks from the period between 1965 and 1980, which are held by the Delhi Tobacco Museum.⁵ The scrapbooks are large annual volumes of newspaper articles which appear to have been regularly selected and copied by OFCTGMB staff news from local, regional and national newspapers (each article is marked with the date and source in handwriting). The scrapbooks pull together broad snippets of daily news on tobacco labour (among other topics) that would have been extremely difficult and time-consuming to locate otherwise, as well as providing an insight into the Ontario tobacco growers' association's attempt to keep abreast of its public image and ever-evolving industry interests. More surprisingly, tensions around tobacco harvest labour were of wider public interest than I had previously assumed, with major national presses like the *Globe & Mail* as well as medium-sized city presses like the *Hamilton Spectator* reporting regularly on the topic as each season's transient influx peaked. While the topics encompassed in the OFCTGMB scrapbooks are wide-ranging (especially those addressing rising public health and anti-tobacco regulation and research), seasonal labour in tobacco was a predominant theme, clearly a concern to tobacco grower representatives. The research process itself involved manually retrieving any reference to tobacco labour in the scrapbooks and manually documenting and coding their content chronologically. To verify whether these topics were of broader historical relevance beyond the news in the scrapbooks, I reviewed the OFCTGMB's Annual Reports (1965–1980), other industry and government documents and reports, as well as other secondary sources such as documentaries and older research. Where relevant, these sources are cited throughout. My archival approach builds on more contemporary news content analysis from 1996 to 2002 on Ontario's "offshore workers" (SAWP migrant farm workers) by Harald Bauder, who shows that, "interlocking narratives constitute a powerful discourse of offshore labour that simultaneously identifies migrants as cultural threat, valorizes their economic contribution but subordinates their labour" (Bauder, 2005, p. 53).

Labour geography of precarity in migrant farm work

Labour geography's crux has been that organized workers are powerful agents in shaping the geography of capitalism in their own interests, particularly in the context of the postwar regulation of industrial labour market regulation throughout the twentieth century, the setting which [Andrew Herod's work foregrounds \(2001\)](#). With the growth of precarious forms of work in Western economies – declining rates of union density; temporary and sub-contract employment; increasingly less social and employment provisions; etc. – querying labour geographies in under-regulated, low-paid workplaces is especially important ([Coe, 2012](#)). Used to describe labour market flexibility and liberalization under post-Fordist neoliberal policies, precarity has traditionally been used to highlight how poverty is actively produced through conditions of employment, marking a departure from the commonly-held notion that poverty was synonymous with unemployment ([Waite, 2009](#)), especially as social provisions that supported safe, full-time

employment have been retrenched. Here I focus on *precarity* where low-wage, insecure labour markets, temporary forms of citizenship, and social inequalities such as age, race, citizenship, and gender intersect ([Goldring and Landolt, 2013](#); [Vosko, 2006](#); [Waite, 2009](#)). This is because precarious work articulates with new migrant divisions of labour such that precarity and migrant low-skill, low-wage work is a systemic facet of labour market restructuring and the way capitalism and urbanization have been re-organized in many Anglo-American settings ([Wills et al., 2010](#)). Moreover, labour market restructuring has drawn migrant workers into unfree labour arrangements through institutionalized, formal policy mechanisms in Canada and the UK ([Sharma, 2006](#); [Strauss, 2013](#)). [Kendra Strauss \(2013\)](#) argues that cheap food policies pursued to subsidize a falling household wage in Western economies are connected to recent migration management strategies by UK and Canadian governments. Low-cost labour migrants are funnelled into the lowest echelons of labour markets with few opportunities provided for gaining a social and political foothold to pull themselves out of these sectors. Importantly, Strauss' account is historical and political economic, as she argues that unfree farm labour organized through gang-labour and performed by children, women, racialized and migrant populations is a resurgent rather than new phenomenon, socially embedded in reproduction crises in the UK.

Precarity in migrant workplaces, and by extension its effects on political, organizing possibilities and challenges, must be considered in historical, institutional, and geographical settings. For the most part, this review focuses on migration into precarious work in Anglo-American settings. As Louise Waite as argued, "Precarity as a concept for geographical enquiry will be hollow and of questionable value if it flattens or homogenises difference" (2009, p. 413). Workers' subjective reactions to their position in particular sectors interfaces with non-class bases of identity ([McDowell, 2008](#)), which shapes how and whether migrant workers organize, a pattern that is borne out by this archival research. While the state and capital actively produce differences within the working class through labour market segmentation and national citizenship, the working class itself has also promoted exclusions along lines of gender, race, and citizenship, in part driving the making of migrant precarity ([Silver, 2003, p. 24](#); [Hahamovitch, 1997](#)). Indeed, the working-class as a historical force demarcated white, male wages against rather than in solidarity with other working populations (e.g.: racialized, immigrant and migrant work, and women's unpaid and reproductive work).

We might be able to organize attempts to contest precarious work in two areas: associational and structural. While freedom of labour mobility relative to the mobility of capital is extremely unequal, 'marketplace or mobility bargaining power' has been a crucial source of structural working class power leveraged alongside associational forms of power among working classes over the 20th century. [Erik Olin Wright \(2000\)](#), [Beverly J. Silver \(2003\)](#), and [Chris Smith \(2006\)](#) argue that "mobility struggles" are under-recognized arenas of struggle over labour power: "we need more research to investigate the disruptive, conflictual and destabilizing effects workers can exert by using the labour market for dispute resolution" ([Smith, 2006, p. 393](#)).

Defined by spatio-temporal fragmentation, precarious employment poses new challenges to organizing, particularly for temporary migrant workers. Associational forms of organizing among precarious migrant workers the UK, Canada and the US include successes in community, faith-based, and social unionism, for example ([Aguilar and Ryan, 2009](#); [Tufts, 2009](#); [Wills et al., 2010](#)). In terms of structural forms of 'marketplace power', the results are more ambiguous in recent research. Certainly spatial mobility shapes labour markets, wages, and working and living conditions. Some labour geographers have also queried how 'movement across space' itself represents agency for migrants ([Castree et al., 2004, Chapter](#)

⁵ By 1980, reporting on transient workers had ebbed. This pattern reinforced my argument regarding the government's institutionalization of labour migration and displacement of transient migration.

4; Rogaly, 2009). As workers “shun the worst aspects of exploitation... capital must necessarily accommodate to this process, and, to the extent that this is so, labourers fashion both the history and geography of capitalism.” (Harvey, 1982 quoted in Rogaly, 2009, p. 1977–1978). Individual agency is a necessary daily practice in low-wage, temporary migrant workplaces, where “workers’ everyday micro-struggles over space and time” matter to survival (Rogaly, 2009, p. 1977). Productive or workplace spaces are difficult to disentangle from social reproductive ones. Spaces of travel, recruitment, eating and shelter are all critical spaces upon which individual and collective agency in the formal workplace can be harnessed and controlled (Buckley, 2013; Rogaly, 2009). Conversely, other researchers underline how systemic mobility, particularly among migrant farm workers, has rarely been leveraged to contest precarious employment and migrant poverty but rather has ensured a flexible and docile farm labour supply that has disproportionately constrained workers’ structural and associational power alike (Mitchell, 2011). Indeed, while neoliberal ideologies would have us believe that marketplace power places the full benefit of labour market flexibility in the hands of the seller of labour power (worker), for the most part seasonal, low-wage, employment-related mobility in Canada has been shaped by rural poverty and other social vulnerabilities to the benefit of employers in resource-intensive, migrant-receiving industries (Mason, 2013).

Debates in migration research focus on the tension between precarity and agency crystallizing at the interstices of mobility power and exploitation. Where Marxist research traditionally framed migrants as structurally powerless within systems of “super-exploitation”, compelled to leave their homes as sources of surplus value extraction and cheap labour where the costs of social reproduction is borne by those left behind (Kautsky, 1988), feminist and postcolonial migration research by geographers suggest that (receiving-country) workplaces cannot be singularly seen as the locus for migrant workers’ identity, power, and re/production. Migration into ‘precarious work’ can actually represent counter-hegemonic practices which challenge household, gender, caste, or ‘village’ hierarchies, for example (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan, 2003; Silvey, 2004). The purpose here is to hold in tension multiple conceptualizations of migrant agency and to emphasize the crucial role relative spatial mobility plays in shaping agency within and beyond the workplace, whether it means surviving, re-working and/or resisting structural violence among precarious workers (Katz, 2004, Chapter 9).

Precarious employment for migrant farm workers in Anglo-American low-wage work has been a historical norm rather than a recent phenomenon of neoliberal globalization. Agricultural workers were excluded from or left at the margins of the (white male) working class. Waged farm workers and domestic workers in the US and many Canadian provinces were excluded from collective bargaining and other labour and social provisions just as the model of post-war industrial relations extended these rights to other industrial sector workers. Unsurprisingly, these exclusions affected workers who were predominantly immigrants, migrants, women and racialized persons. *Migrant precarity* in agricultural labour markets, contemporary and historical, in the US and Canada has been shaped by legal and social exceptionalism (Hahamovitch, 1997; Thompson and Wiggins, 2002; Tucker, 2012) which is distinctly racialized. Agricultural production has been capitalized upon these labour geographies (Hahamovitch, 1997; Mitchell, 1996; Walker, 2004). Waged agricultural work is temporary, seasonal and migrant, filled by vulnerable populations who have limited claims to citizenship and are legally or illegally recruited across national borders. In Ontario, agricultural workers have been and continue to be legally excluded from collective bargaining, employment standards and other labour rights (Law Commission of Ontario, 2012, pp. 74–80; Tucker, 2012). At the height of the

postwar era – the very historical-geographical antithesis of precarious employment – Ontario farm workers were formally excluded from provincial collective bargaining entitlements, among many other employment provisions. In the absence of formal associational bargaining rights, this paper historicizes structural mobility power and mobility struggles among migrant farm workers.

Migrant poverty in agricultural labour markets in the Canadian, UK and US jurisdictions has not been inevitable or unchallenged, but rather actively struggled over and produced through institutionalized and legal mechanisms. A labour geography lens attunes us to workers’ roles in contesting their subordinate position within these highly precarious labour markets. How were former migrant farm worker populations able to harness particular forms of agency? What oppositional forces did they confront? How is agency, in its multiple forms, historically layered within geographies of production and how does this impinge on the organization and conditions of work, worker identities, and barriers to organizing in current agricultural contexts? Although migrant farm workers have historically struggled to shape social relations of agrarian production in their own interests, their efforts have been frequently lost, undermined, or short-lived due to outright and structural violence (García, 2012; Hahamovitch, 2011, Chapter 7; Mitchell, 1996, 2011). Part of this process has involved making and unmaking multiple migrant workforces divided by origin, race, and citizenship. Like California’s massive agricultural sector, albeit on a different scale, Ontario growers have relied on multiple migrant workforces – recruiting, employing, exploiting and expelling workforces in cycles. Workers’ “naked exposure to the market”, mediated by a modicum of poor protections at different moments, has “been the permanent condition of farm labor” rather than a “passing phase” (Walker, 2004, pp. 66–67). Notably, migrant labour in agriculture in each of these settings has been organized in many instances through indentured or unfree wage relations, as mentioned earlier. These are not isolated, disconnected patterns but interrelated, emblematic characteristics of agrarian capitalist trajectories in Anglo-American settings.

Ontario’s tobacco transients

Tobacco-growing is an exceptional cash crop in southwestern Ontario, whose recent decline eclipses its significance to Ontario farm worker history and contemporary agricultural landscape. Beginning in the 1920s, tobacco growing in Ontario transformed sandy, low-grade agricultural land along the north coast of Lake Erie (Fig. 2) into a dynamic agricultural zone that remains strong today (OMAFRA, 2012). Historically tobacco was the most valuable cash crop in Ontario, reaping profits disproportionate to the acreage it occupied (Ramsey and Smit, 2002; Tait, 1968). Small tobacco-growing towns like Tillsonburg, Delhi, Simcoe and Aylmer were transformed into powerful rural economies. Tobacco marketing was supply-managed in the province from 1957 until 2008 under the grower-based marketing association, the *Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers’ Marketing Board* (‘the Board’ or OFCTGMB from here; Ramsey et al., 2003; Tait, 1968). The OFCTGMB was instrumental in organizing growers as a significant political and social class, in spite of major differences between growers.

Intensive manual labour was required to harvest ‘the back-breaking leaf’, as the crop was called in an early Canadian documentary (Macartney-Filgate, 1959). Up to 60,000 transient workers would “swarm into tobacco-land” – Quebecers, Atlantic Canadians and Northern Ontarians, university students, older and highly skilled tobacco ‘curers’ from southern US states – all looking to pocket harvest wages over a six-week span (Toronto Telegram, 2 August 1967). During the 1960s and 1970s, tobacco and other fruit

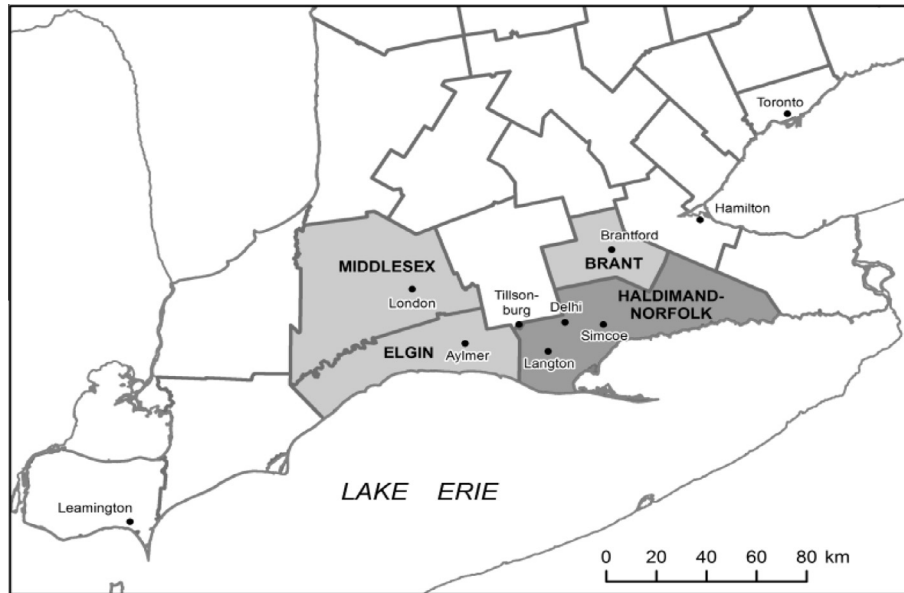


Fig. 2. Ontario tobacco-growing region and towns. Map by Byron Moldofsky, Department of Geography, University of Toronto.

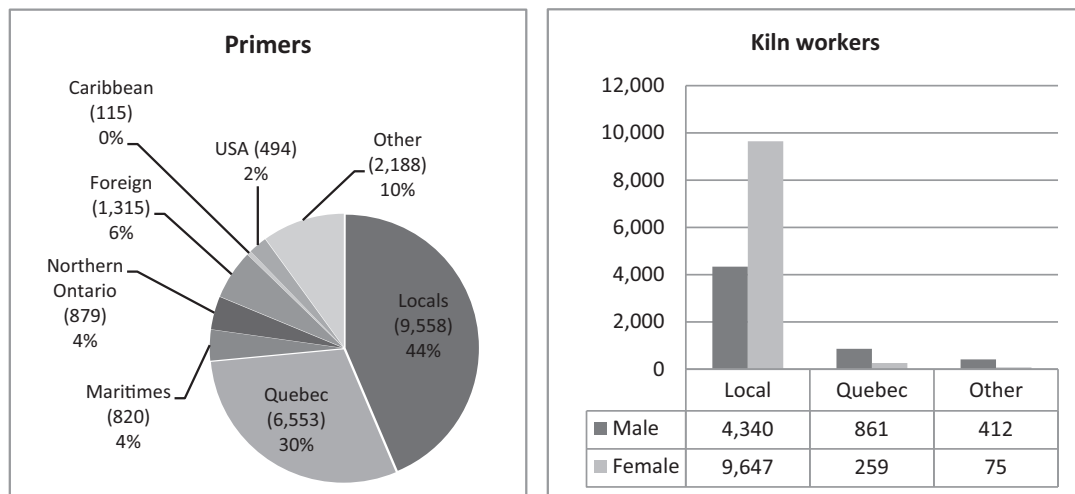


Fig. 3. Tobacco harvest primers and kiln workers by origin and gender, 1969. Primers were 99% male. Figures were collected by the OFCTGMB and published in the 1970 Annual Report. They counted a total of 22,071 primers and 16,110 kiln workers employed on 3,737 tobacco farms. The terms used to categorize workers' origins (e.g.: "foreign") are based on those used by the OFCTGMB. Source: OFCTGMB (1970, p. 10).

and vegetable harvest workers also included new immigrants, First Nations populations, Mexican-Mennonite migrants, and the chronically unemployed. Those hired to 'prime' tobacco (field workers who harvested the leaves from the stalk and transported them to be cured in tobacco kilns) were nearly all men. It was difficult physical work, soaking workers in dew in the morning, scorching them in the afternoon, covering workers in tar and sometimes poisoning them. Priming was disproportionately performed by local and Québécois males and was the bulk of harvesting labour demand (Fig. 3). Cut tobacco was primarily prepared to be hung in tobacco kilns by local women workers, the tobacco 'tiers' (Fig. 3). Highly skilled kiln 'curers' were responsible for achieving the appropriate flue-curing of raw tobacco. These three central harvesting jobs were being mechanized and de-skilled in the 1970s, reducing but not eliminating the need for harvest labour (Ramsey et al., 2003). In the absence of minimum wage provisions, associational rights or adequate employment standards in Ontario

agriculture, wages in tobacco were relatively higher than those in fruit and vegetable picking, which were abysmal.

During this time farm labour supply and migration, both internal and international, came under the renewed ambit of the federal *Department of Manpower and Immigration* ('Manpower' from here on) in unprecedented ways.⁶ In the mid-1960s the *Department of Manpower and Immigration* adopted an increased, 'active' role to labour market planning that Grundy (2013) has characterized as a high modernist, calculative approach. Tobacco labour recruiting by Manpower during this era is emblematic of this dynamic. "GET THE JUMP ON HARVEST!", a Manpower advertisement proclaimed, "Canada Manpower Centers Serve You Gladly, To Obtain Your

⁶ *Manpower and Immigration* became *Employment and Immigration*, and then split into *Citizenship and Immigration Canada* (CIC) and *Human Resources and Social Development Canada* (HRSDC). As of 2014, HRSDC is known as *Employment and Social Development Canada*.

Harvest Help, Drop In Soon". In the ad, workers are cartoon-like and parachuting into a tobacco field, with their parachutes labelled: "Ontario High School Students, Canadian University Students, European Students, Americans, Clearance Quebec, Eastern Ontario Workers, Women Primers, Caribbeans, and Local Help" (*Canadian Tobacco Grower*, June 1973, p. 4). In seasonal farm work, Manpower reserved well-paid jobs for Canadian workers while maintaining that "foreign workers" would be imported for the jobs no Canadian worker wanted (Sharma, 2006).

Transients and the camp 'fix'

Migrant housing, transportation and other basic necessities dialectically embed labour flexibility and mobility in the agricultural landscape and infrastructure (Mitchell, 1996). Agriculture is an exceptional form of capitalist production that must continuously "overcome some of the obstacles thrown up by agriculture's exceptional characteristics", in particular its bio-physical ones (Guthman, 2004, p. 65). Innovations in labour control are one means by which these obstacles have been surmounted, and the over-reliance on low-wage migrant labour is exemplary of this dynamic (Guthman, 2004). Migrant housing infrastructures, for example, socially and spatially entrench the temporally fragmented, migrant, and subordinate character of labour in the agricultural process. However, at once stabilizing forces, spaces like housing can be subverted and harnessed as a means of organizing and strategic disruptions of production (Buckley, 2013; Hahamovitch, 2011, Chapter 7; Rogaly, 2009). Migrant camps, dormitories and housing alleviate the chaos of migrant labour mobility as well as providing spaces where informal agency can be mobilized. In an infamous example in US history, large Depression-era *Farm Security Administration* housing complexes for migrants were auctioned to grower associations, some for \$1 each (Hahamovitch, 1997). Insofar as these infrastructures of migrant social reproduction stabilized as well as provoked social unrest, they can be seen as contradictory 'spatial fixes' which both guaranteed production at the same time as these infrastructures could prove disruptive.

In Ontario tobacco this was no less true. Employers provided room and board, though this practice was relatively informal and rarely contractual. Growers did not feed or house harvesters until the day that the harvest commenced. Workers waited to be hired in local parks, camping haphazardly in abandoned buildings, railway cars, cemeteries, and small-town parks, often with no formal authority to do so. The beginning date of the tobacco harvest was notoriously inconsistent. Often miserable and broke, out-of-work transients would seek food and shelter from local churches and social services, while others, it was reported, stole food and clothing from gardens, stores, and clothes lines. Responsibility for workers' welfare was consistently the source of local debate. From 1962 until 1966, a local tobacco-grower committee was formed to fund and run tobacco transient camps in major tobacco towns, where the unemployed could eat, sleep and bathe. Camp conditions were purposefully minimal, "... meant only to provide the barest necessities of food and shelter until work is found, and to keep [workers] from creek banks or in shantytowns" (Brantford Expositor, 8 August 1965).

Camps were an acknowledgement that the tobacco harvest and the wider tobacco economy relied on vulnerable populations who deserved support. However, this sentiment butted against widespread portrayals of transients as criminals who brought havoc to small tobacco towns. Police reinforcements were sought from larger cities to manage increased public drunkenness, fighting and petty theft over the harvest period. A *Toronto Globe and Mail* reporter described how the Delhi police chief had "no days off and long hours of overtime" during the tobacco harvest. The sensationalist article continued:

They patrol in pairs, long nightsticks on the seat of the cruiser and a sawed-off shotgun locked to the dashboard. Back at the station is Rocky, the force's trained police dog, whose bared teeth and snarl have quickly broken potentially dangerous situations. Before harvest the town and district provincial police are plagued with petty thefts, shoplifting and trespassing. Moving in with the workers are the professional criminals, thieves, and prostitutes, who on pay nights sit in the beverage room to see who is flashing money and who will assault and rob to get it. (9 August 1965).

Additionally, the tobacco region was a rural Tory stronghold. Conflicts over Québécois migrants were refracted through broader anxieties related to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's new bilingualism policy (Canadian Tobacco Grower, July 1965), Quebec nationalism, and the federal government's youth and unemployment programs in the 1970s (Mason, 2013, Chapter 5), which were viewed suspiciously in the tobacco region as encouraging unsuitable tobacco workers, like hitchhikers and hippies, to seek harvesting jobs. The camps were designed to render migrant workflows less chaotic, to reward docile and 'deserving' transients, and reduce the visibility of transient misery in tobacco towns, but they produced the opposite effect. With several hundred frustrated and bored job-seekers congregating in one place, the camps helped to momentarily suspend the pervasive spatial and temporal barriers to farm worker organizing.

In 1967, a group had formed called the *United Transient Laborers Association*. John Coyne, 26 years of age and from Montreal, stated to the press, "In some cases working conditions on farms are quite atrocious. We work for 10 to 11 h a day for \$15, plus room and board. We sleep in barns and when it rains... barns leak. We don't get the big wages most people believe." After asking a local priest for help, "We were given a dollar and were told we were not from this area and were not going to be charity and were not to come back." Police broke up the large group under the pretext that the gathering was an unlawful assembly (Delhi News Record, 20 July 1966). Just over a week later, awaiting the harvest start-date, a group of around 100–200 tobacco transients were met by police as they marched in protest into Delhi, the centre of the tobacco region (Toronto Telegram, 2 August 1967; Simcoe Reformer, 4 August 1966). Demonstrators had assembled at a nearby transient camp where 580 unemployed were registered. The marchers were concerned about lack of work, work conditions and wages, and their treatment in the camps and local area. The Riot Act was read by police, prohibiting the association of groups, and the March disbanded. Nine of the group's leaders were arrested, charged and fined with unlawful assembly.⁷

The camps were permanently closed, with the "near-riot being blamed on trouble-makers and separatists" who congregated at the camps (London Free Times, 5 August 1966; Simcoe Reformer, 14 March 1967). Drawing a link between transients' lack of docility in the camps and their potential threat to growers, the camp committee chairman and local priest stated: "I just wonder how many of those big mouths that were making all the noise have had bacon and eggs for breakfast... If they want this food for lazing around camp, what are they going to demand on the farm?" (Simcoe Reformer, 4 August 1966). The closure of the camps brought transient debates full circle. Lacking shelter, homeless transients would be left to camp and squat in parks and on roadsides. New anti-camping by-laws were passed in numerous tobacco municipalities to stem transient encampments while police ramped up their evictions of transients. Debates about transient camps emerged

⁷ Allegedly, the national Canadian Broadcasting Corporation produced a television report critical of tobacco growers' response the transient 'riot', yet the CBC report is dismissed by editors from tobacco-town presses as misinformed.

intermittently over the next decade. But concerns were repeatedly raised at these proposals, with “the possibility of trouble with all the transients milling around”, that harvesters were “a bunch of trouble makers”, and that “our children wouldn’t be safe in the streets” (Delhi News Record & London Free Press, 5 July 1967).

By 1970, unemployment was at a level unprecedented since the Depression (Mason, 2013). In tobacco, unemployed transients had come to find harvest jobs since the 1930s (Dunsworth, 2013). However the promise of tobacco wages no longer solely attracted poor, itinerant families and unemployed single men, but young hitchhikers and students. Younger unemployed Canadians lacked the same attitude as former generations of itinerant workers. Counter-cultural and new political influences infused the tensions between tobacco transients and tobacco-town locals. Transients were less likely to accept sub-standard provincial labour provisions in agriculture. As noted earlier, employment, living and associational rights for seasonal farm workers in Ontario were extremely poor during this period (Tucker, 2012). It is no surprise that some tobacco harvesters quit before the harvest’s end. Some reporters were apparently sympathetic to transients’ perspectives. A group of 75 job-seekers was profiled after they quit looking for tobacco work and accepted lesser-paying fruit picking:

The group’s social life – and that of other jobless or employed migrants ... usually centres on [a local] park. Walking through the park on most nights one will see groups sitting around tables discussing everything from how to prime tobacco to Quebec politics. A young woman from Montreal said: “It’s sort of like a community centre where you can go and meet other people from Quebec... There’s a feeling of comradeship...” (Brantford Expositor, 2 August 1969).

Yet there are few adequate accounts of transients’ own narratives and experiences in the OFCTGMB’s archives. In any case, if growers and local authorities feared that transients associated and organized as frustrations grew over lack of work, and that their organizing was embedded in broader political and cultural social movements, they were certainly correct.

Manpower and transient tobacco workers

Contrary to the notion that the federal government acted on behalf of growers alone, the federal government repeatedly refused tobacco growers’ demands for guestworkers, seeking to reserve tobacco jobs as ‘good jobs’ for Canadian students and the unemployed (Satzewich, 1991, 2008; Sharma, 2006). Until the early 1970s, the federal government’s role in securing seasonal tobacco workers for growers was not prominent. Efforts to ‘clear’ individual workers for specific tobacco jobs before they departed for southern Ontario and to ‘hold’ workers in their home communities until required for harvest were intended “... to prevent the area from being overrun by transients looking for work” (Simcoe Reformer, 14 July 1967). These practices were not new but more emphasis was placed on them beginning in 1967, a direct response to transient organizing the year before. The campaigns also anticipated conflicts that might arise in the conspicuous absence of any transient housing facilities (Tillsonburg News, 2 August 1967; Simcoe Reformer, 14 July 1967; Delhi News Record, 19 July 1967). Workers who registered with *Canada Manpower Centers* (CMC’s) had their transportation costs for long-distance travel subsidized by the federal government. But these costs would only be covered if workers finished the harvest season with their designated employers. The clearance and hold campaigns reveal how Manpower enacted soft control tactics to curtail transients’ existing labour mobility by creating incentives for them to remain with employers and reduce turnover. It provided free hostel or motel vouchers to its recruits

in tobacco towns, to reduce their visibility in public space and prevent rising tensions between locals and workers (Brantford Expositor, 2 August 1969).

Tobacco growers were also encouraged to rely on Manpower’s recruiting programs. Advertisements heeded growers to register their labour needs far in advance, though tobacco growers were wary of the young workers that Manpower recruited. The latter were considered indistinguishable from the unsuitable transient workforce the federal government meant to displace. The location of CMC’s in tobacco towns aroused hostilities and opposition from locals. One tobacco-town mayor stated:

This centre is a collection point and has a tendency to keep the workers in town instead of out where the tobacco is. You can rest assured it will not be located there next year. The area around the office is a disgrace. (St. Thomas Times Journal, 13 August 1969).

Government-managed farm labour migration clearly had an effect on tobacco workers. Because they travelled with government help and the promise of the job, workers were less desperate but also less autonomous and less visible when they arrived in tobacco towns. These factors shaped workers’ ability to associate and mobilize.

Two exposés on poor working conditions, low pay, and widespread use of “illegal” family and child labour in southwestern Ontario agriculture were conducted by federal Manpower officials in 1973 and by the *Ontario Federation of Labour* (Ontario umbrella trade union) in 1974 (Department of Manpower and Immigration, 1973; Ward, 1974). Mexican-Mennonite families and Portuguese men working with visitor visas on Ontario farms (e.g.: the source of child and ‘illegal’ labour respectively) were recruited and employed informally by fruit, vegetable and tobacco growers (Martens and Epps, 1976; Satzewich, 2008). The reports called these workflows a form of ‘foreign transience’ (Toronto Globe and Mail, 1 June 1974a; London Free Press, 5 June 1974). Putting Manpower at open odds with the Essex, Ontario-based vegetable grower and federal Minister of Agriculture, Eugene Whelan (Satzewich, 1991; Toronto Globe and Mail, 1 June 1974a), the reports underline the need to regularize informal (internal and foreign) farm labour migration. The federal Manpower department also wanted to address regulatory gaps in statutory employment provisions, associational rights, and housing conditions in seasonal agricultural labour that were the province’s jurisdiction (Department of Manpower and Immigration, 1973).

In 1974, Manpower unveiled two managed migration programs which sought to segment internal Canadian and ‘foreign’ farm work migration: the *Canada Farm Labour Pool* (CFLP) as well as new bilateral guestworker *Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program* (SAWP) agreements (Mexico and Trinidad & Tobago in addition to already existing agreements with Jamaica and Barbados). To address accusations that the federal government was gaining too much control over labour recruitment and conditions, thirty seasonally-operated Local Agricultural Manpower Boards (LAMBs) were established to provide local grower input into farm labour issues. Southwestern Ontario-area LAMBs were critiqued for lacking any representation from organized labour, a salient exclusion since the committees were charged with setting local wages, work conditions and housing criteria, as well as “renting” workers to farmers (Ward, 1974). Growers were resistant to the CFLP because they were required to pay wages in advance to LAMBs, who in turn paid wages on Friday nights. Workers who required housing before the harvest began could be housed through CFLP funds in local motels or campgrounds (Hamilton Spectator, 15 February 1974).

SAWP- and CFLP-mandated employment contracts tied workers to particular farm employers and had the objective of displacing transient forms of work through state-managed migration. Both

were meant to establish contracts in waged farm work to standardize wages and living and working conditions. Both indirectly managed workers' movement such that they did not have strategic visibility in public space. Both programs provided growers with greater degrees of control by prioritizing recruitment of workers 'named' by growers over those unnamed or deliberately not named (Delhi News Record, 11 August 1976). Yet the SAWP provided a critical labour control edge to growers that the CFLP did not, and growers were well-aware of this. A grower stated, "I like Caribbean labor because I hold something over him. If he chatters too much or stays out too late at night I can send him home. You have no control over Canadian labor. *You can't force them to stay.*" (Simcoe Reformer, 11 February 1977; emphasis added). Transnational guestworkers' legal status as "temporary workers" under new 1973 federal immigration law was institutionalized as formally unfree, non-citizen and deportable (Perry, 2012; Sharma, 2006). Although each program undermined the informal agency which transients (internal and 'foreign') could harness, the SAWP performed this function in dramatic ways. By 1975, there was greater pressure among tobacco growers to dissolve the short-lived CFLP entirely and provide greater grower access to SAWP "off-shore" guestworkers. Five hundred tobacco growers attended a 1975 town-hall meeting with Manpower over annually-imposed guestworker quotas. The meeting dissolved into a "near mob scene... with local Manpower officials as the target" (Brantford Expositor, 25 March 1975). Manpower officials explained the federal government's sense of alarm at the rapid rise in recruitment of Caribbean "offshore workers" (SAWP workers) in tobacco. There had been three guestworkers in the crop sector in 1972, 400 in 1973 and 1600 by 1974. The conflict over access to so-called off-shore workers would continue through the rest of the decade, with partial and full restrictions announced and fought over between Manpower and growers each season (Tillsonburg News, 11 June 1976; London Free Press, 7 May 1977).

Efforts to displace transients were also renewed. Municipalities pursued "closed door" policies towards them. Anti-camping by-laws were passed and enforced, with signs in parks in French and English. Churches were requested to cease providing services to transient workers like food vouchers and beds. Veteran tobacco primers were unable to find work. A vicious attack by locals against two Quebecois and two other Canadian workers in a local park was widely reported (Tillsonburg News, 2 July 1975; London Free Press, 9 August 1975; Simcoe Reformer, 11 August 1975). At the same time as claims of tobacco labour shortages circulated, the media reported on experienced tobacco workers searching for work around the countryside in vain. Manpower spokespeople openly

declared that claims of shortages were overblown (Simcoe Reformer, 4 August 1978). Nonetheless, evidence points to transient migration stemming due to the creation of government-managed farm migration under the CFLP and SAWP programs. Research from that period explained this dynamic succinctly:

Prior to the development of the CFLP system and off-shore worker programs, a variety of labour related problems were experienced by the tobacco industry. Shortages of labour were common at crucial times of the production year such as the harvest period. Furthermore, each year many thousands of transient workers would migrate to the tobacco growing regions creating many problems for local communities. (Smit et al., 1985, p. 21, emphasis added).

By the 1980s, greater numbers of CFLP and SAWP workers made up the tobacco harvesting workforce (Fig. 4) than they had in 1969 harvesting. Further, research on labour turnover during the 1981 harvest indicates that 'named' worker provisions under the CFLP and SAWP had some effect on reducing early termination and turnover rates, either because workers were better informed of the conditions that awaited them or because they were scared of losing the privilege that being 'named' conferred (see Fig. 5). Still, many were informally recruited, whether locally, inter-provincially or internationally (Fig. 4). What had, however, clearly been resolved was the 'transient problem'. A Delhi police chief told the *Ottawa Citizen* that he credited "Canada Manpower and the Farm Labor Pool with practically eliminating problems caused by transients" (31 August 1978). A year earlier the *Globe and Mail* remarked,

A most noticeable change is on the streets of the tobacco towns. The few itinerants hanging around are mostly quiet. Only the odd one yells in the street or carries beer on his shoulder, a stark comparison to the times when hordes of tobacco workers descended on these towns and turned them into disaster areas. They came by the thousands and drank, stole, fought and even murdered (9 August 1977).

Implications & conclusion

Mobility struggles between migrant workers, employers, and the government over Ontario's tobacco growing industry in the 1960s and 1970s shaped the emergence of precarious unfree, migrant labour markets as they currently exist. Peeling back growers' claims of labour shortages, we plainly observe how real conflicts animated the rolling-out of neoliberal guestworker poli-

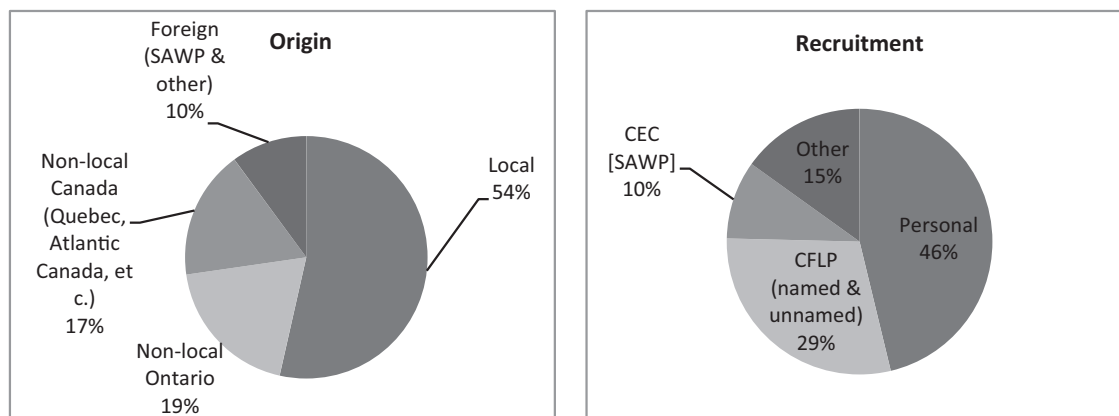


Fig. 4. Tobacco harvest workers by origin and recruitment, 1981. Figures are based on a 1981 workforce sample from 145 Ontario tobacco farms (Smit et al., 1985). Canada Employment Centers (CEC's) replaced Canada Manpower Centers (CMC's), which managed SAWP labour migration in coordination with sending-country governments. Source: Smit et al. (1985).

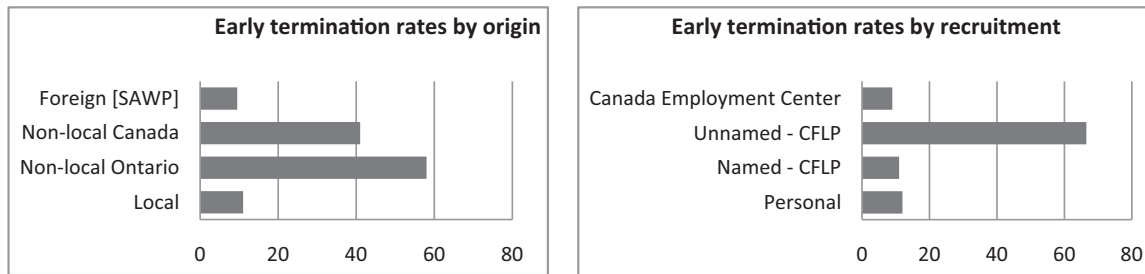


Fig. 5. Percentages of early termination rates among tobacco harvest workers by origin and recruitment, 1981. (Canada Employment Centers replaced CMCs.) Source: Smit et al. (1985).



Fig. 6. The worn-out sign “NO HELP NEEDED” on an old tobacco kiln in Norfolk, Ontario is rare testimony to the historical reliance of the tobacco-growing economy on transient workers, and to their displacement. This photo was taken in 2002 by Alison Thomas and is reproduced with her permission.

cies and labour market planning more generally. There are few overt traces of transient tobacco workers in the region today or in existing research (Fig. 6). Yet in historical hindsight they prove to have shaped the labour geography of southwestern Ontario agriculture. As the government stepped into oversee migration governance, it not only institutionalized the provision of deportable, non-citizen, unfree workers for Canadian growers, but it also weakened Canadian migrant workers' agency. Today, much seasonal and temporary work on Ontario farms, including on remaining tobacco farms, is filled through managed transnational migration programs. Unlike the CFLP, the SAWP's popularity grew consistently from 1966 onwards, and 'guest' farm labour migration programs were again expanded in 2002 (Bridi, 2013; Preibisch and Binford, 2007, p. 14; Preibisch, 2010; Satzewich, 2008). In fact, it is unclear what happened to the CFLP. Conversely, the SAWP is seen to be well-managed. It and other agricultural streams of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program have been exempt from very recent public scrutiny and federal reforms of the TFWP (ESDC, 2014).

With falling aggregate demand, global competition, rising tobacco and cigarette taxation, and public health pressures, Ontario tobacco growing contracted in the 1980s. This long-term process of agricultural restructuring pushed growers to diversify into other niche crops, like ginseng and field vegetables, or out of agriculture altogether (Ramsey et al., 2003). As tobacco growing grew more financially risky, labour flexibility likely grew more important for growers. In an ethnography on the restructuring of North Carolina's tobacco-growing industry, Peter Benson's research (2012) expertly traces precisely this dynamic. Ontario tobacco farmers in a 1996 survey identified “the ability to obtain offshore labour from Mexico and Jamaica” as one positive policy factor affecting tobacco farming amidst negative, anti-tobacco

policies (Ramsey and Smit, 2001, p. 354). Despite the decline in tobacco growing, the economic geography of the tobacco growing industry as a whole – shaped by workers' labour – created an agricultural land market and significant capital which new and existing growers captured. Approximately 800 tobacco growers remain active in the region (Bridi, 2013), which remains one of the most important agricultural zones in Canada and Ontario and a primary destination for agricultural SAWP guestworkers (Binford, 2013; OMAFRA, 2012).

Tobacco growers' barriers in recruiting and retaining reliable harvest workers were legitimate frustrations. Yet the research situates these frustrations in the context of systemic antagonisms between employers and 'free' labour, where the commodification of labour produces counter-movements or resistance from workers. This tension has been particularly high in agriculture, where farm labour costs and flexibility have been essential areas of struggle for growers in the face of global competition and increasing costs (Basok, 2002; Guthman, 2004; Hahamovitch, 1997; Mitchell, 1996; Satzewich, 1991; Walker, 2004). In turn growers have actively lobbied to maintain precarious employment in order to preserve low costs and flexibility in seasonal labour. Growers as organized social and political classes have stymied the formation of waged farm workers as an organized class (that is, from a segmented class-for-itself or community of the oppressed to a class-in-itself or 'active community'; see Mitchell, 2011). In part these efforts have involved producing and exploiting labour market segmentation and social differences between workers along racial and national lines. As Tom Brass argues, the object of unfree waged work serves “to prevent [or curtail] the emergence of a specifically proletarian consciousness...”, transforming what could be a transformative or even revolutionary situation “... into a politically reactionary combination of nationalism and racism (...) on the part

of an existing agrarian workforce displaced by the nationally/ethnically/regionally specific labour-power of cheap/unfree migrants" (Brass, 1999, pp. 13–14). Labour conflicts in tobacco and the emergence of institutionalized unfree migrant labour in the 1960s and 1970s should be understood within the context of these antagonisms.

At the same time, the character that this antagonistic relationship between growers, the state and workers in agriculture takes necessarily varies. In the absence of associational bargaining power, migrant farm workers in tobacco harnessed mobility (or marketplace) bargaining power (Wright, 2000; Silver, 2003). Problems with 'labour turnover' (Smit et al., 1985) are indicative of the political economic salience of what Chris Smith (2006, p. 392) calls 'mobility struggles' – workers' 'exit power' as means of dispute resolution. Growers' complaints of high labour turnover and a transient problem were not an altogether invalid complaint, but rather symptomatic of the real threat that seasonal migrants' mobility power posed to tobacco harvesting. Further, growers elided workers' needs and interests, casting migrants who left harvest jobs prematurely as persons of poor character and even criminals undeserving of local jobs or welfare. Discursively, the pejorative connotations invoked through the term 'transient' itself performed this trick of displacement.

Socially-embedded struggles over migrants' strategic visibility in rural Ontario are significant factors explaining how desirable and flexible unfree guestworker programs are to growers. Labour shortage crises cannot be disentangled from these struggles. Associational and labour market mobility rights interact with other regulatory, historical and socio-spatial factors to influence migrant workers' capacity to organize. CFLP and transient Canadian migrant workers were national citizens with formal labour market freedom. Despite this, transients in the 1960s and 1970s seem to have harnessed unique forms of logistical, spatial and political forms of power that CFLP-recruited workers did not. While systemic geographic mobility and poverty have been synonymous in migrant farm workers' lives, for transients, mobility could be subverted. Migrant workers used their visibility strategically in local tobacco towns in order to gain work, welfare provisions and attention and to transcend some of the geographic, social and temporary confines of their rural work-live spaces.

Representations of transients' mobility were materially powerful forces. Mobile populations are frequently marked by social difference and subject to persecution and containment (Cresswell, 2006). The term *transient* functioned in this way. During the Depression, transient referred to reserve labour armies who pooled at the farm-gate willing to accept the worst wages and working conditions. In the 1970s, the term reflected the changing political and social context for North American farm labour politics and unemployment. Farm workers were less and less acquiescent of their lot. The quality of transients as a source of docile and flexible farm labour had shifted. Transient used to signify labour control. Now it meant insubordination. These conflicts refracted seemingly unrelated tensions – not only political economic but regional, linguistic, generational, and cultural. Nationalism, bilingualism, anti-authoritarianism, free love and hitchhiking influenced transients' non-class based identifications with one another. At the same time, the 1960s and 1970's was a period of resurgent working class militancy in the US (Brenner et al., 2010). Led by Cesar Chavez, the United Farm Workers spearheaded unprecedented grape and lettuce strikes in California (García, 2012). Tobacco growers' labour shortage crises crystallized as a reaction to these intersecting dynamics. Representations of transients as undeserving and subversive if not criminal populations lent material legitimacy to tobacco growers' claims of labour shortages. While Manpower remained sceptical of the validity of this emergency, it still targeted transients as subjects of improvement.

In many ways, the globalization of low-skill, low-wage agricultural labour markets actively pursued by the Canadian government suggests that the eventual restructuring of migrant farm labour relations was overdetermined if not inevitable. Transients organized, protested and quit tobacco jobs at higher rates than growers were willing to tolerate. In its fractured and contradictory response to transients' and growers' demands, the federal government undermined migrant farm workers' labour geography, that is, the conditions favourable to migrant labour being able to "determine the structure of the political economy and social landscape within which they worked and lived" (Mitchell, 2011, p. 565). Cindy Hahamovitch fittingly notes: "The [US] federal government would assume the role of guardian, benefactor, protector, even mother to migrant farm workers, but it would not legally empower farm workers to protect themselves through collective bargaining." (Hahamovitch, 1997, p. 150). In Ontario, this is no less true. The federal and provincial governments have left egregious gaps in the provision of suitable associational, employment and other social rights for migrant farm workers. Currently, migrant guestworkers' local spatial mobility is legally and socially constricted. Migrant workers' bodies, presence and voices in rural public spaces continue to be considered socio-spatial transgressions (Black, 2013; CBC News, 2013; Sacheli, 2012; Sonnenberg, 2011) in ways which evoke the sensationalist debates over transients in rural spaces several decades ago. Historicizing migrant farm worker precarity serves to demonstrate how migrant struggles over the longer term have invariably shaped the labour migration governance and everyday life of migrants in southwestern Ontario communities today. Unconventional labour organizing tactics upon which migrant and non-migrant farm workers have relied are not new. They can shed a light on the production and shaping of migrant precarity as an unsettled and contested terrain.

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