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The Other Side of *el Otro Lado*: Mexican Migrant Women and Labor Flexibility in Canadian Agriculture

Throughout the global South, women are fast becoming the predominant waged labor force in commercial agriculture. In particular, the rise of high-value agriculture for export and domestic consumption has resulted in a marked preference for female labor.¹ This contemporary rise in female employment has roots in women's long experience in agriculture; historically, women have played a central role as unpaid labor within subsistence and small-scale production and, in many countries, as the temporary workforce sustaining commercial enterprises. The incorporation of workers from the global South into commercial agriculture within high-income countries, however, has had a decidedly masculine bias. In North America, for example, guestworker programs for agriculture in the United States and Canada have predominantly recruited men, while women are sought to fill jobs in the hospitality or caregiving sectors. These processes underscore how central the social construction of gender is to employment relations in agriculture's multiple sites of production.

While academics have made inroads in documenting and theorizing the gender relations that organize migration and farmwork, important limitations remain. Research in high-income countries tends, within the scholarship on gender and migration, to adopt a gender analysis when processes appear to be feminized, as can be seen in the now-ample literature on migrant domestic caregivers. Further, the literature on women in agriculture in the global North has focused on women on family farms.

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¹ The term "high-value agriculture" refers to the commercial production of nontraditional commodities that have a higher market value than traditional cereal grains and export crops.

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Our study takes a different angle, focusing on women employed in labor-intensive agriculture, specifically women who take up jobs as migrant farmworkers in Canada.² By tracing the incorporation of Mexican women as migrant farmworkers into a highly masculinized guestworker program, we highlight a less visible facet of women's migration and a highly gendered set of employment relations in agriculture. Further, by focusing on Canada as our site of analysis, we provide another side to the literature on international migration from Mexico, which remains focused on U.S.-bound actors and which has only begun to explore experiences due north of *el otro lado*.³ Indeed, while the United States receives the majority of Mexican migrants, the growing integration of North America is also resulting in rising Mexico–Canada migratory flows involving refugees, tourists, immigrants, people lacking legal immigration status, and temporary visa workers who migrate back and forth between the two countries annually. Finally, by exploring gendered employment practices beyond the family farm, we expose another side to the gender relations of agriculture in high-income countries.

We begin our article by weaving connections between the literature on women in commercial agriculture and gender and migration studies. We then turn to our empirical study of the Mexican women who leave their rural communities to work as migrant farmworkers in Canada. We explain the reasons for the preference for men in both labor supply and demand in this guestworker program. This involves providing a profile of its female recruits, who must come from rural areas and have experience as farmworkers to qualify yet who are seen both by their employers and their home communities as unusual participants by virtue of their apparent transgression of gender norms as international migrants. The main focus of our analysis is on the lived realities of women migrant farmworkers and the gendered, racialized employment relations that characterize their workplaces, an exercise that necessitates analyzing gender at the crossroads of citizenship, class, and race. We argue that temporary migrant worker programs further entrench existing structures of labor segmentation in

² We use the term “migrant worker” to refer to those people employed in Canada under temporary visas who do not hold Canadian citizenship or permanent residency (landed immigrant status). Although the concept of “migrant” in the context of Canadian agriculture is slippery since the domestic workforce includes internal migrants from economically marginalized regions and socially marginalized groups, we prefer to delineate our particular use of an imprecise concept rather than use the term “foreign worker,” which contributes to the disentanglement of international migrants (see Sharma 2006, 53).

³ When referring to migration, Mexican citizens often call the United States *el otro lado*, “the other side.”

farmwork. Further, they grant employers access to a highly vulnerable group of workers—people who embody the economic, social, and political marginalization within their home countries—who are then placed at a disadvantage within the Canadian labor market through a range of legal disentanglements that hinge on their immigration status as noncitizens. Our analysis provides insight into the gendered incorporation of migrant workers in agricultural production in the global North and, by focusing on southern women on northern farms, breaks with traditional schemas of how we understand women in agriculture and migration in general.

The gendered relations of global agriculture

Global restructuring of agrifood markets has resulted in rising levels of female employment in high-value agriculture in the global South. Although women form a smaller percentage of the permanent workforce employed in commercial agriculture, they often constitute the majority of the temporary, seasonal, and casual workforce that provides the greater portion of labor, in addition to filling most positions in packinghouses and other value-added processing activities.⁴ Another trend associated with global patterns of restructuring that has heightened demand for women's labor is contract farming, a form of agriculture in which small-scale farmers commit household labor, land, and other resources to supply agricultural products to processing and/or marketing firms under forward agreements.⁵ Scholars have attributed growing female employment in commercial agriculture to a global trend toward flexible labor strategies instituted by firms struggling to maintain a foothold in increasingly competitive markets. In this context, flexibility is achieved by creating a temporary, seasonal, and informal workforce that can be mobilized and disbanded according to varying labor needs, thus keeping labor costs down and reducing the non-wage-related costs of employment (Standing 1999). Maintaining women in casual, informal employment and paying them less (or paying them through their male partners) have often been justified by, and made possible through, their roles in social reproduction (Lara Flores 1998; Raynolds 2002; Dolan 2005). As Lourdes Arizpe (1988) has noted, the comparative advantage of agrifood industries in global markets rests on the comparative disadvantage of rural women in national labor markets. Further, capitalist agriculture benefits not only from

⁴ See Barrón Pérez (1994), Lara Flores (1995, 1998), Marroni de Velázquez (1995), Barrientos, Dolan, and Tallontire (2003), Barrientos et al. (2005), Dolan (2005), Barrientos and Dolan (2006).

⁵ See Raynolds (2002), Barrientos et al. (2005), Dolan (2005), Smith and Dolan (2006).

the devaluation of women's labor but also from their skills and experience working in subsistence and small-scale production. Women are central to food systems throughout the world, producing food crops but also many of the high-value crops on which commercial firms depend (Sachs 1991; Lara Flores 1998). Employer preference for women's labor in tasks requiring dexterity, precision, and care is also considered to result from abilities women have acquired through their responsibilities in the reproductive economy (Lara Flores 1995).

Feminist scholars have also made contributions to understanding gender relations in agricultural production in the global North.⁶ The bulk of these studies have focused on women living on farms as wives, daughters, or farm operators or on off-farm workers and have attempted to make visible women's labor contributions to farm households, to theorize the gender relations of farming, and, in general, to expose the meanings and practices of agrarian patriarchal culture. This literature has made important contributions to understanding the social relations of agriculture within the rural landscape. First and foremost, it has exposed agriculture as a decidedly patriarchal arena in which work is highly stratified by gender while emphasizing the consequences for women's positions in rural households and communities. On the farm, work is assigned and ranked according to gender; male bodily qualities are valued for most, if not all, forms of agricultural tasks and have come to symbolize farmwork (Leckie 1993, 1996; Saugeres 2002; Brandth 2006). Overall, "the masculine is valued over what is considered feminine, and as a consequence farm women's bodies and abilities are inferiorized and devalued" (Brandth 2006, 20). Further, scholars have shown how gender differences in farm labor participation reflect and reinforce women's social and economic marginalization in the rural sphere (Whatmore 1991a; Leckie 1993). The literature on gender in agriculture in the global North, however, remains focused on the family farm (Sachs 1991; Brandth 2006). While some research has explored how the modernization of farms masculinized formerly female responsibilities and appropriated agricultural technology from women, a look at the full complexity of the gender relations of labor-intensive corporate farming is conspicuously absent (Sachs 1991; Brandth 2002; Saugeres 2002).

This lacuna in the literature can be explained in part by the persistence of the family farm as the dominant unit of agricultural production in high-income countries throughout the twentieth century, despite extensive re-

⁶ See Sachs (1991), Whatmore (1991a, 1991b), Leckie (1993, 1996), Brandth (2002, 2006), Saugeres (2002).

structuring (Whatmore 1991a; Winson 1993). The rapid rise of corporate agriculture and growing labor demand for cheap, vulnerable workers in North America, however, has triggered some scholarly consideration of farmworkers.⁷ Very few studies explore the situation of women farmworkers; those that do tend to focus on labor rights, health risks, and sexuality, engaging only weakly with gender analysis.⁸ Although Canada has a much smaller labor-intensive agricultural industry than the United States, its growth in the last decade as a result of global restructuring has inspired some research on women farmworkers and the gender dynamics of agricultural labor.⁹ These examples aside, the general lack of research on women farmworkers in the academic literature on northern agriculture corroborates the marginalization of *rural* and *women* in the social sciences. It is no surprise that within this context, less visible women such as waged workers (often from racialized groups) have fallen off the radar and that gender analysis is rarely invoked when farm labor issues are examined.

One body of literature that has generated significant empirical data and theorizing on the involvement of women of color in northern labor markets is gender and migration studies. The field of migration studies has been gendered over the past twenty years, with feminist scholars giving visibility to the women participating in international migration flows who had been obscured by decades of research based predominantly on male subjects and, moreover, exposing gender as a relation of power shaping the movement of people.¹⁰ Among its contributions, this literature has encouraged integrative approaches to the study of migration that consider the intersectionality of gender with a wide range of social relations of power. Nana Oishi (2005), for example, uses a multilevel analysis to explain the feminization of international labor migration, taking into account a range of factors from the social legitimacy of women's workforce participation abroad to employers' gendered and racialized preferences, which have shaped occupational demand for migrants. Much of the gender and migration literature, however, has focused on Asian women working as

⁷ See Bolaria (1992), Wall (1992), Griffith and Kissam (1995), Basok (2002), Binford (2002), Findeis (2002), Mines (2002), Martin (2003), Walker (2004), Barrón Pérez (2006), Griffith (2006).

⁸ See Guendelman (1987), Buss (1993), Van Hightower, Gorton, and DeMoss (2000), Villarejo (2003), Griffith (2006), Castañeda and Zavella (2007).

⁹ See Barndt (2002), Preibisch (2005), Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría (2006), Becerril (2007).

¹⁰ See Grasmuck and Pessar (1991), Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), Goldring (1996), Kanaiapuni (2000), Sassen (2000), Parreñas (2001), Erel, Morokvasić-Müller, and Shinozaki (2003), Pessar (2003), Oishi (2005).

domestic caregivers or nurses.¹¹ Very little work has been done on migrant women entering male-dominated occupations or on how masculinized migratory flows are also gendered. By focusing on women migrants employed as farmworkers in Canada, we intend to fill this gap.

Methodology

Our study is part of the community university alliance Rural Women Making Change, a program of research that seeks to make visible the challenges facing rural women in their everyday lives, to bring a rural and gendered analysis to bear on the local and global processes from which these challenges stem, and to propose effective strategies to get rural women's concerns into policy agendas.¹² Our project within Rural Women Making Change sought to include the small but rapidly growing population of migrant women in rural Canada. Our fieldwork explored Mexican and Caribbean women who migrate seasonally via a highly managed temporary migrant worker program for agriculture and Low German-speaking Mennonites who engage in circular migration between Canada and Mexico via Canadian passports. This article concentrates on our Mexican temporary migrant worker participants. We conducted sixteen in-depth, one-on-one interviews, one focus group, and innumerable hours of ethnographic observation.¹³ Coauthor Evelyn Encalada Grez has considerable experience working with migrant farmworkers within Canada and various migrant-sending communities in Mexico

¹¹ See Arat-Koç (1989), Giles and Arat-Koç (1994), Macklin (1994), Stiell and England (1997), Pratt (1999), Chang (2000), Parreñas (2001), Stasiulis and Bakan (2003), Oishi (2005).

¹² For more information on Rural Women Making Change, see their Web site at <http://www.rwmc.uoguelph.ca>.

¹³ All participants were employed under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program and had worked between one and sixteen seasons. They ranged in age from twenty-five to forty-nine, and all but three had children. About half of the mothers had divorced or separated from their husbands; the other half had never married, nor had the three women without children. Most were from states in central Mexico, with the exception of two from Oaxaca. Participants were recruited in three localities in the province of Ontario: Niagara, the region employing the majority of women migrants; Leamington, the second-highest employer of women; and a remote, small locality (unidentified to preserve anonymity) employing very few migrants. Since social isolation characterizes the lived experience of transnational migration to rural Canada, our purposive sample sought to include women in areas of high and low migrant concentration. We conducted the interviews in 2006, all of which were subsequently transcribed in the original Spanish. All quotations are our translations; some have been edited with care to remain true to respondents' accounts. Any names that appear are pseudonyms.

as the cofounder of Justicia for Migrant Workers, a migrant-rights advocacy group.¹⁴ This article also rests on previous, ongoing research on migrant farmworkers in Canada, including some sixty in-depth interviews with men and women migrants as well as their allies, employers, and government representatives (Preibisch 2004, 2007) and doctoral research in Mexico and Canada.¹⁵ Since our research was not designed to be representative of the diverse range of agrifood operations hiring migrant workers, it should be interpreted within its limitations and, hopefully, will kindle further research in this area.

Migrant workers in Canadian agriculture

Global restructuring of agrifood markets has initiated significant changes in the employment of migrant labor in Canadian agriculture. The number of workers employed under temporary visas is increasing rapidly, practically doubling within the last decade. The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP), Canada's principal guestworker program for agriculture, now grants over 25,000 temporary visas annually. Further, a newly created temporary migrant worker program called the Low Skill Pilot Project (LSPP), which is not sector specific, employed at least a further 4,000 migrants in 2007 (HRSDC 2008).¹⁶ The range of industries eligible to receive temporary visa workers has also widened considerably, as has their geographical distribution. While the province of Ontario still employs some 78 percent of migrant farmworkers, they are now present in most provinces.¹⁷ Moreover, migrants' work seasons have lengthened both through extended visas under the new LSPP and as a greater number of employers hire workers for the maximum period. Furthermore, in 2007 it became easier and faster for employers to apply for and receive migrant workers as a result of a concerted policy agenda enacted by the Canadian government and policies within sending countries designed to improve the management of their worker-abroad programs. Finally, there is evi-

¹⁴ See Encalada Grez (2006).

¹⁵ The dissertation, by Encalada Grez, is currently in progress and is titled "Mexican Women Organizing Life, Love and Work across Rural Ontario and Rural Mexico: A Practice of Transnational Storytelling and a Proposed Translation for Change."

¹⁶ In 2007, the LSPP was renamed the "Pilot Project for Occupations Requiring Lower Levels of Formal Training (occupations listed in sections C and D of the National Occupations Code)." For ease of referencing, it is referred to by its previous name here.

¹⁷ "SAWP Number of Workers Admitted by Province and Country of Last Permanent Residence." Data requested from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Ottawa, July 11, 2007.

dence to suggest that migrant workers account for the greater share of total hours worked in some agricultural labor markets and that employers consider them to be their core labor force, with Canadian workers or permanent residents as supplements.

The increasing demand for migrant workers reflects the growth of labor-intensive agrifood industries in Canada that have shown success in global markets (Preibisch 2007). It also highlights a national labor market in which job shortages have been created in certain occupations that citizens with other employment opportunities reject (Bolaria 1992). Indeed, the working conditions in agriculture the world over are, to a large extent, socially created through low wages and poorly regulated labor environments (Castles 2006). Canada is no exception: Farmwork is at the bottom of the occupational ladder and among the most dangerous types of work. Although there is enormous variation among agricultural jobs, in general they are poorly rewarded in material and status terms, involve inconsistent hours, and often entail considerable physical exertion under variable climatic conditions. Agriculture is also less regulated than other sectors; farmworkers have historically been excluded from the protections other workers enjoy, including the right to unionize.

The social construction of labor conditions in Canadian agriculture has a long history. Throughout the postwar period, growers met their seasonal labor needs through marginalized or less-than-free populations, including prisoners of war, conscientious objectors, and orphans.¹⁸ In the 1960s, growers began incorporating noncitizen migrant labor into their operations, a practice that was institutionalized in 1966 with the SAWP. The program operates under bilateral frameworks of agreement between Canada and the labor source countries, namely Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Mexico, and members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. Under the SAWP, growers are able to hire migrant workers from these countries for as little as six weeks to as long as eight months and, in subsequent seasons, to request workers by name. The creation of the LSPP in 2002 liberalized the international labor pool available to Canadian employers, allowing them to hire migrant farmworkers from outside the SAWP bilateral partner countries. This policy change has opened the door to Chinese, Guatemalan, and Thai migrant farmworkers as employers seek out the country they perceive will offer the most hardworking, reliable, and flexible workforce.

Migrant workers constitute a desirable alternative to Canadian citizens or permanent residents for a number of reasons that have been amply

¹⁸ See Parr (1985), Satzewich (1991), Bolaria (1992), Wall (1992), Basok (2002).

documented.¹⁹ To begin, migrant workers' labor mobility is highly constrained through work permits that are valid only with a single designated employer.²⁰ This grants employers tremendous power to institute mechanisms of labor control, including the ability to repatriate workers when they are no longer required, if they demonstrate undesirable behavior, or if they fall ill or are injured. Recruitment policies in the sending countries play an important role in generating a premium pool of workers, especially by selecting individuals with prior experience in agriculture. To qualify for recruitment, individuals must have dependents, while Canadian visa restrictions require them to leave their families behind, a practice designed both to select workers with more reasons to return home than to stay and to reduce their social responsibilities during their migratory periods. Furthermore, migrant workers are recruited on the basis of need from countries with large populations in poverty, often from the rural landless and land-poor, a strategy that helps constitute them as a much more willing and committed workforce than that available within Canada. Finally, in an apparent breach of federal and provincial human rights legislation, employers are able to select their migrant employees on the basis of nationality and sex.²¹ This is a crucial element of temporary visa programs, enabling employers to create competition among labor-supply countries and workers themselves along a number of social hierarchies, in which gender and race figure prominently.

Gendered demand, gendered supply

International migration to work in the Canadian agricultural sector has been highly masculinized. Women did not participate for almost a quarter century after the SAWP was founded. Today, women represent between 2 and 3 percent of the workforce, with the vast majority from Mexico. Tracing the masculinization of migrant labor to Canadian agriculture reveals a complex set of gender ideologies held by farm operators, civil servants on both sides of the border, migrants' households and com-

¹⁹ See Bolaria (1992), Colby (1997), Smart (1997), Basok (2002), Binford (2002, 2004), Verma (2003), Preibisch (2004).

²⁰ Migrant farmworkers are unable to work legally for another employer without negotiating a government-approved contract transfer. Labor-sending countries and employers exert considerable pressure for migrants to return home upon completion of their contracts (or when they are injured or sick) in order to avoid visa overstays.

²¹ Although migrant workers are covered under federal and provincial legislation against these types of discrimination, at press time no individual or organization had launched a legal challenge against the government, presumably because of the costs involved.

munities, and migrants themselves. The supply side of this equation, involving the gender ideologies operating within migrant-sending countries that constrain or facilitate men's and women's migration, has received considerable attention in the gender and migration studies literature.²² In the case presented here, women have faced a number of institutional barriers to their participation as migrant farmworkers in Canada. The Mexican state did not allow women to participate until 1989, and only single mothers were eligible until 1998 (Preibisch and Hermoso Santa-maría 2006). Although Mexican officials claim that applicants can access the SAWP equally regardless of their sex or marital status, propaganda used to recruit participants in some Mexican states often specifies male applicants only. Moreover, our participants perceived the principal requirement for women's entry to be the status of single mother.

An additional factor that must be considered on the supply side is the social legitimacy of women's international migration (Oishi 2005). Although Mexican women are participating in U.S.-bound migration in record numbers, women's mobility is highly constrained by social norms and gender expectations (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 2003; Curran et al. 2006). As Shawn Malia Kanaiaupuni (2000) has argued, it is not the responsibility for children that explains Mexican women's lower participation in international migration but expectations of what it means to be a good wife or daughter. For all our respondents, the act of even initiating the application process required considerable fortitude, bravery, initiative, and perseverance. Two women spoke of their husbands' deterring their eventual migration with ultimatums and how these men ended up leaving them, despite the fact that their inability to provide economically had motivated these women's wishes to enter the SAWP. A third woman's ex-husband threatened to gain custody of their children if she migrated abroad. Other women faced significant opposition from fathers and brothers. Men in Shadira's (born 1974) family, for instance, had migrated to Canada for years but vehemently opposed her wishes to do so, refusing to provide her with any information on how to apply.

Women also confront considerable challenges in completing the application process, particularly because this initially involved traveling back and forth to Mexico City several times.²³ Although the costs of migration

²² See Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994, 2003), Kanaiaupuni (2000), Parreñas (2001, 2005), Pessar (2003), Oishi (2005).

²³ Many of the steps involved in applying and predeparture procedures have been devolved from federal offices in Mexico City to various employment centers at the state government level, thus decreasing the trips to Mexico City for most migrants.

to Canada are relatively low compared with undocumented migration to the United States, they are still out of reach for most rural women. One woman, Angelina (born 1967), recounting her reaction when someone told her the application process involved trips to the capital, said: “To say ‘go to Mexico City’ was like saying ‘go to end of the earth.’ Because of my economic situation I said: ‘where will I get so much money to go to that city? God knows that here I don’t even have food to give to my children. Where will I get money from? Who is going to loan me money when I don’t have anything?’ I don’t have land, I don’t have livestock. ‘If you don’t pay, we’ll take away the house.’ But I didn’t even have a house for them to take.” The journeys associated with the application process, while not as dangerous as those faced by undocumented U.S.-bound migrants, often place women in situations of risk. As Rosa (born 1950), among the SAWP’s first women, related:

I would go to the Ministry [of Labor] and they would say “come back in eight days”; then, “come back in fifteen days.” And that is how it was for two years. Sometimes I’d have to borrow money to go to Mexico City, where I had to stay in the bus terminal. Sometimes I’d sleep in different places because I didn’t have money to pay for a hotel or to eat properly. I’d have to wash up in public washrooms so I could look presentable among the administrators of the program and sometimes stay overnight outside the offices of the ministry.

Stories like Rosa’s must be read within the context of high rates of gender-based violence in Mexico City (CDHDF 2008) and the fact that at least one woman in the program’s history has been raped outside the offices of the Ministry of Labor. Despite these and various other obstacles—being told there was no employer demand for women, obstructionist or indifferent government personnel, congested phone lines—our respondents persevered with their decisions to migrate.

Once in Canada, women have to contend with stigma from both the migrant community and their home communities, who see them both as questionable mothers and as sexually available women (Preibisch 2005; Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría 2006). Gloria (born 1973) described the verbal abuse by male coworkers in Canada: “Many of the men that pass you in the street call you a pile of stupid things. For the men, all of us women working here [in Canada] are prostitutes.” Nonmigrant women criticize migrant women for leaving their children and accuse them of being home wreckers who extract men’s earnings in Canada. In particular,

the wives of male migrants see their husbands' female coworkers as potential threats to their marriages. To illustrate, Gloria described the hostility she senses from migrants' wives when they accompany their husbands to the government offices: "You feel them staring at you up and down in the lines and they lift their heads high. [You want to say:] 'Señora, it's not me, it could be someone else [having relationships with the men], not just us [Mexican women], but white or black women.' Well, it is one of the ways we [women who migrate] suffer." In women's home communities, their migration is vilified while men's is socially accepted. Indeed, while men are seen as fulfilling their primary gender role by engaging in transnational livelihoods, women who do so are seen as deserting theirs, at least according to how motherhood has traditionally been defined.

Of principal concern to the women we interviewed, however, is not how they are perceived by others but the outcomes of migration for their children. As Angelina related, "I told my mother: 'Look, I'm going to submit my paperwork, and if I manage to get in, you can be sure that my marriage is over, but I don't care. What I care about are my children.'" Another woman explained that when life and work in Canada became unbearable, she coped by thinking of her son. Our participants often reiterated that women's international labor migration is primarily motivated by maternal love, even though it means separating from their children for up to eight months every year. Women frequently spoke of their migration as a sacrifice that could create alternative futures for their children by providing the education they never had. When women discussed the injustices they suffered as part of their destination experiences, these were often framed in pragmatic terms, as circumstances that they had no choice but to bear as they focused squarely on their purpose for migrating—their children—a theme we revisit later.²⁴

The demand side of gendered migration flows is an equally compelling but less studied area in the literature, involving the highly ideological territory of immigration policy but also the gendered and racialized perceptions of employers offering work (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1997; Oishi 2005; Griffith 2006). Indeed, the overwhelming preponderance of men as migrant agricultural workers in the SAWP (and conversely, the pre-

²⁴ Not all women migrating to Canada as farmworkers are single mothers or have children. Single women also participate, often as the primary breadwinner in their households. These women confront stigma in different ways: they are not mothers leaving children behind, but they are engaging in two activities typed as male (international migration and farmwork) without recourse to the justification that their choice to migrate was imposed through male abandonment and/or maternal responsibility.

ponderance of women as caregivers under Canada's other flagship managed migration scheme, the Live-In Caregiver Program) illustrates how entrenched gender segmentation can become if the tools are made available to do so. Given findings in the literature on gender and agriculture highlighted earlier, which depict a highly patriarchal agrarian culture operating within high-income countries, it is not surprising that male migrants are the preferred candidates. Canadian employers and civil servants hold rigid gender ideologies that perceive women as less suitable for farmwork (Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría 2006). One civil servant, explaining employers' reticence to hire women, claimed:

There are some inherent logistical problems not only in accommodations but the nature of the work. . . . [When hiring women] you have to be a bit more selective in assigning the job duties. Because women are great if they're standing and working with their hands, which is what food processing is all about, or packing, if you're packing fruit . . . but if you put a female into a tobacco priming aid . . . [employers] may find they may not be as durable, or the longevity of females may not be as great over time. . . . I'm not saying [women] can't do it [but] employers are leery about making wholesale changes.²⁵

As this excerpt illustrates, women are generally perceived as suitable for only some of the tasks that compose farmwork, whereas men are considered appropriate for the full range of activities.

Gender ideologies explain part, but not all, of the scarce presence of women as migrant farmworkers in Canada. Historically, the importation of racialized male labor was also aimed at maintaining images of migrant workers as temporary, asexual, and alien (Galabuzi 2006). Canadian rural communities remain racially homogeneous places within a nation that continues to hold strong political and cultural attachments to its history as a white settler society (Galabuzi 2006; Sharma 2006). Critical historical analysis of government discussions regarding the SAWP has revealed how official discourse, by means of racist, negative depictions, legitimized indenturing Caribbean and Mexican men to agricultural jobs and denying them the opportunity to apply for permanent settlement (Satzewich 1991; Sharma 2001). Indeed, migrants to Canada enter an ideological context that is by no means neutral, one in which racialized forms of difference play a central role in organizing inequalities (Sharma 2006). Not sur-

²⁵ Interview of Canadian civil servant by Kerry L. Preibisch, Toronto, 2002. The name of the interviewee has been withheld to protect anonymity.

prisingly, farm operators' efforts to bring migrants into rural communities, from the 1960s to the present day, have been met with considerable resistance by local residents. In order to mitigate xenophobic opposition from their neighbors that could ignite political debate around guestworker programs, employers have engaged in a number of measures to make migrant workers less visible, including concealing their housing. They have also attempted to constitute the black and brown bodies of migrant men as both temporary and less dangerous, seeking to limit their sexuality by constraining their mobility or recruiting married applicants of a single sex.

Efforts to desexualize workers have been complicated by a number of processes, including the recruitment of women migrant workers, which gathered pace in the 1990s as certain labor-intensive industries began achieving dynamic growth. Although today women constitute some 600 of the 27,000 to whom visas are issued—a mere 2 percent of the labor force—their numbers show modest increases. The incorporation of women into the production of select commodities and into particular stages of production reveals the gendered process by which this has occurred. In 2002, for example, close to half of all women workers employed were involved in fruit production, with greenhouse horticulture and floriculture as the next main destinations for female workers. This contrasts to the SAWP overall, in which tobacco, tomato, and fruit production are the top employers (Weston and Scarpa de Masellis 2004). Our ethnographic research suggests that women are performing particular tasks within these commodity sectors, such as packing fruit, potting seedlings, and cutting flowers.

Ironically, the same gendered ideologies that pose obstacles to women's employment in agriculture have become the grounds for their recruitment (Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría 2006). Employers and civil servants claim that women possess a finer, lighter touch and are more patient, responsible, and productive than men. Men's and women's suitability for farmwork in Canada is also highly racialized (Preibisch and Binford 2007). This is expressed, for example, in employers' perceptions regarding the appropriateness of workers for tasks according to their nationality but also through racialized perceptions regarding work ethic. The circulation of these gendered and racialized discourses has a number of functions. For one, they serve to characterize men and women from the global South as naturally suited to agricultural work and less deserving of the employment options, working conditions, and legal entitlements Canadian citizens enjoy. A second major function is their role in constituting the perceived ideal workers for production. As Leslie Salzinger (2003) argues,

“femininity matters in global production not because it accurately describes a set of exploitable traits, but because it functions as a constitutive discourse which creates exploitable subjects” (21). When employers use racialized and gendered discourses to compare and contrast workers in terms of who is better at a particular task, harder working, or less problematic, they are communicating what they see as desirable traits for workers. As migrants are well aware, those who conform to this fantasy will be requested for the following season. The role of gender, race, and citizenship in organizing work is thus reflected not only in the lack of women’s participation as migrant farmworkers overall but in their specific insertion in production, the gender ideologies surrounding it, and shop-floor practices, an area to which we now turn.

Gendered, racialized employment relations

Farmwork is among the most gendered and racialized occupations in Canada, highly segregated by sex, race, class, age, and citizenship. Within the agricultural workplaces hiring a substantial amount of paid labor, the general contours of a social hierarchy can be discerned. At the apex of the hierarchy are the best jobs, fewer in number and characterized as requiring lower physical exertion, monotony, or contact with dirt or the elements. Included here are positions involving control over machinery or personnel. At the base of the hierarchy are the famous “3-D jobs”: dirty, difficult, and often dangerous. Jobs at the apex are often assigned to white men and women, including members of the farm operators’ family, even children. Local whites—those whom growers refer to as Canadians—are near the top. Descending down the hierarchy, the next positions are filled by so-called “immigrants”: Canadian citizens or permanent residents who belong to racialized groups. Many of these workers are people who can only take up flexible and seasonal work because of their reproductive responsibilities (as mothers) or productive engagement elsewhere (as students or part-time workers). Others include those who cannot find or retain employment in better-paying, higher-status jobs (elders or those lacking English, for instance). Migrant farmworkers are located at the bottom rung of the social hierarchy in agriculture, followed only by undocumented migrants of color, if present.²⁶

²⁶ This general sketch of labor-intensive agriculture has numerous limitations. Employment practices vary greatly by commodity, geographical location, and the dynamics of the local labor market. Furthermore, although we have depicted farm operators as white and

Temporary migrant worker programs further entrench existing structures of labor segmentation by allowing employers to formally choose their staff on the basis of sex and nationality (often a euphemism for race). They also enable and legitimize a range of employment practices that hinge on differentiating workers on the basis of gendered and racialized criteria. Most immediately, temporary migrant worker programs enhance employers' ability to segment their production processes along linguistic and cultural lines. In those workplaces where employers have recruited women to work alongside men, for example, a trend has emerged to segment the sexes by country. In particular, this tendency prevails in the tender fruit industry, where farm operators will hire Mexican women for the packinghouse of a fruit orchard picked by Jamaican men, according to a litany of gendered and racialized essentialisms. Employers and civil servants frankly acknowledge that this hiring strategy is intended to create barriers within the workplace that will both mitigate the potential for greater socializing that accompanies the introduction of a mixed-sex environment and reduce the formation of intimate relationships that could create new social commitments (Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría 2006). The fact that migrant farmworkers have fewer social obligations than their Canadian counterparts is precisely one of the reasons why they are valued by their employers (Basok 2002; Preibisch 2004). As mentioned earlier, employers also seek to reduce the extent to which rural communities perceive male migrants in their full humanity as sexual beings, including as the potential partners of white women.

Temporary migrant worker programs, moreover, allow employers to hire a range of workers who can be compared, contrasted, and ultimately placed in opposition to one another. The hiring of different groups of workers and their assignment to particular tasks, along with their accompanying discursive justifications—Jamaicans as stronger, Mexicans as more docile, women as patient, men as less complicated—send messages to workers that communicate “specific understandings of who they are and what the work requires” (Salzinger 2003, 20). One medium that communicates these discourses to migrants is the constitution of the workforce that is rehired each year, a process that we describe in greater detail below. They are also communicated through praise or censure of performance and behavior. Our respondents indicated that their employers commend them for their perceived greater compliance, attention to detail, and greater dexterity. Maria (born 1963) claimed her boss hires women be-

male, a small number of farms in Canada are owned and operated by men of color and white women.

cause “women bring more enthusiasm to work than men. We are four women here in Canada for eight months and there are men that at the fifth or sixth month you can see their exhaustion or laziness to even walk. Not women—we are always active.” The reinforcement of gendered subjectivities even transcends the workplace and invades migrants’ quarters, where women are praised for keeping better quarters than men. To provide the most blatant example of how gendered roles are cultivated outside of work, one employer annually awards a trophy, “The Golden Broom,” to the cleanest residence.

This register of positive feminine traits, however, is also accompanied by negative ones. The most common negative stereotype of women that is communicated by employers and civil servants, and internalized by migrants, is that women are “problematic,” a broad label that encapsulates a range of behaviors considered uniquely feminine. Being problematic, for instance, often refers to a perceived female propensity to engage in dramatic infighting that affects the work environment or impinges on managers’ time by forcing them to act as mediators. Being problematic also includes women’s capacity to reproduce. Employers see women who arrive pregnant or become pregnant in Canada as a major inconvenience, and pregnancy is (unofficial) grounds for repatriation. Fernanda’s (born 1965) employer became aware that she was expecting a child when internal bleeding prompted a doctor to prescribe two weeks’ rest; she was berated and sent home on the next flight. Employers and the governments of migrant-sending countries attempt to avoid these scenarios through such measures as predeparture pregnancy tests, but because the tests do not occur at the airport (as they do for women from the Caribbean), some women are pregnant during their work periods in Canada. Those who want to remain working or, at a minimum, be allowed to participate in the SAWP in subsequent years, go to great lengths to conceal their pregnancies, continuing to undertake arduous tasks and refraining from seeking medical care that could draw attention.

In addition, being problematic also refers to women who assert themselves by reaching out to advocacy organizations or Mexican authorities to solve their personal or workplace concerns, including the exercise of their legal rights and entitlements. In general, the migrants who do so, or who even raise complaints, risk immediate repatriation.²⁷ Employers’ ability to select their workers on the basis of nationality and sex grants them immeasurable power to discipline the workforce by, for instance, firing a group of workers and hiring workers of another nationality or sex

²⁷ See Colby (1997), Basok (2002), Verma (2003), Binford (2004), Preibisch (2004).

when they are displeased with workers' behavior or performance (Preibisch and Binford 2007). In one case, a farm hired only Mexicans until a wildcat strike by the men led to their immediate deportation and replacement with Jamaicans. As Gloria recounted, "Imagine, the [Mexican] men were kicked out from one day to the next and that night the Jamaicans arrived. . . . I think that owing to the strike the men held, the company wanted to do a test. Now that they've seen that, more or less, the Jamaicans have worked out well, there are more." The practice of switching migrant-sending countries, or threatening to do so, disciplines both workers and their states, whose economies rely heavily on remittance income (Preibisch and Binford 2007). It is no surprise that migrants mistrust and heavily criticize the Mexican government personnel in Canada whose role is to represent workers, given that their ability to do so is compromised by their simultaneous responsibility to increase their country's share of job placements on farms and to ensure the continued flow of remittances home.

The timbre of the disciplinary mechanisms that communicate to migrants their precarious hold on their jobs in Canada is amplified among women. The scarce number of female positions—a ratio of one position for women to forty-three for men—serves as a constant reminder to women of their disposability. Rural women's subordination within their home countries and within the global economic system means that they highly value these select positions, most likely to a greater degree than men do. Women in our study repeatedly explained the challenges they had to overcome to acquire their transnational livelihoods and stressed the importance of protecting their Canadian jobs, which maintained their families and allowed them to access property, housing, and investment capital—endowments formerly far from their reach. Most of our participants had similar work trajectories prior to migrating internationally, holding low-paying jobs working in maquiladoras, industrial homework, seasonal farmwork, domestic labor, or petty commerce. As women, particularly as rural women, their employment options were severely limited. For single mothers, the main demographic among SAWP women, their situation was further aggravated by their lone headship of their households.

Women are therefore highly protective of their jobs and constantly feel the need to prove themselves as able workers. This is reflected in Gloria's account of how Mexicans have been replaced by Jamaicans at her workplace:

Each year there were sixty [Mexican] women. Then they reduced the numbers by five year by year. Now there are only fifteen of us

for picking, but we finish the work in the same amount of time as before. They even rated our work with scanners and punch cards that counted each row. For us it was terrible pressure. Even a supervisor inquired, "Why are you rushing like mad?" I think that we've fought hard among us to be the fastest, to produce more work. We've given so much of ourselves, and it is a form of protecting our work.

Likewise, Jessica (born 1980) claimed: "We work harder than men; you can tell. Sometimes even our male coworkers tell us the same: 'You women are harder workers than us.' We see some of the men weeding and then they sit down and they start to talk, and we don't. We may talk but we do not stop working."

Women not only test their physical capacities to the limit in order to protect their jobs, but they also submit to substandard housing, poor working conditions, and a range of employer demands. Some will forgo medical attention if they perceive it might threaten their jobs. It is likely that some women have also had to tolerate workplace sexual harassment; at least one woman was repatriated in 2007 for refusing to have sex with her boss. When questioned, women justify their compliance with these and other indignities first and foremost by citing their responsibilities to their children and families. To illustrate, Jessica stated that "sometimes tiredness does not matter but rather money for the family so that they can be taken care of." Gisela (born 1978) claimed: "I adapt everywhere. All that I care about is that there is work; what I like is to work. I do not care about the house where I live, if it is nice or awful, that is of least importance to me." Indeed, it is likely that women's commitment to their gendered responsibilities constitutes them as highly valuable workers.

Disturbingly, our respondents appeared to identify their precarious status as self-created. To illustrate, Lupe (born 1959) declared: "We women are killing this source of employment due to the problems that there are in all the houses. This is why the program closed employment to women for a time." Another respondent claimed: "We did damage to ourselves on our own, creating little problems and everything." Further, Shadira explained: "If we do not protect our place, they will divide half Mexicans and half Jamaicans in some of the farms." Women's observations of continual labor replacement along gendered and racial lines make employers' verbal threats to enact such replacements almost superfluous.

As we have argued, the operation of temporary migrant worker programs in Canada serves to create deeply divisive workforces in which employees compete with one another to hold on to their jobs. It is within

this context that employer allegations that women are more problematic must be read. Whether or not women's perceived tendency to compete with one another is carried from Mexico as part of their psychological baggage allowance, it is certainly cultivated within Canada. More often than not, women are forced to live in tight quarters, often sharing rooms with strangers, because of the heavy rotation of women from year to year on any given farm. Since the quality of migrant housing is very weakly regulated, it ranges from very good to very poor, with most somewhere in the middle. Poor housing—particularly overcrowded, underserviced accommodations—exacerbates tensions. Racial divisions are aggravated by some employers who physically separate workers from different countries, as is the case on one farm where bathrooms, bedrooms, and kitchens are divided with signs labeled “Mexicans” and “Jamaicans.” Competition between women is also heightened in the male-dominated migrant community environment in which women are highly sexualized. This further filters into the workplace when employers and supervisors enter into sexual relationships with migrant women. At times, women in these relationships use their power over others; at the minimum, these arrangements intensify the existing tensions between women.

Women also face greater restrictions on their mobility. Our research corroborates findings that women's movements and sexuality are highly constrained by practices restricting women to the farm property, prohibiting or curtailing visitors of the opposite sex, and establishing curfews (Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría 2006; Becerril 2007). On some farms, women are under heavy surveillance, either by the farm operator and his or her kin on smaller farms or by supervisors and even security guards on larger operations. In one case, a sign in Spanish dictated the times when visitors were allowed and ominously warned that a private security company was reporting violations. On another farm, a sign warned that men were not allowed on the property. Control exercised through restrictive farm rules exacerbates tensions among migrant women housed in enclosed quarters on isolated farms without recreational breaks from the monotony of their daily routines.

Labor-sending governments have been willing participants in the policing of women's movements and their sexuality. At one time Mexico's predeparture orientation for women involved talks that warned them not to become involved with men and even required them to sign waivers signaling their agreement. The division fostered between women has resulted in some migrant women actively participating in these practices of labor control, including enforcing employer-imposed curfews, passing information to the boss, or notifying the Ministry of Labor of women who

form sexual relationships with men or, conversely, those who transgress heterosexual norms. As this discussion of gendered and racialized employment relations highlights, migrant women's position at the bottom of the social hierarchy within their Canadian workplaces and the subordination they face as a result of their subject positions within their home countries constitute them as particularly vulnerable recipients of this peculiar panoply of labor control, with considerable consequences for their lives.

Conclusion

The global restructuring of agriculture is dramatically disrupting and realigning how women and men around the world relate to agriculture. Those seeking to understand the new social relations of agriculture in North America, Europe, and other parts of the high-income world must look beyond the family farm if they are to comprehend fully the range and scale of changes underway. Increasingly, this involves turning our attention to rising international migration from the global South, an exercise that demands further interrogation of the processes that link agriculture's multiple sites of production, including models of economic growth that promote the redundancy of small-scale agriculture, favor export-led strategies, and create highly competitive agrifood markets. In the case of Canada, temporary migrant worker programs have played an essential role in allowing labor-intensive agricultural operations to withstand, and even thrive under, the pressures of recent global restructuring. While these programs are lauded for their role in guaranteeing growers a supply of labor in periods of peak production, they do much more than that. They grant employers access to a highly vulnerable group of workers who, once in Canada, are positioned disadvantageously within the labor market through a range of social and political disentanglements. Furthermore, they allow employers to further entrench existing structures of labor segmentation and facilitate the implementation of a particular set of employment practices that would not be possible with only a domestic workforce.

As we have shown, the systems of labor control and forms of work organization made possible through these programs rely on multiple systems of oppression, particularly power relations based on gender, race, and citizenship, among others. These strategies have yielded a degree of success, infusing greater flexibility into the agricultural labor market. While the focus of our article was to document and analyze these processes, particularly as they relate to gender and women in agriculture, it would be disingenuous to ignore how they do not proceed smoothly—that is,

how points of resistance emerge. Indeed, migrant women find ways to assert their agency in multiple ways in order to contest their terms of employment and social location within Canadian society. Despite a range of obstacles to prevent them from forming social relationships with one another or the broader community, for instance, they overcome linguistic, cultural, and racial barriers to become friends, lovers, and, in some cases, parents. Despite efforts to divide them, women demonstrate remarkable solidarity with one another by, for example, helping to hide a coworker's pregnancy or protecting another from repatriation. Despite legal impediments to their permanent immigration, they seek ways to negotiate Canadian citizenship or to bring their children to visit them in Canada. Despite controls on their bodies and their sexuality, they actively contest efforts to dehumanize them by leaving farms on weekends to attend dances, by forming intimate relationships with others, by breaking curfew, or by inviting guests to farm premises. Finally, despite attempts to keep these rural women from making change, they speak to researchers and activists so their stories of struggle are not silenced. These forms of contestation, a topic for a future paper, are indeed the most remarkable *lado* of life on the northern side of *el otro lado*.

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