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Mélissa Dubé

AUTEUR DE LA THÈSE / AUTHOR OF THESIS

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**Two Words, Two Realities
The Social Experience of Seasonal Agricultural Workers in Québec**

TITRE DE LA THÈSE / TITLE OF THESIS

Philippe Couton

DIRECTEUR (DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS SUPERVISOR

CO-DIRECTEUR (CO-DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS CO-SUPERVISOR

Deborah Sick

Susan Spronk

Gary W. Slater

Le Doyen de la Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales / Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

**Two Worlds, Two Realities –
The Social Experience of Seasonal Agricultural Workers in
Québec**

By

Mélissa Dubé

B.A. (Co-op) with Honours in Spanish, St. Thomas University, 2007

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Abstract

This thesis explores the social experience of Mexican and Guatemalan temporary immigrants in Québec who are part of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) and the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP). Two distinct perspectives exist on the matter: that the programs are beneficial for all parties involved (workers, employers, and governments); and, that the programs exploit the workers involved, who must make important sacrifices and get meagre benefits. In the literature review, a neoliberal environment is found to be a macro factor that affected the programs substantially. This thesis, based on qualitative research conducted with workers and other program participants, brings new evidence to bear on these debates. Even though the workers come to Québec strictly to earn money for their families, the social isolation and language barrier they endure in their host communities make their lives in Canada often very difficult. While more and more activities for the workers are being organised, additional efforts could be made. This thesis concludes that, overall the experience of the workers is not poor, but there is clearly room for improvement in order to balance their significant sacrifices and the benefits they (and Canada) get from the difficult work they perform.

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Thank you to everyone who has participated in my research. You all have shown a great deal of generosity that was needed in order to tell the real story. All those involved have shown kindness and humanity and I sincerely believe that by all working together, the social experience of the workers could be greatly improved. I also want to share my everlasting admiration and respect that I have for the workers I have met, but also for all the others I did not get the opportunity to meet. They have shown me what true dedication and love for their own is. It is because of these people, wonderful human beings, that this research was done. Their hope is contagious and I am honoured to have the privilege to be their voice. Listen to their voices.

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

-Mahatma Gandhi

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Chapter One – Introduction

A number of questions may come to mind when one is at the market or the grocery store buying fruits and vegetables: Were they produced locally? How fresh are they? Were pesticides used? Etc. While these inquiries are valid, too often we forget to ask ourselves questions about the hands that picked our fresh lettuce and strawberries. We forget about them, or we do not even realise and think of the long hours they spend out in the burning sun or in the cold of early mornings cutting the vegetables free while there is still a haze over the fields. This thesis focuses entirely on these hands, on these men and women who are hundreds of kilometres away from home in order to provide food on their family's table and on our Québec tables.

There is an important pool of studies that have been conducted throughout Canada, with Ontario in the lead as the hosting province to seasonal agricultural workers. The province that receives the second highest number of immigrant workers, Québec has been the topic of very few studies on its seasonal immigration cohort. Giselle Valarezo (2007), whose master's thesis is called "Out of Necessity and into the Fields: Migrant Farmworkers in St Rémi, Québec", is one of the few who has explored this cohort in Québec. "Fight Back Workplace Justice for Immigrants" by Choudry et al (2009:57-73) also presents a chapter on the seasonal agricultural workers in Québec. This thesis will add empirical findings to the few studies done in the province.

The new visa requirement, imposed on Mexican travellers in 2009 by the Conservative government, shows that Mexican immigration into Canada is not a new trend, but is an increasingly complex process. Guatemalan entries also are increasing. Both immigrant cohorts are worth studying due to the growing number of requests and of

newcomers who come on a permanent, temporary or humanitarian basis. In 2008, there were a total of 20,900 entries of Mexican temporary foreign workers and 3,303 entries of Guatemalan temporary foreign workers in Canada (CIC, 2008). This study focuses on the temporary stays of the Mexicans part of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) and of the Guatemalans part of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). The demand by Canadian farmers has been considerably increasing and the number of workers has also been escalating accordingly.

Two distinct perspectives arise from the literature review on this matter. They can be summarized as follows: the first one argues that these programs are beneficial for Guatemalans, Mexicans and Québécois (and Canadians). The second argues that these programs exploit workers who are treated, at times, in ways that approach conditions of contemporary slavery.

This thesis will explore the social experience lived by the Mexican and Guatemalan seasonal agricultural workers in Québec¹. It will also analyze the impact that the seasonal stay and the money earned of the workers have on their family and on their home community. The research I have conducted will contribute new empirical information on these two important groups, based on original fieldwork and qualitative interviews conducted in the province of Québec.

Further exploration on the subject is also needed as Canada and Mexico have a strong partnership, based on a number of agreements, which facilitates migration between

¹ Please note that throughout this thesis, the immigrating cohort and workers that is referred to, unless specified otherwise, is part of the Mexican Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) and the Guatemalan Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP).

the two countries (Government of Canada, 2010). Canada also has bilateral relations with Guatemala and shares interests alike while both governments are looking into signing more agreements (Government of Canada, 2010). This research intends to document the social experiences of the workers from both countries and also has potential to be used for government policies to enhance the already existing programs. More broadly, the Canadian agriculture sector plays a huge role in the country's economy. It is worth \$90 billion a year and ranks the fourth in the world when it comes to exporting food or food products to other countries (Gibb, 2006:6), in no small part because of seasonal workers.

Richard E. Mueller (2005) underlines the importance of taking a closer look at the Mexican immigrants as they are likely to continue to come to Canada for a number of reasons: NAFTA, Canada's workers shortage, and the return of the Mennonite² population. TFWP is viewed by the Guatemalan government as very important and as a "model for arrangements with other countries" (Government of Canada b, 2010). In fact, the numbers of Guatemalan workers have increased from 300 to 3,000 since the start of the program. Since "throughout [its] (...) history, Canada has sought immigration to expand the population, boost the economy, and develop society" (Gibney & Hansen, 2005:63), it is vital to address the social aspect of this temporary migration.

The second chapter will explore the literature on several important aspects to provide the context of this study. Aspects such as Canada's labour shortage, facts on legal

² The Mennonite population is a group of people originally from Manitoba and Saskatchewan who moved to Mexico in the 1920s. Due to NAFTA, globalization, the scarcity of lands, declining agricultural prices, the increase in the cost of living and in the use (abuse) of alcohol and drugs, the younger generations of this group have been moving back to Canada in hope of better living (Mueller, 2005 38)

Guatemalan and Mexican migrants, the SAWP, the TFWP, integration, immigration in Canada, contexts in Mexico and Guatemala, and remittances are explored. Hypotheses are derived from this literature review that will guide the empirical research. Chapter three discusses the methodology used to conduct this study. In the next chapters, empirical findings are discussed: chapter four is the personal experience of the seasonal agricultural workers while chapter five focuses on the impact that their employment and the money earned has on their family and home community. Chapter six presents conclusions inspired by empirical findings discussed.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

Peter S. Li argues that:

immigrant nations are constituted by waves of settlers and immigrants from the outside such that the majority of the population is not indigenous to the land.... Like the United States, Canada is a country of immigrants in that most of its people originated from another country and moved to Canada either in their generation or in previous generations (2003:9).

Being a country of immigrants, Canada has always had an interest in how immigrants settle and integrate. It is said that Canada is now facing a labour shortage and is attempting to attract workers from across the world. These seasonal workers may address the agricultural Canadian labour shortage, but it is important to look at their social experience within the Canadian context. Statistics show that the number of Guatemalan and Mexican immigrants coming into Canada, on a temporary or on a permanent basis, is increasing every year (CIC, 2006 and 2008). Therefore, these migrant cohorts are likely to play a role in addressing the labour shortage.

The following sections of this chapter will present the social and economic context of Canada, and of Guatemala and Mexico. Topics including the history and structure of the programs (SAWP and TFWP), the participation of women, working conditions, the impact felt by the family and the community of the agricultural workers, remittances and integration will also be analyzed. The last section presents the two contrasting perspectives mentioned above.

Context

Canada's Agricultural Labour Shortage

Addressing the reason why foreign temporary workers are needed is important to establish the relevance of conducting this study. Bente Baklid (2008:2) states that the Conference Board of Canada foresees the year 2011 as the year when Canada will attain its peak of labour shortage because of the baby boomers reaching 65 years of age and retiring. Smith and Edmonston, quoted by Putnam (2007:140) maintain that "In advanced countries with aging populations, immigration is important to help offset the impending fiscal effects of the retirement of the babyboom generation". This highlights the urgent necessity to attract temporary and permanent immigrants to fill this need. In addition, Burstein and Biles mention that Canada needs to create a policy that will permit to not only attract but also retain productive (low or high skilled) immigrant workers (2003). Peter S. Li (2004:76) also notes that the solution to stabilize Canada's population will be immigration and not fertility as the latter will be insufficient to make up for the increasing death rate. It is said that "Scholars recognize that international migration is a growing global phenomenon, so much so that it is changing the geography of labour by creating pools of flexible workers that are able to temporarily transcend national borders" (Valarezo, 2007:12). Based on the increasing statistics of Mexican and Guatemalan immigration, these two groups are likely to play an important role in this process.

However, questions arise: what is the meaning of "labour shortage"? Why is there a persistent unemployment while we face a shortage? "The number of resident Canadians willing to work in horticulture declined 25 per cent during the 1990s" writes Brem (2006:3) from The North-South Institute. Satzewich writes that the Canadian Federation of

Agriculture has confirmed the shortage, which is especially crucial at season's peak: "there is a continuing need for seasonal harvest labour for picking, on fruit, vegetable, flower and tobacco farms" (1991:60). During the interview I conducted for the purpose of this research, the FERME employee answered that there is a shortage in agriculture but also in other areas. The employee commented that the climate changes; the seasons are longer (thus agricultural work is longer and more difficult); students are more interested in working in stores that offer less tiring work that is not seasonal; and there are fewer students available to work in that area who are in the regions. Tremblay (2009) quotes the Québec Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity, Sam Hamad who said: "D'ici trois ans, on prévoit 460 000 départs à la retraite, ce qui créera une pression sans précédent sur le marché du travail. Puisque les travailleurs sont en position de choisir, ils vont se tourner vers des emplois de 'qualité', ceux qui offrent davantage d'heures tout au long de l'année". Moreover, "in general, farm labour employment is characterized by poor wages, poor and unsafe working conditions, long hours of work, the lack of protection under provincial labour standards legislation, and the absence of habitable accommodation" as Satzewich pointed out (1991:62).

The Minister added that there is a shortage not only in Québec, but in Canada, Australia and the United States of America: the countries are competing for mobile labour (Tremblay, 2009). Canada competes on a global scale to host the skilled and unskilled workers but, "Canada has the fourth largest inflow of foreign workers" (Hennebry, 2008:342). Satzewich also confirms that "there has (...) been a historical dependence on foreign-born labour to fill harvest labour positions" (1991:121). Valarezo, citing Brem

(2005), adds that “Quebec manifestly depends on migrant labour in order to maintain its vital agricultural sector” (2007:47).

Dalia Gesualdi-Fecteau, a lawyer who also works at the *Commission des normes du travail* of Québec, maintains that according to the Canadian government, there is a permanent labour shortage in agriculture, but that to address this shortage; the government attracts temporary immigration (Centre international de solidarité ouvrière, 2010). The workers are not blind to this phenomenon as Satzewich explains:

The contradiction (and injustice) of where in many cases the same temporary workers have come to constitute a permanent part of the Canadian labour force is not lost to the workers themselves. According to one participant in the migration stream ‘we have become the new coolies in Canada - good enough to work on the land but not good enough to remain in the country’ (1991:115-116).

The government, at first, maintained that they were not sure if the workers would be needed the following year, thus explaining their temporary stay (Choudry et al, 2009:60). However, as it is known, workers are coming year after year and the numbers are in fact increasing significantly. The government was even asked why the workers are not given residency since they will be needed the year after (Choudry et al, 2009:61). The government responded that “If we gave them residency they wouldn't be obligated to stay in the agriculture sector” (Choudry et al, 2009:61). It was then concluded that it is not a matter of temporary need but rather a “you stay in agriculture and you stay there” (Choudry et al, 2009:61).

Immigration Phenomenon Defined

Immigration has played a very important role throughout the history of Canada, often described as a “nation of immigrants”. Throughout the years, the government of Canada has either welcomed with open arms different ethnic groups or simply banned them. Immigrants have been welcomed to further the economic growth and open new areas to agriculture, especially west of the country. The government implemented a point system in 1967 to allow a non-discriminatory system on the countries of origin of the immigrants (Beaujot, 2002:4-5). The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), was passed in 2002, and is intended to ensure the respect of the rights of all individuals with regards to immigration. When the IRPA took effect, it had a tremendous impact on the temporary immigration: “there has been an increasing emphasis on the recruitment of temporary migrant workers since changes to the IRPA came into force in 2002” (Hennebry, 2008:343). Nowadays, immigration is essential to Canada as it “comprises about half of population growth” (Beaujot, 2002:2).

Immigration is generally understood to be a movement of individuals or groups who go from one country to another, and who may be seeking citizenship, in order to settle permanently or temporarily, generally for economic or social reasons. There is a major difference between asylum seekers and immigrants as the former are likely to be forced to leave their country while the latter are usually willing to move (Gibney & Hansen, 2005:xxii). However, “willing” to move does not necessarily mean that they are enthusiastic about moving but rather they are usually doing it out of necessity. In the host and origin countries, immigration can be a divisive topic as it often gives rise to large-scale debates on

issues including racism, multiculturalism, economic growth, diversity, politics, integration, and emigration just to name a few.

Immigration is further divided into the permanent and temporary flows. Under the permanent immigrant category, immigrants may be found under the objectives of “reuniting families, contributing to economic development and protecting refugees” (CIC, 2006:25). The economic class comprises people chosen because of their skills and capability to contribute to the economy. These people can be live-in caregivers and skilled workers for example (CIC, 2006:26). They are the workers Canada competes internationally to attract. Refugees are accepted when it is proven that they are thought to be risking their lives in their home country. On the other hand, a temporary resident is “a person who is lawfully in Canada for a temporary period of time. Temporary residents include students, foreign workers and visitors, such as tourists” (CIC, 2006:59). Generally speaking, foreign workers must have a job offer and a work permit prior to arriving in Canada (CIC, 2006:62). The seasonal agricultural workers, subject of this research, fall in the “foreign workers” category.

Tanya Basok (2007: no page number) mentions that to policymakers, temporary migration is more appealing than permanent migration:

In particular, temporary migration permits greater flexibility in the labor market and can seem more acceptable to electorates that find permanent immigration ‘threatening’. Also, a legal channel for labor migration can reduce flows of unauthorized immigrants. A less considered reason among destination countries is the development impact of migrants remitting income.

Thus, the “Economist Manolo Abella conservatively estimates that, since 2000, the temporary migration of foreign workers into high-income countries has grown at about 4 to

5 percent a year” (Basok, 2007: no page number). This shows that it is a popular trend encouraged by “high income” countries as it is less threatening than permanent immigration. It can also be an interesting option for workers who may not necessarily want to move permanently to another country. Often, however, the family cannot move temporarily along with the worker which can be a drawback. After looking at the broad picture of immigration within Canada, the next section will focus on the integration of the workers in Canada.

Integration

Immigration policy is influenced by Canada’s language dualism and official multiculturalism. Immigrant integration into Canada is supposed to be eased by the multiculturalism policy. However, doubts have been raised about how well newcomers integrate (Gibney & Hansen, 2005:67). While integration for a permanent immigrant is a long-term process, the situation is different for temporary immigrants who, by definition, are not expected to remain in Canada. Nevertheless, integrating newcomers is no easy task for the host country: “there are also short-term costs of integration especially in the case of immigrants lacking skills that are readily marketable” (Beaujot, 2002:11). However, Depatie-Pelletier states: “the federal administration should also make sure that (...) workers under temporary status are covered by integration programs in matters of health, housing, working conditions, etc, in the region of employment and that service providers are available to be contacted directly by the foreign worker” (2008:23). Just because they are temporary does not mean they are not part of Canadian society, in other words. The following section will further explore how temporary Mexican and Guatemalan immigrants arrive and fare in Canada according to existing research.

Facts on Legal Mexican and Guatemalan Immigrants

Mexican and Guatemalan immigrants, permanent and temporary alike have emerged as important immigrant groups in Canada. Table 1 shows the numbers gathered in the 2006 Census by Statistics Canada.

Table 1 – Mexican and Guatemalan Immigrants, 2006 Census

Canada								
Immigrant status and period of immigration								
Place of birth	Total-Immigrant status and period of immigration	Immigrants	Before 1991	1991 to 2000	1991 to 1995	1996 to 2000	2001 to 2006	Non-permanent residents
Mexico	61,470	49,925	18,950	14,450	5,965	8,490	16,520	11,550
Guatemala	16,150	15,705	8,045	6,405	4,705	1,700	1,255	445

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006

Mexicans are present in Canada in larger numbers than Guatemalans for a variety of reasons including NAFTA, immigration policies, geographical location, its closer bond with Canada (for example, tourism), demographic differences, and the longer history of having the SAWP implemented (which means more Mexicans have known about Canada for a longer period of time). Richard E. Mueller draws attention to the fact that not only is Mexico the biggest producer of immigrants from Spanish-speaking Latin American countries; it is also the nation that has the fastest growing flow of immigrants going to Canada (2005:33). Between 1991 and 2001, the number of incoming Mexicans almost doubled from 22,035 to 42,720 (Mueller, 2005:35). The CIC report confirms that Mexico is

ranked number 2 producer of foreign workers going to Canada in 2006 but that Colombia has more permanent residents than Mexico in Canada (CIC, 2006 & 2008). Guatemala is ranked number 12 sender of foreign workers going to Canada in 2008 (CIC, 2008).

It is also worth mentioning that there is also an increasing flow of Mexican students coming to Canada, but they seem to only come to study for a short period of time (Mueller, 2005:42). The number of refugee claims has also increased tenfold between 2003 (2,428 cases) and 1994 (Mueller, 2005:48). In 2005 and 2006, the flow of humanitarian immigrants from Mexico into Canada ranked first (CIC, 2006). These figures complement Mueller's data and show that there is a rising interest among Mexicans in wanting to come to Canada.

Information on Guatemalan immigrants is slightly more difficult to find as it is a less important immigrant group numerically. As Lisa Kowalchuk (1999:627) writes, along with other Central Americans, Guatemalans are the newest group of immigrants from the Latin America region which is due to the political violence and their hope of better economic possibilities. She adds that a vast number come as refugees: "Since 1983 half of all the Guatemalan immigrants to Canada each year have been political refugees" (Kowalchuk, 1999:627). Kowalchuk (1999:627 & 628) explains that the increasing immigration trend in Canada "in the 1980s and 1990s [was] partly the result of the genocidal wave of state terrorist activity in the Guatemalan countryside that began in the late 1970s and partly the result of changes in Canadian immigration policies". The changes in the policies in the Immigration Act of 1976 allowed refugees in: "'refugee' became a category under which people were regularly permitted to enter the country.... immigration from Guatemala more than doubled from 880 in 1975-80 to over 2,000 in 1981-85" (Kowalchuk, 1999:628). The immigrant numbers continued to increase until the year 1987 from which, until 1991, the

numbers dropped considerably “although it is not clear why, since human-rights violations in Guatemala continued in that period” (Kowalchuk, 1999:628). A reason might be that Canada is appealing to Guatemalans because of the “United States’ tendency to reject the vast majority of refugee claims from rightwing dictatorships, including Guatemala, whose government the United States has generally supported” (Kowalchuk, 1999:628).

Harald Bauder and Genevieve Gilbert noted that even the Guatemalan migration to the United States increased during the 1980s and 1990s (2009:279). They quote Hamilton and Stoltz (1991): “Labour migration from Central America and Guatemala to the United States has reached unprecedented levels with the ascent of global neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s” (2009:279). Bauder and Gilbert (2009:279) also pointed out that the documented Guatemalan immigration to the United States of America continued in the years 2000 (10,000 in 2000 and approximately 24,000 in 2005). This immigrating trend to the United States of America is significant as it can be clearly seen that Guatemalans were leaving their home country.

Reflecting back on this particular section, a question as to why so many Mexicans and Guatemalans want to move north (United States of America and/or Canada) may arise. The following sections will briefly look at the history of Mexico and Guatemala in order to put into context the situation in which the Mexicans and Guatemalans have to live.

Mexican and Guatemalan Contexts

The historical evolution of the Mexican economy and agricultural sector is worth exploring in order to understand why the SAWP is so appealing for Mexican workers even though they can suffer mistreatment in the Canadian program. According to Binford, Mexico was self-sufficient in grains and oilseeds until the late 1960s which then was

disrupted by the “import substitution industrialization” (2009:505). Then the oil shock and the debt crisis of 1982, the selling of parastate industries, the privatization of the rural banking system, the dismantling of state purchasing and distribution institutions (which were providing substantial support to small and medium farms), the signing of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986, the amendment of the land reform provision of the constitution in 1992 and the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, all contributed to an important decrease in government’s funding to farmers (Binford, 2009:505-506).

NAFTA allowed for imports, thus exerting negative pressure on the prices of the local products. In fact, according to Barndt, NAFTA “has merely made permanent the export-oriented model imposed on Mexico by earlier structural adjustment programs of international agencies, a model built on and dependent on low wages for Mexican campesinos and other existing social inequalities” (2008:216). Mexico went from “‘food self-sufficiency’ (...) to ‘food security’” (Binford, 2009:506 & Barndt, 2008:216) which implied relying even more on other nations to import the needed food. The NAFTA grants failed to compensate and support the Mexican farmers who by now were “presumed” to have either modernized or given up the agrarian sector (Binford, 2009:506). Moving masses left their villages for the cities, which were/are unable to accommodate rural newcomers. A million and a half jobs in the countryside (between 2000 and 2005) have been lost, thus more and more Mexicans are competing against each other in a sector that cannot sustain all of them (Binford, 2009:506). Consequently, Binford argues that neoliberal economic restructuring is a factor:

In the South liberalization has ravaged agriculture, small business and much industry leading to a growth in unemployment and, especially, underemployment. Most of the new entrants onto job markets in Latin America confront a series of unappealing choices: precarious and poorly paid work in the informal sector; criminal activity (...); or labour migration, which more often than not means, at least in Latin America, undocumented migration to the USA... (2009:504).

Binford's findings are in sync with Mueller's study (2005:33) as the latter writes that the increase in incoming Mexicans is noted because of the implementation of NAFTA in 1994, the restructuring of the Mexican economy, the increasing number of Mennonites moving back, and the increasing appeal that Canada possesses due to the rising complexity of moving to the United States to work.

Based on Binford's findings, it is understood that the working and living conditions in Mexico are far worse than the ones that the Mexicans experience in Canada, but as a result of profound economic and political transformations:

Given that neoliberal policies have reduced the options available in Mexico, and diminished the attractiveness of those that remain, contract labour in Canada presents one of the few opportunities many poor, rural Mexicans have to acquire the income necessary for a minimally dignified life (2009:505).

Binford is also cited by Valarezo who writes: "In combination with neoliberal strategies, the Mexican government lowered labour standards, leaving many members of the working class unable to find a decent job. As a result, migration from all across Mexico dramatically increased as people sought capital and labour outside of the country (Binford 2005)" (2007:38). Valarezo, quoting this time Salas (2005), added that "Mexico has joined many

other countries across the world in the global ‘race to the bottom,’ altering labour standards that benefit, for the most part, large businesses” (2007:38).

Having the opportunity to a minimal dignified life is appealing enough for workers to leave their family and community for up to eight months a year in order to provide for their needs. Interestingly, in order to demonstrate the purchasing power, analysts used a product available in various countries that offers the same quality: a Big Mac from fast food chain restaurant McDonalds (Tremblay, 2009). Tremblay (2009) informs that, in order to be able to buy a Big Mac, it takes 129 minutes of work in Mexico versus 15 minutes of work in Montreal.

Recent debates surrounding Mexican citizens now requiring a visa to enter Canada has raised several reactions (Radio-canada.ca, 2009). This decision made by the Canadian Conservative government can be explained by the increasing number of Mexicans (tourists, workers, refugees, etc) requesting to enter the country. In addition, it has also been shown that this decision has hurt the Canadian tourist sector (Radio-canada.ca, 2009). While this decision has affected “all” Mexicans, the Mexican workers taking part in SAWP have not been required a visa. Logistically, this could have been devastating as more than 20,000 workers come under this program every year. The following section will now focus on the Guatemalan context which has its share of painful past events.

The history of Guatemala is complex and filled with challenges: “Like so many other sending countries, Guatemala is a developing country with a history marked by civil war, economic strife, and the oppression of women and indigenous populations” (Lawson, 2005:229). It is also, along with the other countries of “Central America (...) an important site of transnational processes, particularly the unfolding of a hegemonic, transnational

agenda of neoliberalism and polyarchy” (Robinson, 2000:89). The following paragraphs explore the historical evolution of the country and help put into context the reasons why Guatemala is now facing agrarian and malnutrition crisis, which are discussed afterwards.

Between 1944 and 1954, after many years of military ruling, the country went through a social revolution (Lawson, 2009:229). In 1954, the president was overthrown by a coup endorsed by the American government (Lawson, 2009:229). The coup was in fact due to the United Fruit Company (“UFC”) complaining to its American government³ that the Guatemalan government was implementing communist reforms to expropriate them from “unused land (...) [in order to] address the problem of landlessness experienced by the rural, primarily indigenous, poor, and to redistribute this land for agricultural use” (Lawson, 2009:229). Following this coup were years of repression against the indigenous and working class populations (Lawson, 2009:229). A civil war began in 1960 (Lawson, 2009:229). Over the following thirty-six years, numerous events took place: more than 200,000 Guatemalans were killed or “disappeared”; 600 villages were destroyed; more than one million Guatemalans were displaced within borders; 200,000 fled to Mexico and thousands more escaped to the United States of America; and in 1985 a constitution passed giving new civil and social rights to citizens (Lawson, 2009:230). The year 1996 marks the signing of Peace Accords which “call for accountability for human rights violations committed during the war” (Lawson, 2009:231). However, the peace accord is thought to have some weakness: “Authentic democratization requires a radical redistribution of wealth and power toward the poor majority; but the peace accord ratifies existing property relations

³ The American government responded because it was scared of losing control of the region (Lawson, 2009:229).

and rules out such a redistribution” (Robinson, 2000:89). Furthermore, the government, in 1997, engaged itself in adding on a “long-term program of neoliberal transformation first launched in 1989” (Robinson, 2000:100) while it is said that “Neoliberal restructuring often results in an increase in poverty and inequality in the adjusted country as wealth is redistributed upward and shifted from the domestic market to the external sector linked to the global economy” (Robinson, 2000:91).

After a heavy past, the country struggles to provide for its population. For example, sanitation corps and hygiene programs, that were present before the civil war, are now gone and because of that (dirty water and inadequate sanitation), diseases and malnutrition are omnipresent (Loewenberg, 2009:188). However, before going into further details of the present situation of the country, a look at the agrarian business of the country is important to better understand the context, and what the people live. After all, TFWP recruiting agents are mainly looking to hire workers from rural areas.

Elena Reilly, in her article “Agribusiness and the Land Crisis in Guatemala: No Peace without Agrarian Reform”, questions the agrarian crisis: “Surrounded by hungry children and swollen bellies, I [author] realized the severity of Guatemala’s ‘land problem’ and began to question why children starve in this fertile country of temperate climate and rich volcanic soils.” (1999: no page number). She states that local farmers are harvesting on inadequate pieces of land while “Multinational food corporations such as Dole, Del Monte, and Chiquita reap the benefits of Guatemala’s rich agricultural environment” (Reilly, 1999: no page number). Reilly’s article explores the historical aspect that has lead the country to

this agrarian crisis which is said to be “minifundio-latifundio dicho-tomy [*sic*]”⁴ (1999: no page number). Reilly (1999: no page number) explains that the purpose of Central America, at the time of colonialism, was to provide “luxury goods” (sugar, cacao and indigo dye) for Europe and to create an income for the colonists. This resulted in taking away lands, labour and installing monoculture. By the year 1889, the coffee industry consisted of 96% of the country’s export earnings due to foreigners taking over the lands and forcing local farmers to abandon their own harvesting and families in the interest of the agribusiness (Reilly, 1999: no page number). This pattern continued throughout the twentieth century. In the 1930’s Depression, American corporations increased in participation and the UCF became the largest landowner and major foreign investor of the country (Reilly, 1999: no page number). While

The company was notorious for exploiting natural resources, paying unjust wages, consistently opposing organized labor, and orchestrating the CIA-engineered overthrow of the progressive government of Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 (Burbach and Flynn 1980:207).... The UFCo, and its successor Del Monte (they took over UFCo’s operations in 1972), thwarted Guatemalan efforts to gain control over their own natural resources (Reilly, 1999: no page number).

While all of this has benefited the North American elite and a handful of Guatemalan elites, the “dehumanizing imbalances” has been noted in a “high infant mortality rates, rampant malnutrition, violent encounters over land ownership and natural resource rights, breakdown

⁴ Reilly writes that “‘minifundio-latifundio dicho-tomy’ [*sic*] [is] a grossly inequitable land distribution pattern characterized by expansive tracts of land devoted to export agriculture (latifundios) and minuscule subsistence-oriented farms (minifundios) that feed the majority of the population” (1999: no page number).

of traditional justice mechanisms, and familial and social stresses” (Reilly, 1999: no page number). The author writes: “As families grow and available land shrinks, minifundistas face the threat of proletarianization, complete marginalization from their land and full integration into the wage labor force” (Reilly, 1999: no page number). Countless workers moved from West to East to work in the coffee, banana or beef industries while others worked in *maquiladoras* or moved to the United States of America in hopes of better salaries (Reilly, 1999: no page number). The ones remaining on their lands have difficulties providing healthy options for their families, which translates into diseases and malnutrition. The environment suffers “degradation, deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution, and agrochemical contamination” which undeniably, affects the rural areas, where the poorest can be found (Reilly, 1999: no page number). The United States of America’s policies have been an important factor in this degradation: “[they are] undermining subsistence agriculture and encouraging minifundistas to abandon staple crops for export agriculture” (Reilly, 1999: no page number). Reilly “spoke with many Guatemalan cauliflower farmers who felt they were little more than slaves to the multinational food corporations who brought and then exported their products” (1999: no page number).

In a World Report entitled “Guatemala’s malnutrition crisis”, Samuel Loewenberg discusses the increasing rate of malnutrition in the country and writes that it “has some of the worst rates of chronic malnutrition in the world” (2009:187). Lowenberg highlights that the problem is not a lack of food, but rather a lack of the right kind of nutritious food. Loewenberg quotes Wayne Nilsestuen from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in Guatemala: “The chronic malnutrition could at any moment turn acute with the current economic crisis” (2009:187). Loewenberg reminds that Guatemala has a very steep

difference between the poor and the rich: “Most of the hunger hotspots also track with the places in which the civil war was most fierce” (2009:187). Loewenberg adds:

It is among the most unequal countries in the world, with 20% of the population receiving 60% of the income. An extremely low tax base means that the government has very little to work with to alleviate the poverty. Around 6 million of the country’s population of 14 million live in poverty, and nearly half of those in extreme poverty (2009:187).

Loewenberg also clearly states the reasons for the malnutrition problems in the country:

The stark income inequality; a lack of education; the increased price of beans and eggs, which are one of the only sources of protein for villagers; poor, or in some cases non-existent, infrastructure, meaning no electricity or running water, and certainly no clean water: so diarrhoea is a major factor.... Guatemala remains a highly dysfunctional society, still badly damaged by the 36-year-old civil war that wiped out an estimated 200 000 people, most of them civilians. There are also 24 different Indigenous groups, each with their own language; many of whom speak only rudimentary Spanish (2009:188).

Loewenberg explains that in Latin America, Guatemala is the only country that has substantially failed at diminishing the malnutrition, and has done worst than other countries who suffer from higher inequality (Brazil) and from higher poverty (Honduras, Nicaragua) (2009:188). While the “political will” is questioned, a problem of distribution of resources is undeniable. Quoting John Hoddinott (senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, DC, USA), Loewenberg writes that “per head income figures in Guatemala are four or five times higher than in Haiti – yet the two nations

have roughly similar rates of stunting” (2009:188). Theresa Lawson adds, that “According to the United Nations Development Programme (‘UNDP’), Guatemala currently ranks 121 out of 177 countries in human development, a measurement based primarily on life expectancy, education, and living standards” (2009:232).

On September 11, 2009, a bulletin released by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies stating that “The President of the Republic of Guatemala has declared a state of public calamity due to the high level of malnutrition caused by the loss of crops caused by irregular rain, dry and hot conditions as well as high food and fuel prices.” (2009). The bulletin goes on adding that:

The World Food Programme (WFP) in coordination with local authorities has distributed food parcels to 428,427 people in 21 departments. National authorities indicate that 60 to 80 percent of the crops have been lost, placing 93,000 families at risk.... Furthermore, there is currently concern that numbers of cases of dengue are on the rise in Guatemala.... According to the World Food Programme in Central America, 7.5 million people were reported to be malnourished between the years 2002 and 2004. In Guatemala, 50 percent of children under the age of five suffer from malnourishment (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent, 2009).

Jeremy Hance in his news article⁵ relates similar information while adding that the global economic crisis has played a role and that the Guatemalan families are receiving fewer remittances from family members in the United States of America (2009). This shows without a doubt, that a number of these families in Guatemala depend on remittances, which means that they are dependent on employments found abroad.

Both Mexico and Guatemala have a heavy past and their own share of challenges that explain their current social and economical situations. Very few are aware of these historical events that have put generations of these two countries in front of obstacles to come. On top of all of that, both countries have also suffered the economic crisis of 2009 that has spread worldwide. A brief look at the impact of this crisis on both countries, and region of the world, will help furthermore understand the necessities of these workers.

Economic Crisis of 2009

The recent economic crisis that has had a worldwide impact needs to be addressed to explain further the context in which Guatemalans and Mexicans live. While we all know that the crisis has touched many different countries in different ways, it may have been even more disarming for countries with a lower GDP. However, as the United Nations

⁵ Many other articles treating this issue were released. For example:

Derbew, H. (2009, September 19). Hunger crisis in Guatemala worsens. *MediaGlobal Voice of the Global South*. Retrieved on February 2, 2010, from <http://www.mediaglobal.org/article/2009-09-19/hunger-crisis-in-guatemala-worsens>

Rosada, T. & Bruni, L. (no date). Crisis and rural poverty in Latin America: the case of Guatemala. *Dinamicas Territoriales Rurales*. Retrieved on February 2, 2010, from http://www.rimisp.org/FCKeditor/UserFiles/File/documentos/docs/pdf/DTR/Executive_summary/N45_Executive-Summary.pdf

UN News Centre. (2009, September 11) Hunger crisis in Guatemala draws mounting concern from UN food agency. Retrieved on February 2, 2010, from <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=32027>

Development Program indicates on their website, the impact of this particular economic crisis has yet to show its true colour and is only beginning to surface now (UNDP, no date). While some may be enthusiastic as the economy is starting back up, the effects of having to take children out of school, or not having adequate access to nutritious food due to the crisis will have a long-term impact. UNDP (no date) states on their website:

Poor and low income families are clearly struggling. Already the World Bank is reporting that as many as 55 to 90 million more people could be pushed into extreme poverty as a result of the crisis in addition to the estimated 160 to 200 million people who fell into poverty from rising food prices between 2005 and 2008.

This economic crisis is an important hold back on achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and clearly works against the agricultural workers, who come generally from the poorest and rural regions of Mexico and Guatemala. UNDP (no date) goes on by writing that:

When children grow up lacking education and suffering from the effects of malnutrition, they face irreversible physical and cognitive consequences for their development. Transient poverty can have consequences over the long run. This, in turn, affects a country's long-term human and economic development prospects, meaning that the losses of today can translate into losses for generations to come.

Duncan Green, for Oxfam International, raises that, according to different criteria, Mexico was identified as a country at risk by The Economist, while the World Bank also identified Mexico along with Guatemala as being at risk in the Latin American region (2009:4 & 5).

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) addresses that "When the financial crisis hit, Latin America was witnessing its fastest rate of economic growth in

30 years and was meeting important goals to reduce poverty” (IFAD, 2009). IFAD argues that “because of lower incomes due to fewer jobs (caused by a drop in demand or investments), a decline in remittances from migrants and reductions in public spending” (2009) the region of Latin America is particularly feeling the impact of the crisis. It is said that there has been a considerable drop in remittances in countries like Guatemala (by 11.9%) and Mexico (also by 11.9%) (IFAD, 2009). In addition to that Green wrote that the exports of Mexico fell by 31.5 % in 2008 and “Mexico’s financial sector, in contrast, is dominated by foreign banks that largely stopped lending once the crisis hit” (2009:1). Barbara J. Fraser confirms the decrease in remittances by writing: “While remittances jumped from \$30 billion to \$45.5 billion between 2004 and 2006, the figure levelled off to \$45.9 billion last year [2008]. Only half of Latin Americans living abroad said they sent money home in 2008, down from 73 percent in 2006” (2009). This not only represents risks of families falling under the poverty line, it could also translate into a new wave of migration (Fraser, 2009). The President of the IFAD adds that “In today’s economic crisis, migrants are returning to their villages in developing countries, having lost their jobs in the cities or abroad. This re-migration means more mouths to feed with less food and less money” (IFAD, 2009 & Duncan, 2009:3). Significant (negative) impact will also be noted in the rate of employment and percentage of households in poverty for example. Green writes that in January 2009, Mexico lost 128,000 formal sector jobs in a single month (2009:3). Fraser lets on that the poor of the region will be hit the hardest: “It will increase unemployment, pushing more into the informal economy – without insurance, pensions or other benefits – and widen the gap between rich and poor” (2009). In the end, it is still unsure to what extent the region will be affected and different countries may be affected at

distinct levels. Green states that “the outlook is particularly uncertain for Mexico, with its combination of extreme dependence on the US economy and apparently inexorable rise of narco-related violence” (2009:5).

Now that the context of both countries has been explored in addition to the economic crisis of 2009 that has affected many families in Mexico and Guatemala, but also worldwide, both programs, through which the seasonal agricultural workers have the opportunity to work in Canada, will be analyzed.

The Programs (SAWP⁶ and TFWP)

The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) are programs that in the surface may seem quite similar, as they both allow foreign labour to come to work in Québec. However, as will show the following section, it is not the case and differences must be pointed out to understand even more the functions and the workers’ experiences that will be discussed later on⁷.

Logistics of SAWP

SAWP was implemented following World War II by first having Caribbean workers come to work (Mueller, 2005:44). In 1974 the Mexicans joined the program and now are the biggest cohort of workers coming under this program. Mexico and Commonwealth countries of the Caribbean, such as Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Saint Vincent, Grenadines, Grenada, Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, Anguilla, Dominica, Saint Kits-Nevis,

⁶ Please note that in distinct studies, different acronyms can be used to refer to the “SAWP” such as the “MSAWP” that stands for “Mexican Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program” and the “CSAWP” that stands for “Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program”.

⁷ Please refer to appendix one for a table summarising the differences between both SAWP and TFWP.

Saint Lucia, and Montserrat, have a bilateral agreement with Canada and signed Memorandums of Understanding (Gibb, 2006:4, 5 & 7, & HRSDC, 2010).

SAWP was created by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) in order to fill in the labour shortage in the fruit and vegetable farms during peak agricultural periods. Currently, HRSDC is managing the program. HRSDC works with different private agencies such as Foreign Agricultural Resource Management services (FARMS) in Ontario and its equivalent; the Fondation des entreprises pour le recrutement de la main-d'oeuvre (FERME⁸), in Québec. While FERME takes care of administrating the program in Québec, the governments of the countries of origin take care of recruiting potential candidates. FERME works for the employers (farm producers) but they also indicated, in the interview for my research, that they do not necessarily take the side of the employers: they are fair to the workers and to the employers and want to mediate. As indicated to me in the interview with the employees of the Mexican General Consulate, the role of the Consulate of Montreal mainly consists in three tasks. The primary one is to provide help to the workers (accidents, parental benefits, income taxes, pensions, illnesses, etc). Secondly, they administrate the program by closely working with FERME, Services Canada and HRSDC. Thirdly but not lastly, they ensure

⁸ Founded in 1989, FERME consists of a group of 5 horticultural producers' associations that is administered by an administration council of agricultural producers whom also require foreign labour. The foundation's mission is to organise and offer all the necessary services in order to facilitate the hiring of foreign seasonal labour for local employers who are members of the foundation. They assist members with the government, organisations and agencies and assume all the administrative formalities. Furthermore, FERME advises and gives information to the employers about the adequate living norms, informs the employers about the hiring procedures; coordinates the welcoming and travels of the workers, and supports both employers and workers if problems occur. FERME manages SAWP and TFWP (FERME, 2010)

that the employers respect their employees' contracts (by requiring well maintained house, good treatment and proper deductions, by visiting farms, by fixing problems between workers and employers and/or between workers themselves, by taking care of ill workers, by mediating, etc).

The employer interested in hiring a foreign worker must demonstrate to HRSDC that he/she was unable to hire a Canadian and that the foreign workers will be well-treated during their stay in the country. The employer has several elements that he must fulfill such as ensuring a wage that is the same to Canadian agricultural workers doing the same tasks; assuming certain expenses; ensuring that his/her employees are protected by the regime of worker's compensation and health insurance; signing an employer-employee contract and providing free housing (HRSDC, 2010). Then, HRSDC approves the employment offers to farm workers. CIC's role is to issue work permits (Gibb, 2006:5) which are only valid for a position in agricultural manoeuvre with one employer and up to eight months. Over and above, the candidate is expected to be at least eighteen years old; be of nationality of one of the participating countries; satisfy the immigration laws of Canada and the worker's home country; and accept and sign an employment contract (HRSDC b, 2009). Conversely, the website of the General Consulate of Mexico indicates that workers must be: a farmer, journeyman or someone who works in agricultural activity; be between the age of twenty-two and forty-five; hold a minimum of three years in primary school education and a maximum of three years of secondary school; be men or women, married or in a de facto union, preferably with children (celibate persons who wish to participate may do so if they prove that they have economic dependants); and, live in a rural zone (The seasonal agricultural worker program, 2009). It can be noted that there is a discrepancy in the

requirements of age between the Consulate's and the HRSDC's websites. The participants are also required to pay "\$450 toward their transportation costs and \$150 for the work permit processing fee" (Valarezo, 2007:42).

The sending Mexican government has agents whose mandate is to find workers via their Ministries of Labour. In addition to their own government, these agents are in close contact with the Canadian government and with FERME. It is also part of their role to help resolve conflicts between workers and employers (Gibb, 2006:5). All provinces, except Newfoundland and Labrador, take part in SAWP and each provincial government deals with certain aspects of the program such as the "provincial human rights standards, labour standards, and workplace safety laws" (Gibb, 2006:5). Also, the houses are to be visited on a yearly basis and must fulfill the standards of each province. In the end, the farm owners, government agents and the workers themselves must sign an employment agreement in which are stated the terms and conditions of employment (Gibb, 2006:5). It is mentioned that SAWP undergoes an evaluation, by the governments of Canada, the sending countries and the farm owners (represented by FERME in Québec) every year in order to verify its functionality and to determine if it can be improved.

Employees of the Mexican Consulate mentioned in the interview that they visited about ninety farms in 2009 (plus another ten in the Maritime provinces). While they cannot logistically visit all of the 300 farms in Québec in a year (likely due to insufficient number of employees), they visit the farms that have not been visited before to ensure things are working well, to give out information and to answer any questions. They will also visit farms that request their presence.

Success of SAWP

According to the Mexican government, 80% of the workers return to work in Canada again and very few stay illegally (Mueller, 2005:45). Over the years, Mexicans have increased in importance and are now the largest cohort to come to Canada under the SAWP (Mueller, 2005:44). Table 2 shows the numbers for the last four years (2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009):

Table 2 – Number of Temporary Foreign Worker Positions under SAWP

Province	2006	2007	2008	2009
Prince Edward Island	81	131	118	145
Nova Scotia	322	407	622	805
New Brunswick	17	25	19	28
Québec	3,171	3,595	3,758	3,754
Ontario	18,097	18,744	18,552	17,989
Manitoba	311	299	343	362
Saskatchewan	42	84	101	124
Alberta	527	684	950	1,010
British Columbia	1,484	2,614	3,768	3,437
Canada – Total	24,050	26,622	28,231	27,654

Source: HRSDC c, 2010

The SAWP has been noted as very successful, as the Mexico's vice-consul in Toronto (at the time of Mueller's study) says: "the Mexico-Canada guest worker program 'is a real model for how migration can work in an ordered and legal way'" (Mueller, 2005:45). The employees of the Mexican General Consulate concurred by noting that some workers have been returning for up to thirty seasons and that, to them, indicates that the program is

successful as it allows them to develop further and enhance their lifestyle. They also mentioned that the communication between the different parties involved in the program flows really well.

Logistics of TFWP

Similar to the SAWP, the agricultural version of the TFWP is available in Québec as well as all Canadian other provinces, except for Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Newfoundland and Labrador. Table 3 presents the distribution of the agricultural workers, under this program, who came to Canada to work in 2008.

Table 3 – Distribution of TFWP Seasonal Agricultural Workers in 2008

Distribution of seasonal agricultural workers traveling to Canada, by provinces (2008)⁹						
Province	British Columbia	Alberta	Ontario	Québec	Prince Edward Island	TOTAL
Total	252	165	258	2,632	6	3,313

Source: IOM, 2008

The pilot project was launched in 2003 and is only available for Guatemala (FERME, 2010). In Québec and New Brunswick, the program is managed by FERME. It is a signed agreement between FERME, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the office of Guatemala. In the interview, I conducted for the purpose of this research, with an employee of the General Consulate of Guatemala, their role was explained in two words: to advise and monitor (“*monitorio*”). This means that the General Consulate of Guatemala monitors and advises on different issues of foreign workers related to health,

⁹ There are no numbers for this particular year for the provinces of Nova-Scotia and New Brunswick, but the provinces participate.

treatment, conditions, adaptation, repatriation, etc. Their objective is to prevent and solve problems. The General Consulate of Guatemala did approximately 294 visits in 2009 to different farms, to see employers and workers.

Comparable to SAWP, the employer must also demonstrate that he/she was unable to hire a Canadian resident for the available position. Furthermore, the work visas can be emitted for a period of up to twenty-four months. The employers must also assume the recruiting costs and the return plane ticket; ensure that there is adequate housing available; ensure the medical insurances until the employee is covered by the provincial's insurance; offer equal or higher wages than any other Canadians working in the same occupation and region; and must also sign an employer-employee contract. The work permit allows the worker to work for one particular employer only. Unlike SAWP participants, the workers are not required to pay transportation costs but must pay accommodation costs (Valarezo, 2007:43).

The recruitment of the Guatemalan workers is supervised by the Guatemalan government and the IOM. Similar to SAWP, the houses in which Guatemalan workers live must be inspected and meet the provincial standards. In fact, it is not rare to have Guatemalan and Mexican workers sharing the same households.

The TFWP also goes under an annual revision with the different partners that are IOM, FERME and representatives from the Guatemalan and Canadian governments. However, the Guatemalan General Consulate's employee stressed the fact that an intergovernmental interlocution, equal to equal, is needed. According to them, further dialogues are necessary as the workers come with a certain fear because there are no set in stone contracts: there is no existent contract between both countries that would secure the

program, thus the workers' jobs. In this sense, if Canada changes its policies, the program partners do not have any control. In fact, as explained by the FERME employee, the TFWP consists of an agreement between the workers and the employer in contrary of the SAWP that is a bilateral agreement.

Success of TFWP

The IOM praises the benefits of the TFWP for all the partners: "Besides being an efficient mechanism for the recruitment, protection and return of workers, the project provides an alternative to irregular migration and generates economic benefits to all parties concerned" (IOM website, Guatemala Facts and figures, 2010). The organization also noted that the number of workers has increased every year, since the beginning of the program: it began with 215 workers in 2003 and by the end of 2009 they were expecting to have sent 3,500 Guatemalans (IOM website, Temporary Labour Migration Programme to Canada from Guatemala Reaches Milestone, 2009)¹⁰. The percentage increase from the first year is of 1,800%. Of all these workers, 94% go to Québec to work in agricultural sector. IOM conducted a survey in 2008 with the workers and 95% answered that they were happy with the working and living conditions; with their relationship with their employer and that they wanted to work more than 40 hours per week to be able to send more remittances (IOM website, Temporary Labour Migration Programme to Canada from Guatemala Reaches Milestone, 2009).

¹⁰ Conversely, the "Rapport Annuel 2009" of FERME writes that in 2009 there were in fact 3,693 Guatemalan workers in Québec. The employee of the Guatemalan General Consulate also gave a different number and said that there were 3,858 agricultural workers sent in all of Canada and that the vast majority (3,247) were sent to work in the province of Québec.

When asked about the strengths and aspects to improve about the TFWP, the employee of the Guatemalan General Consulate answered that on the upside, people and employers understand that the workers live an important cultural shock. The workers and the employers share their abilities and their different cultural knowledge.

Differences between SAWP and TFWP

In the interview, one of the employees of the General Consulate of Mexico raised a few differences between both programs that could explain the sudden raise in Guatemalan workers' numbers. TFWP is a low-skilled program and it is a Canadian program only, therefore requires fewer negotiations than the SAWP, which is a bilateral agreement in which there are annual negotiations between both countries (Canada and Mexico as well as Canada with all other participating countries listed earlier). Preibisch (2007:443) writes that the most significant difference between both programs is that TFWP is "less regulated: it operates outside of bilateral agreements between Canada and the labor-sending countries, freeing employers from the annual negotiations and the levels of government scrutiny built into the SAWP". Indeed, some employers are thought to be enjoying the higher flexibility offered in the TFWP to deteriorate the working conditions and diminish "labour organizing efforts" (Choudry et al, 2009:57). Choudry et al (2009:69) add that the Mexican numbers have stagnated while the Guatemalan numbers have increased significantly because of the fact that Mexican workers have been demanding better conditions and that employers are looking for more "docile workers."¹¹

¹¹ A graph comparing the numbers of workers from Mexico and Guatemala can be found in appendix two.

The TFWP allows the workers to be available for longer periods of time; they must pay a weekly amount for their housings; put in a deposit to be in the program; and, if the worker is not requested the following year in the program, he/she is excluded from the program. On the other hand, Mexican workers do not pay for housing, do not pay a deposit and if one employer does not call back a Mexican worker, the worker will be given other opportunities with other employers. The agreement signed between the government of Mexico and Canada states that “employment should be for not less than 240 hours for a period of six weeks or less and that it should not exceed eight months” (Basok, 2002:40). On the other hand, “the TFWP (...) does not contain any provisions regarding minimum contract length” (Preibisch, 2007:443).

Thus, overall, this could translate into Mexican workers being more willing to “fight” than Guatemalans who do not have a second chance. The FERME employee, during the interview I conducted, maintained that the fact that Guatemalans may stay longer than Mexicans has had an impact in the important increase of Guatemalan workers over the past few years.

The employees of the Mexican General Consulate noted to me in their interview that the Government of Canada should show more flexibility by letting more workers come to Canada as well as allowing a longer period of stay for Mexicans. Currently, they are only allowed to stay a maximum of 8 months, and there are job opportunities that would require a longer stay while other workers could transfer from different positions and exceed the eight month time period. On the opposite, the Guatemalan General Consulate employee maintains that the workers part of the TFWP cannot work more than 4 cumulative years in

Canada (CIC, 2009) which can be problematic for the workers as they may want/need to work more than that.

The FERME employee shared during the interview conducted for this research that the Canadian government is looking at “harmonizing” both programs. This would likely be an advantage for the workers as they would not face different treatments (i.e. fees for housing, length of stay, etc.) and would prevent potentially favouring a program over another (thus one group of workers over another).

Both programs are similar in their objectives but are distinct in their logistics. However, for both programs, the majority of workers are of male gender. Nonetheless, just like the overall number of workers, the number of female workers increases on a yearly basis. The following section briefly explores their participation in SAWP and TFWP.

Participation of Women in SAWP and TFWP

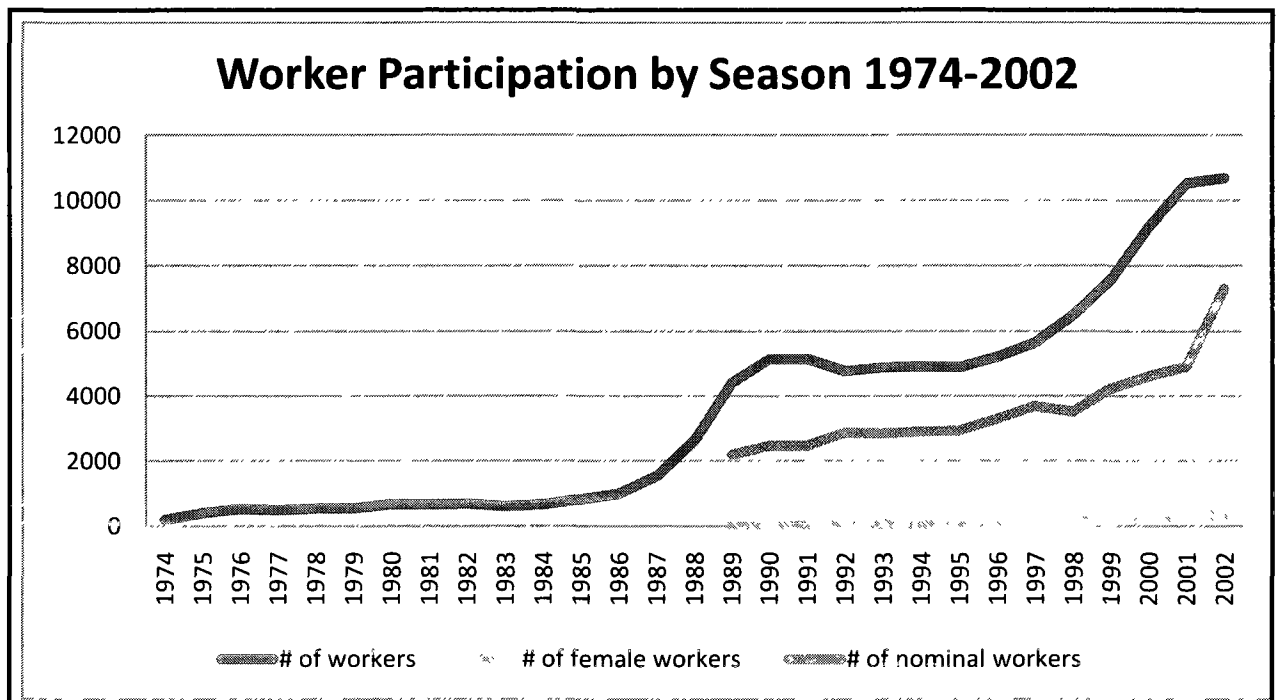
Most of the information that is found in the last sections of this chapter was taken from research and studies that were done specifically on SAWP Mexican workers: the list of research done on Guatemalan workers part of the TFWP is rather limited. However, it is believed that due to the nature of the programs and conditions, to their reasons to participate and to their sacrifices made, the Guatemalan workers live an experience similar to the Mexican workers (this does not take into account the difference in the logistics of the programs but rather the overall social experience). Mexican and Guatemalan families and home communities will likely be impacted the same way also.

As Mueller (2005:44) points out, the majority of the Mexican migrating cohort is under the temporary workers’ category, (under the SAWP) and are mainly males. However, women do participate and Gustavo Verduzco gives some numbers in his article on women’s

participation. Thirty-seven women first joined SAWP in 1989 following the request of Canadian employers. The year after, there were seventy-six and the numbers grew and reached one hundred forty-five in 1998. Nowadays, women represent a bit over three percent of the SAWP workers (Verduzco, 2007:5).

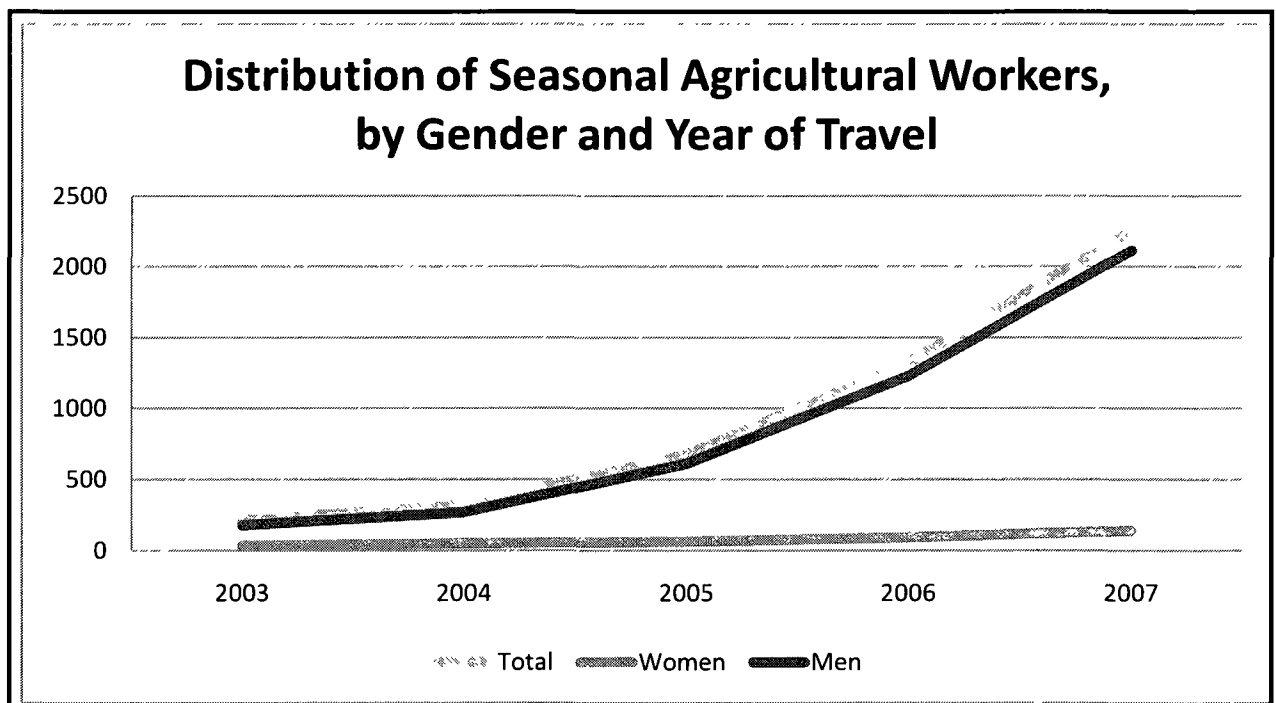
Women also are present in the TFWP and also have shown an increase in numbers over the years. The following Charts 1 and 2 show the growth of the workers' participation in both SAWP and TFWP over the years, with a specific line reserved to women's participation. The specific numbers of the charts can be found under appendix three.

Chart 1 – Growth of Women’s Participation in SAWP



Source: Gustavo Verduzco (2007:5)

Chart 2 – Growth of Women’s Participation in TFWP



Source: IOM, 2008

Regardless of gender differences, both men and women workers have difficult jobs because of long tiring hours and do not always report illnesses (Preibisch, 2005:93). Although, they also share the same status of farm workers and non-citizens from the South, their respective experiences are different. Working in a predominantly men's world, women have to deal with their family and community not understanding their choice to emigrate and with prejudices of working in a patriarchal field (Preibisch, 2005:93-95). Also, being mainly single mothers, the women have to leave their children ("deserting" versus "fulfilling their primary gender role as breadwinners" for men) with other people while the men have their wives remaining at home (Preibisch, 2005:93-95). Finally they have different sexual roles and are often perceived, by their own communities, as going to Canada to "prostitute" themselves (Preibisch, 2005:93-95). All these different factors, in addition of being away from their family and friends and possibly having inadequate living and working conditions, make the experience very stressful for women participating in both programs. In this sense, the next section will look at some findings of previous conducted studies that discuss the workers' experience.

Individual Experiences of the Agricultural Workers

As determined in the programs' contracts, the workers are usually found to be harvesting a range of fruits and vegetables (Basok, 2002:34) during the peak season. Previous statistics have shown that they are mainly working in Ontario and Québec. The workers who are married and have children are given hiring priority: they are more likely to return to their household once their contract is finished versus a single childless man. As Basok notes, this is a good way to ensure that the temporary immigrants will not become

permanent immigrants (2002:98). In addition to that, this minimizes the issue of tracking down illegal workers.

One would think that the performance of the Mexican workers would be closely related to their living and working conditions but this is not what has been found. Basok (2002) shows that the Mexican workers part of SAWP are not in a situation likely to encourage productivity. In fact, the argument has been made that “migrant agricultural workers are subjected to exploitation and social exclusion as a direct result of their non-permanent status” (Valarezo, 2007:3). To confirm, Mueller (2005:44 & 46) writes that “Most work 10- to 12- hour days, six days a week for four to eight months” and that “there have also been some complaints that workers are not treated well yet are afraid to criticize substandard working conditions for fear of not being able to return the following year”.

The workers must be ready for physical and tiring work: “Success in Canada also requires that workers possess the skills, physical stamina and mental toughness to meet the expectations of demanding employers, withstand long days in the hot, humid southern Canadian summer” (Binford b, 2006:2). Moreover, the workers are known to be facing recurrent sanitary and health risks (La Jornada en Línea, 2010). In fact, workers deplore a lack of appropriate training and comprehensive instructions:

Fewer than half of the CSAWP workers surveyed in their home countries said they received adequate training in the handling of machinery or agricultural chemicals, and many said they were not given protective clothing or equipment to wear. Fewer than half of the workers who said they used pesticides said they had received the recommended training (Brem, 2006:10).

Thus, considering different factors such as long hours of work, few breaks, continual bending and lifting, working on bent knees and squatting (sometimes up to 10 hours per day), lack of training, exposure to different chemicals, one out three Mexican workers have reported being injured or ill (Brem, 2006:9-10 & McLaughlin, 2009:5). In the “Los Mexicanos: Le combat de Patricia Perez” documentary, it can be seen that the living arrangements are not healthy as the floor is rotting, there are pesticides in the kitchen and they have to put buckets in their bedroom so that the floor does not get wet from the rain (Latour, 2007). In another documentary called “Migrants: Those who come from within”, it is possible to hear the story of workers who have faced health complications (cancer, health complications resulting in death, stroke) while working abroad or due to working in farms (Diaz Mendiburo, 2007).

In addition of their mistreatment and having left behind their family and friends; the Mexican workers generally do not have resource people. When they are supported by non-state actors, it has been showed to be positive as Valarezo explains Preibisch’s findings: “non-state actors (...) who attempt to ensure that workers are allowed access to rights they are entitled to, have helped to initiate positive transformations in the rural host community” (Valarezo, 2007:1). In fact, the personal fight of one woman in Saint-Rémi has helped tremendously the workers to become aware of their rights with the creation of the support center (Latour, 2007). However, they are often alienated in their host communities due to language barriers but also due to prejudice that they are victim of (Basok, 2004 & Sook Lee, 2003). One worker in the “El Contrato” documentary states: “Maybe they [villagers] think we’re here to take their jobs. They look at us strangely” (Sook Lee, 2003). They lack a

social network and are therefore available to work tirelessly. Gibb (2006:8) also mentions this aspect in her study:

Some workers have been coming to Canada every year for more than 20 years. When they are in Canada, they do not feel a strong connection to the towns or cities near the farms. They feel isolated. Most Mexican farmworkers do not speak English [in the case of other provinces, and for Québec, French]. This makes it harder for them to talk to the farm owner and to Canadians in nearby towns and cities.

Seasonal workers also suffer from social isolation due to their non-citizen status. With a temporary visa in hand, the workers may misinterpret (or just do not know) their rights and entitlements as Elgersma (2007:8) points out. The workers do not want to raise any issues by fear of being repatriated and losing this opportunity for them to make money (Elgersma, 2007:8).

Basok also mentions the relationship that the workers develop with their employers and the latter's ability to secure cheap, productive, disciplined and fully committed labour (2002:143). The relationship that exists between both the employer and the worker is highly crucial as it makes the difference between a positive and a negative experience. This maintains the argument that Mexican and Guatemalan workers have become indispensable for Canadian agriculture. Gustavo Verduzco (2007:7), who conducted a survey with a cohort of workers of the SAWP, confirms what Basok (2002) reports in regards to the verbal mistreatment and health problems ignored with rare reported cases of physical abuse, adding that in general the workers are satisfied with the program and they do not want to harm it.

Even though they work long hours, isolated, injured or sick, Basok demonstrates that the workers are productive and avid to come back in the future years to earn more money

than back home. And that, even though some workers may have found their employment difficult:

Looking back at the eight months that he had spent in Canada, Rodolfo thought that they were certainly tough. Yet[,] it felt good to know that he could provide for his family, that his eldest son would be able to attend a secundaria [high school], and that he would be able to start buying material to build a house (Basok, 2002:129).

Earnings can then most likely be perceived as a main factor of wanting to come back: “the high return rate suggests that the SAWP’s beneficial aspects outweigh the problems, at least as far as the workers themselves are concerned” (Mueller, 2005:46). Basok mentions that a worker in south western Ontario earns \$345 (Canadian) per week (2002:131). If they work for eight months, they can send home up to \$8,000 (Canadian) which equals to a salary they would be making home in five to six years (Basok, 2002:131-132). Gibb (2006:8) reminds the readers that “unemployment is high in those countries [Mexico, Caribbean], particularly in rural areas. CSAWP allows farmworkers to enter Canada legally”. The fact that unemployment rate is high in both countries’ rural areas is crucial because, if the rules are applied correctly, only workers from rural areas are to take part in the programs. The workers endure the working and living conditions because of the money earned. They can provide a better quality of life for their family: the children are going to school, they can build themselves a house and they can even possibly create a small business (Verduzco, 2007, Basok, 2002, Gibb, 2006).

An extensive revision of the problematic of SAWP has been conducted by Heather Gibb for the North-South Institute. In her study, Gibb collected different ideas and opinions

from the workers on how, according to them, SAWP could be improved. Following is a summary of the suggestions gathered:

Workers could agree to pool their savings from work in Canada to gain more access to loans from banks in their home countries. Their own governments could provide free financial advice to farmworkers. Deductions for Employment Insurance (EI) in Canada could go into a Migrant Workers' Fund that would offer loans to workers who wanted to start or expand a business back home. The sending governments could consider ways to support small business development and local jobs in rural communities.... Canadian farmers could help farmworkers understand more about modern farming methods.... more women workers [could be included] (Gibb, 2006:9).

Evidently, the majority of the suggestions from the workers relate to developing different mechanisms that would help and support the workers with their capacities to develop at home. Giving them the tools and knowledge to have and maintain their own businesses would inevitably increase the success of the programs and add an interesting aspect as it would help the Canadian farmers with working hands. It also has the potential to help the development of local communities of origin in a significant way. It is easy to think that similar recommendations could be suggested by the Guatemalan workers for the TFWP.

Remittances

Remittances are a crucial factor for the working migrants. It is stated that:

Remittances provide funds for the families of the migrants, who use them to satisfy basic needs such as food and housing and to make investments that can improve the family's future income.... Countries such as Mexico are

attempting to increase these positive impacts [i.e. children remaining in school, jobs created by the remittances sent home, etc.] by lowering the cost of transferring remittances to the broader economy and by matching funds that are invested in job-creating factories (Gibney & Hansen, 2005:510).

This is interesting as there are questions debating whether this is a way to attract cheap labour from developing countries to come do the work citizens do not want to do.

Putnam discusses a study that has been conducted by World Bank which states that: “immigration from the global South to the richer North greatly enhances development in the South, partly because of remittances from immigrants to their families back home and partly because of the transfer of technology and new ideas through immigrant network” (2007:141). The Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) (2004:3) confirms that Canada, being a remittances’ source country, does not get harmed as a nation since the remittances represent a small amount of money in comparison to how much positive impact it brings to a developing country. Not only are the workers sending remittances to their home of origin, but they also are able to invest in housings, farms and businesses back home (Gibney & Hansen, 2005:166). Because of remittances, 93.1% of the SAWP Mexican workers with families report that it has improved their well-being in their communities of origin (Verduzco, 2007:10). Sandra Elgersma mentions in her text that “one bank with a remittance program tailored to Mexican SAWP participants reported 1,500 transfers, with a total amount of \$2,000,000 in 2003” (2007:5).

Family of the Agricultural Workers

The next two sections are interesting to look at as it can demonstrate whether the remittances earned by the workers can help the development of not only their families but

also of their home communities. Verduzco (2007:8) notes in his research that “90.2 percent [of the workers] believed that participation in the program had enabled them to improve their well-being and that of their families”. Basok (2002) explored the experience of one specific Mexican worker who spent eight months working in Canada. While discussing his family, it was mentioned that his wife had mixed feelings: “Sometimes Celia had cried on the phone. She had told him that she missed him and that it had been difficult to manage the children without their father around. But at the same time she had been glad to receive the money that she needed so badly to manage the household” (Basok, 2002:129). This particular worker, with the money earned, was able to allow his son to go to secondary school and to begin buying material for a future house (Basok, 2002:129). This father was also able to buy gifts and pay the debts of his wife’s caesarean section (Basok, 2002:130).

Basok (2002) writes that with their earnings, the workers are able to provide for the basic needs. The author (Basok, 2002:132) pointed out that a lot of the workers she interviewed were still living with their parents when they first left to work in Canada. At first, a lot of the money goes to pay off their debts (usually the first year). Then from that point on it goes towards building their own house (Basok, 2002:132). It first starts with one room, and as more money comes in, more rooms are added onto the building (Basok, 2002:132). This process can take from two to seven years of working in Canada eight months every year (Basok, 2002:132).

Another priority of the workers, noted by Basok (2002), is the importance of sending their children to secondary and possibly post-secondary education institutions. The workers feel as though they owe it to their children, so that they can compete in the job market:

Once the family has decided to send their children to school, it is essential for the male heads of the households to renew their Canadian seasonal work visas for many more years – up to thirty years – until all their children have received the education they require. At the same time, once the household's standards of living improve, its members' expectations rise (Basok, 2002:130).

Verduzco (2007) also brings up these points in his study showing that children are now more likely to be going to school. Closely tied to the families' experiences is the experience of the home communities. A question of how much the money earned abroad impacts the communities is explored.

Home Community of the Agricultural Workers

Basok (2002:131) states that there is a very low number of Mexicans who invest their earnings in either land or business. This could be thought as impacting very little home communities. Leibel quotes Kearney in stating that Mexicans do not invest in “productive infrastructure” but rather invest on their own lands (2007:9). Ironically, the Mexicans who do most of the investing with their Canadian earnings are the ones who should have not been sent to work abroad if the Ministry of Labour had imposed the strict criteria of enrolment (Basok, 2002:131)¹². On the other hand, Basok brings up the point that a low skilled and poor rancho Mexican worker has very unlikely chances to be able to invest in any kind of profit maker (2002:131). However, having said that, some workers do invest in buying lands, tractors, shops and rely on their sons to keep the business running while they are

¹² The Mexican Ministry of Labour has “stated preference for participants with rural backgrounds” while Basok interviewed workers coming from “small towns and semi-urban areas around Mexico City” (Basok, 2002:131).

working in Canada (Basok, 2002:135). In this occurrence, employment will be created for family members. In some rare cases, the workers are able to hire *jornaleros* (Basok, 2002:135-136) and thus create a few jobs in the community. It is noted that the longer a worker has been working in Canada over the years, the likelier he will invest in a productive way (Basok, 2002:135).

Furthermore, not only do workers send remittances, but they also transfer technological knowledge to allow an economic growth (Elgersma, 2007:6). The idea that they can transfer technology knowledge is debatable as they often do not receive proper training in Canada on how to use the machinery. In addition to that, they do not necessarily have access to the same kind of machinery once they are back home. The experiences of the families and the communities are closely linked to the remittances that are sent by the workers.

Debate

Benefits or Sacrifices?

The previous paragraphs put well in context why and how the situation is for Mexican and Guatemalan migrant workers. It is clear that the workers do not have alternatives and that if they wish to work legally and hope to move forward; they must work in Canada as part of the SAWP or the TFWP. Thus, questions arise: how much are the workers going to (willing to) suffer and going to deal with to earn their life and provide for their family? From these questions the following debate arises.

Positive Experience

Don DeVoretz's article "An Auction Model of Canadian Temporary Immigration for the 21st Century" (2008:4) discusses the issues and the lack of success of permanent immigration: "The inadequacies of Canada's permanent immigration program in filling short-term skill needs have led the current Conservative government circa 2006 to propose an extensive temporary visa programme". This article explores the possibility of creating a new policy to settle on "conditions of admissions for temporary Canadian workers" (DeVoretz, 2008:11). Interestingly, DeVoretz writes: "the temporary admission of foreign agricultural workers to Canada is permitted only after strict labour market wage and working conditions are met" (2008:5). Implicit in this argument is the idea that temporary migration is a positive economic tool for workers and for the host country. However, as it will be shown in the next section, not all these conditions are met by all employers. The author also discusses the fact that depending on the "demand [of the temporary immigrants] for public monetized services" it can increase or decrease the tax base of all Canadians (DeVoretz, 2008:5). This brings us to the questions as to whether temporary workers are beneficial for Canada as a whole, and to particular groups, including Canadian farmers, and as to the place of Mexican and Guatemalan temporary migration within the greater context of North American economic integration.

HRSDC, the department in charge of the program, promotes the fact that contracts, between them and the farmers, are respected. For example, farmers are responsible to provide (or offer in the case of TFWP workers) housing approved by the province and municipality, to pay the workers same wages as Canadian agricultural workers and fulfill the requirements for hours of work and safety (Leibel, 2007:72). It is also written that workers,

who must work with chemical and/or pesticides products, must be provided with appropriate protecting gears, free of charge (Leibel, 2007:72).

The workers' experience in Canada, allows the workers to send remittances home. IOM quotes on their website Stefan Mantsch, who works for IOM Guatemala, and says that:

'The migrants invest their earnings in buying land, building or extending houses, and providing a higher level of education for their children. And they also apply the technical skills learned in Canada when they return home,' explains Mantsch. 'The Canadian employers are very satisfied with the knowledge and willingness of the workers to learn new skills. This is confirmed by the high rate of requests we receive each season'.

Basok (2007: no page number) explores the economic benefits of SAWP with the help of a FARMS report dating from 1995¹³. The report, quoted by Basok (2007: no page number) states that:

new jobs are created and old ones sustained in fields related to agriculture because of the employment of seasonal foreign workers.... Canadians filled only 90 percent of these jobs, generating a shortage of 9,876 jobs.... each farmworker in horticulture supported 2.6 jobs in the supply and processing sectors in 1995. If the 9,876 jobs in the Ontario industry were not filled, 25,678 jobs in other sectors would have been lost.

Basok goes on to discuss that SAWP is considered a model not only at the national level but also at the international level as the

¹³ Basok explains that there are no latest statistics on the economic benefits of SAWP available.

2006 World Bank report identifies numerous benefits of the Canadian program. Growers receive reliable and experienced agricultural workers. Local communities benefit from expanded employment opportunities for native workers.... Foreign workers stimulate demand for local services and goods (2007: no page number).

A Sacrifice

The article “Under *legal practices similar to slavery* according to the U.N. Convention: Canada’s ‘non white’ ‘temporary’ foreign workers in ‘low-skilled’ occupations” by Eugenie Depatie-Pelletier (2008) presents an interesting perspective and contributes to the debate on temporary immigration. The author’s conclusions are that “policy reforms will have to be implemented by CIC and HRSDC if Canada is looking to match the human rights standards set by the *U.N. Convention against practices analogous to slavery*, the *Canadian Chart*, and the *U.N. Convention for the protection of the rights of all migrant workers and members of their families*” (Depatie-Pelletier, 2008:29). According to this author, of the different twelve categories of temporary workers, a number of them are in violation. The author argues that a slave is “a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised” while “persons under servile status are defined as persons ‘in the condition or status resulting from any of the institutions or practices similar to slavery’” (Depatie-Pelletier, 2008:3). The author claims that the SAWP workers are suffering from practices that are similar to slavery (Depatie-Pelletier, 2008:17). Indeed, a worker shared in an interview that he feels treated as a slave: “They treat us like slaves! The Mexican government sells us and the Canadian government exploits us” (Choudry et al, 2009:57).

Examples that can be taken as practices similar to slavery are: the SAWP workers are obligated to live in the employer's property; their work permit is also limited to only one employer; their rights to liberty, to security, to freedom of association, to temporary family reunification and to access the immigration system are denied (Depatie-Pelletier, 2007 & 2008:13-18). Moreover, Josephine Smart conducted research in Alberta where she witnessed that

Even though the employment contract stipulates that the employer must provide adequate housing, neither premises we visited could be described as 'adequate' housing condition by Canadian standards.... The workers reported extremely long working hours from 7 or 8 in the morning until 1 or 2 the next morning (...) for 3 weeks in August, 1997. Their 'usual' working hours were from 7 or 8 in the morning until 9 or 10 in the evening.... Inadequate washroom facilities at the field sites, short meal breaks (...), extremely long working hours for weeks on end are the main ingredients in the creation of the Mexican workers' self identity within the Canadian economy – a work machine” (1998:149, 150 & 152).

This lack of compliance of contract should be acknowledged and dealt with as human beings are suffering: “The MSAWP is similar to provincial [British Columbia] farm labour legislation in that some of its regulations leave workers open to exploitation and abuse, while those that could protect them are often not enforced” (Leibel, 2007:74). Leibel also mentions that the wording of the contracts is vague thus leaving its interpretation to the farmers (2007:74). Leibel quotes Basok that states that: “there is a considerable disjuncture between the program as it exists on paper and as it is enacted in reality” (2007:74).

In addition to that, Depatie-Pelletier has also found that amongst the workers themselves, inequalities and discrimination exist and white immigrants are more likely to have their rights respected than non-white immigrants (2008:26). Having said this; workers become vulnerable to their worker's rights from the beginning as they are dependent of them. This may cause possible abuses of their rights (Depatie-Pelletier, 2008:28). Furthermore, Valarezo (2007:24) explains that even though the human rights are meant to be universally accessible, the host countries continue to deny the workers' rights due to the fact that they are not permanent residents. This translates into the workers being vulnerable to exploitation, more flexible and competitive than non-migrant workers (Valarezo, 2007:18). According to article 33 of the Convention, it is up to the government of Canada to be sure that the workers are informed of their fundamental rights that they have as seasonal workers (Depatie-Pelletier b, 2007).

Leibel discusses about the freedom and unfreedom of migrant labour and mentions that SAWP workers are unfree as they are not granted citizenship rights, unlike immigrants (2007:12). Satzewich explains the meanings of the term unfree:

They [agricultural workers] have been defined as temporary entrants to Canada without the right of permanent settlement, and because it is not intended that they become citizens of the country and parts of the imagined community of the Canadian nation, they are considered here as a form of unfree migrant labour (1991:111).

For example, they are unable to change employers, in the event of mistreatment, and they must please their employers as they are the ones who ultimately decide whether they will be back the following year or not. In fact, Satzewich argues that "it is precisely their condition of unfreedom and inability to circulate in the Canadian labour market that constitutes the (...)

farm workers into such a valuable labour force” (1991:113). Leibel even explores the opinions that have been brought up that illegal workers in the United States of America are freer, if a job does not comply to their wishes, they can move on to a better employment and income (2007:13 & 14). Thus, labour migrants are easier to exploit than undocumented workers (Leibel, 2007:13 & 14). This is rather shocking as one would believe that undocumented workers have worse working conditions than a worker who takes part in a model, structured program that is recognized internationally. Leibel (2007:138) also mentions the “drain on the sending communities” that the SAWP creates as the younger, healthier workers, who may be trained, leave their homeland to work abroad and come back with no particular advantages such as new skills.

However, Binford (2006:61) raises the fact that they are not obliged to solicit the program and neither are they forced to stay in the program. Still, it was clearly demonstrated that the workers do not really have any options. It is the same case for the TFWP workers who have the same conditions. Depatie-Pelletier concludes that these workers must have the same conditions and protection that any other Canadian worker has (2008:24) as it is recognized that temporary migrant workers do not have access to the same rights that landed workers and Canadian citizens do (Sharma, 2006:117). This is an important debate as the foreign workers are hired to do jobs that Canadians do not accept due to their conditions.

Neoliberal Environment

While the programs have been recognized as both beneficial and full of sacrifices, there is a broader environment that exists that we must look at in order to understand all of the matter. The neoliberal environment presents different aspects that play a role in the

social experience of the agricultural workers. While the neoliberal environment is explored on its own under this section (as it is clearly explored by different authors as being a factor in the debate); it will be incorporated within the two positive and negative perspectives in my empirical chapters because of the limitations of the capacity to explore this theme by my interviewees. My interviewees are more familiar and aware of the micro side of this debate.

As previously mentioned in the section of “Mexican and Guatemalan Contexts”, a series of events contributed to create a Mexico in need of “food security” (Binford, 2009:506). The neoliberal economy also had tremendous, negative impact on the families and communities of rural Mexico (Binford et al, 2004:106). Along the same lines, “Popkin (2003) maintains that the collapse of the agricultural sector, which can be attributed to government neglect in rural areas and a series of natural disasters (...) has kept levels of poverty and unemployment in Guatemala markedly high” (Valarezo, 2007:36).

The neoliberal environment is believed to have an impact on the creation of the programs: “Neoliberalism makes reference to the adoption of economic liberalism in the political arena for the advancement of economic growth. Neoliberal policies and practices place emphasis on deregulation, free market forces, and reduction of state intervention (Harvey 2005)” (Valarezo, 2007:12). As a matter of fact, “for international bodies such as the World Bank, International Labour Organization and the U.N.’s Global Forum on Migration and Development, temporary labour migration programs are key components of an emerging neoliberal model of migration and development” (Choudry et al, 2009:57). The authors go on adding that immigration is now perceived as “state-structured labour mobility programs, or temporary migration”, with workers relying on their employers for their legal status (Choudry et al, 2009:57). Choudry et al (2009:57) also maintain that some

international organizations listed above believe that the remittances “replace international aid as a key strategy to ensure ‘development’ of countries in the global South”.

Furthermore, Valarezo explains that “perpetuating cycle of transmigration is instigated by external forces that superimpose an economic neoliberal discourse onto peripheral countries that are searching for a means to participate in the competitive global market” (2007:12 & 13). Valarezo continues by quoting Doreen Massey (1998):

a common misconception regarding emigration is that it is a product of a lack of economic development in poorer countries.... misleading perspectives regarding underdevelopment advance the promotion of neoliberal restructuring for economic development in the sending countries as a way to control immigration in the wealthier receiving countries (2007:13).

Leigh Binford believes that the temporary workers’ programs are a means by which the home countries avoid the necessity of developing solutions to address the increasing underemployment and the landless rural peasants in rural areas: “Bilateral contracts allow labour-export states to adopt a strategy that abandons agricultural reforms that have the potential to create employment opportunities and intensify productivity” (Valarezo, 2007:14). In this sense, Valarezo cites Salas (2005) who believes that

poorer nation-states are lowering labour standards and wages in their attempts to generate export-oriented employment, advancing their global ‘race to the bottom’.... With the poor and working class of economically marginalized countries unable to earn a proper living, many are forced to look elsewhere for economic opportunities (2007:15).

Binford (2009:504) points to the restructuration of the neoliberal economic as a factor that left the Mexicans with the choice of working very unattractive jobs in the informal sector, being criminals or taking part in labour migration. To confirm, Deborah Barndt says “Not surprisingly, Mexican farmworkers who have been left landless by neoliberal policies are migrating in ever greater numbers to support their families; they are perhaps the most flexible labor force of the free trade era” (2008:188). Thus, working legally in agriculture in Canada versus, for example, working illegally in the United States of America is by far more appealing and represents considerably less risks. If the Mexicans and Guatemalans want to earn a stable source of income that will enhance their lifestyles, they have little choices as they have few options.

Leibel approaches her study with the political economy model and argues that, with quoting Basok, “unequal economic growth between Northern and Southern countries, processes of globalization and transnational migration, the development of new labour procurement strategies, and political considerations at both the provincial and federal levels have all shaped the decision to implement the MSAWP” (2007:11). Under this theory, three perspectives prove the necessity of this program:

[firstly,] employment of foreign labour to shortages in the surplus population of workers available in a country; [secondly,] the employment of foreign workers to the need to fill jobs in vulnerable economic sectors, which, because they are characterized by poor working conditions and low salaries are not desired by domestic workers; [and thirdly,] the demand for (im)migrant labour is fuelled by global restructuring, which involves the outsourcing and downsizing of businesses and the formation of transnational corporations in an attempt to reduce production

costs; as a result, many jobs have become low-wage, insecure, and unattractive to domestic workers (Leibel, 2007:11).

Josephine Smart mentions in her study that globalization and NAFTA play a big role in the change of employment dynamics:

Globalization is not a new phenomenon, but its intensification since the 70s in the form of industrial restructuring and trade liberalization has created a new set of economic and social conditions that have far reaching impacts for countries around the world.... A central feature of globalization in the current era is the increased mobility of capital aided by both formal and informal free trade agreements (NAFTA, APEC, EU; ASEAN)¹⁴ and policies of modernization/development (1998:141).

As it is mentioned, no country in the world is an island as all are or will be affected by globalization. Previously, workers were competing against a small scale of workers (at the municipal, regional and national level to some extent), while nowadays, workers come from every corner of the world:

many growers are now choosing to import temporary foreign workers under contract programs such as the U.S. bracer and H-2A programs and the Canadian MSAWP, a development that is closely linked to the larger processes of globalization that have resulted in the mass of migration of people from developing to developed countries in search of work (Leibel, 2007:134).

¹⁴ NAFTA stands for North American Free Trade Agreement; APEC stands for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation; EU stands for European Union; and ASEAN stands for Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

This phenomenon is likely to impact the competitiveness of the workers and of the jobs placement. Losing employment contributed to a decrease of quality and a shift of jobs. However, Canadians are not working these jobs (in the agriculture sector for example) because the conditions are lower than Canadian standards and what we, as workers, accept. The question of who is to blame arises. Leibel argues that “shortages of farm labour have largely been created by the agricultural industry and governments, neither of which has improved the conditions of farm work to the point where agricultural labour would appeal to domestic workers” (2007:135). In addition to this, Leibel discusses Sassen-Koob (1985) and Fernandez Kelly (1985)’s studies that state that

poor working conditions (...) therefore labour shortages, are linked to the processes of global restructuring (...). The entry of transnational corporations into farming, with their emphasis on higher profits and lower labour costs, has ensured that the conditions of farmwork either remain static or worsen (2007:135).

Therefore, as previously seen, the Mexican and Guatemalan workers, who will work in the agriculture sectors to provide better opportunities for their families, increase in numbers every year as there is a definite need for workers regardless of the working conditions, or so it seems.

It is crucial to note that neoliberalism has not only greatly affected Mexico and Guatemala and their job market but also the Canadian job market. The Mexican and Guatemalan job markets have suffered, and the workers have broadened their options, by taking job opportunities in Canada. The Mexican and Guatemalan job markets complete in some way the Canadian job market.

Based on the literature, a debate arises. According to some, the programs are beneficial for all partners involved (including agricultural workers); while to others they are similar to slaves stripped of their rights and working in poor conditions. The neoliberal environment comes into play as showed above in a macro matter. While policy says that certain working conditions must be met, in reality it can be seen that they are not. Different conclusions are often drawn. In order to contribute to this debate, the purpose of this study is to go to the source: the seasonal agricultural workers. Several questions arise following the literature review:

What are the social experiences of the seasonal and temporary agricultural Mexican and Guatemalan workers in Québec (according to them)?

- Are they exploited or treated fairly?
- What are their working and living conditions?
- How is the relationship of the worker and the employer affecting his/her experience?
- Are they isolated or integrated into their host community?
- Why do they come to Québec to work? (tied with next questions)

Does the employment of the workers in Québec affect the workers' families and communities (according to them)?

- If so, how does it impact them (positively, negatively)?
- Are the children going to school and studying further?
- Do the remittances allow community development (job creations)?

Chapter Three - Theory and Methodology

Qualitative Research

The social sciences typically rely on methodological approaches that differ from those used in the natural sciences. However, they are very valuable aspects of our everyday lives that can help understand different patterns met on a daily basis:

In the natural sciences, there are certain patterns of relationships between things that occur with such regularity that they are deemed laws: occurrences of universal certainty. There are no such laws found in the social sciences. This does not, however, mean that social life operates in a totally chaotic or completely irrational manner. Rather, social life operates within fairly regular patterns and, when carefully examined, these patterns make considerable sense (Berg, 2004:15).

Exploring the social experience of the agricultural workers is interesting and has potential to impact not only the workers themselves and their own families, but also the host society, with whom they live side by side for many months every year.

One of the enduring methodological debates in the social sciences opposes the usefulness of qualitative research versus quantitative research. This particular study relies primarily on the qualitative approach, since the main objective is to understand the social aspect of the workers' experience in Québec, but also uses complementary quantitative information. Berg quotes researchers that have concluded that

criticism of qualitative approaches arises out of an 'erroneous equation of the term 'empirical' with quantification, rather than with any real defect in the qualitative paradigm itself.' Although various technologies may be used by different

researchers, it turns out that everyone is doing science, provided that *science [sic]* is defined as a specific and systematic way of discovering and understanding how social realities arise, operate, and impact on individuals and organizations of individuals (2004:11).

The goal is therefore not to favour a particular approach at the expense of another, but to find the most appropriate method for the topic at hand. This is vital to relating a research idea to a precise research plan which will then develop into a structured investigation.

My personal interests in the lived experience of temporary seasonal agricultural workers and the nature of my research question led me to conclude that a qualitative method was indeed the most appropriate. Qualitative research, as described by Bruce L. Berg,

properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings. Qualitative researchers, then, are most interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth (2004:7).

The approach Berg described fits the purpose of this investigation and its focus on the individuals and their experience in Québec while analyzing the impact of their temporary migration on their family and community. While quantitative data will be used to provide aggregate information, qualitative research will go further by exploring and analyzing the Mexicans' and Guatemalans' actual experience, as described by workers themselves and other participants in those programs.

Any tangible research has its own theory which can be defined as "a general and, more or less, comprehensive set of statements or propositions that describes different aspects

of some phenomenon” (Berg, 2004:15). This research process will be enriched by the theory chosen for this study: grounded theory (which will complement the other conceptual approaches discussed in the review of literature).

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory emerged from the collaborative work of a study on dying patients in hospitals, by the sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss in the mid-nineteen sixties (Charmaz, 2006:4). The researchers “explored analytic ideas in long conversations and exchanged preliminary notes analyzing observations in the field. As they constructed their analyses of dying, they developed systematic methodological strategies that social scientists could adopt for studying many other topics” (Charmaz, 2006:4). The researchers published their work in the 1967 book entitled “The Discovery of Grounded Theory” in which they promoted their method of developing theories from the gathered data instead of reckoning hypotheses from already established theories (Charmaz, 2006:4). The interesting aspect of the grounded theory is that not only does it allow one to learn about the topics of our research but also to develop theories to better understand different phenomena through our past and present experiences and our “interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (Charmaz, 2006:10). By the 1990s, the theory became accepted for its “positivistic assumptions” and its flexibility by researchers (even quantitative researchers) (Charmaz, 2006:9).

As a result, I started with a limited conceptual framework and looked for existing patterns among the workers in regards to their experience and social impact away from their families and communities with a goal to establish a theory without preconceptions.

Moreover, grounded theory is often described as a useful complement to qualitative research:

To generate theory... we suggest as the best approach an initial, systematic discovery of the theory from the data of social research. Then one can be relatively sure that theory will fit the work. And since categories are discovered by examination of the data, laymen involved in the area to which the theory applies will usually be able to understand it ... (Berg, 2004:273).

While leaving room for creativity and scientific rigour at the same time, it must be ensured that the researcher follows the different guidelines: think comparatively, obtain multiple viewpoints, periodically step back, maintain an attitude of scepticism and follow the research procedures (Babbie, 2008:324). An advantage to using grounded theory is that it can easily “complement other approaches to qualitative data analysis, rather than stand in opposition to them” (Charmaz, 2006:9). Using grounded theory allowed me to gather rich data, to sort and analyze it according to what is found at the core. Charmaz explains the methods of the grounded theory:

Stated simply, grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves.... Thus, data form the foundation of our theory and our analyses of these data generates the concepts we construct (2006:2).

Being and remaining open throughout the research is vital in order to avoid neglecting potentially valuable information. The method of grounded theory consists first in collecting data and then analysing it at least partly inductively. While this process seems to be linear, researchers who use grounded theory,

stop and write whenever ideas occur to them. Some of our best ideas may occur to us late in the process and may lure us back to the field to gain a deeper view. Quite often, we discover that our work suggests pursuing more than one analytic direction. Thus, we may focus on certain ideas first and finish one paper or project about them but later return to our data and unfinished analysis in another area (Charmaz, 2006:10).

As qualitative research is flexible in itself, grounded theory allows even more flexibility during the process and allows the researcher to explore emerging ideas (Charmaz, 2006:14). Throughout this investigation, different ideas came up while observing and conducting interviews. For example, the original proposal for this research was presented with the goal of only investigating Mexican seasonal agricultural workers. However, during observations, it became clear that I could not overlook the Guatemalan seasonal agricultural workers as they not only present an important cohort but also an emerging one that has yet to be extensively explored. Furthermore, during interviews, it became also apparent that comparing the social experiences of both Guatemalans and Mexicans would be valuable as the nature of their distinct programs is different, thus can potentially affect their experiences. Nonetheless, due to a lack of resources and time, this aspect was not explored and revised as much as hoped. A late realisation of the benefits of having more than one-time only interviews and focus groups also emerged. Yet, due to the nature of the work and lack of contact and time of the interviewees, it would have been difficult to have further interviews. Charmaz perfectly captures one of my sentiments felt throughout my research: “You will learn things during your research that you would have liked to have explored earlier” (2006:16).

The empirical findings that are presented in this thesis are not only based on the different interviews conducted, but also on the observations that were made and on the analysis of different sources (media, academic, etc). It is a common practice, in grounded theory, to gather data using different strategies (Charmaz, 2006:14).

Qualitative Coding

Charmaz describes coding for grounded theory as: “naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data.... Your codes show how you select, separate, and sort data.... Coding is the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations” (2006:43). Coding the data gathered through observations and interviews can be overwhelming and intimidating. In fact, coding is the vital step that allows a researcher to make sense out of all the information accumulated. Giving an excerpt a shorter name allows to assemble all of the information into logical categories which, when done, can then warrant the adjacent steps of the analysis and interpretation to take place. This process eases the structuring of the research and represents the primary structure: “Grounded theory coding generates the bones of your analysis. Theoretical integration will assemble these bones into a working skeleton. Thus, coding is more than a beginning; it shapes an analytic frame from which you build the analysis” (Charmaz, 2006:45). However, as Berg emphasizes the categories chosen must relate to the research question: “it is important to keep in mind that the categories should have some relationship with the research question and should not simply be random words that seem to occur with some regular frequency” (2004:285).

Coding allows moving on from the process of gathering rich data to the process of developing a grounded theory in order to explain the data. Charmaz describes two of the important phases of grounded theory coding: “1) an initial phase involving naming each word, line, or segment of data followed by 2) a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amount of data” (2006:46).

While the interview guide is designed to gain information about certain topics, the open-ended questions may have allowed for more information to be obtained. Thus, some unforeseen data may be waiting to be discovered among all of the rest. Codes are therefore important to identify what emerges in the data: “Codes emerge as you scrutinize your data and define meanings within it. Through this active coding, you interact with your data again and again and ask many different questions of them” (Charmaz, 2006:46). The action of coding is based upon not only my perspectives but also the participants’ and what I see is happening: “Thus we define what we see as significant in the data and describe what we think is happening” (Charmaz, 2006:47). While it is my own analysis and thinking that drives this process, it is important not to impose already existing labels to certain data. Every piece of data needs to be read and analyzed as its own and as potentially fitting into a new category (Charmaz, 2006:47).

Part of the coding may make one realise that some data is missing, or that somehow elements that would connect it all together are missing. Charmaz explains that

Initial grounded theory coding can prompt you to see areas in which you lack needed data. Realizing that your data have gaps-or holes- is part of the analytic process....

After all, making ‘discoveries’ about the worlds you study and pursuing these discoveries to construct an analysis is what grounded theory is about (2006:48).

Charmaz goes on explaining that an advantage is that, once you have realised that you are missing data, grounded theory allows you to go back and explore further to gain the missing data (2006:48). Ideally, more time and resources would have been welcomed to help me advance even more in my research.

Sampling

The sampling method used falls under the nonprobability category which is usually employed in small-scale qualitative studies. The nonprobability is defined as

efforts (...) undertaken (1) to create a kind of quasi-random sample and (2) to have a clear idea about what larger group or groups the sample may reflect. Nonprobability samples offer the benefits of not requiring a list of all possible elements in a full population and the ability to access otherwise highly sensitive or difficult-to-research study populations (Berg, 2004:34).

Additionally, the snowball sampling method was privileged to conduct the study. The snowball sampling may be used in instances when “sensitive topics, or difficult to reach populations” are the subjects investigated (Berg, 2004:36). The topic of the social experience of the seasonal agricultural workers is clearly sensitive, and involves a hard to reach, vulnerable population. Agricultural workers are difficult to reach because of the very nature of their work: long working hours, remote location, lack of mobility – housing and transportation -, etc. The fundamentals of the snowball sampling are that first, subjects are identified to be interviewed and secondly, once interviewed, these people are asked to share names of other people who would fit the study (Berg, 2004:36). However, in my research,

none of the workers provided names. One worker interviewed encouraged four workers that he knew to take part in my study. The snowball effect took place as they agreed and approached me to take part in my research. Two other interviewees were acquaintances and they both agreed simultaneously while the eighth worker agreed by talking to me about the reasons of my study.

The primary objective was to obtain fifteen interviews from seasonal agricultural workers. As discussed below the recruitment process was difficult. A total of eight one-time only qualitative interviews were conducted. These were done in the months of September and October 2009 and they lasted from fifteen to forty-eight minutes in length. All respondents were Mexican temporary workers or Guatemalan temporary workers working in farms in the province of Québec. Table 4 introduces the eight seasonal workers who participated in the research. Their names have been changed to preserve their confidentiality while some identifying details (with no impact) may have been altered to preserve their anonymous status.

Table 4 – Description of the Eight Agricultural Workers Participants

Name	Age	Level of education	Origin	Status	Number of children	Years in the program
Esteban	35	Some High school	Mexico	Married	6	4
Alejandro	33	Primary	Guatemala	Married	3	6
Bastian	36	High School	Mexico	Married	3	10
Diego	46	Some primary	Guatemala	Married	7	5
Benito	34	Some High School	Mexico	Married	3	9
Ricardo	43	Some college	Mexico	Married	5	8
Raul	38	High School	Mexico	Married	3	4
Orlando	44	None	Guatemala	Married	5	7

It would be erroneous to claim that eight interviews of workers represent accurately all of the 6,000 seasonal agricultural workers in Québec (FERME, 2010). However, time, resources, nature of this particular study and hesitation from the workers have limited the capacity in interviewing more workers.

Thus, in order to enhance the empirical data, other interviews were conducted. Semi-standardized qualitative interviews were conducted with two people who work at the Agriculture Workers Alliance Centre (AWAC). Three other semi-standardized qualitative interviews were conducted with two representatives of the General Consulate of Mexico, one representative of the General Consulate of Guatemala and one representative of

FERME. Also, an email interview was conducted with a Québec farm employer. Therefore, in total, fifteen people have been consulted to conduct this investigation.

Recruiting seasonal agricultural workers proved to be more complicated, demanding and challenging, than anticipated. I had the opportunity to get in touch with the AWAC in Saint-Rémi, Québec. The centre kindly accepted to allow me to conduct recruitment and interviews within their facilities. I also volunteered myself as a French teacher to give classes on Sundays and lessons, when required, to the workers. I also accompanied workers to the bank as an interpreter and helped in different tasks when possible at the centre. Thus, I was available to help in order to allow the workers to see me and to get them to know me. All of this was to create a sense of trust. While casually discussing with the workers, once they knew that I was fluent in Spanish, they were very talkative and interested in chatting about anything. The challenge was to convince them that my research was worth it but more importantly absolutely confidential and anonymous. Many were reticent at the idea of signing a consent form with their name even though the Spanish-written form assured them that their name, or any identifying information, would not be revealed anywhere. At first, I tried recruiting without an incentive but as time was going by without any success, I decided to give an incentive of \$25.00 (Canadian) in a form of an IGA gift card (grocery store) to participate in my research.

Interviewing

Conducting efficient and “perfect” (for a lack of better word) interviews for qualitative research is basically an art that is learned by practicing and conducting interviews. Thus, as a first time qualitative researcher, I have done the best that I could while realising as the interviews went on how I could adjust to gain even better data. An

interview “is a directed conversation” in which the “interviewer is there to listen, to observe with sensitivity, and to encourage the person to respond. Hence, in this conversation, the participant does most of the talking” (Charmaz, 2006:25-26). For my interviews with the seasonal workers and the two AWAC employees, I also privileged using a tape recorder in order to allow me to focus entirely on the participant instead of my notes: “Using a tape recorder allows you to give full attention to your research participant with steady eye contact and gives you detailed data. Taking notes on key points during the interview helps as long as jotting notes does not distract you or your participant” (Charmaz, 2006:32). I also strongly believe that maintaining good eye contact helps the atmosphere in general and in gaining the trust of the participant. It contributes to making the participant feel as though he is being sincerely listened to and that his views and opinions are being heard. Having the tape recorder and a clear interview guide helped me to have smooth interviews without worrying about missing some of the data. The interviews with the other participants were done without a tape recorder as preferred by the interviewees.

The interviews that I conducted were semi standardized, which means that a set of predetermined questions, evolving around topics such as integration, working and living conditions, language barrier, family and community were designed (for seasonal agricultural workers). Predetermined questions evolving around the experience of the workers, their conditions were designed for the other interviewees who were not seasonal agricultural workers. This means that most of the questions were open-ended which allowed for more information to be shared, if the question was properly formulated. As Charmaz writes,

By creating open-ended, non-judgmental questions, you encourage unanticipated statements and stories to emerge. The combination of how you construct the

questions and conduct the interview shapes how well you achieve a balance between making the interview open-ended and focusing on significant statements (2006:26). Also having the opportunity to ask questions to clarify what the interviewee said was a valuable option to ensure a full understanding and richer data. However, as an interviewer, it was important to know when to press for more detail, so as to avoid generating uneasiness for the participant: “Interviewers learn how deep to go and when to explore a point further with probes as they become sensitive to their participants’ concerns and vulnerabilities” (Charmaz, 2006:27).

The interviews were conducted to collect both basic information (i.e. age, origin, and wage) and a more in depth conversation about their experience and the impact of their work on their own lives and on their family and home community. While I, as the interviewer, was granted some freedom, consistency between the interviews was essential:

These [predetermined] questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact, expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions (Berg, 2004:81).

I had to approach the subject with the same perspective he or she has on the world and with vocabulary familiar to the subject. Also considering what my past personal experiences and the participants’ was vital as our own respective perspectives were not necessarily the same. In addition to this, living in two considerably different worlds does have an impact on our own personalities, interactions and beliefs. On top of considering these different factors, I had to realise and understand that the gender and age can affect the development of the interviews:

In addition to the dynamics of power and professional status, gender, race and age may affect the direction and content of interviews. Men may view intensive interviews as threatening because they occur within a one-to one relationship, render control of interaction ambiguous, foster self-disclosure and, therefore, risk loss of public persona (Charmaz, 2006:27).

All of these factors had to be taken into consideration in order to be as open, receptive and accepting as possible. Conducting interviews was essential because they were more personal than any other form of data-gathering. Besides, this interview gave the participant the opportunity to be the expert, to decide on what to share and how, to break silences and share experiences, to raise awareness and inform (Charmaz, 2006:27). In a way, I became their voice and gave them the opportunity to be heard.

In addition to open-ended questions, the interview guide was designed with two other essential varieties of questions: closed ended and contingency questions (see appendix four). Closed ended questions were for questions such as the age or gender (quantitative data) and contingency questions were applicable to some people in the event, for instance, that they work overtime and that they are paid overtime or not (qualitative data).

While recruiting was a challenge, once a worker had agreed to do the interview, they were usually very open at answering my questions and sharing as much as possible. Of the eight interviews conducted with workers, one worker was very scared and anxious. Even though I indicated to him many times that he was not obliged, he decided to do the interview regardless. After the interview he mentioned that once the interview had started he was feeling more confident and no longer had fears.

Clear ethical guidelines for this research were followed. Because of the purpose of the research, no respondent was identified in this or any other document. By interviewing only legal immigrants, I avoided the need to address the issue of illegal entry in the country. In order to prevent uneasiness, to respect their personal lives and to allow the workers to freely express, their names, their employers' and the companies' were kept confidential. Respondents were also informed that they were free to refuse to answer any question they wished and to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences.

Observations

As part of my field research, I also did some observations at the AWAC as a lot of worthwhile information was shared, not necessarily knowingly, by the workers. The way the centre is set up favours discussions amongst the people there: in the waiting room, where there is also a television, there are three couches placed in a "U" shape. Also, in general, there were always more than one worker and at times there were more than ten workers present. The centre also offers coffee to the workers. Thus, all of these elements definitely favour a sense of "living room" which translates in a relaxed atmosphere with perhaps a sense of trust.

While sometimes I was not participating actively in the discussions, in other cases, I was engaged in their conversations. There were recurring themes during the observations such as, the (low) number of hours worked, the difficulty of being far from home and their families, the language barriers and the Canadian/Québec culture. The observations that I have made were added into my empirical findings, and are clearly identified as observations. One of my general observations is that the workers were more open to discuss their

experiences in a room full of people, without being recorded or quoted, than in a one on one interview.

Textual Analysis

Different texts can be analyzed and used to support the empirical data. In this particular research, extant texts were also used in my empirical analysis. Extant texts are documents that the researcher did not write her or himself. Furthermore, extant texts are used to enhance the empirical findings: “Researchers treat extant texts as data to address their research questions although these texts were produced for other – often very different – purposes” (Charmaz, 2006:35).

Most of the empirical findings that are used in this research were gathered from the interviews and observations. However, some texts are very valuable to add to the empirical findings. FERME provided their 2009 Annual Report, for instance, which has been used in the following chapters. Also, media articles were used to enhance the empirical data.

Chapter Four – Individual Experiences of the Agricultural Workers

As previously noted in the literature review, two competing views of seasonal agricultural immigration have emerged: that the programs are beneficial for Canadians, Guatemalans and Mexicans themselves; and, that the Mexican and Guatemalan workers are treated in a way that approaches slavery (i.e. lack of freedom of mobility, obligation to stay with a specific employer). A neoliberal aspect was also detected, based on the literature review, and will be present in the positive and negative results. As a global process cannot be analyzed based on interviews with workers and local actors only, it will be touched upon indirectly.

The aim of the two following chapters is to explore which one of these two positions more accurately reflects the reality of Mexican and Guatemalan seasonal farm workers in Québec. While the majority of the information found in these two chapters is based on the eight interviews done with workers, further information will also be gathered from other interviews conducted for the purpose of this study. The other interviews conducted were with two AWAC employees, with two employees at the Mexican General Consulate, with one employee at the General Consulate of Guatemala, with an employee at FERME, and with an employer. Some observations made and extant texts were also used, which are identified accordingly.

Chapter four will solely analyze the experiences of the participants in Québec while chapter five will discuss the families and the communities of the workers. The empirical findings of these chapters are organized around the two positions outlined above. The empirical findings are not always black or white. The lives of the participants were put into

context in chapter three (marital status, number of children, etc.) in order to have a better understanding of who the participants are and what their obligations are. The empirical findings in this chapter will highlight their professional, social and personal experience.

Before going into the empirical findings, it is important to summarize the principal arguments that are made by the stakeholders in charge of the programs, in favour of both SAWP and TFWP. Both programs function well, thanks to the important and ever increasing economical motivation and interest of the agricultural workers. The economic advantages for someone taking part in the programs are highly praised, and include the argument that most of these workers are not able to find similarly paid employment in their countries of origin (considering their specialisation, their education, etc.). Furthermore, the working and living conditions are thought to be fairly good, and better than the ones that exist in their home countries. Besides, the workers are said to be well informed and well looked after by the different organisations that manage both programs. Generally speaking, the experience of the workers is thought to be largely positive by those responsible for the programs. As some of the empirical results discussed below, the experience of the seasonal agricultural workers in Québec confirms this perspective. However, other results on the experience depart in significant ways.

Much of the fieldwork conducted for this thesis took place in Saint-Rémi, Québec. In this little town, located on the south shore of Montreal, the approximately 6,000 permanent inhabitants (Ville de Saint-Rémi, 2008) enjoy the presence of hundreds of Latin American temporary residents. The locals run their errands without a second thought: Mexican workers have been coming to this town for many years and Guatemalan workers

since the implementation of their program in 2003. But for an outsider, the sight of Guatemalan and Mexican flags, signs in Spanish and “envios para México y Guatemala” written in the windows of some stores (“*remittances sent to Mexico and Guatemala*”) is strikingly unusual. Its strategic location, the number of seasonal agricultural workers found in and around this town and the fact that the only Agriculture Workers Alliance Centre (AWAC¹⁵) in Québec is found in this particular town guided me to choose this region of Québec to conduct my research.

Positive Experience

Can the experience of the seasonal workers be described in positive terms? Some of the evidence does point in that direction, as it will become apparent below. It was found that the economic advantages, the retention, the relationships amongst coworkers, and the relationships between Mexicans and Guatemalans were the beneficial aspects of the personal experience of the workers that came up most frequently during interviews. The impact in Québec is also found to be in the positive experience although not directly related to the social experience of the workers. It is however, indirectly positive for the workers as based on their opinions, and they make a constructive impact in Québec with their jobs.

¹⁵ As written on the AWAC’s website, their services include informing “all agriculture and migrant workers on how to become members and the benefits to which they would be entitled [Their] varied services include updates on agriculture workers working conditions, help and assistance on tax filling, assistance on CPP & QPP application, EI benefits, workers compensation benefits and other issues that migrant workers face while working in Canada” (AWA, 2010) The AWAC is part of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) (www.ufcw.ca).

Economic Advantages: A Strong Motivation

The list of empirical findings that are positive for the experience of the workers is rather short in comparison to the negative list. However, as it will be shown, there is one major positive aspect that seems to overpass all of the negative ones. Thus, the dominant positive aspect of the programs is the economic advantages that the workers enjoy by taking part in the programs in Québec.

The economic benefits are the primary reason why workers return year after year. If the workers did not earn more in these two programs than in jobs at home, they would most likely not make the kinds of sacrifices described later in this thesis. Hence, the fact that some workers feel underutilised is important and will be exposed. However, for now, some background information on the programs and the economic situation of the workers in their home countries will be explored. This information will put into context how important the economic advantages are.

To begin with, the criteria written on the Mexican General Consulate's website to enter the SAWP are that workers should be from poor rural areas and preferably previously or currently employed in agricultural activity. Based on the HRSDC website (b, 2009), the workers are required to have farming experience in order to be able to join the programs. Guatemalan workers also usually come from poor rural areas. Thus, without a doubt, the majority, if not all, should be agricultural workers from Mexico (the same applies to Guatemala) going into Canada to do similar work. This criterion is vital for the Mexican and Guatemalan governments as it assures that workers sent to Canada are able to perform. This is a political decision to choose the poorest in their homeland and to send them to Canada where they will be able to endure the employment and have, at last, a chance to

potentially enhance their lives. It is a political decision that makes the senders and receiver both happy. The senders because they are supplying a labour force barely able to survive in their own country due to the different factors (NAFTA, neoliberal economy, economic crisis, etc.)¹⁶ and the receiver because less time is required for training as the workers are used to difficult tasks and they are in great need of employment. They can work harder and longer than workers who are entirely new to the area. This criterion plays an important role as it makes the agricultural workers of these particular countries more appealing and competitive in our Québec job market.

While the workers must have agricultural experience, once they return home from a finished season, they do not need to go back to agricultural work: they work in whatever they can find. In fact, all of the participants have mentioned difficulty finding employments in their home countries whether it is before or after the program. Alejandro¹⁷ answered that he worked in whatever he could find to meet his family's needs:

Well whatever comes up, (...) because one cannot refuse work if it is about earning money. We are to work in whatever. So, a little bit of everything¹⁸.

Of the eight participants interviewed, seven were employed in agriculture prior to joining the programs. They also usually work in agriculture when they go back to their home. The products that are grown vary between, but are not limited to, corn, beans, barley and lettuce. However, agriculture has shown itself insufficient to provide for their exploiters: "It is very difficult to sow (...) because of money (...) and also if you sow or you plant the problem is

¹⁶ This was discussed in the sections "Mexican and Guatemalan Contexts" and "Economic Crisis of 2009".

¹⁷ All of the names of the participants and identifying details have been changed or omitted to preserve their anonymous status and confidentiality

¹⁸ All of the translations from Spanish to English have been done by the author.

the production, there is no sale” (Bastian). Of the seven who work in agriculture, three also work in any other areas possible than agriculture such as blacksmithing, paint, construction in order “to continue going forward” (Ricardo). The eighth worker primarily dedicates himself to construction, remodelling houses, truck driving and blacksmithing. Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, employments are not set in stone, thus are susceptible to changes because of the economy and of the availability of employments.

According to the participants, the employment situation in both countries seems to be very fragile and precarious. On numerous occasions, the participants mentioned the 2009 economic crisis and how it has worsened their economic situation, which in this case makes both SAWP and TFWP programs more appealing to them. The participants mentioned that there are many layoffs. While Bastian agreed that the crisis has made opportunities more rare, he mentioned that “The one who does not have money, always is in crisis, no?” and “The crisis affects those who have a business, those who have companies, to us how can the crisis affect us, we are always in an equal situation when it comes to employment”.

The employees of the Mexican Consulate confirm that in Mexico’s case, the economic and social situation is not well. They mentioned that in some workers’ cases, the SAWP is their only income. The participant Esteban emphasized the fact that in Mexico, life is bad: people want to work but often jobs are available only for half of the year. He said that the months of December, January and February are the most difficult ones to find employment and that it is difficult for one worker away in Canada for up to eight months per year to find work when he/she returns. Thus, they will likely accept anything that comes up. But others, thanks to their SAWP participation, now have their own lands and small businesses.

Letters from workers are received at the General Consulate asking for help to find employment through the SAWP. However, it is not part of the General Consulate's task and all they can do is to direct the workers at the appropriate office (the Mexican Department of Labour in this case, who is in charge of recruiting). Sometimes, workers can ask friends they know to refer them to their employers. However, this practice is not common and not to be generalised as the Department of Labour must give equal opportunities to everyone who is on the waiting list.

When asked the reasons why the participants come to Québec to work, the most common answer was: “Por necesidad” (“*out of necessity*”). Bastian added to that by saying: “out of necessity, not by choice. You know it is painful to also leave your family”. In Mexico as well as in Guatemala, the participants mentioned that there are few job opportunities, and if they have employment, the income is insufficient to take care of their families. In Canada, for them, the conditions and the salaries are better: “work from here and from there is not very different, the difference is that the money that we can earn here, multiplying it there, is more money than we can save for ourselves over there” (Benito). Diego also mentioned the necessity of coming but he also talked about the sacrifice that he and his thousands of fellow migrants make in order to provide more (i.e. money wise) for their families:

doing the sacrifice of leaving our family in Guatemala. Yes, it is worth it, in my personal experience, yes it is worth it. I am telling you over there I go to work only so that I can buy food and clothes, nothing more. If one wants to build well it is difficult, many times one wants to buy a little piece of land to build a house, over

there we cannot because the economic situation does not let us. So, yes for me it is worth doing the sacrifice to come here to Canada.

On top of earning more money, he also mentioned the fact that his boss, due to the signed contract, is obliged to give him a minimum of hours. Thus, this translates into a known and secure employment.

In my observations, one of the recurring sentences heard from the workers was: “uno viene aquí para sufrir” which translates into “one comes here to suffer”. The workers know that it is their choice to come here to work, but in their mind, they do not have an option if they want to improve their lives. The sections on the Guatemalan and Mexican contexts confirm that the workers, in search of better living, do not really have any other options than to find work up North, whether it is in the United States of America or in Canada.

Without any doubt, the unstable employment market in addition to the general social and economic situation of both countries has an impact on the decision of the participants to come back or not the following year. While one could think that the workers, once they have worked abroad and have experience, could be more appealing to different employers or jobs in their home countries, it is in fact untrue, as lived by the participants. The job markets in their home countries are unstable and do not offer good opportunities to allow improve their lifestyles. Thus, the economic advantages presented by the programs are a strong motivation.

Retention

When asked if they were considering returning or not the following year as part of their respective programs, many of the participants hesitated and/or found the question

difficult to answer. However, the consensus was affirmative, depending on circumstances often out of the hands of the workers (i.e. health, if the employer asks him back or not, etc.) with the exception of Orlando. He is concerned with the raising rate of crime in his community and wants to be home to make sure that his children avoid this path and to support his wife with raising their children. On another note, Alejandro answered with hesitation:

A question a little bit difficult to answer, I do not really wish to return [to Québec], to leave my family, in my case six months. If I had the opportunity to obtain a job, a job where I could work twelve months per year [at home], I do not think I would come back.... The situation is a little bit difficult in our country.

Bastian concurred by stating that “more than certain yes I will return next year, I no longer want to but like we say, what can one do in Mexico, work is difficult there. The time that one is here, yes it helps but it does not make one rich”. Bastian makes an interesting point as people could assume that the seasonal agricultural workers of both programs make enough money to become rich or much better off in their countries. While the money certainly has its value in enhancing their lifestyle; the money earned does not necessarily alleviate their poverty entirely. In fact, the workers do come back year after year to take part in the programs. Also, as it was previously mentioned, to some, the only income resides in participating in either program. Thus, some may be living on a yearly basis on an income earned in a time period of up to eight months.

Evidently, the situation in both Guatemala and Mexico greatly affect the retention level of the participants. Lacking opportunities at home makes the occasions abroad much more appealing and likely to retain workers. However, if both sending countries were able

to increase the quantity of interesting or at least “liveable” job opportunities for the ordinary population, perhaps more would be likely to stay at home with their families. While not claiming that the governments are not trying to create opportunities for their people, having programs like the SAWP and the TFWP are great prospects for the sending countries as they receive remittances and have great partnerships and agreements with a “developed” nation.

When asked, Esteban hesitated a lot even though he said that he is considering returning. The nature of his hesitation was due to the number of hours offered, which in his opinion were far from sufficient:

[I hesitate] because of the change in the hours... there is less... and sometimes it suits you and sometimes no. If one earns \$200 (CAN) per week, it does not suffice, that quantity of money is earned weekly in Mexico. Thus one leaves his country to come earn a little bit more, so that it is worth it. And if they don't give you [enough hours], you remain with hesitation...

Esteban's answer demonstrates that the decrease in working hours available affects quite a deal the workers' willingness and interest into coming to Québec to work. The decline in the number of hours worked makes the opportunities less appealing against the sacrifices encountered. However, it is believed that, due to the signed contracts that promise a minimum of hours, the workers are likely to earn more than \$200 on a weekly basis, with possible exceptions due to the climate.

Of the remaining four participants, Ricardo and Raul mentioned that if their employer requests them back, they will return the following year. Benito puts his life in God's hands and said: “well if God lends me life, yes” and Diego simply answered yes as he

has a large family and that in general the situation and economically speaking, things are not well in his country.

Various times, mentions of the difficult situations in both Guatemala and Mexico have been raised. Thus, questioning about the participants' views of obtaining the Canadian permanent residency was explored. Seven participants answered this particular question about their interest in the Canadian permanent status. Diego, Ricardo and Orlando answered negatively to the idea of living permanently in Québec as they all prefer to return to their countries. One mentioned the climate as being an issue and another mentioned that with his large family, it would be challenging. The other four participants have mentioned some interest as it would be less lonely and happier for them to have their families with them here. Bastian and Raul mentioned not knowing how to request a permanent status and even further, Bastian said that he was not able to obtain help on the matter.

Overall, the retention level is clearly due to the fact that, even though the working hours have decreased, the job opportunities, therefore, the money earned, are far more appealing than what is offered in both Guatemala and Mexico. It is clear, however, that even though it is their decision to come to Québec, it is strictly out of necessity and not out of pleasure or personal or professional interest.

Relationship with Coworkers

The relationship between coworkers is without a doubt a key factor in the wellbeing of the workers and in the general atmosphere of their worksites. Like any other work environment, the atmosphere and the relations with coworkers can have a very strong influence on the experience of workers. All of the participants in this study answered that their own relationship with their coworkers was good. There were mentions of working in

team, sharing the work load and coordinating work and leisure together, all of which are undoubtedly key elements to maintain a good working relation.

However, there were a few “buts” in the answers. Benito highlighted the fact that when stress is present, relationships become more difficult: “when there is a lot of stress, it is difficult. But in general it is good”. Understandably, stress can occur for different reasons (personal issues or at home, pressure felt at work, lack of sleep, etc.) which are not limited to this work environment. Alejandro mentioned that the quality of the relationship depends on how each one of them behaves. Bastian also answered that his relationship with the others was fine, but that he felt that at times there was competition to perform and that it was perhaps to steal a co-worker’s position. The workers often live and work together, thus it means that they spend a lot of time together. The employees of the Mexican General Consulate noted that living and coexisting in close quarters can also present its challenges. They also mentioned examples of workers having been longer at a farm than others. This situation may create problems as the “veterans” sometimes claim a leadership position, making it more difficult for new workers to claim their spot and integrate.

As previously mentioned, Mexicans have been coming to Canada as part of the SAWP since 1974 while Guatemalans have been coming to Québec since 2003 as part of the TFWP. One could think that there might be frictions between Mexicans and Guatemalans because the latter may be perceived as slowly replacing the former, especially due to the characteristics of the TFWP program that may be more appealing to employers. Thus, a question closely related to the relationship amongst coworkers was asked: How is the working and social relation between Mexicans and Guatemalans? The following brief paragraphs analyze the answers of the participants.

While all of the participants who have been interviewed live with both Mexicans and Guatemalans, none of them mentioned having problems with one another. To Diego, they are all “friends”. While Esteban mentioned that they are all human beings and that they are equal and respectful of one another, Raul said: “there is no problem in regards to anything (...) good relationship, is a good relationship, and it is better we live, exchange, talk, instead of fighting”. Bastian is the only participant who mentioned having heard “talks” about problems between Guatemalans and Mexicans. He was, however, unable to give more details on the nature of the problems.

One of the employees of the Mexican General Consulate mentioned that when it comes to the working relations between Mexicans and Guatemalans, there are “opiniones divididas” (“*divided opinions*”). While some workers, like the participants interviewed, do not perceive any friction, some however, do. Some Mexicans, who have discussed with employees of the Consulate, feel as though they are competing against Guatemalans and feel preoccupied. For example, it has happened that the employer will ask a Mexican worker to train a Guatemalan worker. The Mexican will then wonder and worry if he/she will be asked to come back the following year since the Guatemalan worker is now trained and that the TFWP presents more interesting options for the employer. One of the Mexican General Consulate employees noted however, that the Mexicans are more trained and experienced in comparison to the Guatemalan workers who come, usually, from very rural areas of their country. The employee remarked the important increase in numbers of Guatemalan workers in comparison to the Mexican workers (see appendix two for a graph comparing the Mexican and Guatemalan workers’ numbers). This could be explained by the importance in the distinctions that exist between both programs.

Interestingly, the employee of the General Consulate of Guatemala answered that the Mexican and the Guatemalan workers get along well, even though there might be exceptions. The employee noted that approximately 80% of the Guatemalan workers are indigenous and that discrimination by Mexicans towards Guatemalans has happened. The employee highly praised the capacities and qualities of the Guatemalan workers: they are serious people who respect hierarchy. The workers are descendants of the Mayas and have a strong conception and ability for agricultural work, discipline and interest in the work.

The relationship between coworkers therefore appears to be positive but at times can present some challenges, due to stress for example. The participants mentioned feeling no significant friction between Guatemalans and Mexicans or vice versa while sharing the workload and working in teams: they are equal. However, it is important to note the differences between both programs and to keep in mind that, in the long run, those differences could potentially have an effect on their relations. The employees of the Mexican General Consulate have already noted some uncertainty and fear from the workers due to the different nature of both programs. On the other hand, the employee of the Guatemalan General Consulate noted some discrimination lived by Guatemalans because of Mexicans. Although the interviewees all mentioned a good relationship, with some exceptions, a feeling of competition between both programs and participants can be sensed.

Impact in Québec

The last question asked in the interviews was how the participants think they impact in general Québec, with their employments. Different perceptions and answers were given by the participants. Esteban answered that for some it is good and for others their perception is not so good. He claimed that the workers are very important because of their work and

that Québécois are not willing to do the work that they do; otherwise, the participants would not have any employments. Esteban went on by adding that the people here (in Québec) are more reserved and look for another type of employment that is more tranquil (“not as demanding”) than theirs.

Alejandro also said that the people here are happy and proud to have them here because the Québécois are unable to do the work that the workers do. He also added that the people here have an option: if they find the tasks too difficult they can change employer. However, the Mexicans and Guatemalans, on the other hand do not have that option: “us no, if we arrive at that farm and that they treat us poorly and that the job is difficult, well there we have to endure” (Alejandro). Raul answered that he thinks that it does not affect the people here but rather benefits them: “all of us who have been coming here, I believe that we are very beneficial, very beneficial”. Ricardo answered that according to him; their employments here are beneficial to the Canadians as people from here are not willing to do their jobs:

I say that it does not affect them at all, because well one does not come to take the bread away from them. Well if one does not come to Canada to [help] increase its production, because if we do not also come (...) I think that, they [Canadian producers] would not be able to produce what they are producing up until now, nowadays. Yes because we are aware of that. Because [when] people from Québec come to work: it is difficult here in the fields, they [Québécois] do not endure the hours that we work.

Benito concurred what Ricardo said and added that:

no I do not feel that it affects the people here because the people here do not do the work that we do. In fact in Mexico, they tell us in the offices, 'You are going to go do the work in Canada that the Canadians do not want to do.' They tell us like that over there and it is because Canadians do not like to be on their knees, tearing vegetables, they are in the machinery, on the tractors. Or that the work that we do us, Mexicans and Guatemalans, and the people who work in agriculture [fields], is the most heavy work that there is in all of the country's regions. Wherever you want, it is the heaviest [most difficult] work and the less paid.

Bastian is the only one who mentioned anything slightly negative about the perceptions that Canadians may have of the workers. He said that he has heard rumours that Canadians and permanent immigrants have said that the workers part of the SAWP and TFWP are taking their jobs away from them. He also said that if they were not accomplishing well their tasks, the employers would not request them.

Orlando perceived it as a negative impact and answered that "almost not because during the seven years I almost have had no problems with the people from here". Diego put more emphasize on the fact that he feels that his employment is not known throughout our communities:

The people here, I think, are not familiar with our work. Yes because it is not a work, well that is in the town if not that it is in the fields. So, there is quite a bit of people that, well I think that the majority, who do not know what it is to work in agriculture.... It is not an office job, it is not a construction job, less, if not that it is in the fields, I believe where no one wishes to work.

Tied with the positive answers of the participants, the FERME employee commented that the workers help immensely the agricultural production in Québec and that it helps the producers compete in an ever-growing global market. Having a stable workforce also guarantees the seasons and farmers are able to plan ahead. In her article, Tremblay discussed with a producer who shared: “On n’était pas capable d’avoir un noyau de main-d’oeuvre stable et efficace. Les gens faisaient une semaine ou deux et ils s’en allaient” and added that “Jamais on n’aurait pu croître sans cette main-d’œuvre. On serait encore à 50 acres et on se ferait manger la laine sur le dos par l’Ontario, comme c’était avant” (2009). Furthermore, the workers have a positive impact in the general community as they generate a noteworthy clientele to local stores in their host communities by buying not only for them but also gifts to bring back home (Valarezo, 2007:58&62).

Moreover, an issue that was raised by the FERME employee is that while the wages increase, the prices of the products do not. Hence, an adjustment must be made somewhere as the producers do not make as much money and still need to pay the minimum wage. This is a situation that is likely to affect the workers and the society. The FERME employee added that everyone benefits from the presence of the seasonal agricultural workers: the host community has more business; the host governments receive more taxes; the producers can produce, etc. The Guatemalan representative also added that the workers benefit financially but also culturally and personally. They mention that it is a positive globalization.

The answers of the participants have given valid points. After all, there are local citizens who would be able and available to perform work in the fields, but a question as to whether they are willing to do that job may be asked. The participants realise that their

participation in the programs is beneficial to the Québec population as it allows for a higher production.

These programs are a way for Canada to reach abroad to find agricultural workers to be employed in the fields as there are less and less Canadians willing and wanting to work in such a difficult environment and in such conditions, for so little money. It is an unequal system that was put in place to satisfy primarily the big players and down the road, the workers with economic advantages. They receive economic advantages, but are perceived as workers, not as human beings.

It is clear that the workers who take part in both programs do it for the economic advantages that are offered to them as it is shown that the economic situations of their home countries are fragile and precarious. They knowingly make sacrifices to be able to improve their lives and the lives of their families. Closely linked to the economic advantages is the retention level of the workers: it demonstrates that this experience is positive for the workers as they do return year after year (but not out of pleasure but out of necessity). Their relationship with one another also seems to be good although there can be frictions due to the distinctions in the programs. It is very difficult for the workers: they leave their families behind and suffer from language barriers, just to name a few obstacles. The impact that their employments make in Québec is positive as most know that they are essential to the agricultural Québec sector. The following section will explore the sacrifices made by the workers on a personal basis. In chapter five, a similar section called “A Family Sacrifice” addresses the sacrifices made in regards to their families and communities.

A Personal Sacrifice

This following section of the empirical findings contains the results that are suited under the negative perspective. Discussions on the work experience, the relationship with the employer, the contact with unions and/or other organisations, the living conditions as well as the social life and language barrier will further explain the reasons why there is a negative outlook. As discussed in the literature review in chapter two, to some, the workers are facing conditions that can be compared to slavery. To others, it may be extreme to call it “slavery”. However, different practices and factors may lead to a more contemporary version of slavery (while not claiming nor comparing it to sex slavery or other forms of contemporary slaves). Being a “slave” can also be understood as a state of being under the control of someone, which is one of the factors that will be presented below.

Work Experience

The interviews with the eight agricultural workers go against previous findings that highlight poor working and living conditions. The descriptions of working conditions analyzed below should be taken with a grain of salt however, partly because of previous findings, and partly because of my observations and my interviews with the two AWAC employees. Even though I made it very clear that confidentiality and anonymity were strongly protected, it is not difficult to realise that participants (and workers in general) feel more at ease to be honest about their working conditions with the people who help them, behind a shut door, rather than with a researcher equipped with a voice recorder. The discrepancies in the findings show in fact that there is an ongoing need for further research. Workers are scared to share the truth when they really should not, since everyone is entitled to freedom of speech and adequate working conditions. It is nevertheless possible that the

views of the eight workers interviewed for this research, reflect the fact that most enjoy acceptable working conditions. It is important to remember that agricultural work is very difficult: “farming remains the third most dangerous industry in Canada in terms of work related injuries” (Satzewich, 1991:63). The tasks required may be simple; but it may be required to work excessively fast. In her article, Tremblay (2009) quoted Amélie Châteauneuf (porte-parole du Front commun des personnes assistées sociales) who said that : “Aucun être humain ne devrait avoir à travailler dans ces conditions-là.”

Hours

Both my findings and previous studies concur that income is the reason why foreign workers come to work as part of the SAWP and the TFWP. But this income is very unstable due to the nature of their work environment. Agriculture is very dependent on weather conditions and its vicissitudes. As of May 1, 2010, depending on what type of organisation the SAWP workers are employed, the minimum hourly wage rate varies between \$9.50 and \$12.32 (HRSDC b, 2010). The \$9.50 hourly wage rate is for workers employed in fruits, vegetables and greenhouses. In the case of the TFWP, the employers must “offer wages that are equal or higher than the prevailing wage rate paid to Canadians in the same occupation and region” (HRSDC, 2009). Guatemalan workers are also paid the minimum wage of \$9.50 per hour.

Depending on how many hours are worked per week, the participants have mentioned their income ranging from \$250 per week to approximately \$500 (lowest to highest amount mentioned by the participants). Esteban mentioned the lowest earning for a month being at \$400, which seems unlikely or should raise questions, since it would mean that he only worked about 45 hours during that month (whereas their contract stipulates 40

hours of work per week). The numbers given by the participants were combined and they average to a weekly pay of approximately \$383¹⁹. With a \$9²⁰ hourly wage rate, this amounts to about 43 hours per week. For most of the workers I have talked to or observed, 43 hours of work is unacceptably low. Many mentioned wanting a minimum of about 60 hours per week, in order to maximize their earnings. Orlando stated that work has considerably dropped. One worker mentioned to me through my observations: “we came here to work, we want more hours”. They want more hours of work, not necessarily because they enjoy their tasks but because it increases their earnings.

Alejandro mentioned that one of the problems is that his boss requests to have his/her workers in early May when there is not a lot of work to do: at times they require about one or two hours of work per day. He also mentioned having weeks, throughout the season, of thirty to thirty-eight hours. When there are things to do and when the weather cooperates, work days average nine hours, six days a week. Most of the time, Sunday is to relax, unless there has been rain over the week. They may be then asked to work. It is likely that the employers would also prefer to have more tasks achieved: it would translate into more production and money in the end. Orlando said in regards to the lack of work: “there is no work so why fight with the bosses”. Tremblay (2009) noted that, on average the Mexican workers they have met have worked approximately 1,500 hours for a period of five and a half months.

¹⁹ This calculation is only the average of the amounts mentioned on the top of the participants’ heads. It could easily be higher or lower and is only intended to give a rough estimate of their earnings on a weekly basis as this calculation also does not consider different taxes taken off of the pay.

²⁰ At the time of the field research (fall 2009), the minimum wage in Québec was of \$9 per hour.

The employees of the Mexican Consulate noted that obviously, nobody controls the weather and that the workers do get desperate as they want to work. Both employees think that it is easier for workers to be away from their families when they are working as they think less about them since work occupies their mind. When employers can no longer guarantee 40 hours per week, the workers can be sent back home or can be transferred if any opportunity arises as there is a breach in the contract. The formal way to be transferred is for workers to contact the Consulate and request a transfer. The Consulate then forwards a list of interested workers to FERME who then match the workers according to their availabilities with new employers. The informal way is when workers hear through other workers that there are positions available (or between employers). The worker interested can then talk with the employer, who then contacts FERME and the Consulate. FERME and the Consulate must know at all times where the workers are employed.

Treatment

The work done by participants included, but was not limited to: harvesting cabbage; cropping; packing; using the forklift and tractor; transporting vegetables; working inside and outside, etc. None of the participants had negative comments to share about the work itself. They said that it was good, not very difficult, but tiring, and that one gets used to the tasks with time. It is important to remember that most of the participants interviewed work in agriculture back home so they are already familiar with the work, as Ricardo noted: “same that in Mexico, it’s the same, (...) it’s what agriculture is.”

Treatment by their employer also seems to be fine in general. Esteban mentioned a previous job experience where he worked fourteen hours per day, and was under a lot of pressure. His supervisor was requesting of him fourteen dozen of carrots, cilantro or onions

per hour. But in addition to that, he also mentioned that it was worth it as he would earn \$600 (CAN) per week: “más presión, más trabajo, más dinero” (“*more pressure, more work, more money*”) (Esteban). Alejandro answered that the treatment is “more or less” because there are days that his boss is angry, sometimes for no reason, and other times it is fine. Meanwhile, Diego answered that: “if I behave badly, the boss will treat me badly”. Thus, it can be assumed that in Diego’s work environment, workers are only treated badly if they deserve it.

Far from the answers of the participants, the two AWAC employees, answered, when asked about treatment of workers by employers, that there is quite a bit of mistreatment but that the workers do not want to complain about it. They were asked to give examples of the poor treatment that they have had to deal with or heard of. One example was of workers working in the cold and picking apples without gloves. The workers told their employer that they did not feel their hands anymore and wanted to take a break or have gloves. The employer answered that they were not there to party, but to pick apples. The employer added that if they wanted gloves, they should buy their own. This example is very pertinent as most of these workers are not used to our crude cold days. They gave a second example that happened to a Jamaican worker. While not Guatemalan or Mexican, this is relevant as it demonstrates the treatment that agricultural foreign workers may receive. One of the two employees described:

[et] l’autre [travailleur] qui a même pas la permission d’aller aux toilettes, qui a pas la permission de boire de l’eau, mais lui il fait la cueillette des fraises, (...) [il n’a] pas de pause et pas le droit, écoute [s’accroupit pour me démontrer], tu travailles comme ça [et] si il se levait, le boss disait ‘down, down, down’ au jamaïcain, (...)

[et] c'est ça. [Le travailleur demandait] 'Est-ce que je peux aller aux toilettes? J'ai envie comme vraiment besoin naturel urgent.' (...) [L'employeur de répondre] 'non' [et] le gars est obligé de ben excuse le langage cru, mais de *chier* dans le champ à côté des fraises [et] à côté de tout le monde. Parce que qu'est-ce que tu veux faire à un moment donné quand faut y aller faut y aller.

This example given was rather shocking as no Québec worker (resident) would be willing to accept such working conditions. The workers are not only entitled to breaks, they should also have access to toilets and water, especially since they do such a physical job. A third example was given, by one of the AWAC employees, with workers who work with packing machinery:

I have heard a lot this story with the machinery. They start working and then the boss, yes, he accelerates the machinery, so the workers have to like [hurry] to pack, and for the tractor also. [They say] 'slow it down, we are not animals'. But yes [alas], no one tells them out of fear, fear of not being called [again next year], (...) they accelerate, they accelerate. The work that they were doing in one hour, now it is done in half-hour. It does not matter to them [employers] if they [workers] have tendinitis because of so much movement that is done or because of stress, stress itself.

This third example also shows that the workers are not respected in their job and that they are perceived as robots. In fact, the employee of the Guatemalan General Consulate used the term "robot" and said that "the workers need to rest, they are not robots". Workers who are not well physically are likely to be less productive, thus, it is not to the advantage of the employer to treat their employees in such way.

An article written in “*le Bulletin des agriculteurs*” relates a worker’s story of being unfairly fired because he was ill: he was able to finish the season but was never called back the following season (October 8, 2009). The worker, who is back in Guatemala without a contract to work in Québec, filed in a complaint. However, as he did not have funds, he was unable to come back to Québec to be heard, thus his attorney put in a request (with Commission des Relations du Travail) so that the worker could be heard via videoconference, which was denied (Commission des Relations du Travail, 2009). This is an example that there is a big flaw in the procedures as the workers, when they find out that they are fired, are most of the time back in their home countries and are unable to pay the expenses to come back to Québec. The system is clearly working against the workers and not protecting their rights or at least, makes it harder for them to be able to exercise their rights.

Female Workers

It is believed that due to a considerably low number of female workers, on top of the overprotection by the employers, I was unable to meet female workers. Nevertheless, it is important not to forget and to discuss their experience. A question on the experience of women seasonal agricultural workers was asked to the employees of the AWAC. One of the employees answered that of all the women he/she has met: “elles étaient toutes insatisfaites de leur expérience, et insatisfaites de leur situation de liberté qu’on pourrait dire, elles sentent qu’elles [ne] sont pas libres”. The other person answered in reference of the women having a more difficult experience:

From what she told me (...) well that it is more difficult because [of] the situation, (...) the employers say this ‘we are going to protect you more because you are a

woman' and in this overprotection many freedom rights are lost, freedom of mobility, freedom of expression, of realisation, of communicating with us, that is what she tells me so.

One of the two AWAC employees interviewed also added that they have heard about some women sleeping or going out with male coworkers. This particular behaviour has caused problems. In addition, when asked if they have heard of sexual assault (verbal, physical) one answered that he/she had not heard of any kind of physical assault but rather had been told of verbal: "mais harcèlement psychologique oui (...) une par exemple se faisait traiter de prostituée par les (...) autres travailleurs qui disaient qu'elle se prostituait (...) [il y a de l']intimidation".

An employee of the Mexican General Consulate agreed that the experience of the women, who usually work in the strawberry and flower industries, may be more difficult. Physically speaking, due to biological reasons, women, in general, are found to be less resistant to difficult and tiring physical work than men. Therefore, working an important part of the day (if not all of it) on their knees is very tiring and difficult for women. Many women raise their children alone and in order to be able to come to work, must leave their children with a guardian. The Mexican General Consulate employee highlighted that there is a difference between women and men in SAWP: the benefits of the women's employment goes directly to their children (education) while in the men's case, it also goes towards their children but also towards housing, car, small business, etc. For the women, it is an important sacrifice as they feel as though they leave their children behind and are worried about their well being, unlike the men who know that their children are fine with their mother. Being without a parent (or two) is likely to have a social impact on the children.

The employee of the Guatemalan General Consulate added that usually, in contradiction to the men, women already know how to cook. Therefore, women face fewer difficulties with that aspect but have to deal with other issues.

The examples given show that women may have a more difficult experience than their male coworkers as they worry for their children and may be overprotected, poorly and unfairly treated.

Working Conditions

The working conditions also seem fine in general especially with time as they are able to get used to the work. While Diego said that the conditions were fine, he also said that “to cut, in this time of year [autumn], it does not matter if it is raining, if it is snowing, we are going to cut”. This shows that, for anyone, but especially for people who are not used to the rude Québec climate, it can sometimes be more difficult because of the cold and the snow. It adds another challenge to the task. Raul answered: “here well they [working conditions] are normal, not very well not very bad well it is in the middle”. He added: “they are a bit heavier [“difficult”] here but with the will that one brings, one can surpass them”. Raul also mentioned that the difference is that in Mexico, if one does not like his/her job; he/she can change it. But in this employment in Québec, it is different: “and here no because you bring a contract that obliges that we stay with the boss that you first started working with, whether they are easy or hard tasks, you have to be there”. By saying this, Raul highlighted one of the aspects that can bring people to compare the conditions of the workers to a form of slavery. The workers do not have freedom of mobility and are tied to one employer; no matter what the conditions are (unless a formal complaint is filed, if needed be). In a similar vein, Orlando talked about the difference in the working speed:

the problem here is that one works a little bit faster (...) because here it is another form and one is paid per hour (...) one needs to work somewhat faster in comparison to over there in Guatemala if it is your own work nobody orders you, nobody tells you to work faster (...) [here] we have to work at the rhythm of the boss.

Orlando also mentioned that as part of their contract, they cannot request to leave at a certain date, the employers decide who leaves when and who stays until when: “we only wait for the order, if we cannot order, we cannot tell the bosses that we want to go now because we have signed a contract and have to stay until the supervisors tell us ‘it’s done now’”. This is another example given by Orlando that shows that they live a form of slavery.

The answers of the workers about their working conditions show that they are at the mercy of their employers. For example, sometimes an employer requests to have workers, even though they have very little work to do at the beginning of the season. They do not have a choice, if they want to be part of the program. Thus they come early, are away from their families, and on top of that barely have any work to do. Another example is the fact that the workers here have no mobility whatsoever: if they wish to change employer, because they are treated poorly or for any other reasons, they are unable to do so, unlike Québec residents who are free to leave employers as they wish. Also, employers will often have workers return home in groups at different intervals. For example, one group could leave late-September and the next group could leave mid-October. In this case, the workers are also unable to request in which group they would prefer to leave. A list on a “first come, first serve” basis of who prefers to go first could easily be set up.

After reading this section on the work experience of the workers, it is easy to note that not all workers have good working conditions. It is clear that the number of hours

worked is not sufficient in the eyes of the workers and that they want more. The women may have a more difficult experience as they are overprotected and deal with different emotional issues of leaving their children “alone”. While the treatment and the working conditions are not all negative, there are examples that should never occur. While easier said than done, the workers should not fear of losing their jobs, and should be able to voice freely their unhappiness with certain aspects of their employments. Closely related to the working conditions is the relationship that the workers have with their employer, which will be analyzed in the following section. It is important to remember that obviously, not all employers are “good” or “bad”.

Relationship with Employer

A specific question on how the relationship of the participants is with their employer was asked. This relationship is certainly one of the most important ones in any work environment but especially for the workers as the employer is the one who controls whether the workers will be back or not. While discussing with the two AWAC employees, it was explained to me that the employers give each of their worker a letter, that must remain sealed, which states whether they want the worker back or not. The worker must hand in the letter to their government’s representative once they are back in their home country. The worker cannot appeal the letter if it is negative. The FERME employee remarked that out of more than 6,000 workers in the province of Québec in 2009, there were only approximately thirty to forty cases of workers who had poor work ethic. Moreover, the employee also indicated that most of the repatriation cases (which are very few) are linked to cases of illness in the family or problems tied to a piece of land bought by the worker in their home country. René Mantha, general manager of FERME, said that about three percent to five

percent of workers are unable to finish their contract: “Ils vont demander à quitter parce qu’ils ne sont pas capable. Ce n’est pas juste le travail, c’est l’environnement et le déracinement aussi. La première année est vraiment cruciale” (Tremblay, 2009). In the case of poor relationship between the employer and the employee (for whatever reason), the FERME employee added that neither the employer nor the employee usually want to take the “easy” way out which is repatriation. The worker wants to keep working, while the employer wants to keep his/her trained labourer to accomplish the tasks. It is said that problems usually occur between employees rather than between the employer and an employee. FERME mediates and helps working out the problems.

Six of the participants answered that their relationship with their supervisor is good: “it does not matter who the person is, I have to obey her/him and I have to respect her/him” (Diego). One participant also mentioned that his employer has taken Spanish classes and is able to communicate well in the language. Alejandro and Ricardo mentioned some friction between their co-workers and their own employers. Alejandro said that there are excellent days but there are also others not so good because of the few hours available to work. He mentioned his employer being angry because the workers demanded to know the reason for the decreasing number of hours. Ricardo answered: “well fine, good, the employer has not treated us very well or very badly.”

While the answers provided by some of the participants in this section may be sincere, having talked with some of the participants off the record, I know that they have different things to say. Two participants confessed to me that their employer keeps their documents such as their passport even after being asked to return them. Thus this brings me to think that even if the participants were assured full confidentiality, it could be assumed

that they still did not feel completely confident in the interview while being recorded. This point also raises broader concerns since the employer is violating a law as it is illegal to keep someone else's papers without consent: "Employers ARE NOT [*sic*] permitted to take away and keep worker's passports, medical cards or other personal documents for any reason. If this occurs, workers should contact their government liaison officer immediately" (HRSDC b, 2009).

On the other side, the two AWAC employees had fewer positive comments and examples to say about the relationship of the workers with their employers. While it is known that not all employers are considered to be "bad" and some do take steps forward to improve the lives of their workers, others do not. When asked if the workers have problems with their own employers, one of the two answered:

Oui ça c'est monnaie courante. Le travailleur se blesse, le patron est pas vraiment chaud à l'idée de l'amener chez le docteur. Finalement il l'amène chez le docteur mais il est comme trop tard (...) [et] ça [ne] guérit pas. Pis là [il] faut qu'il retourne chez le docteur pis le patron [de dire] 'j'ai tu l'air d'un service ambulancier ou je [ne] sais pas quoi j'pas là moi pour t'amener au docteur au chaque 2 minutes [etc.]'. Finalement le travailleur se fait renvoyer chez eux parce qu'il est malade pis ça c'est monnaie courante.... Il n'est pas rappelé l'année suivante, c'est [écrit qu'il est] (...) mauvais travailleur, travailleur faible, [et qu'il a une] santé fragile.... [C'est] un accident de travail et ils vont dire que c'est un travailleur faible, santé fragile, [et qu']il ne peut pas accomplir le travail sur la ferme.

Again, it would be interesting and valuable to have statistics on cases similar to that in order to have a better idea if this is a common or an isolated problem. The employees at the

Mexican General Consulate did discuss examples of workers being sick. They explained that it is the culture in Mexico that when one is sick, one goes to the clinic. They acknowledged that in Canada if one has a sore stomach they will likely just take something for it and wait for it to pass. Thus, some employers will be reticent to bring a worker to see a doctor and lose time at work. They also added that the workers have a tendency to wait until they feel really bad until they tell someone. When seriously ill or injured, it is imperative that they get treatment as they are covered by the provincial healthcare system. However, some prefer to return home. CSST covers the time lost from work after an accident while a private insurance can cover time lost from work from being ill.

The employee at the General Consulate of Guatemala also raised health as being an issue: workers do not dare telling their employer if they feel ill, by fear of not being named again the following year (workers must be named to be able to participate in the program). The employee mentioned that the agricultural work is very difficult, thus the workers may become ill. The representative added that at times the employer will bring the worker to the clinic, and sometimes not. The health subject is important to the Guatemalan General Consulate.

The two employees of the Mexican General Consulate mentioned that on occasion, they have been to farms where the employer was not satisfied with the behaviour of a worker (or more). Alcohol has been raised as an issue. In those cases, the employees try to mediate the situation between both parties. Depending on the situation, the employer may wish to give the employee another opportunity or request him or her to leave.

In other instances, depending on the circumstances of a worker going back to their country of origin for personal or professional reasons, if the worker is nominal, the employer

may pay the return flight or parts of it. It is possible for workers to go back home and to return if they judge that the time left in the season will allow them to work enough hours to compensate and earn more than the cost of flying home and back to Québec.

On the other hand, if the Mexican General Consulate has received many complaints about a particular employer, representatives of the Consulate will also go to the farm, in order to assess the situation and to try to mediate the situation. If the complaints are deemed justified, they can give time to the employer to fix the problem. If the problem does not get fixed, the employer may be removed from the program. The employees of the General Consulate noted that one employer in 2007 and another one in 2008 were removed from SAWP, while no employers were removed from the program in 2009. The employer interviewed had only positive comments and praises to share about their workers: “Ces travailleurs étrangers font un excellent travail qui est grandement apprécié. Il [*sic*] sont fiables, disponibles et très vaillants.”

Overall, the participants did not have any overly negative comments to say about their employer, on record. However, the people who work closely with workers had other stories to share. As previously noted, two participants, off the record, told me that their employer kept their passport without their consent. This may indicate that workers feel more comfortable behind a closed door with people who support them, than with a researcher. This also adds to the point that they are treated in ways similar to slavery as they are not only tied to the employer, but the employer, on occasions, also may (or not) mistreat them. Valarezo even writes that in the opinion of the workers she interviewed, the consulate, who is supposed to protect the workers do not: “Workers not afraid of being vocal made it clear that the consulate places the interests of the Canadian government and

employer in front of its own citizens” (2007:84). In this sense, it is believed that more staff should be appointed to the support of the workers (Valarezo, 2007:110).

Closely related to the working conditions and the relationship of the workers with their employer, the following section on the contact of the workers with unions is interesting. While unions and any other local organisations could inform the workers of their rights, very few workers have contact (or claim to) with either.

Contact with Unions and/or Other Organisations

The topic of unions is sensitive and I definitely felt some hesitation from the participants when asked if they had any contact with unions. An important detail to mention is that the AWAC does not only preach for unions but also does a lot of work supporting workers. Esteban and Alejandro are the only two of the participants who mentioned that the AWAC had mentioned to them how to unionize, while the latter uncomfortably claimed having forgotten what he was told about unionizing. Bastian simply stated no (while in fact I met him at the AWAC) while Diego only answered “very little”. Ricardo and Benito mentioned that they do have contacts with the centre about knowledge and procedures regarding parental benefits they are entitled to. Orlando mentioned having contacts when he needed help or just to visit his friends at the centre: “Sometimes we only go there at the centre but for a visit, only when anything happens to us, whatever it is, the thing is that we have friendships there (...) we have a problem, we can go there”. Raul was by far the most open about his contact with the centre and stated that: “si, hemos pedido la ayuda a ellos” (“yes, we have asked them for help”) and “Que nos abran, que nos quitan la venda de los ojos en qué forma para que el patrón no nos dejó desconocer” (“so that they open, so that they remove the blindfold from our eyes so the employer does not leave us in ignorance”).

He added that they also tell him about his rights: “cuales son también nuestros (...) derechos para que el patrón no nos pueda forzar más de lo que uno no desempeñe” (“*what are also our (...) rights so that the employer cannot force us more than what one should work*”). The coordinator of the AWAC said in an interview that: “C’est comme si c’était un produit jetable [les travailleurs]. On s’en sert quatre ou cinq saisons et on s’en débarrasse. C’est un cycle qui ne finit pas” (Tremblay, 2009). On the other hand, the employer interviewed claimed that their workers are in contact with unions but does not encourage it because they think that the unions control the information shared to their advantages.

During the writing of this thesis, a decision²¹ taken by the *Commission des relations du travail* (CRT) opened the doors to unionization for seasonal agricultural workers (Radio-canada.ca, 2010). The Commission declared “inopérant un article du Code du travail qui empêchait jusqu’à maintenant ces travailleurs de se syndiquer du fait qu’ils ne travaillent pas au Québec 12 mois par année” (Radio-canada.ca, 2010). The article continues that “Selon la Commission, cette disposition est une atteinte directe à leurs droits constitutionnels, en particulier à leur droit d’association. De plus, elle leur interdit de prendre des moyens pour améliorer leurs conditions de travail” (Radio-canada.ca, 2010). This decision rejoices the UFCW (Radio-canada.ca, 2010) as they have been claiming that it was unconstitutional. It is believed that the workers could benefit from being unionized in order to have their rights respected.

I spent a lot of time helping and observing in the AWAC: I can confirm that the centre is there to help the workers in any way possible. The numbers of workers going into the centre on a daily and weekly basis varied a lot. Sunday is usually the most popular day

²¹ The decision is listed under “Commission des relations du travail” in the bibliography.

for workers to go to the centre as it is their day off. Some Sundays, there were easily about 20-25 workers (it depended quite a bit on the weather also). Thursday nights were also a “good” night in terms of visits as the workers usually go in town to do their errands and are driven by a bus/van from their farm. Some of the services offered to the workers by the centre are: help with income taxes, parental benefits, bank problems, pension plan, CSST applications; French classes and/or help with translation; raise awareness of their rights; give general information and on unions; available to discuss with the workers, etc.

The participants answered unanimously to having no contact with any other Canadian organisations than the centre: lack of time and knowledge and language barrier may be factors into this. This could definitely be something improved to enhance their social experience in Québec as other organisations could create events, activities and social resources for them (besides masses in Spanish and a soccer tournament).

The topic of unions is taboo as it was observed during the interviews. Many workers who come to the centre enter by the back door as it was later explained to me, many are scared of their employers or coworkers seeing them enter the building where the centre is. The idea of the centre being there to support and help the workers is not very clear and it seems that there is a lot of misconception about the role of the centre. While it is a union centre, the centre offers a multitude of services that support the workers on a daily basis.

Living Conditions

Although most of the interviewees, except for the two AWAC employees, shared positive comments about the living conditions, this matter is under the negative perspective. Participants may have felt uncomfortable talking about this as they may not feel free to talk unlike the two people who can freely express what the workers tell them. Also, the fact that

the Guatemalan workers are overcharged for their rent is another reason that the living conditions are considered negative. However, to be fair, FERME has demonstrated improvements in the housing situations (FERME, 2009). My findings for the living conditions also go against the previous studies that have been looked at. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that while the previous studies looked at the bad cases of living conditions, it does not mean that all workers have bad living conditions. Also, it is very possible that, since the majority of the other studies were conducted in other provinces, that it may not be a problem in the province of Québec. Also, in my research, while only eight workers were interviewed, it does not mean that all of the workers in Québec have good living conditions. However, it is encouraging to see and hear only good feedback on this aspect from the participants. In addition to that, an employee from the Mexican General Consulate added that it is rather rare that they hear complaints from workers about living conditions. They noted that it seems to be more common in Ontario for example.

All of the participants only had good things to say about their living conditions: “on that side, we are very well” (Ricardo). Esteban mentioned that the living conditions here are far better than the ones in Mexico. All the participants mentioned having plenty of space, good kitchens, sufficient bathrooms and bedrooms (either on their own, by 2 or in a dormitory), television with cable, washing and drying machine, telephone, micro wave, etc. Thus, while they may be tired from their jobs, according to them, they have adequate houses to rest in. Not related to their house living but still pertinent, Bastian believes that life seems easier here than in Mexico: “Life here we see it as easier. But others say that it is more difficult, they pay taxes to the government. They take away from us but less than from the ones from here. For one it is easy for another one it is difficult”.

In contradiction to what the participants have answered, the two AWAC employees answered the opposite. One said that: “des conditions de logement pas acceptables (...) le chauffage d’appoint, au lieu [du] système de chauffage normal, c’est un système de chauffe d’appoint accroché au plafond (...) pas sécuritaire”. Valarezo shares that in her interviews, workers “made note of the fact that there is no privacy in their housing and that being roomed with a large number of men is not a comfortable and suitable living situation” (2007:96).

One of the two AWAC employees: “le premier problème de logement qu’on voit c’est justement le problème du loyer à \$45.00 par semaine pour les guatémaltèques (...) c’est le code civil qui s’applique parce qu’ils viennent travailler ici au Québec”²². Interestingly, none of the Guatemalan participants mentioned in my interviews having to pay \$45.00 per week for the living accommodations. Yet, I know through observations that one of the participants filed a complaint because of this. In Valarezo’s investigation, one Guatemalan worker “felt that it was not right that Guatemalans had to pay rent while Mexicans did not, arguing that, ‘paying for rent and paying for food, little is left for us’” (2007:100). To clarify, it is actually written in the pamphlet “Las normas de trabajo en Québec y los trabajadores agrícolas extranjeros” (“*Les normes de travail au Québec et les travailleurs agricoles étrangers*”) given by the *Commission des normes du travail* of the Government of Québec that: “When the working conditions oblige the salaried to be fed or lodge in an establishment or in the employer’s residence, the maximal amount of money that can be required is of: (...) \$20,00 CAD per week for the room”. For that reason, the

²² The SAWP workers (Mexicans in this study) do not pay for housing, unlike Guatemalans who are part of the TFWP.

Guatemalan workers are being overcharged for their rent. As a matter of fact, during my observations, a group of approximately twenty Guatemalans came to AWAC to file a complaint based on the fact that they are being overcharged by \$25.00 on a weekly basis for their living accommodations.

It was indicated by the FERME employee that they have a housing inspector who visits the houses, ideally prior to the arrival of the workers, to ensure that they are adequate, according to the Canadian and Québec norms. If a house is judged to be unacceptable, the owner is given a period of time to rectify the problem. The 2009 Annual Report of FERME, states that in 2009, about 350 housings conformed while 120 needed a follow-up. It is also written that the numbers of unacceptable housings are constantly decreasing and that they only represent about five percent of the housings (FERME, 2009). In the same way, the Québec *Commission des normes du travail* has started in 2009, according to the FERME employee, to visit the farms and houses of the workers to see their conditions. The Mexican General Consulate employees welcome such initiatives as they are not expert on all matters and further added that the Commission has visited approximately 100 in 2009. Working together will ensure a better experience to everyone: workers and employers included.

Thus, having to live in their employer's establishment, which at times are inadequate, on top of being overcharged, in the case of the Guatemalans, shows that, the workers are at the mercy of their employer. The nature of both SAWP and TFWP makes that Guatemalans, who live with Mexicans, must pay for housing while the others do not. This could likely create frictions and could be, to an extent, considered as a type of discrimination. For uncertain reasons, except perhaps to make more money, the employers

take the opportunity to raise the weekly amount. Despite that, overall, it seems as though the living conditions do not represent a problem to the workers.

A Non-existent Social Life

Anyone's social life will likely be affected by where they are and whether they are able to speak the language or not. The fact that people will help them integrate, or not, will also play a role in how their social life can develop. To some, being social may be less important than others. However, in this case, it is believed that if their social life was improved, the workers would have a better overall experience. When the participants were asked about their social life, there was a bit of hesitation. This particular section on the social life of the participants demonstrates well that while some of the participants want to have a social life, they are unable to. Throughout the different aspects of this section, one obstacle is persistent: the language barrier, which brings one to think that it may be one of the biggest factors, if not the main one.

Cultural Differences

One of the most striking aspects that demonstrate that the workers make an important sacrifice to come to work in Québec is that they are socially isolated from their host community. Arguably, Latin Americans tend to be very social and live very close to their families and friends. It is not a rare sight, in Mexico for example, to see many gatherings of friends and families, whether it is over the weekends or in the evenings in the plazas of their home towns or cities. It seems as though it is part of their everyday life and culture. While observing, Alejandro mentioned that he missed going in town, during evenings and weekends where he can meet many people whom he knows. Conversely, while families and

friends are very important, in Québec we do not traditionally gather in a central point of the town/city. This is an important cultural difference, which explains why so many of the workers say that they are suffering a great deal from being isolated.

Some of the workers leave their home countries for the first time to come to Canada. They may face important cultural shock and have a difficult time adjusting to their new, but temporary, lives. During his interview, Esteban acknowledged never having left his own country before his first departure as part of the SAWP: he did not really know where he was or who he was. During his first year, he saw many of his co-workers go back home because they were not doing well. There was a lot of depression felt by these workers who left. He said that it is important to keep the mind busy; otherwise, it starts to work and think about things that are not necessarily positive.

Lack of Activities, Time and Transportation

A recurrent theme was the lack of activities and of things to do. Since the participants are agricultural workers, it is obvious that most are situated in rural areas of Québec. Anyone who is familiar with the province of Québec can confirm that in rural areas there are few activities for any locals thus potentially even less for temporary migrants who do not speak the language. Depending on the season and the climate, workers will have more or less free time for activities. Integration programs and activities should be organised by the hosting municipalities to ease and improve the workers' experience.

One activity that has been organised and that definitely should return on a yearly basis are the soccer games. Five out of eight participants (Esteban, Bastian, Ricardo, Orlando and Raul) mentioned going to the soccer games to have fun: "well we were going there almost every Sunday because there is nothing to distract us here. We had to run to see

the games and yes for that because it benefits us because we do not feel lonely or sad anymore, we go to distract our mind a little bit there” (Ricardo). Raul said: “there is a sport [soccer] that is practiced during the summer and we go watch it (...) and we like going to observe or we like to go see our companions that play there, support them”. Bastian also mentioned that he only goes to see the soccer games, and does not participate as he is scared to hurt himself. It is evident that this activity distracts the workers and has a positive impact on them. Esteban also mentioned having the weekend of the “Fiesta des Cultures” organised by the town of Saint-Rémi as a social opportunity to celebrate different cultures. That weekend, without a doubt, is a great opportunity for the workers to meet up and celebrate their culture. It is also a great opportunity for the locals to discover and share different cultures and to know more about the seasonal agricultural workers who live in their hometown and in neighbouring villages.

Another aspect that was hardly mentioned by the participants is the fact that workers may have little time to take part in activities. Benito mentioned that he has many things to do outside of work: “work from 7am until 7pm there is no time to visit friends, we have to cook food, take a shower, sleep, and then work and then it is all over the same again”. However, Benito is the only one who said that he does not really have time to socialise. This goes against what the participants said earlier about having less hours of work which would mean that they have more free time. Raul, Ricardo, Esteban, Bastian and Diego all mentioned having time to socialize but also talked about the challenge of being able to communicate with the locals. Bastian also wondered what there is for him to do. Thus, clearly, the language barrier and the lack of possibilities limit greatly the occasions of being social.

Orlando also raised the issue of a lack of transportation that the workers have to deal with. He said: “here we arrive and from here we leave because there is nowhere to go it is not like in our country (...) there are, well we say buses, buses that bring us to another village, and the bus passes, and it is possible to go wherever it is you want to go, but here it is different”. Bastian confirmed what Orlando said by mentioning that they only have bicycles as a mean of transport so they can only go to the village, nothing more. He would like to be able to go out: he feels isolated and lonely as he is always in the house. The employer interviewed stated that their workers are always together and that they do not really manifest interest in integrating the community: “Nous croyons qu’ils n’en ressentent pas le besoin. La langue constitue certainement une barrière pour eux. Ils ne souhaitent pas dépenser leur argent ici ou très peu. Certains vont s’intégrer à la communauté mais il s’agit d’une minorité.... Quand on travail [sic] 7 jours semaine, il y a peu de temps pour l’intégration...” The employer raises valid points in that the language barrier, the money and the time may work against the integration of the workers. However, basing ourselves on the comments by the workers, while recognizing certain obstacles, they would appreciate opportunities of being social with local residents.

Personal Activities on Free Time

According to the participants’ answers, they do not have access to a lot of activities outside of work. Thus, they were asked what they do during their own free time. Diego, Esteban and Alejandro all mentioned that they spend some time reading or studying. In addition, Diego, Orlando and Esteban watch television while Diego favours Christian movies. Esteban pointed out that they asked their supervisor to have Spanish channels on their television but they still had not heard anything back by the time of the interview. They

spend a lot of time with their coworkers at home: Alejandro even said that they spend too much time together. Orlando and Esteban both mentioned also listening to music while Esteban is the only one who mentioned exercising. Benito simply answered “sleep”. Bastian said that he does not do anything but that he would like to. Just like Raul, he goes to the AWA centre to chat a bit but does not know what else to do. Ricardo also said he does not do anything and stays in the house but would like to be more associated with people. Raul also mentioned that he does his errands during his free time. To Alejandro, the town, where he is, is pretty but partly sad because there are very few people and he does not know anyone: he does not take part in any activities outside of work. He mentioned that even though he has time to engage in social activities, he faces a strong language barrier. From time to time, masses in Spanish are organised and Esteban and Benito attend. Interestingly, this particular town was said, by the employees of the Mexican General Consulate, to be a good town to be in as the workers are less isolated and that there are actually activities organised for them. Both the Guatemalan General Consulate and FERME employees also mentioned St-Rémi as being a good town to be in to have activities (mass, soccer, Fiesta des Cultures, etc). However, the participants still feel quite a bit isolated and wish there was more to do. Valarezo also writes that “while these events [soccer games, masses] can be seen as a gesture of accommodation on the part of the St. Rémi [*sic*] community, this is not sufficient support for migrants workers in the area” (2007:71). The Guatemalan employee also noted that the majority does not visit because they do not want to waste their money and may not have the time. However, the employee also voiced that to the workers, socializing is very important as many workers desperately miss their families. FERME indicated that there are other towns, such as Laval, Saint-Eustache, Sainte-Hyacinthe, that have activities.

Earlier, the employer interviewed stated that integration can be challenging as the workers work seven days/week. However, the employer also said that their workers do have free time and they usually spend it resting, shopping and playing soccer. Perhaps some of this time could be used to improve their integration.

Overall, the comments made by the workers bring one to think that the social isolation lived by the workers affect them even more than expected. This raises further preoccupation as there are many workers who live in even more rural areas: they could potentially feel very isolated.

Social Network

The participants were asked about their social network: having friends or not will greatly affect the fact that they feel isolated or not. Even without activities organised by the town, having friends makes a difference as they can then have their own activities. However, in general, the participants answered that the people consisting their social network are their co-workers, other workers they have met in town or have known from their home country and employees and volunteers at the AWAC. Thus, the participants do not have great opportunities to get to know people outside of their work environment. On top of that, the language barrier is an important obstacle. While it is valuable to have good relationships with your co-workers, it is also beneficial to have other friends to change air and atmosphere. It makes Diego particularly glad and proud to meet other workers who are from the same country as he said that: “if one goes to another place, well to me, it is quite satisfying to meet with other friends from the same country, because one should not be selfish like we say, if I have this opportunity better that other friends have it too”. Alejandro was the only participant who mentioned that he also made friends with people outside of his

work environment. He said that he met people, while doing his errands in town, who speak a little bit of Spanish.

Host Community

The participants also discussed their relationship with their host community. When answering that question, there was also a consensus on how the participants' relationship with the community is. To them, the best way to describe it is "non-existent". Esteban mentioned that he has been treated well and that there are people who speak a little bit of Spanish and that he has a good impression of the Québécois. Bastian also mentioned that many locals speak and greet him and that he does not perceive things differently here mainly because he does not talk with the locals. On another hand, Alejandro answered that his relationship with the community is not the greatest but it also is not bad. Their (his) problem is that they do not speak French; thus there is a very important language barrier that stops them from being able to further develop their relationship with the community.

When asked this question, Diego answered: "there yes we are not doing so well, as I am telling you, our language does not allow us to interact with them". In Diego's mind, not having a relation is bad, thus without a doubt, the fact that he cannot interact with the locals affects him. Benito answered: "On a regular basis, we do not have much of a relationship, nothing more than one day per week we go do our errands, and Sunday we go out a little bit". Interestingly, Ricardo and Orlando both answered similarly by mentioning that they do not put themselves (or are not looking for) into situations that could cause problems: "one does not look for problems" (Ricardo) and "since we cannot speak French, it is best that we do not put ourselves into problematic situations" (Orlando). Orlando added: "we are missing words in French" so it is "best to stay (...) in the house so that we do not go get

lost”. Thus it seems as though, since they cannot communicate adequately in the host language, they think that there is a greater risk for them to get into trouble or to get lost.

Raul is the only one who directly talked about discrimination and said that his relationship with the host community is:

Fine, with the ones that we understand and that we chat, (...) but with many well no.... There is a few that discriminate us a little bit.... Or rather, there are some, not all of the persons, there are a lot of good people but between (...) 500, 600 there is always going to be one, one to whom they will treat him/her bad.

Raul did not give more details on the discrimination that he has encountered. However, he brings an interesting point that discrimination can be another challenge to overcome by the workers. Along the same lines, Alejandro feels isolated because of the color of his skin, his origins and the different language. He feels as though people look at him differently and he indicated having had bad experiences without providing further examples.

During my observations at the AWAC, I was able to help out the workers. On different occasions, I accompanied workers at a bank as they needed help with interpretation. In this particular bank, there are two waiting lines: one for the agricultural workers and one for “locals”. Understandably, during rush hours (i.e. usually on Thursday nights), there is a considerably longer waiting line for the workers as it is, for most of them, the only opportunity to go to the bank. Due to the waiting lines, even though workers may have arrived prior to villagers, the villagers get to go to the shorter waiting line reserved to them (as the villagers do not necessarily have a “rush” hour with only one weekly opportunity to go to the bank). In my opinion, this is a rather shocking privilege reserved for the locals. Why would villagers have priority over the agricultural workers? Whose

money's worth more? Why is it not on the basis of "first come first serve", as any other "regular" bank offers? This could easily be considered as discrimination. Thus questions on the motives should be brought to the administration. Through observations, one worker has said to me, in reference to having two waiting lines at the bank that he thought that he gets service as a number two rather than a number one because he wears "dirty" clothes as he does not have time to change before their employers bring them in town. Evidently, the fact that the workers have a separate waiting line affects them and certainly does not help with their sentiments of isolation.

Valarezo (2007:62) writes in her thesis that Thursdays, in Saint-Rémi, are known as "Mexico Day". She argues that it shows the lack of knowledge, by the community, of the presence of Guatemalan workers. While she acknowledges that they are a new immigrating cohort, they should still be recognized by the community: "When engaging in discussion with local community members, most seem to assume that migrants employed in the surrounding farms are all Mexicans, overlooking Guatemalans entirely, despite the fact that they too are becoming significant contributors to the St. Rémi [*sic*] community" (Valarezo, 2007:62). Moreover, Valarezo writes that the host community in general is not receptive to the seasonal workers: "this community member explained to me how many individuals are not open to, nor comfortable with, the influx of migrants who temporarily reside in their community" (Valarezo, 2007:68).

Adaptation was also mentioned, by the employees of the Mexican General Consulate, as a challenge that the workers must face. The employees mentioned that to ease the adaptation and the integration of the workers, the municipalities could be more engaged

to help with those aspects (as well as with regulating housings for example). However, municipalities often do not have that sort of budget.

As it was seen in this particular section, the social life of the participants, in their opinion, is rather non-existent. The participants feel isolated and only have one another to be social with. At times, to be working, living and sharing free time with the same people, can likely be difficult. Everyone needs a little bit of changes to revitalize and invigorate. The participants suffer from the lack of social activities, of opportunities and of transportation. After all, Saint-Rémi is geographically-speaking very close to Montréal: if the participants had opportunities, they could likely spend some of their leisure time in Montréal. The participants need to have more activities organised by the municipalities and/or organisations to ease their integration and to allow them to make friends more easily outside of work. The participants are far from their families and friends and suffer because of the distance. Unquestionably, if their integration was taken in charge, it would enhance their social experience and ease their sacrifice made to be far away. If in other words, they were treated like full human beings than just workers; their experience would be greatly improved.

Feeling alienated and isolated from a community where you live, sometimes up to eight months per year can be a very negative experience in itself. Some workers spend more time abroad than in their home communities. Therefore, without a doubt, being isolated adds to the difficulty and to the sacrifices that the workers make to work in Québec.

Language Barrier

An omnipresent theme in the previous section on the social life of the participants is the language barrier lived by them. While some claim to be able to understand and communicate a little bit, their French level is not sufficient to be able to socialise. The language barrier and the social life of the participants are intertwined. They are not comfortable in French, but do not have opportunities to practice it, and they are less likely to go on their own and create their opportunities to be social.

The challenge created by having a language barrier does not only affect the social life of the workers. It also affects their basic needs in their everyday lives. Diego gave an example: “I want to go buy a medicine at the pharmacy and that is what is quite difficult to me because I do not know how to ask, what the product is called or how to use it, so for that it makes it difficult to me”. Ricardo also talked about how difficult it is for them to ask and to buy things. During the months that I conducted my research I accompanied workers to the pharmacy and the banks to interpret. A concrete example at the pharmacy was when I helped two workers buy sunscreen as they were concerned with protecting their skin due to long sun exposure: due to the language barrier they were unable to do that on their own. Another example was at the bank previously mentioned. One employee said to me in French: “They have [Spanish-speaking agricultural workers] been coming for 20 years but I still don’t know how to greet them in Spanish”. While on the other hand, when I went to another competing bank I was informed that one employee speaks Spanish and her/his job is to help the workers. While this latter bank has adapted its service to help the workers, the former bank, as demonstrated by the employee, has done little to nothing to provide a better service for the workers. In this particular situation, everyone (employees and clients) should

make an effort, since saying “welcome” or “thank you” in French and in Spanish is basic communication. While claiming that all workers know how to say “thank you” would not be rational, I would claim that by far the vast majority of them know at least how to say “thank you” and “hello” in French.

Another interesting example that shows the language barrier lived by the workers is the service offered by the government. The government provides information, to the workers, which is often only available in French or in English. Still, it is fair to add that the government of Québec has developed an informative pamphlet in Spanish. However, as demonstrated in the documentary “Los Mexicanos – Le combat de Patricia Perez” by Charles Latour (2007), when calling the number given on the Spanish-written pamphlet to get further information, the phone services are only available in French or in English, which is no help to the Spanish-speaking workers. The pamphlet in Spanish is better than nothing, but how can workers get further details if the number to call does not provide Spanish service? My points are not to animate debates on linguistic matters but rather to realise that thousands of workers come as part of a bilateral agreement and valuable program. They are essential to our agriculture production and a minimum effort to provide them with a better service and better information on their rights would be appreciated and valuable.

On the opposite of the government, the foundation FERME does have Spanish speaking employees. In the interview, the FERME employee even added that the foundation has approached a company that provides Spanish teaching services. The employers, member of the FERME foundation and interested in learning Spanish, will have to pay for the service but will also have access to courses. Due to busy lives, the courses, done over the phone, can be accomplished during fifteen minutes per day, four days a week for a

period of six months. While it would be preferable to have longer courses and more immersion, this is a step in the right direction. FERME maintains that more and more employers are speaking Spanish, and with this new program, it is likely to help even more the communication between workers and employers.

Some of the participants said that they know a little bit of French and/or are studying French. Ricardo knows a few words but, in his opinion, not enough to have a dialogue. So he spends his time with his companions at home. Raul said that he understands a little bit of French: “I do not speak it a lot but yes I understand them a little bit, the indispensable that is for work, request things”. Bastian mentioned that one needs to study more French to be able to communicate. He sometimes studies French and understands a little bit but he says that it is a difficult language. Alejandro is studying and trying to learn French so that he can explain himself to people. He mentioned that his first year was rather difficult, especially with the food because he did not know what was what and what to buy. He thought to himself: “what am I going to do here”. Now, he learns day by day. As far as his knowledge of French, Diego answered that “it can be said that nothing”, in other words he does not speak a word of French. He also added: “the ideal would be that one would learn, because it is quite difficult but not impossible, like they say, and it would be of great help to us”. Thus the participants are aware that knowing French would be of great value to improve their social experience in their host community and that everyone should do their part to decrease the language barrier.

Another important aspect to remember is that not all the workers who come to Québec to work have Spanish as their first language. Thus, having another language as a mother tongue, and Spanish as a second language, makes things even more complicated for

them. They get served in Spanish so it requires extra effort to understand and they may or may not understand. Therefore, it makes things even more complicated for them to learn a third language (French). Orlando is a good example of this. He frequently mentioned, during his interview, that a big problem is the fact that they do not speak French and that they barely have time to learn it (“*casi no tenemos tiempo*”). On top of that, Orlando’s first language is not Spanish: “we have two languages in which well, we can speak naturally our dialect and we can talk a little bit of Spanish (...) but more or less. There are a few [instances] that requires more effort because we are more used to speak our dialect”. During my observation, I also met another worker whose first language was not Spanish. While Orlando seemed to understand a bit more Spanish; the other worker was having a more difficult time understanding Spanish. Without a doubt, the experience for these workers is more difficult as they already are not functioning in their mother tongue, let alone learn a third difficult language that is French.

The language barrier that the workers face is a recurrent problem throughout the interviews with the participants and the conversations I have had with non-participants of this research. However, what can be done to help the workers other than give them French courses? The employers can also take Spanish classes to be able to communicate efficiently with their employees. However, through my observations, workers have said that some of the employers do not like the idea of their workers learning French and there are increasing numbers of employers speaking Spanish instead. Why would the employers prefer to have their workers not speak French? Likely to ensure the unfreedom status previously mentioned in the literature review.

What are the workers doing to improve their language barrier? While some of the workers mentioned studying a little bit and attending French courses, more should be done on their part. Most of the participants interviewed, as well as most of the workers met during observations, indicated that they did not work enough hours. Thus, it is not unrealistic to think that the workers could study more French as they seem to have time. However, let's not forget that these workers are oftentimes not very "scholarised". To some who may be struggling with their own language, learning a new one as complex as French definitely represents challenges.

Language barrier can cause other problems other than having a non-existent social life. Both AWAC employees mentioned that there are a lot of physical problems encountered because of the repetitive work such as tendinitis and back problems. The former is possibly due to a repetitive movement done many hours per day and the latter likely due to having to bend over the entire day to cut vegetables for example. The workers may suffer and are scared or hesitant to tell their employers. When they do tell, they may be misunderstood due to the language barrier:

en général même le travailleur ose pas (...) demander à son boss quand [il] commence à souffrir vraiment là. Des fois il ose, il finit par y aller [parler à son employeur et] souvent c[e n']est pas clair.... [II] y a un grave problème de communication la plupart du temps. [Donc] des fois il [employeur] dit 'ah c'est quoi t'as besoin d'un jour pour te reposer? Tu peux prendre une journée pour te reposer.' Mais (...) c[e n']est pas ça qui devrait faire il devrait l'emmener direct [voir un professionnel de la santé]. [Sinon] il va à l'hôpital ou à la clinique (...) [et il lui] donne une semaine ça (...) fait *chier* l'employeur.

While it is noted that not all employers would act like this, it is important to highlight the problems of communication encountered by the workers and their employers.

The employees at the Mexican General Consulate noted that one of the biggest problems is the language barrier. There are often miscommunications, misinterpretations that take place due to the language differences. Workers do not understand and neither do the employers who do not speak Spanish. The employees of the Mexican General Consulate also mentioned that depending on the geographical location of the workers, some are more isolated than others. However, it seems as though the workers close to Saint-Rémi are more integrated as they have about 4 to 5 masses in Spanish for them throughout the season and the Fiesta des Cultures organised by the town in August. The General Consulate of Mexico takes those opportunities to go and meet with the workers. They mention that some have the opportunity to take part in events, take French classes but also do not deny the isolation of others who are further away. Municipalities should try and organise activities to help with the integration of the workers.

No one can control the fact that in Québec, French is spoken and that in the origin countries of the workers, Spanish is spoken. However, with globalization, there are also more and more people who speak more than one language. Spanish is becoming more popular. Thus, more people speaking Spanish in Québec could be a plus for the workers. However, a question of whether the people who speak more than one language will live in rural areas can be considered.

Conclusively, the participants and the workers face an important challenge with the language barrier. While some participants do their part by studying French and some employers learn Spanish, more should be done as it can be sensed that the participants are

suffering due to the language barrier. Miscommunications and misinterpretations do happen due to the language differences. While the AWA centre offers French courses, to the best of their ability, municipalities could easily install French courses/lessons/workshops specifically for the workers. This would be a great opportunity for workers to meet local residents while learning the language. Diminishing the language barrier is believed to be an important factor in easing the sacrifices that the workers do out of necessity.

To recapitulate, the workers make a sacrifice to take part in both SAWP and TFWP. The workers suffer from being far away from their families. If an unfortunate event happens in their family (sickness for example), they face emotional struggles. They are socially isolated from their host communities and have one another to share time and have activities with. They face lack of mobility and strong language barriers that affect their social lives but also their basic needs. The working conditions, in general, seem to be fair. However, as it has been previously mentioned, working in agriculture is very demanding and risky. The workers not only have to deal with the risks that any agriculture workers have to face, but they also have to deal with the lack of knowledge of their own rights, with possible abuse from the employers, etc. The workers, while here in Québec, suffer on a daily basis due to all of these aspects. They are at the mercy of their employers as they must live in the housing provided by them. Their hands are tied to their employers. On top of that, the Guatemalans have to pay a weekly fee of \$45.00 fee for their housing that they cannot chose or leave if inadequate. The Guatemalans are even more restricted: if they are not called back by their employer the following year, they do not get a chance into getting in the program again. Thus, the Guatemalans are even less likely to voice their unhappiness as they risk not

getting back into the program. The Mexican General Consulate's employees explained that, the Mexicans can change employer if they are not called back, up to three times. The workers are anonymous, they are not treated as any other regular human or other permanent immigrants, and they are considered as working machines who are not socially integrated.

Chapter four has explored a great deal about the personal experience of the participants. While there are obvious economic advantages for the participants to take part in both programs, more negative aspects resurface. The workers, in the eyes of the partners of these agreements, are in fact “only” workers and not human beings. It is as though the workers are handpicked to be chosen to work in Québec due to their historic background and their ability to perform agricultural duties. They are thought to be able to adapt easily and thus produce more than others. These decisions are strictly for economic purposes. The sending countries want to share their capable labour force to please the receiving country: after all, for the sending countries, agreements like the SAWP and programs like the TFWP are great economical advantages and they must preserve them, for the best interest of their own country. As chapter five will demonstrate, the remittances do help families and potentially communities, which would explain the retention rate. However, while the economic side of it all is looked after, the social aspect of these experiences is certainly uncared for. The social life of the participants is considered poor and their relationship with the locals as “non-existent”. The workers also face important language barrier that can lead to miscommunication and misinterpretation. The workers do not have integration programs and barely have any activities organised for them. An effort by municipalities and by the governments should be made to ease the integration and create local programs to help them

learn French. While the economic advantages have been explored and re explored in various studies, the social aspects must be looked after. Further studies should be done to investigate what consequences it has on the workers to undergo (up to eight months per year for a number of years) social isolation and important language barrier. Without a doubt, living alienation for a number of years has to have its impact on a human being. With that said, the following chapter will look into details the impact that the international employments have on the families and the communities of the agricultural workers.

Chapter Five - Family and Home Community of the Agricultural Workers

While chapter four solely explored the individual experiences of the participants, this chapter will analyze the experience of the families and home communities of the workers. I will discuss for example, how the absence of the father affects the families and home communities and also how the money earned abroad impacts them. As with the previous chapter, the empirical results are organized according the two distinct positions. Chapter four allowed to get to know on an individual aspect the participants: this will allow a context to understand their family situations.

The arguments for and against both programs have been previously presented. While on the one hand, it has been argued that the participation rates have been increasing for both programs, seemingly indicating their success, on the other hand, the lack of mobility and freedom granted to the workers has been noted and criticized. The economic advantages were earlier analyzed and they certainly represent clear incentives to take part in the programs. But workers seem to be attracted to these programs out of necessity and they are clearly making sacrifices for the sake of their families. The following sections will further explore the motives of the workers.

To analyze the impacts that this temporary employment has on the family of the workers and on their community is an additional valuable aspect of this research. Indeed, too often we tend to forget about these families, about the women who raise their children alone up to eight months per year. Raising children can be at times challenging without the father present. Nevertheless, the spouses have said to have an improved lifestyle since their husbands have taken this temporary employment. In this situation, there are pros and cons,

and one can deduct that the pros have won over the cons. After all, the workers do come back year after year to the detriment of saddened families.

All of the participants live with their spouse and their children while one lives with his family and his parents. Most of the participants' children are still in school with a few working with the participants when they go home after their seasonal work. While in observation, one worker even talked about his three children currently studying in university and wishing to come, in the future, to Canada to do their master's degree.

Positive Experience

As it was previously done in chapter four, the empirical elements that are considered to be a part of the positive experience will first be analyzed. The positive aspects are likely to be the elements that have the most influence on the decision of the workers to return year after year to Québec to work. In the present section, remittances and the family, changes in lifestyles and the remittances and the home community will be discussed.

Remittances and the Family

Chapter four showed that the economic advantages were strong motives to the workers who come to work in Québec. Likewise, this section and the following will show that remittances, in the eyes of the workers, are worth the sacrifices. The section will mainly focus on the impact that the earning has on the families and on the communities of the workers.

None of the participants were able to give me a firm amount of money sent on a regular basis to their family: their income depends entirely on the climate and on how many hours they work per week (even though the signed contract obliges the employer to give a

minimum of 40 hours per week). As a consequence, the following numbers found in the table are estimates provided by the participants, starting with the highest figure.

Table 5 – Remittances per Participant

Participant	Age	Origin	Number of children	Amount of Remittances (in Canadian \$)	Frequency	Total of remittances (in Canadian \$) on a monthly basis
Benito	34	Mexico	3	1,500-2,000	15 to 20 days	3,000-4,000
Raul	38	Mexico	3	600-700	15 days	1,200-1,400
Diego	46	Guatemala	7	900	3 weeks	1,200
Ricardo	43	Mexico	5	1,000-1,200	Month	1,000-1,200
Esteban	35	Mexico	6	500	15 days	1,000
Bastian	36	Mexico	3	800-1,000	Month	800-1,000
Orlando	44	Guatemala	5	400-500	15 days	800-1,000
Alejandro	33	Guatemala	3	400	3 to 4 weeks	400-530

There is an obvious and significant gap between the amount of remittances sent by Benito and Alejandro, even though they have, to some extent, similar jobs and work at the same farm. While both highest and lowest amounts of money represent an important gap, the amounts found within the middle are thought to be more plausible (due to the contract, hourly wage, taxes, expenses, etc). That being said however, different factors may come into play that could explain these differences. For example, the nature of the farm (size), a difference in tasks or hours worked, a different salary (on an hourly basis), whether they are Mexican or Guatemalan (Guatemalans need to pay for their rent), a different lifestyle lived

in Québec, etc. One is likely to presume that the divergence in the money makes a difference in the lifestyles of both Benito's and Alejandro's families. The worker with whom Tremblay (2009) discussed worked 1,160 hours in the summer of 2009 and she added that in average, for a period of 6 months, the workers earn between \$9,000 and \$12,000 which equals to about 2 and a half years of income in Mexico.

From the interviews I conducted with the workers, all the participants and their families use the money earned for very similar things. The two reasons that were most mentioned were for the education of their children and to feed themselves. Tremblay (2009) quoted the Mexican Consul General, at that time, Edgardo Flores Rivas who said: "Nous avons des travailleurs qui ont des filles et des garçons qui terminent leur université. C'est un changement drastique pour ces familles de fermiers, quand on pense que le père n'a pas fini ses études élémentaires." Other uses mentioned in no particular order are: "to advance forward', to survive, for medicine, for housing maintenance, to improve the house (and/or to add a room) and to also buy better clothes and to improve their lives in general". In fact, Binford et al (2004:103) write that more than eighty per cent of the remittances are used on food, clothes, housing and education of the children.

Orlando mentioned that his wife manages the money and that they use it for three different things: family, food and savings in the bank. It can be noted that the answers relate to basic needs. Some even manage to put aside a little bit of earnings. The employer interviewed share that their workers leave at the end of the season proud of what they have accomplished. They know that their accomplishments are essential to the success of the company. Furthermore, the employer added "ils semblent satisfaits de l'argent qu'ils réussissent à amasser ici et savent que leurs efforts profiteront au bien-être de leur famille".

Overall, participants and their spouses seem to have prioritized in order to allow their families to “move forward”. It is noteworthy however, to mention that the participants do not seem to be much richer²³, as they are not buying or doing things that could be judged “unnecessary”. As the families are getting used to a higher income, they get used to more material things than having their father work at home. Indeed, the money earned is considerably more than if they were working in their home communities. It would be interesting to be able to compare and analyze the lifestyles of the workers’ families before, during and after the programs. It would also be interesting to compare the workers’ lifestyles to the lifestyles of people, from the same communities, who are not taking part in the programs. Now that the purpose of remittances has been analyzed, the following section will look into details whether the money earned has made a difference or not in their household.

Changes in Lifestyle

Participants and workers, through discussion and observation, have mentioned that they come to work to Québec out of necessity. Based on that assertion, the participants should hopefully have noticed, after being part of the programs, a change in their lifestyle. As Benito noted, he had to borrow money to be able to join the program: he is most likely not the only seasonal worker in that situation. Others may also need to borrow and/or pay off debts the first few years on top of paying the entrance fees for the programs. That being said, the longer a worker takes part in a program, the more he/she is likely to be able to improve the lives of his/her family, without necessarily ending up wealthy. In fact, the

²³ This is an assumption as no analysis of before, during and after the program was conducted.

FERME employee said that usually the first year of participation in the programs results in being able to pay off their debts; the second year of participation allows starting constructing a house of their own; and that at times, by the 4th year, some are able to invest, buy a truck and start a business.

Of the eight participants, only Bastian noted that their lifestyle has remained the same since he started the program. Bastian's case is different as he lives with his parents. In addition, he has mentioned that he has worked in the United States of America, which could imply that his family is used to receiving remittances (i.e. more money than if he was working in his home country). It is unknown if his parents provide an income.

Other participants have noted changes. Orlando mentioned that things have changed for the better while Alejandro also agreed that their lifestyle has improved and that now the money is sufficient for other necessities. Esteban noticed changes in their way of dressing, eating, and in the fact that they have more material things (for example, a new refrigerator and television). Raul also mentioned living a better life, and having food, a house and the essentials. He also added that he was able to install a telephone line in his home. Thanks to this new service, it is now considerably easier for him to communicate with his family: before he had to call someone else who would go get his family if they were available. Similarly, Ricardo added: "yes because, I am telling you, we already have another way of living".

Diego also has noted changes for the best in their lifestyles. He said:

Yes because the entrance of money, well it is better, so surely one needs to improve his lifestyle, because we are not only going to save up the money to lift ourselves up

or only to invest in means, if not that we also need to remember that our family needs to eat, needs to dress, needs to fit, so all of this we need to improve also.

Out of all the participants, Benito has voiced the biggest changes in his and his family's life style:

We are constructing little by little a house because when I began to come to the program here, I started off at minus zero [moneywise], yes because the first year that I came here, I borrowed money to come here. So I, being here, was saving money and sent it and told my wife to pay off the money that we had asked to borrow so that I could come the first year. And after, saving, and with efforts, little by little, we are constructing a house and we cannot do everything with the children, with the cost of having a family, and a house, we do one thing, we do another one.

In the same manner, a Mexican worker shared with Tremblay that: "C'est différent quand vous avez quelque chose qui vous appartient. Juste pour ça, ça vaut la peine d'aller travailler au Canada, même si ce n'est pas facile tous les jours. Peu importe si ma maison n'est pas grande, c'est ma maison et je peux faire ce que je veux.... Finalement, j'ai réussi" (2009). It took this worker seven years to build his home, but he succeeded. Another worker also shared his experience with Tremblay (2009): he also was able to build a house, buy furniture, a television with the cable, and a car. This worker also faced a difficult situation when his pregnant wife had health issues that threatened her life and the life of the baby. His wife conceded that "C'était pire parce que je savais que René était loin. Le médecin m'avait demandé si le bébé était plus important que moi. Il n'avait pas beaucoup de chance de survivre" (Tremblay, 2009). By dint of the money earned in Québec, the worker was able to buy a health insurance of 30,000 pesos (about \$2,500 CAN) to pay off

the hospital debts (Tremblay, 2009). The worker claimed that, thanks to his job, he was able to pay off without putting himself in debts: this likely saved the life of his wife and baby (Tremblay, 2009). Benito also mentioned that he does not consume alcohol, because to him it is a waste of money: “we do not invest money in alcohol, money in alcohol is money poorly invested”.

Furthermore to the basic needs previously mentioned, some of the participants also indicated other achievements allowed by the money earned. For example, Diego mentioned having a small business on the side with the help of his wife. Half of the money is put in the bank to save it and the other half is used for their home (to buy furniture for example). Diego mentioned that, with the money, he has been able to buy farm animals such as milk cows. His wife makes cheese with the milk and receives orders for it. He noted that she told him that they would need to buy another cow in order to produce more cheese to meet the demand. Transforming milk into cheese turned into a small and seemingly growing business for Diego’s wife and provides extra money for the household. This is a great example that Diego’s employment is helping the development of his own family. This small business could also have a positive impact on the community as Diego’s wife needs: to buy the milk cows from a farmer, the different ingredients to make the cheese from a store, and the equipment to make the cheese. Raul also said that he now works for himself with his own animals when he goes back home: “It seems good to me, more than anything; we surpass what we were getting over there (income in Mexico)”. While he did not mention that it was for a business, Ricardo was the only one who mentioned having been able to buy a little truck. Having a truck for Ricardo could definitely be very useful in his everyday life.

A Mexican worker who was met by Tremblay also noted considerable changes in his life: he was able to build a house as well as open a grocery store (2009).

To the employees of the Mexican General Consulate there is no doubt that it is beneficial for the workers to be part of the SAWP. The employees said that the workers are able to build and improve their houses; their children can go study at a university; they can have small businesses and their own lands; they eat better; they have more clothes and they also can adapt the techniques learned in Québec. Also, they noted that many workers part of the SAWP have experienced working illegally in the United States of America, and to them, having the opportunity to work in Canada legally and in a structured program is a big advantage. The employee of the General Consulate of Guatemala concurred that their living conditions can improve and small businesses can be created and sustained. The FERME's employee also affirmed that it is beneficial for the workers and their families and that education is a priority for their children. The employee, who has discussed with wives of some of the workers, also added that the workers, when returning, are more implicated in the household and help with laundry, cleaning, cooking, etc.

Clearly, the participants have noted significant improvements to their lifestyle. In this particular section, tangible examples of how the economic advantages are the primary motives that keep the workers coming year after year and how they impact the workers and their families were exposed. Being able to eat better, to have more clothes, and to subsidise for their basic needs and necessities are important factors that, thanks to their participation in the SAWP and the TFWP, are possible. Remittances do have an impact on their families. The following section will explore, in the opinion of the participants, if their remittances also have an impact on their local community.

Remittances and Home Community

In order to analyze whether the remittances earned by the participants have an impact on the local community, thus on its development, a question about the impact of the remittances on their home community was asked. According to them, all of the participants answered affirmatively to the question that their remittances contribute to their community. Both Raul and Orlando also answered that while they can do little things such as cooperating, they did claim that the money earned is theirs, thus personal. Justifiably, this could be understood as though Raul and Orlando know that they have worked hard to earn their money and that in their context, they must look after the needs of their own families first. Esteban answered that if someone asks to borrow money and he has it, he lends it.

Bastian and Diego both mentioned actual examples of how their money helps their community: they are able to buy things and do errands at local stores that benefit the owners (especially around Christmas):

If I do not have money, I cannot invest. Thus if I do not have money, my children, my wife cannot go buy at a store. Thus, I think that the fact of having money, well my wife and my children can go buy at the store, and that store well, has a little bit more sales (Diego).

Bastian's and Diego's example show that the local stores benefit from participants working in Québec as they are likely to have more money than if they stayed in their own country to work. This has a domino effect as then the store owners (and possibly employees) have more money and can either invest, hire new employees, have a relatively better life, etc.

Ricardo, Benito and Alejandro also gave concrete examples on how their international employment can help their community. They all three mentioned that, thanks

to their income, they can create employments by getting people to work for and/or with them. Alejandro mentioned that for example, while he is renovating his house, he can pay a person to change the roof. This example creates a job for a local that otherwise would not have had this opportunity. Benito feels that his earnings can help others and he also gave an example tied to renovating his house. When refurbishing his house, he can hire a worker: “if I need a worker to help me to work (...) my house, [well then] that money that I saved here [in Québec] (...) can be used to provide him with work to help me. With the money that I pay him, it helps his family”. Ricardo also gave an example on how his money can help people from his local community. He used an example of needing someone to work in the field with him: “Yes because one can sometimes generate employment for the people who are over there [his local community]. Because (...) if I sow in the field I employ people. And then, I pay them. So that is a good deal for me and for them also”.

Perception of Home Community

In general, the participants have reported that their community, friends and neighbours have good perceptions and feedback to offer the workers who work in Canada. Esteban, Diego, Alejandro and Orlando confirmed that their decision to come work in Québec is well perceived by their community. They also all added that some acquaintances, friends or neighbours would like to have the opportunity to take part in the programs. Diego said that he thinks that his neighbours are happy, especially with the fact that when he goes back, it is close to the Christmas holidays and he has money. One of the participants added that it is difficult to enter the TFWP because in the past, taxi drivers were sent to work in agriculture in Canada and were unable to accomplish the tasks required. Thus, the Guatemalan offices were perceived poorly. In this sense, now they (the Guatemalan

recruiters) go in the rural areas to look for the people who can do the work. The participant added that he cannot recommend anyone to be considered for the program.

Bastian was a bit more defensive in his answer and said that the people around him have nothing to say about his participation in the program: he had a chance to enter the program and he took it and does not want to lose it. He also added that many younger adults want to enter the program and he told them how and where to get the information. Bastian knows a few women who are also part of SAWP but did not know enough to share details about their experience. In the case of Benito, he noted a bit of disinterest coming from the people surrounding him: “as if it does not interest them, or at least they see that I do not have anything [more]”. On a different note, when answering this question, Ricardo compared his personal situation with the situation of many other workers who go work in the USA:

it is good, well at least in my case, I go and I return, well it is by contract. There are many that go but in the North to the USA, and they never return or they return six to eight days per year and some no.... Well you go half a year; it is good because one almost does not abandon his family a lot of time.

From his sayings, it could be perceived that in his community, the workers who go to the USA have a more difficult experience and they abandon their own families. Ricardo added that he has encouraged people in his community to enter the program. He has been asked how the work is in Canada and they see the benefits (house, truck): “I already have supported about five people and now they are also coming here in Canada. For that side I am not selfish, well I say that I am doing well, well we must help one another also”. Ricardo

demonstrated a little bit of defensiveness in his answer and voiced the fact that they “help one another to advance”.

Raul also mentioned that the perception is good and that one overcomes things. He has helped numerous persons to enter the program and encouraged them to participate unlike some of his companions. According to him, some of his colleagues of the program try to install fear amongst potential participants:

yes, there are many people [interested in joining the program].... I have invited that they go and participate in the program. If they are accepted well go ahead, that they try it out (...) that they do not let themselves be intimidated by what other companions say because yes, there are persons that scare them.

Raul went on to add that people should try it out and if they like it to continue, if not, that it is not a problem: “more than anything, they always have to see [for themselves] and if they like it, keep going, if not there is no problem anyway”. The answers above showed that while there is interest to enter the programs, some are willing to help one another to achieve their goal, while others are not. Tremblay (2009) had the opportunity to travel to Mexico to explore the impacts that these jobs have. Tremblay met with a seasonal agricultural worker’s friend who said: “Personne ne veut quitter sa famille pour six mois. C’est le travail qui les oblige à partir si loin. Personnellement, je ne trouve pas ça normal qu’on soit obligé d’aller dans un autre pays pour travailler” (2009).

Further to the analysis of the impact the remittances have on their families, their lifestyles and on their communities, it is clear that the workers take part in both programs because of the economic advantages. The workers sacrifice their life for the sake of a better life for their families in the present and in the future. Having the possibility to meet the

basic necessities on an everyday life is important. A bonus to being able to provide for their families is the fact that, shown by the participants, their money has a positive impact in their communities. This money has great potential to help develop the home communities and benefits people on a larger picture. Following the positive aspects that relate to the families and the communities of the participants, the next section will analyze the negative aspects that the seasonal job has on the families and communities.

A Family Sacrifice

It is vital not to let the economic advantages cast a shadow over the sacrifices that are made by the workers and their families. It is clear that it is in the best interest of their own families that the workers endure and suffer being away from them for such a lengthy period. Chapter four showed that they suffer from loneliness and isolation. In this section, alienation felt from being far from their families will be shown. Understandably, the well-being of the family can also suffer from the absence of the father figure and of their husband.

Absence Affecting Family Life

Reflecting back on the situation of the workers and of their families, one realises that they go through quite a big deal of changes and difficult and sad times. When asked if their temporary move affects their families, the participants also reached a consensus stating that it affects their families negatively. A few, when answering these two questions about their temporary move and absence affecting their families, got rather sad. The employee at FERME agreed that the workers make a sacrifice for their children.

It is easier for older children to understand the motives of the absence of their father. However, in Alejandro's case, he has younger children. In addition to having his family saddened by his absence, his younger daughter does not quite understand yet the reasons of his departure and absence. Alejandro added that when he is there, he takes every opportunity to go out and play with his children.

Ricardo also has younger children and he said that one year, when he returned home, one had a difficult time recognizing him: "when I arrived, it was like he/she did not know me; he/she was a little bit scared". It must be difficult for children old enough to understand but even harder for younger children as Ricardo experienced when his own child did not recognize him. This can be disarming for the parent who wants to hug their child while the child is scared because he/she does not recognize their father.

Orlando answered that it also affects his family. He mentioned that when there are members of his family sick, he cannot do anything from Québec. He said that his children cry and say that "without you we are sad" and ask "where is my father?" Also, in Benito's case, the children suffer due to his absence: "the children suffer changes, a lack of their father's presence, they get sick a little. It is sad for them over there". Benito also added that if it was not for the money and the necessity, he would not be doing this: "necessity is what makes us being far away, because one would not wish to be far from his family".

In Raul's case, he suffers from not being able to communicate on a daily basis with his family, like when he is at home: "one feels lonely at the beginning of not having communication like when you are [at home], not going through the day with our children, (...) [I] try to help them so that there are no problems". Raul has explained the reasons why he comes to Canada to work, but when he speaks to his children on the phone, they tell him

that it affects them. Raul speaks approximately three times per week with his family. Raul said that his family goes through lonesome times but that at least his wife has their children and she can talk with them. Raul goes outside and keeps his mind busy in order to help him maintain his sanity. However, he does not go out to drink at the bar as he specified. Raul's comment about not going to the bar makes one believe that when workers go drink at the bar, it is potentially perceived poorly by other workers.

Esteban affirmed that his absence does affect his family quite a bit and that no one would like a similar situation. However, his children, who are teenagers and young adults, understand why he comes to Québec to work. In fact, they would also like to come here to work because there are no job opportunities in their country. This is rather interesting as it shows that, even though the children know how it is to not have their father around eight months per year, they would still be willing to come to Canada to work. This brings one to think that, even though it is painful to see a loved one go, the remittances are worth it to the detriment of their family life. It shows that the children do not think that the job market in their home country will improve significantly to make them want to work there. It also adds to the questions of whether these programs will create a future workforce willing to work outside of their own country, rather than in their own.

Ricardo emphasized the fact that, according to him, the experience is worth it: "to me yes it is worth it, because this way, one can overcome a little bit in Mexico". He, however, also mentioned the sadness that his family lives "you can see that their face is sad, more than anything" but that on the other hand, if he stayed, things would have no way of improving for him and his family: "if I stay, we are also always going to remain the same but yes, it affects". Ricardo communicates two to three times per week with his family by

phone: “for me it is difficult, because to be somewhat far from the family it is sad, no? It is sad”.

Diego mentioned that in his family, discipline is getting more challenging as the children are getting older: “the children are now older, and for my wife it is challenging to get them to obey, it is quite difficult for her”. The children are also sad that their dad is so far away and they do not wish to speak with him on the phone. He added that it is difficult for him also: he misses his family.

Bastian’s case is different. He has a history of being away from his family: he has been part of the program for ten years and before that he was gone to the United States of America (USA) for approximately four or five years. He said that at the beginning it does not feel good but after awhile, one gets used to being outside of his/her own country. He does spend, on a yearly basis, about eight months per year in Canada. He also claimed that his family is used to it by now and that it does not really affect them anymore. Bastian said that when he is in his country and that there is no work, he misses Canada. Bastian’s comment makes one believe that it is difficult to be happy, no matter where the workers are. While they are in Québec, they are missing their families, and when they are home, if they do not have any jobs, they miss working in Québec. The workers live in two different worlds which also hold different realities.

Without a doubt, it is difficult for a child to grasp the reasons why his or her father is gone for such a long time for a number of years. Children at a young age are not able to understand everything. Further studies on whether the absences of their father (or mother) have an impact on their children would be interesting. Do the children feel abandoned by their father? How do they adapt when he/she leaves versus when he/she returns?

This section showed that an important sacrifice is made not only by the workers, but also by their families. One of the criteria to get into the programs is to have children, thus, without a doubt; numerous children in Mexico and in Guatemala suffer the absence of one of their parents (if not both). Certainly, as some have mentioned, their wives suffer the absence and must manage the household and their children on their own. With that in mind, the following section is on the question of whether the spouse supports or not, their decision to come to work in Québec.

Support from Home

The spouses of the participants, as it was established in the above section, do not find it easy to have their husbands away. It is a sacrifice that the wives have to make: have their husbands away for such a lengthy period, for a number of years for the sake of being able to meet their needs. Diego's wife, according to him, supports very little the decision to come to work to Canada. He answered: "very little, because I am telling you that it is quite difficult for her that we are separated, for me to come here, I tell you, I have to fight with my family because they do not want me to come". He added that his wife says that he spends more time in Canada than with his own family. Thus, the fact that his family and his wife do not approve his decision, may or may not make this experience more difficult for Diego: on top of leaving his family, he also does not have their approval.

Benito explored the fact that the jobs in agriculture, in his home country, cannot subsidise enough income to financially support families. He mentioned that his wife supports his decision because the agriculture in Mexico cannot provide for them: "As over there [Mexico] the agriculture is not sufficient to maintain us, well then she supports me to come here so that we can advance". Alejandro's wife supports the decision but is not

necessarily happy with it. However, Alejandro said that it is better to be far but to have money for food and other necessities. This shows that Alejandro does not have a choice and that he cannot control the situation: it is one or the other. Esteban alleged that his wife supports the decision sometimes and sometimes no. He added that: “it is not possible to have everything at the same time, you have your family at your side but you do not have money, you have money but you are not with them”. Esteban highlighted an interesting point that due to their social and economic situation, they cannot be together and earn money at the same time. They must be without one to have the other.

Raul compared his option of working in Canada to his other option of working in the United States of America: the two options are due to the North American economy and that in fact, he does not have a choice but to work outside of his own country. While his wife supports his decision, it is rather painful. She wishes that they would not be separated but also understands the situation they are in. Raul said:

my wife now supports this more than anything. As she says herself ‘I know that you go five to six months but I know that you come back’.... If I were to go to the USA, I [would] have to walk and pay to “jump” to the “coyote” and I [would] have to suffer more and be more time in the USA than here [Québec] this way, I say, five to six months but then I return with happiness, no?

Thus, in Raul’s eyes, the option of coming to Québec is better than going to the United States of America. After all, the former is legal, safer and temporary, while the latter is often illegal, unsafe and for an undetermined period of time, if not permanent.

The workers are far away from their families and one could think that out of sight, they may misbehave. However, Ricardo and Orlando mentioned that their wives trust them.

Ricardo said that his wife not only supports him but also has faith in him: “yes she has to support because like I am telling you, she sees, she knows that well, one comes here (...) to work, well she trusts me”. Orlando added that he does come here to meet the needs of his family and that it is not out of fun: “yes, I come to work, I don’t come well just to pass by and nothing more, I don’t come to drink beer, nothing. I come for necessity of our family and to advance forward a little bit”. Tremblay also had the opportunity to meet a worker’s wife who confessed that:

Je me sens vraiment seule lorsqu’il n’est pas là. C’est mon soutien, mon copain. Lorsqu’il part, c’est moi qui dois faire face aux problèmes.... Je trouve ça difficile, mais c’est nécessaire parce qu’il n’y a pas beaucoup de travail ici. On ne sait pas ce qu’on a jusqu’à ce qu’on le perde. J’apprécie beaucoup ce qu’il fait pour nous (2009).

This testimony by the wife of a worker explains well the situation that they are found in. It is extremely difficult for the spouses but they also realise that there are no other options in order to improve their living. In some of the workers’ case, they may receive no or very little support from their families. The workers must do what they think is best for their families even though there is a great deal of suffering and sacrifices involved.

Chapter five has explored the impact that the international employment of their father and husband has on the families and the communities. The economic advantages dominate the positive perspective. Two participants have noted that, thanks to their money earned, they are now able to have their own business and work for themselves. The participants have also mentioned living better and having money for other necessities than

their basic needs. They are able to buy material things, to buy more clothes and to eat better. The money is also used to improve their housing while a big portion is reserved for the education of their children. Incontestably, the money earned has allowed them to live better. The perception of the home community is also, in general, good. In fact, the participants have mentioned the interest of different acquaintances to join the programs.

While the money clearly benefits the families, the money can also benefit the home communities. Jobs are created because the workers are able to afford hiring someone. More business is also created because the workers have more money to buy things at local stores. However, while the economic advantages are tangible, the impacts that the absence of the father has on the families is still unclear. The families are very sad and find it rather difficult to have their father and their husband away for such a lengthy period. Children have difficulty understanding the motives. While the spouses realise that there are no other real options, they find it very difficult and do not necessarily support the idea of working in Québec. It was seen that the families and the workers do not really have a choice due to the economy of their country and the opportunities that are offered (or rather, lack thereof). The participants mentioned having a choice between working illegally in the USA and working legally in Canada and have opted for the latter. All of this explains the retention rates and interest by the workers to return.

At the end of chapter four, the importance of conducting more research on the impact that social isolation has on the workers was highlighted. In addition to that recommendation, studies on the impact that having a parent figure away for so long (usually the father) on the children and the families should be done. It is important to better

understand the implications that are lived by the families. To what extent is the money worth more than the social well-being of the worker and of his or her family? As it was demonstrated, the wives and the children find it difficult to have their father and husband away.

Chapter Six – Conclusion

In regards to the social experience of the seasonal agricultural workers, a debate composed of two distinct perspectives has been explored throughout this research. Chapters four and five both explored the two distinct standpoints, with the former exclusively looking at the personal experience of the participants, while the latter focused on the impact on the families and the home communities of the participants. The first view states that Mexicans and Guatemalans working as part of the SAWP and the TFWP respectively is beneficial not only for the workers themselves but also for the Canadians. The second debate viewpoint is that the experience for the participants in both programs is negative for them as they have to make important life sacrifices for very few benefits. To some, the workers are also victims of a form of slavery.

The defenders of the programs maintain that they are positive for all partners involved, notably the workers. Undeniably, the participation of the workers to both programs benefits not only the workers themselves, but also the families and communities of the workers, the Canadian employers, the Canadian population in general, and the participating governments, at least from a strict economic perspective. The participants have noted an improvement in their family's lifestyles. Thanks to the remittances, their home communities may also benefit with the creation of a few employments by the participants. Local stores also have more business. All the participants mentioned being able to provide for their families, in terms of food, clothing, accessories and appliances. It is in the best interest of the participating countries to maintain this bilateral agreement and this program as they create opportunities and are indispensable for the Québec agriculture industry.

Still under the positive view is the fact that, according to the participants, they maintain a good working and living relationship with their co-workers. The workers work in teams and even though may not be necessarily from the same country, share similar difficult life experiences and have at least one point in common: they all sacrifice their own lives for their families. It was noted from the other interviewees (non agricultural workers) that frictions may exist between people from both nationalities which is believed to be due to the differences between programs. The retention level, which is fairly high, despite the suffering and sacrifices made by the workers, can easily be explained by the economic advantages that the programs offer.

The second perspective argues that the programs are negative but strictly for the agricultural workers. Throughout the research, it was easy to note that the two employees of the Agriculture Workers Alliance Centre (AWAC) were more vocal about different examples that were negative. This discrepancy can mean that while the participants of the research do not live extreme and negative conditions, others may do. Workers face different obstacles such as a very different climate, stress, language barrier, alienation and potential mistreatment by their employers. The workers do not have other appealing options but to participate in the SAWP or the TFWP. They are picked as agriculture workers going to do agricultural work (which then allows the Canadian agriculture sector to function and grow): they are not picked as human beings.

As it was demonstrated, the workers have difficult social and personal experience. Through observations and interviews, a theme of sacrifice made by the workers was often mentioned. The workers suffer for the well-being of their families and in hope of better lives for them. The workers do not necessarily have poor working or living conditions, but

it does happen. In fact, the employees of both General Consulates and of FERME shared different approaches to ensure that the cases of poor working and living conditions diminish.

The workers face possible and numerous risks on a daily basis and accidents do occur as the two AWAC employees noted. The participants remarked that they suffer from social isolation. Integration programs and more activities should be organized to allow them to socialise with local residents. The language barrier that the workers face is without a doubt an important factor in their level of happiness and integration with their host community. Likewise, the family of the workers suffer from having their father (or mother) away for such a long period of time every year for a number of years.

While the workers do not feel they work under poor conditions, they do feel underused due to the decreasing number of hours worked. It is believed that the women may have even more difficult experiences due to their gender and to the over protection that they may face. The relationship of the workers with their employer seemed to be good in general, but there are still examples of mistreatment or abuse of rights done by the employers. Closely related to whether the workers are aware of their rights or not, is the contact that the workers have with unions and local Québec organisations. While they have no contact with local Québec organisations, very few admit to have contact with unions (AWAC – UCFW).

Overall, the experience lived by the workers, who take part in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) and the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP), is not overly poor in itself. The results of my research confirm both standpoints to some extent. Without a doubt the experience is entirely positive for all the partners involved

(sending countries, farmers, Québec government) except for the workers. While it is positive for them economically speaking, which explains the retention level, it has plenty of room for improvement in the social aspects. While I think it is very difficult to have a “perfect” program, both programs need improvement so that the workers’ rights are respected in a nation that is thought to be a leader in human rights. There is no doubt in my mind that it is worth it for the workers to work in Québec as they do not have other options. However, more has to be done to help them integrate even though they are temporarily staying in Québec. As a society, we have neglected for too long the social isolation lived by the workers.

Also, in my opinion, both programs should be made equal in terms of regulations and conditions. Because, as of now, a rise in popularity in the TFWP can be noted and could shortly replace the SAWP. I do not think that the Guatemalan workers are better workers than the Mexican workers, or vice versa and it is not a matter of favouring a sending country over another. But the difference in both programs will create this discrimination and favouritism towards a sending country. The workers should be called back because they are good workers, regardless of their programs, and not because one program offers more interesting economical aspects to the employers than the other. The sending countries should also be looking into ways to create appealing local employments as relying on remittances is not a viable way to sustainable development. It may work in the short term period but in the long run it is questionable.

The workers are found to be at the mercy of their own employers: they have very little (if any) freedom of mobility. Also, the rights of the workers should be clearer and explained to the workers. While the workers should do their part to learn French (even

though they face strong obstacles as having a low education and sometimes Spanish as their second language) the hosting communities should also do their part to ease their integration by encouraging its population and its public servants to organise activities and programs for the workers. Learning a little bit of Spanish could also be very enriching. I think that the host communities can only socially and economically benefit by being in contact with the workers: whether it is because of their rich and diverse culture or because of their purchasing power. It was also indicated that more communication should take place, and this, not only with the official partners, but also with local organisations and individuals who do their part to help the seasonal agricultural workers. Another improvement could be to have more employees working in both General Consulates for different aspects of the programs. It was sensed that the Consulates were understaffed and unable to do everything desired.

This study is only the first step towards the direction that it is believed future investigations should be heading. The difficulty in recruiting participants for this research can be understood as the fact that workers are still scared and feel uneasy about speaking openly about their experience. The workers should feel comfortable to share their experiences and thoughts about what they live. The population should welcome their opinions and studies on this matter as the workers are an indispensable labour force for the Québec agriculture. While it can be agreed that for workers, to participate in both programs is economically beneficial, questions as to what extent it is socially beneficial are asked. Being, or at least, feeling isolated for a lengthy period, for a number of years can have its negative impact on individuals. Also, having the father (or mother) figure away for such a

long period of time can have its toll and effects on the family. Further investigation in regards to these elements should be looked upon. Will a generation of children be affected by the absence of one of their parents? Since the SAWP has started in 1974 for Mexico, children then are now adults. Do these children take part in the SAWP? Were they affected? Do they have a “better” life in comparison to other children whose parents did not partake in the SAWP? To what extent is the money earned in Canada worth more than the suffering a worker and his/her family endure for up to eight months per year? In the case of Guatemala, as the TFWP is still fairly new (2003), a look at the current children would be definitely valuable to understand if there are any social impacts in the sending countries.

In addition to the social impact that the programs have, a look at the impact that remittances has on the local communities of the sending countries would be valuable. While the sending countries are considered to be developing countries²⁴, the governments of these particular countries should also be interested in the impact that the remittances have on the local development of the communities and families. There are communities who send a large number of men (and women) every year to Canada to work. How are these communities developing in comparison to other communities who send few or no workers whatsoever?

Furthermore, the implementation of the TFWP Guatemala in 2003 has brought other perspectives into the area of seasonal agricultural immigrants. An investigation exploring the differences lived by the participants of the SAWP and the TFWP would be valuable.

²⁴ Mexico's case is controversial in this regards: in some instances it is viewed as a developed nation even though it faces a great deal of poverty and underdevelopment. In other cases, it is considered as a developing nation.

While this current investigation briefly overflowed potential differences, it does not have the pretention of stating that it has looked into the deeper factors. Further investigation comparing the experiences of both programs' participants could expose the practices that function well and the improvements that should be done to both programs to add to their competitiveness.

More research could be conducted on this topic and contribute to the already existing studies in order to raise the knowledge and the awareness. In this sense, the awareness of the social experience about the workers of SAWP and TFWP needs to be raised. Workers must be recognized for their sacrifices and their sufferings. While they do these sacrifices for the sake of their families, they allow the production of the Québec agriculture to operate and to grow. The Québec population needs to realise that they must be thankful to the hands that pick their fruits and vegetables. In fact, these hands must not remain only hands, but they must become names, faces and incredible individuals to each and every one. They are individuals who allow a nation to be productive and who sacrifice their lives out of love and hope for their own.

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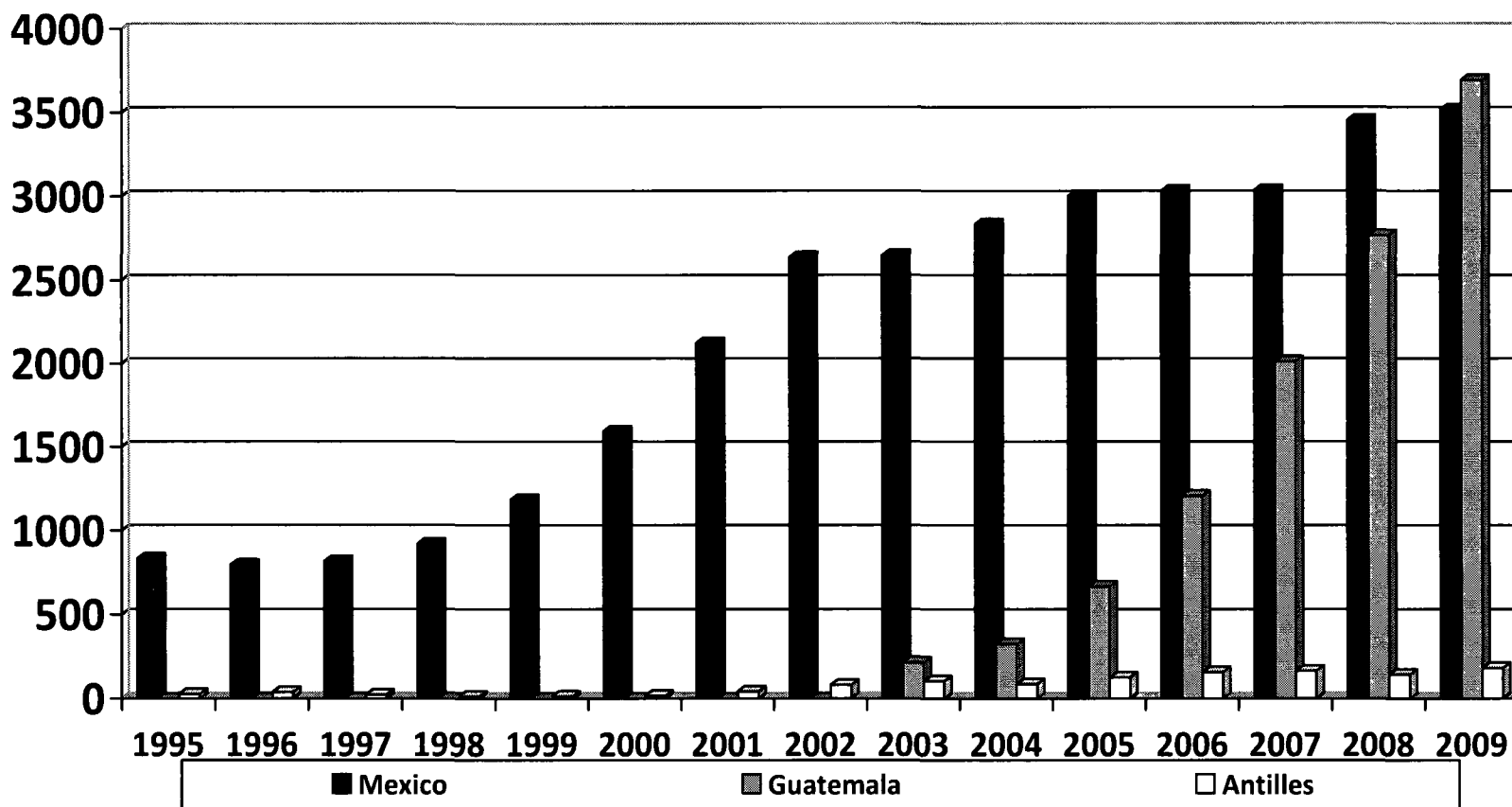
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Appendix One – Differences Between SAWP and TFWP

	SAWP	TFWP
Origin countries	Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Grenada, Antigua, Dominica, Saint Kits and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent, Grenadines, Montserrat, Jamaica, Mexico	Guatemala
Year of implementation	1966 (Mexico joined in 1974)	2003
Partners	Governments of sending countries, Canada government (HRSDC, CIC, Services Canada), FERME	International Organisation for Migration (IOM), FERME, Guatemala government
Minimum length of stay	At least 240 hours in 6 weeks or less	No minimum length imposed
Maximum length of stay	Between January 1 st and December 15 th for a period of up to 8 months per year	24 months
Airfare	Up to \$550 by workers	Employer's responsibility
Housing	Free	Weekly payment of \$45
Mobility	Tied to one employer, if not called back by one employer, can be called by other employer, up to 3 times	Tied to one employer, if this employer does not call back, excluded from the program
Benefits for the workers	Remittances	Remittances

Appendix Two – Comparing Graph of Workers' Numbers from Mexico and Guatemala in Québec



Source: FERME, 2009

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Mexico	833	797	817	921	1183	1594	2124	2637	2649	2835	3002	3033	3037	3455	3518
Guatemala	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	215	324	668	1208	2015	2767	3693
Antilles	27	39	22	13	13	17	43	81	104	86	126	158	165	143	182

Source: FERME, 2009

Appendix Three - Women Participation in SAWP and TFWP

SAWP

Worker Participation by Season 1974-2002					
Year	# of workers	# of female workers	% of female workers	Nominal workers	% of nominal workers
1974	203				
1975	402				
1976	533				
1977	495				
1978	543				
1979	553				
1980	678				
1981	655				
1982	696				
1983	615				
1984	672				
1985	834				
1986	1,007				
1987	1,538				
1988	2,626				
1989	4,414	37	0.8	2,210	50
1990	5,143	76	1.47	2,480	48.2
1991	5,148	77	1.49	2,483	48.2
1992	4,778	77	1.6	2,880	60.3
1993	4,886	72	1.47	2,860	58.8
1994	4,910	48	0.97	2,906	59.2
1995	4,886	56	1.14	2,940	60.2
1996	5,211	57	1	3,314	63.6
1997	5,647	67	1.2	3,690	65.3
1998	6,486	145	2.2	3,529	54.4
1999	7,574	165	2.5	4,238	55.9
2000	9,175	230	2.5	4,620	50.35
2001	10,529	369	3.5	4,910	46.6
2002	10,681	339	3.2	7,297	68.3

Source: Gustavo Verduzco (2007:5)

TFWP

Year	Workers			Increase	% increase
	Total	Men	Women		
2003	215	180	35	-	-
2004	320	270	50	105	48.8
2005	675	611	64	355	110.9
2006	1,323	1,229	94	648	96.0
2007	2,255	2,114	141	932	70.4
2008	3,313	3,097	216	1,058	46.9

Source: IOM, 2008

Appendix Four - Interview Guide for the Agricultural Workers

The interviews will be conducted in Spanish, by the researcher. The interview will be adapted to every worker. Therefore, a list of questions was designed but the interview will not be limited only to these questions. This is a semi standardized interview.

ICE BREAKER/PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Write down gender.
2. How old are you?
3. What is your level of education?
4. What part of Mexico/Guatemala are you from? (City, state?)
5. Do you have a wife/husband and children?
 - a. If so, how many?

WORKER'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

1. What were your previous employments (employment history)?
2. Is it your first time working in Canada as part of the SAWP/TFWP?
 - a. If yes, will you consider returning?
 - b. If no, how many times have you participated so far? Are you considering coming back next year?
3. How do you find working here? (work conditions, treatment, hours, type of tasks)
4. How is the working and social relation between Mexicans and Guatemalans?
5. Why do you come to work here? (Remittances? Better working conditions? Hope of permanency status? Etc?)

6. What is your income? (Range?)
7. Are you able to have a social life? (time allows, alienation, language barrier, other Mexican/Guatemalan workers around)
8. What are your living conditions like?
9. What is your relationship like with your employer?
10. What is your relationship like with your coworkers?
11. What is your relationship like with the broader community?
12. Do you have any sort of contact with guest workers' unions and/or any other type of organizations in Canada?
13. What do you do in your free time?
14. What types of activities are you involved in outside of work (church, sports, voluntary organizations, etc)?
15. What is your social network like (list of friends and acquaintances)?

FAMILY

If worker has family (more likely):

1. With whom do you live in Mexico/Guatemala?
2. How does your temporary move to Québec affect your family?
3. Are you able to send remittances to your family? If so, how much?
4. How is the money you send back home used by your family (food, improve home, new home, children's education, new business?)
5. Is your spouse supportive of your decision to come to Canada to work?
6. How does your absence affect your family at home?
7. What are your children doing? (Studying, working, etc.)

8. Since you have been doing SAWP/TFWP, have you noticed any changes in your family's lifestyles?

COMMUNITY

1. How is your decision of coming to work in Canada perceived in the community?
2. Are your remittances contributing to your community?
 - a. If so, how?
 - b. If not, why not?

IMPACT IN CANADA

1. How do you think you make an impact in Canada?

Do you know of any other SAWP Mexican or TFWP Guatemalan workers who would be interested in taking part in this study? Could you please pass along the recruitment text and consent form and let them know that if they are interested in taking part in this research, they can contact me directly?